

'A Market Town Strategy for Ormskirk'

Work undertaken 2015/16

(Meetings 9 July, 15 October and 3 December 2015)

Meeting of the Corporate and Environmental Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 9 July 2015 the Council Chamber, 52 Derby Street, Ormskirk

Following consideration of the work undertaken in 2014/15, Members discussed and raised questions on the following:

- Work instigated on the Market element of the review.
- Methods to encourage stallholders (approach to advertising; shopper experience; embracing new technology)
- Stall layout and etiquette for the future (positioning of stalls; keeping pedestrian access clear; discouraging random displays of goods external to stalls)
- Link to Ormskirk Town Centre Strategy (branding of Ormskirk market; encouraging footfall; methods of advertising (local radio; links with local transport; posters at stations)
- Tourism (building on historical perspectives – tours of the Parish Church)
- Visitor Map (identification of venues; locations of “the Map” across the town; historical perspective; inclusion of defibrillator access points).

The Technical Services Manager confirmed that comments relating to issues raised previously in respect of the Market had been fed through, as appropriate and, as the Visitor Map was currently being updated, made an undertaking to pass on Members comments in relation to inclusion of the defibrillator icon to denote locations and suggested sites for the map, as appropriate.

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| <p>Recommendation: That the Visitor Map of Ormskirk Town Centre be improved with locations and insertion of defibrillator icon to be inserted, forward, as appropriate.</p> |
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Presentation 3 – Car Parking in Ormskirk Town Centre

Members considered information presented by the Technical Services Manager on car parking in the town centre, supporting information was circulated (Table 7 and 8) on revisions to the Council’s car parks map and car parking charges in the town’s Council was circulated.

In the presentation it was explained that parking in town centres represents a complex of issues hampered by a number of significant problems, including the growth of car ownership, that has exceeded what many traditional urban centres can accommodate. It has had to be recognised that parking comes at a cost that needs to be covered by “someone, somewhere and somehow” but this has proved to be emotive. Car parking policies that are embedded in a holistic transport strategy remain problematic because of the numerous stakeholders involved all working to different objectives.

It is recognised that town centres today are exposed to intense competition and need to do what they can to ensure accessibility. Car use and ownership has continued to rise and saturation point is not expected until 2035.

Cost of Parking

Table 7

Parking Charges table - to be inserted here

The cost of car parking both to the ‘user’ and the Council or private companies, who need to cover their costs in relation to maintenance and management of car parks as well as long-term investment in the quality of the car parks, was referenced. Additionally, car parks also attract business rates that must be paid. Consequentially, neither on-street nor off-street parking is “free.”

Car Parks in the Town Centre

Table 8

Ormskirk Town Centre Car Parks map to be included here

The Council-run car parks in Ormskirk town centre are controlled through “pay and display” There are 847 spaces on 10 car parks. Two other car parks, Finnegans Square and the Park and Ride car park at Ormskirk Station remain free of charge. Current charges to use the council car parks in Ormskirk are applicable Monday – Saturday between the hours of 08.30am – 5.30pm and details were provided on the income, charges and maintenance. Parking permits are also available costing £195 per year or £24 per calendar month.

Enforcement

In relation to enforcement it was stated that the Borough Council are responsible for off-street car parking but it is the responsibility of Lancashire County Council to look after car parking breaches on-street (Monday to Saturday).

The processes in relation to the operation of enforcement including the difficulties encountered by enforcement officers; evidencing breaches and the exceptions that allow some users to park in restricted areas.

It was acknowledged that there had been problems associated with a privately-owned car park servicing the town centre.

Car Parking – Findings of others

Information in relation to access and in particular improving the parking experience in town centres extracted from research undertaken by the Association of Town Centre Management (ATCM) was also circulated.*

The Genecon report on ‘High Street Performance’ issued in December 2011 to coincide with the launch of Mary Portas high street review assessed the causes of decline of the high street and prognosis for the future. Its findings on spacial and physical factors features were referred to as was an extract from the Alliance Boots ‘Car Parking – A Retailer’s View, featured by the Federation of Small Businesses, in particular the loss of customers to other destinations with insufficient / smart car parking; on-line and out of town retail parks being cited as causes.

“Remember that car parks are for people. The more you do to make parking attractive to the people you do want in them, the less attractive they are to the people you don’t want in them. Safer Parking attracts customers.”

Kelvin Reynolds, Director of Operations and Technical Services, British Parking Association (BPA) (Extract from ATCM Research)

Future developments

It was stated that the Council continues to respond to feedback and the experiences of other local authorities.

In relation to the use of technology for alternative methods of payment of the car parking fee, including those via mobile and smart phones, these would continue to be evaluated as were up-grades to the hand-held devices of enforcement officers.

In discussion questions and comments were raised in relation to:

- Pay & Display (P&D) (charges for long and short stays; allocation of disabled bays; facilities at/provision of “cashless” P&D machines; CCTV monitoring; costs associated with provision / maintenance of P&D machines.)
- Alternative methods of fee payment (use of advances in technology; payment via smart phones; credit / debit card payments.)
- Appeals Panel (membership and role of the Panel.)
- Car Parking Map of Ormskirk Town Centre (quality of information provided on the revised Map).

The Technical Services Manager responded to questions and provided clarification on issues raised in discussion. He confirmed, that the updated Ormskirk Town Centre map of council car parks, as circulated, would be included on the Council’s web-site.

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| <p>Recommendations: 1. Alternative methods of payments at Pay and Display machines be included as part of any future assessment of these facilities.</p> <p>2. Ormskirk Town Centre map of Council Car Parks, as revised to be included on the Council’s web-site.</p> |
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Meeting of the Corporate and Environmental Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 15 October 2015 the Council Chamber, 52 Derby Street, Ormskirk

Presentation 4 – Ormskirk Town Centre – Technology, Marketing and the Contribution of Edge Hill University

Members considered information presented by the Senior Planning Officer (Housing and Regeneration) in relation to technology, marketing and the contribution of Edge Hill University and the impact on Ormskirk Town Centre.

Brand and Marketing

The presentation highlighted the need for a single marketing brand for Ormskirk and proposals to establish a Marketing Stakeholder Working Group whose remit would include: undertaking market research to establish a customer base; exploring perceptions and USPs; using evidence to support the development of an “Ormskirk” brand; looking at web and social media; provision of a calendar of events; encouraging footfall through targeted marketing; exploration of the town’s wi-fi provision and other technology to assist marketing.

Technology

Reference was made to the ideas in technology that had been put forward earlier in the review including the exploration of digital signage as an alternative to A-boards outside shops; the display of digital art in empty shops; exploration of a mobile app for Ormskirk (with assistance from Edge Hill University) and exploration of the establishment of a footfall base to assist the measurement / success of marketing.

Contribution of Edge Hill University

The good working relationship of the Borough Council and Edge Hill University (Edge Hill) was referred to. During the development of the Ormskirk Town Centre Strategy the University and Students’ Union had been fully involved and would continue to be part via the working group. The role of Edge Hill in contributing to the economy to benefit the town centre was highlighted. This included drawing on their technology expertise, particularly through the development of a mobile app; becoming more involved in the town centre; harnessing student spending power and encouraging visitors not to bypass the town.

In discussion questions and comments were made in relation to:

- Business in the Community – liaising with town centre business owners; traders; Love Ormskirk; effect of business rate on encouraging retail investment in the town.
- Marketing Stakeholder Working Group – composition / membership / remit.
- Research – updating market research; establishment of a footfall base; recognising “our customer and visitors”.
- Priorities for the future – bus station refurbishment; refinement of the bus /rail/ cycle link; coping with traffic congestion in the Town Centre; involvement with the West Lancashire Masterplan for Transport; Derby Street rail bridge (anticipated

- works); development of the park & ride facility at Ormskirk Station; improvement “visual” impact of visitors alighting from trains / buses into the Town Centre.
- Edge Hill / Ormskirk Bus Station bus service – access by the public to access events at the Ormskirk campus.
- Attracting visitors to the Town – “market day” special bus service (Ormskirk as a tourist destination); advertising more widely (bus shelter hoardings; on transport); improvements to rail station parking facility / access to the town centre; improving the perception of the town as a “whole week” experience, not just for 2 “market” days; impact of car parking charges.
- Role of Merseyrail – liaison; improvements to station approach footpath / car parking arrangements at the station.
- Traffic management - on-going problem of traffic lights combinations; increases in volume of through traffic; bottle necks (Derby /Stanley Street/Wigan Road; Moor Street/Moorgate/Park Road)
- Edge Hill – utilisation as a resource (marketing / business programmes /opportunities for student involvement)
- Investing in technology in the Town Centre – wi-fi accessibility; interactive /touch screens; “big screen” advertisement on “market days”.
- Events Square – exploring effective usage /function.

The Technical Services Manager provided an update in relation to proposed works on the Derby Street railway bridge. He made an undertaking to raise with Lancashire County Council: progress on the railway bridge improvements; the current position relating to traffic-light management in the Town Centre and the proposed cycle link from the town centre to Edge Hill University.

Additional clarification was provided by the Deputy Assistant Director Housing and Regeneration on points raised in respect of on-going discussions with Merseyrail in relation to land affecting improvements to car parking arrangements at Ormskirk Train Station and on the parallel process of the review with the development of the Strategy.

Presentation 5 – The Market and Moor Street Improvements

The Technical Services Manager update Members on the changes to the Market and Moor Street Improvements as part of the Committee’s continuing review.

The Market

The changes to the layout, including the location of stalls and the space that had been created in the town centre as a result of those changes.

Additionally, it was reported that the Market Traders’ had made a request, since the introduction of the new arrangements, for additional space to be allocated to them in front of the stalls. This would only be for movable goods and would not include expansion of the canopied area over the additional space.

Additionally, in consultation with the Council’s Arts Development Manager, it was planned to introduce a ‘vintage’ element to the market. Discussions with existing stallholders in relation to this proposal were currently taking place and it was hoped to commence this venture from April 2016.

The 'branding' of the market was also something that had been referred to earlier in the review and it was anticipated that a relaunch would take place in Spring 2016 with the stalls displaying the new 'branded' canopies.

Members heard that the proposed market research into footfall would include consultation with current market traders as well as town centre retailers.

Moor Street Improvements

The Technical Services Manager reported that the Moor Street Improvements were finished on 28 August 2015, immediately prior to the Motorfest event. Further environmental works, including seating and placement of "trees" was expected to be undertaken in November.

Reference was also made to the 'deep' drainage gullies that had been installed by the contractors were causing problems and that LCC, as the highway authority, would be undertaking remedial work on them. Whilst it was envisaged that the gullies would be replaced by shallower ones, to match those in Aughton Street, it was now understood that the depth of the existing gullies in Moor Street would be reduced with a resin bonded aggregate filler. It was stated that aggregate, whilst initially looking smart, was prone to displacement and breakage, particularly from the weight of goods traffic. It was understood that this may be a temporary fix.

Members expressed concern about the use of the resin bonded aggregate as a permanent solution and advised Mr Brady to seek clarification from LCC on the decision to fill the gullies with bonded resin aggregate.

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| Recommendation: Clarification to be sought from the County Council to establish if the use of bonded resin aggregate in the gullies on Moor Street is intended to be a temporary or a permanent solution. |
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Meeting of the Corporate and Environmental Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 3 December 2015 the Council Chamber, 52 Derby Street, Ormskirk

Presentation 6 – Regeneration, Leisure and the Night Time Economy

Members considered information presented by the Economic Regeneration manager and Arts Development Manager which was supported by a series of slides.⁺

Ormskirk Town Centre Strategy

The Economic Regeneration Manager provided an update relating to the Ormskirk Town Centre Strategy, the draft of which had been approved by Cabinet at its meeting in September 2015 and reported that partner endorsement was being secured. She informed Members that four sub-groups had now been established namely, Market and Car Parks; Building and the Public Realm; BID and Marketing.

She then went on to explain the projects that the Marketing Sub-Group would be tasked with, to include: visitor profiling; shopping habits; perceptions; competitor analysis and the unique selling point (USP). It was envisaged that these would underpin the branding and subsequent marketing of Ormskirk.

An update in relation to events previously reported during the course of the review was provided. Actions delivered in the latter part of 2015 had included the Events Marquee and the expansion of events at the Chapel Gallery to include a vintage/handmade fair and the introduction, for Christmas 2015, of a “storyteller” narrating the Fairy Tale of Ormskirk, through banner and illuminated installations in empty shops.

It was acknowledged that the High Street was changing from the traditional shopping only purpose and its potential was now seen as more of a leisure destination.

The Arts as a tool for Regeneration

The Arts Development Manager explained that by looking at the experiences of other towns and cities who had explored an alternative approach, through innovative arts programmes, a quality experience for visitors could be achieved. It was explained that by drawing on a town’s local heritage as an inspiration for an event the outcome could bring positive memories and encourage revisits.

Cultural Tourism – West Lancashire

Members heard of the great potential in Ormskirk to attract visitors. Examples included the changes proposed at Chapel Gallery, as part of its exhibition and events programme and the potential of the High Street as a leisure destination.

In relation to the “High Street”, the various options to accomplish a change, through animating and improving the environment were referred to including: the introduction of visual sculpture; creating opportunities for animation (the festive displays in empty shops were an example of this); through the performing arts (street entertainers; drama; dance and storytellers) and exhibitions, arts and craft markets (Ormskirk Handmade and Vintage Fair).

It was emphasised that the provision of quality experiences within town centres for its visitors was likely to encourage revisits. The impact of the annual Motofest in Ormskirk town centre was cited as evidence of this.

Reference was also made to the success of the Sunday Summer Vintage and Handmade Fairs piloted in 2013/14 that saw an increase in visitor numbers to Chapel Gallery from 29,000 to 37,000, despite the small exhibition space.

In conclusion, the Arts Development Manager referred to potential ideas /actions for the future. These included the development of an annual fairy tale event; arts and crafts; vintage and handmade stalls alongside the more established traders on the Market, with an outcome, through the provision of a mix of activities, of an increase in the footfall across the town, including Chapel Gallery, thus attracting more visitors and adding to their overall experience of Ormskirk.

Presentation 7 – The Market and Moor Street Improvements

Members considered an updated from the Technical Services Manager on the Market and Moor Street Improvements. This also included an update on refurbishment work undertaken by Lancashire County Council on the gullies, an issue identified earlier in the review.

The Market and Moor Street Improvements

It was reported that resurfacing had been completed; bins installed and installation of the benches and lit street trees were scheduled to be completed during December.

In relation to improvements to the gullies, bonded aggregate had now been inserted and colour-matched to the channels. It was understood that Lancashire County Council (LCC) would be monitoring the effectiveness of the aggregate.

In discussion comments and questions were raised in relation to:

- Moor Street Improvements – effective drainage / performance of the gullies.
- Ormskirk Town Centre traffic management in the pedestrian area – methods to restrict vehicle access / indiscriminate vehicle movement; the effectiveness of enforcement; advantages/disadvantages and types of more physical solutions; restrictions for heavy goods vehicles.
- Derby Street Railway Bridge – proposed works; vehicle restrictions; impact on business deliveries; diversion of traffic.

In relation to questions raised on vehicle enforcement orders in force in the Town Centre, Members were informed that issues affected by these were regularly raised with Lancashire County Council (LCC), as the responsible highway authority.

During discussion on traffic management safety in the pedestrian area, solutions to deter misuse of vehicle access in / through the town centre were put forward including: narrowing the access points to the area; installation of gates; installation of automated barriers or rise/fall bollards. It was acknowledged that any proposals for more permanent “solutions” would need to include measures to allow access by the emergency services and delivery vehicles.

It was agreed that traffic management safety in the pedestrian area was an issue requiring further consideration and the Technical Services Manager was asked to provide further detail in relation to ideas raised and information on the Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) covering the Town Centre. This was added to Project Plan was consideration at the next meeting (*18 February 2016*).

In answer to a Member question relating to maintenance of the gullies and the drainage problems that had been referred to, the Technical Services Manager undertook to raise the issue with LCC.

Members heard that since the provision of trade/stall data, earlier in the review, the popularity of stall trading on “Thursdays” had risen with a larger variety of goods now being made available. The demand for stalls by traders on Saturday remained high. The monitoring of the performance of the two market days would continue.

In relation to the provision of new canopies and re-launch of the Market covered earlier in the review, it was reported that the wet weather had impacted on some improvements and a re-launch of the Market was planned for Spring 2016.