

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

19 JANUARY 2022

TOWN CENTRES STRATEGY & SUPPORT

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 To provide an update to the Committee on our strategy for supporting the town centres within our District, including ongoing activities and proposals for the coming year.

2.0 Background Information

2.1 As an authority the challenges of our town centres and high streets were acknowledged in the adoption of the original Community Plan in 2018. This led to work around and activity such as the Totally locally Campaign and the Future High Streets fund bids. It is widely acknowledged that the challenges to the high street have intensified as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic. There remains a need for intervention and support from national and local government for businesses, residents and visitors who are crucial in the running of our town centres and high streets. There are a number of key plans and strategies that are important to consider:

2.1.1 National Picture and Direction of Travel

The impact of the pandemic and its subsequent challenges on the nation's high streets has been significant. Some of the main challenges have been store closures, lack of footfall and job losses. Local authorities have been called on to reimagine their high streets and to drive forward positive economic growth. The direction of travel is to see town centres, not as retail centres as they have been traditionally as retailers shift more focus towards online sales, but as community hubs with a wide mix of uses. Residential, leisure and retail should sit alongside each other to encourage people to use town centres for a wide range of uses. NSDC's current Plans and Strategies for recovery take this into account, as detailed below:

2.1.2 NSDC Community Plan

The vision and objectives in the NSDC Community Plan underpin our ethos to enable the District to flourish. This Plan has been considered alongside our activities, with a focus on the objective to 'deliver inclusive and sustainable economic growth', which is fundamental to delivering successful high streets and town centres.

2.1.3 NSDC COVID-19 Crisis Economic Recovery Action Plan

This plan's aim is to put forward a plan to build a more balanced and resilient innovation led economy in the wake of Covid-19. The proposed approach is ambitious in looking holistically to plan for growth through renewing and reconnecting Nottinghamshire's natural, built and industrial environments. This plan is set on 5 key principles: response, recovery, restore, resilience and renewal. Furthermore, the five themes that these principles are based on are: people, business, visitor economy, infrastructure and place.

2.1.4 NSDC Economic Growth Strategy

This strategy reflects what NSDC will do to directly support and lead our local economy to achieve our vision of "building a shared prosperity". It emphasises the need to work collaboratively with partners to achieve success after a challenging period. The report highlights the impact of the pandemic on economic growth, citing that the pandemic will result in a loss of £307m GVA across the District. The key messages in this strategy are put forward to encourage investment and opportunity through 2021-2026.

2.1.5 Newark Town Investment Plan (TIP)

In July 2020 the Newark Towns Fund Board submitted the Newark TIP, which outlines thirty projects, including 10 priority projects, to span the next 30 years, including plans to regenerate the town centre, boost business and improve infrastructure.

The vision in the TIP is for a place that people and businesses, which is transformative and crucially, deliverable;

- Choose as their destination of choice for learning and investment in the 21st century.
- Live and locate in green sustainable communities.
- Connect to sustainable transport within the town (within 20-minutes) to fulfil their daily ambition.
- Enjoy our heritage and open spaces and engage with the vibrancy of our town centre culture (shrinkage of retail and replacement with vibrant and viable alternatives).

The vision has been developed to be delivered through four pillars of change within which the vision can be broken into a series of realisable and manageable initiatives being;



In March 2021, it was announced that Newark had been successful in their bid for £25m of the Towns Fund to deliver the 10 priority projects set out in the TIP. Since the announcement, business plans for these projects have been underway and progress has been made on kick-starting delivery. Section 3 gives an update on each of these projects.

2.2 Newark-on-Trent Pioneer for NSDC Activity

Newark-on-Trent, being the districts largest town centre, has been the focus for activity for supporting the high street. The strategic aims for the town are based on the four pillars of the TIP: Skills, Education, and Business; Connectivity (digital, physical, people, and services); Town Centre Regeneration and Culture; and Town Centre Residential. Activities within Newark will be influenced by a number of upcoming key strategies including the Newark Heart project, the HAZ Cultural Consortium, Newark Town Council's What's On Guide, the Evening Economy Strategy, the Public Realm Masterplan, the Town Centre Masterplan and the Movements Strategy. All strategies will be interlinked and draw upon the four pillars of the TIP. Key projects in the town centre led by NSDC that are acting as catalysts for this work include the Travelodge, which opened in May 2021, the

Buttermarket, which is undergoing refurbishment works and has been fully let and 32 Stodman Street, of which planning has been submitted for a mixed use scheme. Furthermore, Towns Fund catalyst projects include, the IASTI, SiSCLog, YMCA, Construction College, 20 Minute Town and the Castle Gatehouse.

3.0 Proposals

3.1 Activities to Date

Taking into account the plans and strategies identified in Section 2, support for the town centres has been a priority for Officers in Economic Growth & Visitor Economies throughout the Covid-19 period and a number of activities have provided some relief.

3.1.1 Covid-19 Support Grants

The Council started paying the Government financial support business grants to local businesses on 27th March 2020. During the pandemic, the range of Government grant awarded to date by NSDC is £50.770m. NSDC has also made £60k in providing business support. Furthermore, NSDC's Economic and Visitor Economy team were trained in Grantfinder, to help local businesses access further grant funding from other sources.

3.1.2 Reopening High Streets Safely / Welcome Back Fund

In June 2020 the Council were provided a Reopening High Streets Safely fund of £108k to provide information, advice and guidance to retailers, to communicate key safety messages to the public. With the prolongation of the pandemic, in March 2021 the Government announced a further £108k titled the 'Welcome Back Fund', for further encouraging visitors back to our town centres.

3.1.3 High Street Diversification Fund

In October 2020, NSDC launched the High Street Diversification Fund to offer funds to support local independent High Street Retail Town Centre based/Hospitality businesses with a grant of £250 (to be match funded) towards investment in e-commerce. More than 200 applications for funding for Web Investment and Social Media Advertising were received and to date over 80 businesses have made claims following the successful launch of e-commerce platforms.

3.1.4 Business Growth & Resilience Programme

This year, NSDC set up and funded a £300,000 Business Growth and Resilience Programme with the aim of supporting over 100 local businesses, creating new jobs and safeguarding existing ones. The scheme started in July 2021 and will run to the end of 2022. The scheme offers support and guidance from professional industry experts to help local businesses in what will be a critical year as the district recovers from the impact of the pandemic. The programme links business service specialists with local businesses in four key sectors: Accommodation, Manufacturing & Construction, Retail, Food & Beverage and Health & Social Care. Advice and guidance from these specialists will help local businesses to adapt, identify new markets or products, develop their plans, modify their ways of working, establish new supply chains, or provide brokerage for skills and training. Those who participate in the programme could also be eligible to apply for a discretionary grant of up to £5,000 to be spent in any way they see fit to boost their recovery and growth.

3.1.5 **Footfall Cameras within Newark's Heritage Action Zone**

The Reopening High Streets Safely Fund partly funded the installation of five footfall sensors within Newark's Heritage Action Zone this summer (with the HAZ funding providing the balance of funds). The sensors can identify accurate visitor numbers, dwell time, visitor movements and the frequency of visits. This data will be used to understand the vitality and vibrancy of Newark town centre to inform future policy. In addition, it will act as evidence to attract businesses and investors to the town centre. Footfall sensors in Newark have recorded an increase of 116% since July 2021, with 146,700 visitors recorded as visiting Newark in October 2021.

3.1.6 **Shop Local Campaigns**

A number of Shop Local campaigns have been rolled out across the District during the course of the pandemic in line with national safety guidelines. Banners, floor stickers, posters have all been present in the towns and campaigns such as Newark, Southwell, Ollerton and Edwinstowe is Open and the Southwell Late Night Shopping Event have successfully brought people back into the town centre.

3.1.7 **What's On & HAZ Cultural Consortia Events**

There is an emphasis on creating exciting events for our local communities that have all been affected by the pandemic. A 'What's On' programme details these visitor events and 'Newark Creates' is a project that connects the High Street Heritage Action Zone capital and community engagement programmes. It strives to discover new ways of working and approaches whilst supporting the existing cultural landscape, local artists and communities.

3.1.8 **Kickstart Programme**

The Kickstart Scheme provides funding to employers to create jobs for 16 to 24 year olds on Universal Credit. To date, NSDC have been successful in getting over 80 young people into work placements across the District.

3.2 **Town Investment Projects**

There has been significant progress in the Town Investment Projects since the announcement of funding in March 2021 and all projects are working towards their business cases:

- International Air and Space Training Institute (IASTI) - In October 2021, demolition began on the Cattle Market to make way for the IASTI. The IASTI will create new jobs locally and train the next generation of skills-matched aviation professionals with military and civil partners including pilots and engineers. A planning application for the IAST's permanent and purpose-build home was submitted in December 2021 and preparations are in place to secure the seedcorn funding needed to progress to a Full Business Case.
- 32 Stodman Street - A planning application was submitted in October 2021 to redevelop this former Marks and Spencers into a mixed-use housing and commercial development featuring 29 new homes and between two to four new retail units creating activity and footfall. The Town Board approved the project in late November with delegated authority provided to the S151 Officer to approve the full business case. A decision on the planning application is expected shortly.
- YMCA Newark and Sherwood Community and Activity Village - YMCA received the first instalment of 34% of their total grant (the total being £2m) in December 2021 for the expansion of their site with new sports and leisure facilities, music and art spaces,

conferencing, a wellbeing and health delivery service suite, culinary training, the largest outdoor skate park in the East Midlands and an Olympic climbing centre. They are on track to complete construction of the project by March 2022. Progress is being monitored and evaluated and reported to Committee under separate cover.

- Smart Innovation, Supply Chain and Logistics Enterprise Zone (SiSCLog) - Soft market testing responses are being analysed to finalise the plans of the different components of the SiSCLog site, which will create a centre of excellence and provide access to skills development and career pathways. A demand piece of work is being undertaken by the Universities of Lincoln and Nottingham in collaboration with Focus Consulting.
- Newark Cultural Heart – a draft vision and masterplan is out for tender and will be appraised in the New Year for plans to drive and measure additional footfall and local spend through the repurposing of public buildings and spaces, an ongoing calendar of events and activities, and developing a brand and tone of voice for the Town.
- Castle Gate House – The purpose of this project is to enhance the experience of Newark’s foremost historical asset and transform the Castle into a major attraction for residents and visitors alike. There remains a need for additional funding with an application for Heritage Lottery Funding having passed the first stage of consideration.
- 20-Minute Town – an Invitation to Tender notice has been published and private sector sponsors are being pursued to work with the District Council and employers to provide a cycle hire scheme across the town.
- Construction College – the expansion of Newark’s Construction College to deliver c1000 new students in the next 5 years has been delivered and the College welcomed the first students in September 2021. Monitoring and evaluation is ongoing.

3.3 **A46 and Southern Link Road**

In October 2021, the Treasury announced that Newark was successful in its bid for £20m from the Levelling Up Fund to develop the Southern Link Road joining the A46 and the A1, drastically improving traffic flow in and around the town. NSDC is currently working closely with key stakeholders including National Highways and Nottinghamshire County Council to ensure the project is implemented. Alongside this a range of authorities including NSDC, NCC, Lincolnshire County Council, Midlands Connect, Midlands Engine and all LEP, Planning, and Highway Authorities along the A46 Trans-Midlands Trade Corridor continue to identify the A46 Newark Northern Bypass as a key scheme to deliver. Confirmation of a preferred route is awaited early in the New Year.

3.4 **Planned Future Activities**

There are a number of activities planned to continue the support to town centres. These include:

3.4.1 **Newark Town Centre Masterplan**

A Newark Town Centre Masterplan will be developed throughout 2022, which will be complimentary to and build upon the projects and key pillars of the TIP. This masterplan will be a wider development plan which will encompass all parts of the Town Centre and will focus on the vision and ‘how’ we intend to develop, including identification of opportunity sites where redevelopment and repurposing will be encouraged. There is currently no Neighbourhood Plan for Newark, which would be incorporated into the local planning authority policies and assist in shaping the local area. A neighbourhood plan is a document that sets out the planning policies for the local area. It is a document written by the local community rather than the planning authority, and is often led by the Town or

Parish Council. It is a powerful tool to ensure the community gets the right types of development in the right place.

To deliver the Newark Town Centre Masterplan, NSDC Officers, primarily from the Economic Growth and Visitor Economy and Planning Policy teams, will work together to develop a specification to procure a partner to develop this masterplan in Spring 2022.

3.4.2 Landlord Commission

The gathering of a group of the key landowners within high streets to update on key activities, share knowledge and ideas, and harness public and private sector experience to target ways in which post pandemic recovery can be supported.

3.4.3 Business Rate Relief Policy

NSDC have a discounted Business Rate Relief Policy which will be reviewed in 2022 and will focus on how to best incentivise and optimise the overall vision. It will consider geography and/or industry subsets which have optimal impacts. The purpose of this policy will to make awards of relief to those that meet defined qualifying criteria with the aim of driving economic prosperity and high street activity.

3.4.4 Evening and Night Time Economy Strategy

NSDC is currently procuring consultants to provide specialist advice and guidance to develop an Evening and Night Time Economy Strategy for the District. This new strategy will research and review the current state of the local evening and night time economy. It will then inform on SMART short-, medium- and long-term actions which will help establish a vibrant, inclusive, and safe evening and night time economy. This strategic plan should aim to support people and high street business in the process of safely reopening the evening economy of the district, ensuring that the area can adapt and reverse the medium- and long-term impacts of Covid-19.

4.0 Equalities Implications

4.1 There are no direct implications on equality.

5.0 Digital Implications

5.1 There are no direct implications for ICT

6.0 Financial Implications - FIN21-22/2634

6.1 This report has no direct financial implications. The Council has committed resources or has received grant funding related to the current activities being delivered. Separate reports will be presented to members for any proposed activities where the financial implications require member approval.

7.0 Community Plan – Alignment to Objectives

7.1 The strategy and activities outlined align to the Vision, Purpose and Values of the Community Plan by delivering inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS that:

- (a) the contents of the report be noted; and**
- (b) the activities to date and activities proposed be supported.**

Reason for Recommendations

To provide an update on Town Centre strategy and activities delivered through the Economic Growth & Visitor Economy team.

Background Papers

Nil

For further information please contact Jane Hutchinson (post Feb 2022) or Neil Cuttell.

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