



AGENDA ITEM: 7(h)

CABINET: 14 June 2016

Report of: Director of Development and Regeneration

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor Ian Moran and Councillor John Hodson

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SUBJECT: ORMSKIRK TOWN CENTRE RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ACTION PLAN

Wards affected: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To update Members on the findings and recommendations of the Ormskirk Town Centre Destination Research project and to outline how these findings and recommendations sit within the Action Plan of the adopted Ormskirk Town Centre Strategy.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That in light of the Ormskirk Town Centre Destination Research project findings; no changes be made to the adopted Ormskirk Town Centre Strategy or its associated Action Plan (appendix 2).

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 Following Cabinet's approval of the Ormskirk Town Centre Strategy in September 2015, the Ormskirk Town Centre Management Group and Task and Finish Sub-groups have been established to guide and deliver the actions contained within the Ormskirk Town Centre Strategy Action Plan.

3.2 A specific action of the Strategy is to:

“Develop a marketing strategy for Ormskirk. This should include establishing and promoting an appropriate brand for Ormskirk, developing an events calendar, delivering marketing campaigns, establishing a dedicated town centre website, investigating opportunities to utilise social media and a free wi-fi service across the town.”

3.3 To take forward this action, the Council, with support from the Ormskirk Town Centre Management Group, commissioned a piece of market research in order to:

- Review and analyse the nature of Ormskirk as a place and visitor destination including current perceptions and retail habits.
- Carry out new research including visitor, potential visitor, resident, student and business research plus stakeholder engagement to support the future brand development and place marketing; and
- Provide a clear direction in terms of Ormskirk’s “story” based on the insights gathered from the research, identifying key themes in the town’s offer and how these link to distinct target audiences.

3.4 This report centres on this work, although there are a wide range of other actions which are being undertaken, some of which are highlighted in Section 6 below.

4.0 RESEARCH APPROACH

4.1 Wide-ranging and comprehensive consultations were undertaken with a variety of stakeholders between December 2015 and February 2016 including: residents; students; Members; visitors to the town; potential visitors from other towns and other stakeholder organisations and individuals linked to Ormskirk.

4.2 A variety of research methods were undertaken which included: face-to-face surveys in Ormskirk, Chorley and Wigan; an online survey; focus groups; workshops; one-to-one conversations and desk research.

5.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 The research findings comprise of a range of qualitative and quantitative outputs which present positive factors and strengths which should be built upon, and also some challenges which need to be overcome in order to make Ormskirk town centre an even more vibrant and attractive destination for its target audiences and to ultimately increase footfall.

5.2 Some of the positive findings highlighted:

- One-to-one conversations with stakeholders concluded that Ormskirk is a good place to live. It is perceived as safe and leafy with a good night-time economy, mix of independent retailers and the economic benefits of Edge Hill University were recognised.

- The face-to-face street surveys which took place in Ormskirk revealed that 92% of the 215 people surveyed said they were very likely to visit Ormskirk again with positive factors including the general welcome upon entering the town, eating options, services and safety.
- External surveys in Chorley, Wigan and Southport revealed that 68% of 80 people surveyed had heard of Ormskirk and, of those who had visited, the location, eating offer, cleanliness were listed as positive factors.

5.3 The research identified some of the challenges which Ormskirk needs to address as follows:

- One-to-one stakeholder conversations revealed that:
 - Traffic congestion is a problem;
 - There is a lack of public events;
 - The gateway signage is poor;
 - There is a fragmented feel between the town and the University which must be addressed; and,
 - There is a feeling that student accommodation is taking over the town.
- There is a general consensus across all methods of the research that the market's offer needs to be improved because:
 - It is perceived as low quality;
 - The offer too generic;
 - The look, feel and experience lacks vibrancy;
 - The layout needs to be reconsidered;
 - More variety and quality of stalls would improve the offer and make the market sustainable in the long term; and,
 - It appeals largely to older people and lacks a broader appeal.
- With regard to the retail offer, students generally felt that Ormskirk meets their needs in terms of convenience but not their desires. The on-street surveys revealed that the range of shops, events, market and parking were all areas for improvement.
- Respondents were asked about their perceptions of Ormskirk via a word association task in an online survey. Of the 311 responses:
 - 83% perceive the town as functional rather than desirable;
 - 82% perceive Ormskirk as boring rather than exciting and;
 - 68% feel it is quiet rather than busy.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

6.1 A number of recommendations have been made by the consultants as a result of the research findings, all of which have been condensed into a ten point action plan detailed below.

6.2 The research recommends that Ormskirk is considered and promoted in terms of three distinct audience groups: residents, visitors and students.

6.3 The action plan contains ten key points:

1. **Place brand** – to include a narrative and visual.

Current position

We have a proposal from the consultants on how to take this to the next stage and consideration will be given to this via the Management Group and Marketing Sub-group.

Through the destination research, the consultants have made recommendations that Ormskirk is positioned as a “University Market Town”. To clarify this is not a strapline; the positioning merely reflects how Ormskirk is different from its competitors and how, through future branding and marketing, it will be presented in the minds of its target audiences.

This positioning reinforces the Ormskirk Town Centre Strategy vision which states that we must “maximise the benefit of having the successful Edge Hill University within the town”.

2. **Place website** – a central place in which to promote Ormskirk’s offer (along with its wider assets) to its target audience groups.

Current position

The action to develop a website will be progressed by the Marketing Sub-group once the Ormskirk brand is developed.

3. **Relationship with University** – linking in via events, cross promotion etc.

Current position

Edge Hill University and Edge Hill Students’ Union are already engaged in the delivery of the Ormskirk Town Centre Strategy through their participation in the Management Group and Sub-groups.

Edge Hill University students are also running a stall at the May Love Your Local Market event in the town centre on Saturday 28th May.

4. **Link Ormskirk in with a wider offer and assets** e.g. Martin Mere.

Current position

This will be considered through the delivery of some of the other actions including the website, the map of the wider place, events, signage and special markets etc.

5. **Create a map of the wider place.**

Current position

Once the brand is in place, the Marketing Sub-group will take forward this action.

6. **Improve signage** – including gateways and in the town centre.

Current position

This action will be taken forward by the Buildings and Place Sub-group and options will be explored. A walk around survey of the town has already taken place to identify areas for improvement.

7. **Two special markets per month** i.e. farmers, higher end, fashion, students.

Current position

Options will be explored through a review of the market which will be undertaken by the Car Parks and Markets Sub-Group.

8. **Change layout of the market.**

Current position

Given the installation of the new public realm on Moor Street, this action may be difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, options will be explored through a review of the market along with layout options for Aughton Street and Church Street.

9. **Events** – more events and maximise existing events producing a comprehensive calendar which can be promoted.

Current position

A lot of events already take place in and around Ormskirk and it is recognised that there is scope for increased co-ordination and promotion.

The Marketing Sub-group will look to collate this information and promote all events. In terms of delivering more events, Ormskirk will be taking part in the national Love Your Local Market campaign which will see the town animated with bunting and banners plus live entertainment. Future events will also be explored.

10. **History** – Proceed and invest or leave it.

Current position

Ormskirk Community Partnership are currently working on an Ormskirk heritage trail and through the Sub-groups we are looking at updating the maps within the town centre, therefore Ormskirk's historical features will be explored through these activities. In terms of the wider use of heritage as an attraction to drive visitors to Ormskirk, this will need to be given further consideration.

- 6.4 This list of actions are already largely covered by the current Action Plan (appendix 2) which was developed as part of the Ormskirk Town Centre Strategy approved by Cabinet in September 2015. It will, however, enable us to prioritise various actions through the Management Group and Sub-groups. Therefore the recommendation to Members is no changes are required to the existing Action Plan.

7.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS/COMMUNITY STRATEGY

- 7.1 There are no significant sustainability impacts associated with this report and, in particular, no significant impact on crime and disorder. The report has no significant links with the Sustainable Community Strategy although it will impact positively on the economy of Ormskirk, support businesses and local employment opportunities, whilst supporting surrounding areas through the development of the wider visitor economy offer.

8.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There will be some financial/ resource implications arising from this report in respect of the brand visual development, website development, map production, signage and event. Some of these costs will be met using existing resources; however, some aspects may require additional financial support, if this is the case a further report will be brought to Cabinet in due course.

9.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 As there are no changes to the Ormskirk Town Centre Strategy or its Action Plan, there are no further risks associated with this report.

Background Documents

The following background documents (as defined in Section 100D (5) of the Local Government Act 1972) have been relied on to a material extent in preparing this Report.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Document</u>	<u>File Ref</u>
April 2016	Ormskirk Town Centre Destination research	

Equality Impact Assessment

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

1. Equality Impact Assessment
2. Ormskirk Town Centre Strategy Action Plan
3. Destination and visitor research for Ormskirk Town Centre