



CABINET: 9 MARCH 2021

**EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW &
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 25
MARCH 2021**

Report of: Corporate Director of Place and Community

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor Ian Moran / Councillor David Evans

Contact for further information: Mr Peter Richards

**SUBJECT: ORMSKIRK TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY ACTION PLAN UPDATE
2021-2026 AND THE HERITAGE ACTION ZONE PROGRAMME**

Wards affected: Ormskirk Ward(s)

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To outline and inform members regarding the details of the Action Plan for 2021 - 2026 in relation to Ormskirk Town Centre and to update Cabinet on the progress of the Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) project and how this project will assist with the recovery and regeneration efforts for the town centre.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

- 2.1 That the Ormskirk Town Centre Strategy Action Plan 2021-2026 be considered and approved by Cabinet.
- 2.2 That the ongoing work on regeneration plans for Ormskirk Town Centre as proposed in the Heritage Action Zone (HAZ), that is included within the Town Centre Strategy Action Plan, be noted.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

- 3.1 That the agreed comments of the committee on the Ormskirk Town Centre Strategy Action Plan 2021-2026 be considered by the Corporate Director of Place and Community, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, before taking the Action Plan forward.

4.0 ORMSKIRK TOWN CENTRE ACTION PLAN 2021 - 2026

- 4.1 The Ormskirk Town Centre Strategy Action Plan 2021-2026 follows the adoption of the Ormskirk Town Centre Strategy 2015-2020 in September 2015, and as agreed by Cabinet, an Ormskirk Town Centre Management Group was established.
- 4.2 In 2020 Ormskirk town centre was successfully awarded High Street Heritage Action Zone funding by Historic England to help deliver improvements to the high street utilising Ormskirk's heritage. This funding (£755,000) was supported by match funding provided by WLBC and Lancashire County Council (£1.9m) which was allocated to deliver improvements within Ormskirk town centre. This updated action plan seeks to link with and build upon the HAZ programme. It is hoped this new vision and proposed significant level of investment can act as a crucial intervention and help deliver confidence that Ormskirk town centre can move beyond the COVID 19 pandemic and prosper in the medium to long term.
- 4.3 Seven key action areas have been included within the updated action plan which will work in combination to continue to progress improvements within Ormskirk town centre. These are Brand, Marketing and Town Centre Management, Heritage & Culture, Ormskirk Market, town centre car parks, transport and access, night time economy and monitoring and review.
- 4.4 Branding for Ormskirk town centre will be developed to build a sense of identity for the town centre. This could be achieved by building upon the heritage of the town and communicating via a robust marketing strategy communicated both locally and further afield.
- 4.5 Liaising with the Town Centre Management Group and the newly formed Cultural Consortium (which includes Ormskirk Community Partnership, Positive Placemakers Community Interest Company, Chapel Gallery, Edge Hill University and Ormskirk and District Family History Society) a series of cultural events are to be delivered both within the town centre and online. These events are to be designed to encourage engagement with all and raise the profile of Ormskirk to help increase footfall.
- 4.6 To help fund town centre improvements funding streams will continue to be identified to ensure any schemes are financially viable. Potential schemes to be prepared to ensure shovel ready projects can be used when grant funding becomes available.
- 4.7 A full appraisal of the Ormskirk Town Centre Conservation Area will be undertaken to provide information on physical assets and their historical significance. All projects undertaken will be, where applicable, discussed with Historic England and advice will be sought to ensure that Ormskirk's heritage is safeguarded and, where possible, enhanced.

- 4.8 As part of the HAZ a number of improvements to the public realm will be delivered over the four year programme to 2024. These include the Ormskirk Eastern Gateway, Moor Street and Wheatsheaf Walk. These projects aim to improve the appearance of this important gateway, enhance accessibility in to the town centre and provide public areas which can be used to increase dwell time in the town centre (i.e. the amount of time they spend in the town centre).
- 4.9 As part of the HAZ a programme of events will take place to deliver events which celebrate Ormskirk's heritage. These will be facilitated in partnership with the Cultural Consortia and partners such as the Chapel Gallery and community groups.
- 4.10 The appearance and stall layout of Ormskirk Market will continue to be improved to ensure the market operates alongside businesses and increase visitors to the town centre. New traders will be encouraged to operate at Ormskirk Market, thus increasing stall numbers and providing a wider range of commodities which will enhance the sustainability of the market. The feasibility of artisan and specialist markets will also be explored to either enhance the offer on regular market days or to operate on additional days to increase footfall levels in the town centre.
- 4.11 The overall use of the land area of the car parks will be investigated to ascertain whether further other services can be installed. Examples of such services could be parcel collection lockers or valeting, potentially raising revenue for the Council and helping our businesses adapt to changing consumer behaviour of shopping online.
- 4.14 The installation of additional electronic vehicle charging points within town centre Council car parks will also be enabled, helping to support the Council's commitment to reducing climate change and improving air quality. This will build upon the funding secured to install twelve electronic vehicle charging points located within three town centre car parks (four charging points in each) to be installed by April 2021.
- 4.15 The installation of additional contactless methods for purchasing car parking tickets to be investigated. This may include payment via smart phone application.
- 4.16 The Ormskirk Eastern Gateway project will enhance transport and access which will link the railway station to the bus station at the eastern approach to the town centre. The project will improve the link to St Helens Road and the town centre. Cycle routes will be made safer and physically improved to help link the railway station to the bus station and Edge Hill University. This scheme should deliver significant physical and visual improvements helping to draw people into the town centre using sustainable transport.
- 4.17 Projects to enhance the public realm to assist the further development of the night time economy will include a landscaping scheme at Wheatsheaf Walk and lighting enhancements in Church Street.

- 4.18 Continued collation of footfall and property vacancy data will help to monitor and review actions taken to improve the town centre. Liaison and consultation with town centre businesses will also help to ensure that any planned projects will help to make businesses more resilient, create a vibrant place and attract further investment within the town centre environment.

5.0 NEXT STEPS

- 5.1 It is evident that Ormskirk town centre is in an extremely challenging period generally and that the COVID-19 pandemic has had, and will continue to have an impact upon it. However, the town centre has fared better than many other town centres during the pandemic and there are many reasons to be optimistic for Ormskirk town centre and, in the short to medium term, Ormskirk is well positioned as a retail/leisure destination in the post COVID-19 world.
- 5.2 With regards to safe transport access Ormskirk is also well positioned with new cycle routes currently in development. Officers at both Lancashire County Council and West Lancashire Borough Council have been working on a number of proposals to improve cycle infrastructure in Ormskirk, with the Ormskirk Eastern Gateway proposals being a key part of this.
- 5.3 Given officers at Lancashire and West Lancashire have already been working collaboratively on a number of transport and public realm related schemes to deliver much needed improvements, supported by a successful Heritage Action Zone bid and effective leadership from Town Centre Management Group, Ormskirk Town Centre is in a strong position to survive in the short term and ultimately grow and prosper in the medium to long term.
- 5.4 As the recovery phase continues, it will be extremely important to use all available means to understand the new baseline position, sustain it and grow as appropriate. Officers will also continue to monitor and apply for all relevant funding streams that could assist with recovery efforts and deliver our aspirations for the future.
- 5.5 Officers will bring an update on progress with the Town Centre Strategy Action Plan 2021-2026 to Cabinet each year, to enable any necessary modifications to the Action Plan to be considered.

6.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS/COMMUNITY STRATEGY

- 6.1 There are no significant sustainability impacts associated with this particular report and, in particular, no significant impact on crime and disorder. The report has no significant links with the Sustainable Community Strategy. However, by implementing the Ormskirk Town Centre Strategy and encouraging businesses to be engaged in its delivery, there are additional benefits that may include increased footfall into the town centre and the economic impacts this would in turn generate.

7.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are financial and resource implications arising from this report in respect of the cost of delivering proposals submitted as part of the Council's Heritage Action Zone programme, and Officer resources to help deliver those programmes. However, funding identified as match to support the Heritage Action Zone bid has already been allocated for individual projects from WLBC and LCC and the additional funding provided from the HAZ funding will help improve the quality and amount of proposals being brought forward.
- 7.2 Officers will continue to monitor all funding streams made available by the Government and others to investigate if they are appropriate and could be utilised to help with recovery efforts and to generally improve Ormskirk town centre.

8.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 The actions referred to in this report are covered by the scheme of delegation to officers and any necessary changes have been made in the relevant operational risk registers.
- 8.2 There is the risk that projects which require materials that need to be imported from outside of the United Kingdom may need additional financial resources following United Kingdom's exit from the European Union. Goods may be more expensive due to being subject to import taxes/levies and, as a result, increase the costs of projects.
- 8.3 There may be a need to use materials sourced from within the United Kingdom which would negate the risk of leaving the European Union.
- 8.4 The continued COVID-19 pandemic will increase labour costs due to revised working practices including social distancing. This will lead to projects also potentially taking longer to complete on site to ensure a safe working environment for project staff and the public and businesses in the town centre.
- 8.5 The risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic will not have been included in previous financial forecasting of projects as this was an unforeseen event. The pandemic will have a substantial impact upon contractors' costs and increase timescales which will need to be considered to ensure minimal disruption to town centre businesses.
- 8.6 To minimise the associated financial risks of projects being over the forecast, Council Officers will investigate with partners the likelihood of any increased financial assistance.

9.0 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The proposals contained within this report should help support the development of the town centre helping to increase access for all to essential services and leisure facilities. The proposals will also help support active lifestyles and positive mental health.
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Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D (5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

There is a direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders, therefore an Equality Impact Assessment is required. A formal equality impact assessment is attached as an Appendix to this report, the results of which have been taken into account in the Recommendations contained within this report

Appendices

Appendix A – Review of Ormskirk Town Centre Strategy Action Plan 2021-2026