

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: THURSDAY, 14 JUNE 2018
 title: CLITHEROE TOWN CENTRE UPDATE
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1 PURPOSE

1.1 To receive an update on activities in connection with Clitheroe town centre regeneration.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities

- Council Ambitions - In addition to Ribble Valley Borough Council striving to meet its three ambitions, it also recognises the importance of securing a diverse, sustainable economic base for the Borough.
- Community Objectives – The issues highlighted in this report will contribute to objectives of a sustainable economy and thriving market towns.
- Corporate Priorities - Delivery of services to all.
- Other Considerations – None.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Council are committed to ensuring the vitality and viability of all the key service centres within the Borough (Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley), and recognise that they represent an important resource of retail, service, leisure and employment provision. This is emphasised within the Council Community Strategy and adopted Core Strategy which identifies as part of its vision that

‘The Ribble Valley will be an area with an exceptional environment with quality of life for all, sustained by vital and vibrant market towns and villages acting as thriving service centres meeting the needs of residents, businesses and visitors.’

2.2 In connection with these aims, the Council agreed in to work with Lancashire County Council, to commission a piece of work to produce a Clitheroe Town Centre Masterplan, as the largest service centre within the Borough, and subsequently Manchester based Turley Associates were appointed to carry forward the project. The brief was to set out the future strategy for Clitheroe town centre, together with development principles for the Market Square, providing the Council with an overview and scope to help create a thriving market place and town centre.

2.3 The Clitheroe Town Centre Masterplan document produced in 2010 identified a number of areas throughout the town centre where improvements could be made to help increase the longer-term vitality and viability of the centre. As part of this, Clitheroe Market and the surrounding site was identified as an area that could act as a ‘catalyst’ where various development options could take place that could better integrate with, and help improve the town centre as a whole. Since then, a number of updates on progress to bring forward an appropriate scheme for the future of the Clitheroe Market site have been made.

2.4 In June 2010 the Council formally adopted the Clitheroe Town Centre Masterplan as a framework for sustaining and promoting growth in Clitheroe. It sets out a number of approaches including potential development areas and townscape improvements. Developed over a period of 12 months consultants established a baseline of evidence, then developed a series of options and approaches to addressing the challenges faced by the centre. The proposals were subject to widespread public consultation and have provided a strategic steer for Town Centre activities. The purpose of the study was to provide a clear Development Strategy and Implementation Plan to enable partners to support the promotion and revitalisation of the Town Centre, helping it to fulfil its potential as an attractive, vibrant and successful location.

3 INFORMATION

3.1 The full Masterplan document covers three primary sections as follows:-

- **Baseline** - the Baseline Paper presented the headlines for Stage 1 of the process. This was informed by a mix of desk and site based appraisals under four key headings to be carried through further work stages to provide continuity. These are described as Place, People & Prosperity, Connections and Town Management. To understand the town, the Baseline paper considered Clitheroe in its wider setting within the Ribble Valley, with a detailed appraisal of the town centre, and emerging opportunities to be considered in further detail through the second stage – Vision and Concepts.
- **Vision & Concepts** - the vision and concepts paper focuses on the key issues for the future of Clitheroe, together with the actions needed to start delivering the vision. This has been set out as 10 Goals, supported by town frameworks and a number of ‘catalyst’ projects. The town frameworks set out the spatial organising principles for Clitheroe, together with a collective of smaller projects that can provide a platform for larger, medium to longer-term catalyst projects capable of activating scales of investment and change that will strengthen local communities and activities, attract new people and activities, and change the way in which people think about Clitheroe as a place to be and visit.
- **Implementation Plan** - the implementation plan is an important aspect within the document to lead the future Vision and Concepts and priority project proposals towards establishing appropriate delivery structures to drive and manage the delivery of the Masterplan projects and in particular and other associated development projects.

3.2 The Masterplan identified a number of activities over a 10 year period including matters around community, townscape, management and marketing and proposals around Castle Street and Clitheroe market. It identified the importance of the market as a catalyst for wider improvement of the town centre, with a high quality, retail led mixed use development, with the main conclusion from work undertaken in preparing the document was the proposal to consider the re-development of the market site.

3.3 The Masterplan also acts a key document as part of the Ribble Valley Core Strategy evidence base, providing the framework principles for Clitheroe Town Centre and information as to where improvements could be made to help increase the longer-term vitality and viability of the area, and whilst the plans for the redevelopment of the Clitheroe Market Site have been subject to a number of changes and delays over some period, recent years have also seen some significant new developments that have taken place that are contributing to overall vitality and viability of Clitheroe Town Centre and its surroundings.

- 3.4 Also, issues regarding town centres generally are mentioned in the Masterplan document such as vacant shop premises and the need to maintain and improve the environment in the town, such as pavements and signage. Arrangements were originally made to bring forward improvements to the streetscape and highways, and discussions had been taking place between Ribble Valley Borough Council and Lancashire County Council Highways Department to identify potential options in which improvements could be made to the general street scene, pavements and highways within the town centre. However due to County Council budgetary constraints this scheme was not progressed. Despite this a number of general maintenance issues which are being dealt with on an ongoing basis in the Town Centre.
- 3.5 Recent years also have seen the introduction of new retail developments around the Town Centre. Firstly Lidl supermarkets opened in August 2011 on Shawbridge Street in Clitheroe and Aldi's new 5,635 sq ft store in Clitheroe opened in late 2015 located on Whalley Road alongside a Pets at Home outlet. These developments in have further assisted the provision of employment opportunities and consumer choices within the town and helping to retain and enhance retail spend and strengthening the local economy.
- 3.6 Holmes Mill is another example of such. The Masterplan identified Holmes Mill as an opportunity site. This exciting new development set on a grade II listed site adjacent to Clitheroe Town Centre was bought by James' Places group in 2015 to redevelop the former derelict textiles mill. The £10million redevelopment of the Holmes Mill complex also includes the Bowland Brewery and Beer Hall, a food hall celebrating local produce from the area, a new 40-bedroom boutique hotel, offices and multi-use function rooms, Bistro and Boiler House Café and development of a new gym facility on the site helping further the local leisure and visitor economy. The Masterplan also identified the Booths site as an opportunity and discussions have taken place the company, these have not borne any fruit in recent times as the company is focussed on other factors.
- 3.7 The Masterplan document detailed a number of specific issues along with the actual formation of 'Early Win' projects, and in revitalising the areas within the Masterplan, it is considered important to identify these small, but significant projects that are achievable in the short term with a view to long term changes when budgets and resources allow. Amongst these early wins that were implemented, activities such as events, marketing and promotion that acted as an important way to demonstrate commitment to Clitheroe Town Centre and the aspirations within the Masterplan.
- 3.8 Originally called the Clitheroe Fine Food and Craft Street Market, which attracted thousands of visitors in August 2010, was one such event as part of the early wins and following on from its success provided the foundations to develop an annual showcase event for the Town Centre plans were put in place for the now established Clitheroe Food Festival, first staged in August 2011 to showcase the best of Ribble Valley and Lancashire food and drink producers. This was a family focused event concentrated around the Market area and Castle Street, and will include a food and drink producers market, country market, live cookery demonstrations by local and top named chefs, children's food oriented activities, historical displays and entertainment.
- 3.9 Complimenting this, a number of marketing, promotion and branding initiatives were developed to emphasize Clitheroe's identity. Lancashire Tourism who went on to brand Clitheroe as 'Lancashire's Food Town' and increasing promotion and tourism activities in this area can trigger wider benefits for future investment and town centre developments. The food town accolade now provides a theme to further encapsulate the brand in addition to the landscape, heritage and independent shopping aspects.

- 3.10 The Council, in recent years also, has also assisted in the creation and facilitation of a Town Team in Clitheroe a consisted of representatives from local interest groups, business, civic and other local stakeholders. The Town Team was originally formed to support the promotion and revitalisation of the town centres, helping them to fulfil their potential as attractive, vibrant and successful locations, bringing together their skills and knowledge and developing links with other local stakeholders. These worked well as a sounding platform for the Council to enable early feedback on any potential or future projects and bring together ideas for other town centre projects. However both these group has not met for some time and the majority of engagement is focused through the towns' local business groups.
- 3.11 For example, Clitheroe Chamber of Trade membership has grown steadily to around 130 from less than 60 in recent years. The continuing growth of the Chamber has also led to stronger partnership working with the Council in activities to promote visitors such as Council support to develop a Visit Clitheroe campaign and website as well as a Facebook platform. This, alongside other initiatives such as the Shop Clitheroe loyalty card scheme has also operated successfully to promote shopping in the town centre.
- 3.12 Clitheroe, like many other towns across the country, has seen many changes in the retail environment in recent years, and in the wake of recent news in both national and local media about distressed retailers (30,000 according to Begbies Traynor) and closures (national brands such as Warren Evans, Thomas Cook, Carluccio's, Jamie Oliver, Byron, Toys R Us, M&S, Prezzo, Maplin, New Look and East are just a few this year), locally, Clitheroe is not immune to the pressures of the 21st Century retail environment.
- 3.13 Clitheroe has constantly recorded one of the lowest shop vacancy rates for many years, not only in Lancashire, but across the country as a whole. However, a number of changes have recently occurred that need to be observed. There are for varying reasons for these occurrences and will be explained later in this report.

GRIMSEY REVIEW

- 3.14 Many retailers are citing the rise in internet sales and changes in buying habits generally, business rates revaluation and uncertainties over Brexit as additive reasons for these current instabilities, and this has been recognised by veteran retailer Bill Grimsey, a former CEO of Wickes, Iceland, Booker and Focus DIY who has decided to put together a team of experienced professionals, from various backgrounds, to revisit the first Grimsey Review "An Alternative Future for the High Street" that was published in Westminster in 2013. Copies of the report are available at www.vanishinghighstreet.com. The aim of revisiting the Grimsey Review will be to establish what impact it had, which recommendations worked and which did not, what has changed since, and what should be done now in order to better prepare our High Streets and Town Centres for the 21st Century. This report is due to be published in July.
- 3.15 One of the members of the team revisiting the Grimsey Review is Matthew Hopkinson who was co-author of the original review document. He has also been involved in the work of the Local Government Association on town centres which officers of the Council have been involved in. The LGA has published a report as part of this work entitled Revitalising Town Centres which can be accessed using the following link www.local.gov.uk/revitalising-town-centres-handbook-council-leadership A copy has also been placed in the members room. In addition to the handbook the LGA has also produced a toolkit to help develop approaches to supporting town centres using broad principles that can be tailored to meet local needs.

- 3.16 The Council has also received a proposal for targeted consultancy to undertake a review of Clitheroe town centre from Matthew Hopkinson to include a package of talks, research and presentations. This information is being evaluated in relation to the wider needs of evidence to support the Councils work. An option could be to explore the opportunity to use these services as a catalyst for wider engagement with the local business community through an event format which will require further discussion with the consultant. A verbal update will be given at Committee
- 3.17 Recent experience and research of this nature highlights that the future context for retailing in town centres will be very different and that centres must therefore adapt to the changing policy and economic landscape. Along with the growth of out-of-centre retail development, the economic climate has had an impact on consumer spending which in turn has had a negative impact on the vitality of the high street nationally which has led to an increase in vacancy rates within many town centres, as retailers attempt to compete in this challenging market and property owners struggle to let their shops to retailers.

SERVICE CENTRE HEALTH CHECKS

- 3.18 The programme of work that has been undertaken to put in place the Core Strategy for the borough in accord with current planning legislation as the central strategy of the Local Development Framework (LDF) assists the Council in the delivery of housing, employment and the protection and enhancement of the environment. The policies within the Council's LDF must be informed by a robust evidence base and therefore as part of this, work is currently being undertaken to update the evidence base to support the LDF and the Core Strategy.
- 3.19 This included Service Centre Health Checks that were undertaken for Clitheroe, Longridge & Whalley that assesses the health of the local centres in line with recognised methodology as well as national policy, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) first published in 2012.
- 3.20 Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley, like other centres nationally, need to play an important role in serving the requirements of the local community on a day-to-day basis. They form a focal point for the surrounding area and provide a wide range of services that are accessible to the population, including retail, employment, leisure along with such things as financial and health services.
- 3.21 In summary, the Service Centre Health Check the assessments drew some positive conclusions in such that the vitality and viability of all three centres - Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley appear to be continuing in their own individual roles and function in the wider Borough in terms of healthy functioning centres. However, given the renewed emphasis on the pressures facing many retailers there is merit in renewing the Service Centre Health Checks not only for Clitheroe, but also for Longridge and Whalley also. These Health Check assessments will enable the Council to review and assess the vitality and viability of the Boroughs' service centres to help ensure an adequate supply of services and facilities to meet the requirements of the local population both currently and in the future.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

- 3.22 As well as the developments mentioned earlier in this report, a number of other developments are currently progressing within Clitheroe Town Centre. Schemes are underway around a number of buildings in the Town Centre; for example, the old White Horse pub on York Street was closed in recent years but has now been undergoing redevelopment into two new retail units and residential accommodation above. The Council's Regeneration department are currently looking into any

potential issues of underused or empty space above businesses within the town centre which will help establish current availability and seek interventions where appropriate for any alternative or residential use.

- 3.23 Another scheme which has recently received planning consent is located at 3 King Street, Clitheroe. The building has been bought and the new owners and proposes alterations and extensions to enlarge two existing retail units, subdivision of existing living accommodation and extension to rear to create four apartments. This site comprises the former Clitheroe Advertiser and Times premises, The Chocolate Box and an apartment above and at the rear of the shops. The small independent chocolate shop established in 1927 is now to close after 91 years in the town and the owners have stated that because the building has been bought and the new owners don't want the business to continue as a chocolate shop.
- 3.24 Also on King Street, Andertons Ribble Valley Butchers has decided to close the Clitheroe shop to consolidate resources and redeploy staff to Longridge, stating that they wish to concentrate on the continued growth and expansion plans for their Longridge based retail, online and catering businesses. Also, Urban Sheep on Moor Lane, citing the rise of internet shopping as a contributing factor leading to the closure of Urban Sheep.
- 3.25 On the site of the Old Post House Hotel on King Street, plans have been approved for a change of use from hotel and restaurant to ground floor and basement retail outlet and six self-contained apartments on the first and second floors and alteration and conversion of rear hotel outbuilding into four self-contained apartments on two storeys. The owners of the hotel site R E Dawson LTD, described of Clitheroe's Dawson's department store also on King Street bosses intend to expand into the site to enhance the existing business sometime in the future but will inevitably mean the closure of the hotel due to this new development. Retail changes, often referred to as churn rates of this nature occur regularly within many market town centres across the country.
- 3.26 As mentioned earlier in this report, the Masterplan is a key document as part of the Ribble Valley Core Strategy evidence base. It is also planned this year to update the previous Town Centre Health Check for Clitheroe to further inform the Council. The study assesses the vitality and viability of each of the Town Centre in the form of a 'health check' exercise in line with national policy and will provide information and context on the continuing role of Clitheroe Town Centre and its function in the wider Borough in terms of a healthy functioning service and retail centre.
- 3.27 Finally, the role and function of Clitheroe as the Borough's largest service centre is influential in the formulation of the Council's Housing and Economic strategies. Improving the public realm, as well as improving the quantity and quality of shopping in the centre helps to enhance self-containment and ensure that shopping and other services are available locally, thus reducing the need to travel elsewhere and contribute to their continuing vitality and viability.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications
- Resources – None.
 - Technical, Environmental and Legal – None.
 - Political – None.

- Reputation - The matters covered in this report link with the Council's objectives of a sustainable economy and thriving market towns.

5 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

- 5.1 To note the contents of this report and endorse the proposed health check review.
- 5.2 Note the proposed publication of the Grimsey Review 2 and LGA toolkit and ask the Chief Executive to prepare a report on actions to support our key service centres in the light of the health check reviews.

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For further information please ask for Craig Matthews, extension 4531.