



CORPORATE & ENVIRONMENTAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

**MEMBERS UPDATE 2017/18
ISSUE: 2**

Article of: Director of Development and Regeneration

**Contact for further information: Mr D Carr (Extn. 5122)
(E-mail: Dominic.Carr@westlancs.gov.uk)**

SUBJECT: ORMSKIRK TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY UPDATE

Wards affected: Ormskirk Ward(s)

1.0 PURPOSE OF ARTICLE

- 1.1 To provide an update in relation to the implementation of the Ormskirk Town Centre Strategy 2015-2020, including a summary of the Ormskirk Town Centre Stakeholder Event held in March 2017.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Following the adoption of the Ormskirk Town Centre Strategy 2015-2020 in September 2015, and as agreed by Cabinet, an Ormskirk Town Centre Management Group with appropriate sub groups was established. The group involves representatives from West Lancashire Borough Council, Ormskirk Community Partnership, Ormskirk businesses, Business in the Community (BITC), Edge Hill University and Student Union. In joining the Management Group all members have formally endorsed the Town Centre Strategy and given a commitment to supporting and delivering its aims.
- 2.2 In November 2015 the Town Centre Management Group held its first meeting and discussed the key actions contained within the Town Centre Strategy as well as the potential of developing a Business Improvement District (BID) for Ormskirk. Subsequently sub groups were set up in March 2016 and held a number of meetings to start delivering key actions contained within the Town Centre Strategy. Although there was merit to these groups it was decided that due to the wide range of topics covered a more effective way to move forward

would be to convene specific task and finish groups, to meet when a specific project is identified for action.

- 2.3 In July 2016 the Council's Corporate & Environmental Overview & Scrutiny Committee completed a project entitled 'A Market Strategy for Ormskirk' in which a number of recommendations in relation to the ongoing improvement to Ormskirk town centre were made. These recommendations were approved by Cabinet and have been fed into the implementation of the actions within the Town Centre strategy.
- 2.4 Although the Town Centre Management Group has made significant progress bringing forward actions contained within the Town Centre Strategy, there have been a number of changes to the makeup of the group including, the demise of Love Ormskirk in 2016, and the creation of a new organisation to represent town centre businesses known as OTC- Business Action. As well as representing businesses, this group is actively looking to deliver events to enhance the town centre. We have also had changes to the representatives of BITC members due to the fact that national store retail managers typically only spend 2-3 years in a store before moving. However, despite these changes the Management Group has managed to adapt and continues to operate effectively.
- 2.5 Since its formation the Town Centre Management Group has met every quarter, demonstrating that it is an effective partnership capable of delivering actions contained within the Town Centre Strategy.

3.0 TOWN CENTRE STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP

- 3.1 An agreed action of the Town Centre Strategy is a proposal to host an annual Stakeholder Event to engage with wider stakeholders who do not sit on the Management Group. The first annual Stakeholder Event took place in March 2017, 12 months after the sub groups and town centre management structure was established.
- 3.2 This event was well attended by representatives from local businesses, resident groups, Edge Hill University, Council officers and members. Presentations were provided by members of the Management Group, as well as the Leader of the Council, to update attendees in relation to the partnership work the Management Group have been doing and are proposing to do. The event was extremely positive and also served as an excellent networking opportunity for business and other groups to connect.
- 3.3 Comments received both verbally and as part of a feedback response were generally supportive and constructive in relation to the activities undertaken by the Management Group. The event provided an opportunity for those attending to understand the objectives of the Town Centre Strategy and the work of the Management Group, as well as signing up to take part. A number of businesses who attended the event also took the opportunity to join the OTC- Business Action group. It is proposed that the next annual Stakeholder Event will take place in March 2018 and we are currently working with OTC-

Business Action to investigate the possibility of holding an additional smaller event to engage with businesses and other stakeholders and provide an opportunity for networking.

4.0 CURRENT POSITION

4.1 The Town Centre Management Group has made progress in implementing the Town Centre Strategy and has been successful in delivering a number of actions contained within the Strategy. Appendix A shows a more detailed breakdown of actions and progress contained within the Strategy. However, a summary of some of the key successful actions include:

- Conducting essential market research to help understand, position and promote Ormskirk.
- Employing consultants to provide branding work to promote the town centre.
- The strategic purchase of Wheatsheaf Walk shopping centre in the town centre and the subsequent successful re-let of vacant units.
- Installing a footfall monitoring system for Ormskirk town centre to capture data over a 5 year period. This helps us monitor the strength of the town centre, evaluate how interventions are performing and provide evidence to assist with funding applications.
- Delivering a number of events to help increase footfall and raise the profile of the town centre including Love Your Local Market festival, Ormskirk Gingerbread Heritage festival, Makers and Vintage markets, Fairytale Come to Ormskirk festival and enhancement of the Christmas lights switch on event.
- Rolling out of branding for Ormskirk including new banners, merchandising and vinyl graphics amongst others.
- Creation of a new website for Ormskirk town centre which utilises the branding work and promotes the town centre and West Lancashire assets.
- Developed an events calendar to pull together the main events that are organised in Ormskirk and supported by different organisations. This is now published on the new website for the town centre.
- The Council has improved the layout and appearance of the market and has introduced new gazebos.
- Using the new gazebos the Management Group has helped facilitate the trial of a series of night markets which have proven extremely popular.
- Investigating the potential of an Ormskirk BID and appointed Groundwork to undertake a feasibility study.
- Creating a business database to improve communication with town centre businesses.
- Council officers also attend the OTC- Business Action group meeting to support and feed back to businesses in the town centre.

4.2 From our vacancy rate survey we know that Ormskirk has significantly lower vacancy rates than the national and regional average and has a higher percentage of independents. This demonstrates that, as a shopping

destination, Ormskirk is still attractive to retailers. In addition, figures from our footfall monitoring camera appear to show that footfall is very healthy and that Saturdays and Thursdays are by far the busiest days, demonstrating the importance of Ormskirk market. It is still too early to understand longer term trends in footfall as the data is only available for just over one year, however officers are currently closely monitoring the data will when trends have been identified a further report will be provided to update Members.

- 4.3 The Harper Dennis Hobbs 2017 Vitality Rankings report which reports on the strength of shopping centres lists Ormskirk at 415 out of 1000 destinations evaluated. This compares favourable against others, for example Southport who were ranked as 690, Prescot who were ranked as 973 and Kirkby who were ranked as one of the lowest at 993. Since the 2016 report Ormskirk had gone up 10 places, demonstrating that Ormskirk is strengthening its position as a shopping destination.
- 4.4 Although Ormskirk town centre is performing relatively well and has benefitted from a number of interventions and careful management, it is important to note that nationally town centres are struggling with increased competition from internet retailing and out-of-town shopping centres. As such, and in order to ensure that Ormskirk remains buoyant, it is extremely important that the Town Centre Management Group continues to operate effectively and positive messages are continually made about the health of the centre.

5.0 NEXT STEPS

- 5.1 It is clear that through effective partnership working Ormskirk town centre is in a relatively strong position. However, with increased competition from internet shopping and out-of-town retailers the Town Centre Management Group and other stakeholders of the town must continue to be responsive to ensure that Ormskirk town centre is in the best possible position to react to market forces and changing shopping trends.
- 5.2 The Town Centre Management Group has also helped to identify potential opportunities for the town and ensure that the town maximises opportunities, such as the growth of international students at Edge Hill University's summer school.
- 5.3 It is extremely important that a sustainable form of finance is found to maintain and enhance Ormskirk's current position. As such the Management Group is currently looking at opportunities for sponsorship for the events that it hosts. The Council has also appointed Groundwork to conduct a feasibility study looking at a possible Business Improvement District for Ormskirk. This would have the potential to provide a sustainable form of finance to deliver additional town centre improvements and activities that businesses might benefit from.
- 5.4 The Town Centre Management Group will continue to move forward to help deliver the action plan in the Strategy. As we have now just passed one full year of data from our footfall monitoring system it will be easier to see trends, such as when the town centre is quieter or busier which can help us to identify

when we need to deliver interventions and how successful interventions have been, helping us to target resources in the most appropriate way.

- 5.5 There are a number of key actions that will help take the town centre forward and which are outlined in Appendix A. Over the coming year it will be extremely important to ensure that we continue to promote Ormskirk as a destination to visit and do business, and that we fully utilise the new website, events calendar and social media channels to raise Ormskirk's profile.

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 which 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 some financial and resource implications arising from this article however these are being met from existing resources.

8.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 This Article is for information only and makes no recommendations. It therefore does not require a formal risk assessment and no changes have been made to risk registers.

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 when undertaking the actions detailed within this article.

Appendices

- A. Review of Action Plan
- B. Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

