

Report to Stronger Place Select Committee



SCRUTINY

Date of meeting: 13 January 2022

Portfolio: Finance, Qualis Client & Economic Development



Subject: Town Centre Programme Review

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Democratic Services Officer: Laura Kirman (01992 564243)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

To review and comment on progress on the town centres programme.

Report:

1. High streets have been under significant pressure nationally with the impact of changing retail patterns and in particular the ongoing challenge of retail spent shift online. These structural challenges have been significantly exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic nationally and locally. In response the council commissioned reviews into each town centre focusing on key challenges and opportunities. These reports were endorsed by Cabinet in 2021 and a new town centre project manager post created to lead this work. A central theme of these reports is to build strong collaborative partnership working with key stakeholder on the high street, public and private and develop a clear common approach to investment and management. The Council have also re-established the High Street Task and Finish panel which met in December 2021 and also reviewed progress on the town centre programme.
2. Significant work has been undertaken in delivering the plans agreed by cabinet and in supporting high street businesses throughout the pandemic.
3. The presentation attached at appendix 1 gives an overview of the work that has been undertaken, highlights recent advice and guidance from national bodies on high street regeneration, and provides an update from the latest high street vacancy survey carried out within the district in the Autumn.
4. Currently high streets in the district, despite major challenges from the pandemic and structural changes in spending patterns, remain in a significantly stronger position than many similar areas in the country. However, the trend identified around the impact of online retailing and on national policy papers indicate that there is no room for complacency.

Reason for decision:

To consult in a timely fashion with elected members and provide guidance for future work.

Options considered and rejected:

To not develop a co-ordinated approach to supporting our high streets in partnership with other stakeholders.

Consultation undertaken:

In developing the town centre reports significant time was spent in consultation with key stakeholders on each high street, pandemic allowing. The TCPM remains in constant contact with Town Centre Partnerships, Town Councils and other stakeholders and this has been used to shape the councils approach to this work. The High Street Task and Finish Panel meeting in December 2021 was also consulted in reviewing the work.

Resource implications:

There are no resource implications arising directly from this report.

Legal and Governance Implications:

None arising directly from this report.

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications:

Essential theme from the town centre reports have been of the need to put in place programmes that make our high streets safe, attractive, accessible places for our residents and visitors to enjoy and use.

Background Papers:

Six town centre reports on each of the districts main high streets – available at:

<https://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/business/town-centre-regeneration-studies/>

Impact Assessments:

The work of the team is constantly assessed for impact.

Risk Management

The town centre work is included in the council risk management programme.

Equality:

The program is based on ensuring all stakeholders have input and the opportunity to play a role in shaping the project.