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Report Originator	Kettering Town Centre Task & Finish Group	Fwd Plan Ref No: N/A	
Wards Affected	William Knibb	30th October 2019	
Title	**KETTERING TOWN CENTRE TASK & FINISH GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS**		

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 For the Committee to note the findings of the Town Centre Task and Finish Group following the completion of; stakeholder engagement, Town Centre visits and the public survey results.

1.2 To seek comments from the Committee in relation to the recommendations for submission to the council's Executive Committee.

1.3 For Members to agree that once the report has been presented to the Executive the Kettering Town Centre Task and Finish Group is disbanded.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1 At its meeting on 6th February 2019 the Research and Development Committee agreed to convene a Kettering Town Centre Task and Finish Group (the 'Task & Finish Group' or 'Group').

2.2 The aim and objectives of the Group are;

Aim
To provide joint business and council leadership to better enable Kettering Town Centre to adapt and compete in the face of changing consumer and social trends. To achieve these aims through a combination of fact finding across Council services and by gaining a greater understanding of the national and local perspective through engagement with relevant representatives.

Objectives

- Understand the challenges and opportunities facing town centres nationally
- Benchmark the health and vision for Kettering Town Centre against other towns to identify areas of best practice ***(refer to 3.2)***
- Gain a greater understanding of Council services which affect the Town Centre ***(refer to report presented to R&D on 25th July 2019 'Kettering Town Centre Task & Finish Group – Progress Update)***
- Review current strategy and delivery for the Town Centre and make recommendations in context of changing consumer and social trends ***(refer to 3.6)***
- Report findings to Kettering Town Centre Conference 2019*

** The Kettering Town Centre Conference is now being held in January 2020*

2.3 A progress update of the work of the Task and Finish Group was presented to the Research and Development Committee on 25th June 2019.

2.4 Since the progress update, the Task and Finish Group have held an additional external stakeholder group on 16th July which consisted of a town centre retailer representative and feedback from market traders. In total three stakeholder meetings were held representing the views of 15 organisations and businesses. For those unable to attend, a further three questionnaires were received.

2.5 An online Town Centre survey was created to enable members of the public to submit their views and ideas for the Town Centre. The survey ran from 25th July to 15th August with a total of 766 responses.

2.6 The Task and Finish Group also undertook factfinding town centre visits to Bedford on 28th August and Market Harborough on 5th September. During these visits the group met with officers and members to ascertain their approach to the future of their town centres. It also provided an opportunity to explore further the represented towns approach to emerging themes from the stakeholder engagement and public survey being conducted in Kettering, helping to provide comparison. These emerging themes were;

- Built & physical environment
- Business support
- Events
- Marketing/branding
- Parking
- Shopping/markets

2.7 It should be noted that since the formation of the Task & Finish Group, Historic England announced that Kettering is one of 69 towns nationally that has been successful following the Councils submission of an expression of interest to the High Street Heritage Action Zone Programme (HAZ), and that the Council will, following the development and approval of a Stage 2 Programme Design, receive external funding of up to £1,985,000 over the next four years. The programme requires the Council to match fund the grant. As reported to Executive Committee in September 2019, the Council will look to work with the private sector to leverage additional investment – meaning a total investment of around £4 million would be made into Kettering Town Centre. It is recognised by the Task & Finish Group that this will provide significant improvements to the conservation area within the Town Centre.

3. CONTEXT and FINDINGS

3.1 The retail sector has and continues to go through a period of significant change both locally and nationally, the way people shop has changed over recent years and will continue to change. These changes have not only affected major national chains but have also impacted on small independent traders.

Town centres lie at the heart of our communities creating jobs and nurturing small businesses and Kettering is no different. However, the way the public shop and the way that communities use their high streets is transforming: we are shopping more online, making fewer big shopping trips and shopping 'little and more often' primarily at supermarkets and retail parks.

Although Town Centres are still important shopping places, they are also important places for people to live, work and enjoy leisure time. This rich mixture of usage builds successful safe, adaptable and resilient town centres. The plans we make for Kettering now must encompass the wider view of the Town Centre as a community hub or civic heart, incorporating health, housing education, arts, entertainment and work as well as a strong evening offer for families, young people and the older generations.

The Group believe now is an ideal opportunity to consider the opportunities for us all, as custodians of our town centre, to enact change.

3.2 As part of the benchmarking and factfinding phase, the Group visited Bedford and Market Harborough Town Centres. Their findings from these visits are set out below;

i. <u>Bedford</u>

The Group were very impressed with the quality of signage in Bedford, especially the signage leading from the railway station directing members of the public to the town centre. The visit had proved that multiple areas of a town could be successful and prosper in different ways.

The market had also impressed the Group, especially in regard to its layout and the set-up and presentation of individual stalls. The permanent market stands looked in-keeping with the historical surroundings of the church, however it was noted that when the markets were not operational these stands were underused.

One area noted as being less than successful was the indoor area with its cluster of independent stores.

In relation to car-parking, it was noted that charges were in place for all but one car park that was located away from the town centre and offered free parking for users.

ii. <u>Market Harborough</u>

The Group noted stronger links between the Council / market with farmers and local producers in comparison with Kettering, and impressive promotional/branding aspects. In addition, the business community appeared to be very proactive, taking ownership of events and elements such as '*In*

Bloom'. There was also proactive advertising of empty business units in the town.

The indoor market had been built into the culture of the town having been in situ for a long period of time. The food offer within the market was popular; however, the other market stalls were less so. The indoor market did continue to offer a community hub aspect.

3.3 Following the baselining and benchmarking phase the Group identified the key areas of focus for improvements, which emerged during the stakeholder engagement sessions, which took place on 17th June, 24th June and 16th July 2019, as;

A. <u>Built & Physical Environment (aesthetics, signage, cleanliness)</u>
The general condition of the Town Centre was raised during stakeholder workshops and also ranked as a challenge in the public survey. The quality of Town Centre planting was noted but it was felt the containers needed to be refreshed to match the quality of the historic surroundings.

B. <u>Business support (for independents)</u>
Encouraging and supporting new small businesses was also rated as the top opportunity in the public survey. The Task and Finish group heard from officers representing Enterprise Kettering and the Business Rate Team about the support provided through training workshops, grants, signposting to external support and awareness raising on national business rate exemptions.

C. <u>Events</u>
The positive impact of events was noted, both in the stakeholder workshops and public survey. In addition to the delivery of events managed directly by Kettering Borough Council, the Task and Finish Group heard how partner events such as *Kettfest* are also supported.

D. <u>Marketing / branding / tourism</u>
'This is Kettering' was acknowledged as a familiar brand which could however be utilised more to promote events to drive footfall. Gaps identified included targeting younger people and promoting the heritage of the Town. In conjunction with the Kettering Town Centre Youth Partnership, a new Youth Zone has been launched on *'This is Kettering'* website which is seen as positive step forward and an opportunity to grow and expand the youth audience.

E. <u>Parking</u>
Within the external stakeholder workshops the charging structure was raised as a potential barrier and possible impact on dwell time. Cost of parking was ranked 4th in the list of challenges in the public survey. The need to move towards more sustainable methods of transport to reduce car usage was also raised in the external workshops.

F. Shopping / Markets

The importance of shopping as the predominant use of the Town Centre was acknowledged but also recognised services, housing, entertainment and leisure as increasingly important roles. The strength and further potential of Kettering's night time economy was also acknowledged. Markets, in line with retail in general, have seen a decline over recent years.

Please refer to **Appendix A – Summary of Stakeholder Workshops**

3.4 This was echoed within the public survey, with the specific headline results being;

- People are using the town centre less – over half of respondents were using the town centre less than this time last year. Less than 10% were using the Town more.
- People mostly stay up to two hours with less than 10% of respondents staying longer.
- Average spend per visit per person is less than £20
- Kettering is used for convenience rather than choice – over 95% of respondents using the Town Centre live locally or work in the Town Centre. Respondents were choosing centres such as Rushden Lakes and Corby for destination shopping based on a greater variety of shops.
- Shopping is still the predominant use of the Town Centre, followed closely by accessing services and café/restaurants
- The biggest challenges are perceived to be the lack of shops/services, cost of running a business and online shopping
- The greatest assets are recognised as Kettering's cultural facilities, events and historical surroundings
- The greatest opportunities were noted as supporting new business start-ups, review parking charges and the ways of paying, and the increasing the variety of businesses

Please refer to **Appendix B – Town Centre Public Survey Results_Aug2019**

3.5 The Task & Finish Group noted the following sentiments that have emerged through this work;

- celebrating what the public and businesses hold in high regard,
- recommending deliverable initiatives, as well as,
- encouraging a long term aspirational and ambitious vision for the town centre

All of which, via the delivery of the recommendation set out within 3.6, should demonstrate that stakeholder and public engagement is being considered.

3.6 The Task and Finish Group recommend the following actions in support of these themes;

A	**Built & Physical Environment (aesthetics, signage, cleanliness)**
A1	Significantly improved signage across the town centre and out of town
A2	Make use of NCC electronic highways signage at the gateways to the town
A3	Launch a shop frontage improvement scheme, with the town centre Council owned properties acting as an exemplar
A4	Utilise the Council’s capital to assist in town centre schemes and initiatives
A5	Whilst the realisation of Town Centre residential development was positively received, it should not be to the detriment of commercial and leisure activities, balance should be created between the two
A6	Review the Town Centre Area Action Plan to ensure it is relevant to the changing town centre environment
A7	Consideration should be given to replacing plastic flower planters with a planter more in-keeping with the heritage appearance of the town. The Group are however pleased with the current state and appearance of flowers in the town centre.
B	**Business support (for independents)**
B1	‘Seats on streets’ as articulated within the Town Centre Delivery Plan 2018-2025 should be actively encouraged and supported
B2	Take a more proactive approach in attracting independent start-up businesses with a methodology introduced to assist with finances in year one with rent or assist with the application of nationally available Business Rate reliefs in accordance with local discretionary criteria
B3	Be more actively involved with retailers and encourage them to work proactively together by being the catalyst for engagement
B4	Engagement and review of format with retailers for Christmas events and late night shopping
C	**Events**
C1	Reinforce and recognise the popularity and success of events in the town centre
C2	The provision of a facility to allow the public to put on their own events in the town centre should be considered with practical help and support provided
C3	Additional evening events at the museum and art gallery should be considered alongside collaborative work with cultural offerings in other towns

D	**Marketing / branding / tourism**
D1	Significantly improve the promotion of “good news” stories
D2	Kettering’s heritage offer needs to be well developed and promoted, with the aim that Kettering becomes a tourist destination, and the Civic Society and public should be involved in its promotion
D3	Additional promotion of events is required, with additional social media use, banners and noticeboards in the town centre advertising these
D4	A map of the town (civic/business) should be incorporate into an interactive noticeboard in the town centre and produced in hard copy
E	**Parking**
E1	Review parking fee structure with the aim of increasing dwell time
E2	Periods of free parking could also be considered after 4pm in Council owned car parks to encourage twilight shopping and footfall following school hours
E3	There was strong evidence to show the popularity of “Pop and Shop” parking, this initiative could be extended to additional locations.
F	**Shopping / Markets**
F1	In collaboration with the Kettering Town Centre Partnership and local stakeholders produce an electronic Business Map ensuring it is kept up to date
F2	The Group strongly suggest that consideration be given for the Research & Development Committee to look at the issue of how to improve the Market offer, including rebranding to reinvigorate and attract new traders and customers as well as exploring the possibility of an indoor market in the town. It should however be noted the positive progress in terms of planned stall improvements and NABMA recommendations conducted earlier in 2019.

The public survey highlighted other areas of concern which are not directly related to the key themes, however they are noted by the Task & Finish Group as having an impact on the town centre. These are; people are using the town centre less (footfall reduction) and people do not always feel safe. Therefore, the Group made the following further recommendations;

G	**Public Safety**
G1	Increase use of warden patrols to demonstrate and support public safety
G2	Review the CCTV set up within the town to ensure cameras are positioned in the most appropriate locations or could be increased in number to boost public

	safety. In addition, radio links between retailers / night time economy could be beneficial
H	Footfall
H1	Footfall counters should be utilised in the town centre to provide vital data that could assist in providing better understanding of movements
H2	The Council to use their own discretion in terms of restricting charity and commercial collections which could be considered as a deterrent for footfall within the town centre

Operationally, the Town Centre Task & Finish group recommend;

I	**Town Centre Monitoring**
I1	Annual report on the health of the Town Centre to the Monitoring and Audit Committee
I2	Retailers should be encouraged to use the Kettering Town Centre Partnership network as a voice to represent their views to the Kettering Town Forum

4. CONSULTATION AND CUSTOMER IMPACT

4.1 As evidenced in the background information, a thorough consultation process has been delivered to ensure the views of local stakeholders and town centre users were fully captured.

4.2 A summary of the stakeholder engagement findings are set out in **Appendix A**. Results and findings from the public survey are set out in **Appendix B**.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Any investment in the initiatives recommended within 3.6 would align within the implementation of the Town Centre Delivery 2018-2025, and would relate and be delivered in accordance to the Local Area Action Plan and Town Centre Area Appraisal.

6. FINANCIAL RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial implications will be assessed should the recommendations be agreed by the Executive Committee.

7. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Officer time would be required to oversee any procurement and delivery of approved recommendations and should be considered within the financial implications, as well as the capacity impact required. The HAZ programme is likely to bring forward additional resource within the council which is considered to support, by its nature, some of the related themes highlighted within this report.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Any works procured would need to be done in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders.

9. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Reductions in car parking charging could increase the number of vehicle movements within the town centre, thereby increasing CO2 levels.

9.2 All initiatives, if recommended by the Committee, will need to considered in more depth in relation to climate change implications

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 That the R&D Committee determine and accept the Task & Finish Group recommendations set out in 3.6

10.2 That R&D Committee formally agree the recommendations to be taken to Executive Committee and if so,

10.3 That Members agree that, on conclusion the Kettering Town Centre Task & Finish Group is disbanded

Background Papers:
Kettering Town Centre Task & Finish Group Minutes
Contact Officer David Pope

Previous Minutes/Reports:
Research and Development Committee minutes ***
Ref: David Pope