



CABINET
Monday, 21st June, 2021

You are invited to attend the next meeting of **Cabinet**, which will be held at:

Conference Suite - Civic Offices
on **Monday, 21st June, 2021**
at **7.00 pm** .

G. Blakemore
Chief Executive

Democratic Services
Officer

A. Hendry (Democratic Services)
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Members:

Councillors C Whitbread (Leader of the Council & Leader of the Conservative Group) (Chairman), , N Avey, N Bedford, L Burrows, A Patel, J Philip, S Kane, D Sunger and H Whitbread

PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS MEETING IS OPEN TO ALL MEMBERS TO ATTEND

1. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

This meeting is to be webcast and Members are reminded of the need to activate their microphones before speaking.

The Chairman will read the following announcement:

“I would like to remind everyone present that this meeting will be broadcast live to the Internet and will be capable of subsequent repeated viewing, with copies of the recording being made available for those that request it.

By being present at this meeting, it is likely that the recording cameras will capture your image and this will result in your image becoming part of the broadcast.

You should be aware that this may infringe your human and data protection rights. If you have any concerns then please speak to the Webcasting Officer.

Please could I also remind Members to activate their microphones before speaking.”

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

To be announced at the meeting.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To declare interests in any item on this agenda.

4. MINUTES (Pages 5 - 16)

To confirm the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 20 April 2021.

5. REPORTS OF PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

To receive oral reports from Portfolio Holders on current issues concerning their Portfolios, which are not covered elsewhere on this agenda.

6. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND REQUESTS TO ADDRESS THE CABINET

To receive any questions submitted by members of the public and any requests to address the Cabinet.

(a) Public Questions

To answer questions asked by members of the public after notice in accordance with the provisions contained within Part 4 of the Constitution (Council Rules, Rule Q3) on any matter in relation to which the Cabinet has powers or duties or which affects the District.

(b) Requests to Address the Cabinet

Any member of the public or a representative of another organisation may address the Cabinet on any agenda item (except those dealt with in private session as exempt or confidential business) due to be considered at the meeting, in accordance with the provisions contained within Article 7 of the Constitution (The Executive, Paragraphs 27 and 28).

7. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

To consider any matters of concern to the Cabinet arising from the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function and to identify any matters that the Cabinet would like the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to examine as part of its work programme.

8. COUNCIL HOUSEBUILDING CABINET COMMITTEE - 16 MARCH 2021 (Pages 17 - 22)

(Housing Services Portfolio Holder) to consider the attached minutes from the meeting of the Council Housebuilding Cabinet Committee, held on 16th March 2021, and any recommendations therein.

9. REFURBISHMENT SCHEME (OLDER PERSONS SHELTERED HOUSING) (Pages 23 - 50)

Housing Services – (C-001-2021-22) - This report sets a programme to renew the 'look' of the sheltered Housing communal areas, taking an interior design approach.

10. NEW POLICY - DISPOSAL OF HRA ASSETS (Pages 51 - 62)

Housing Services (C-003-2021-22) - a policy has been written to set out the framework in which the housing assets disposals would take place.

11. REGENERATION OF HRS ASSETS - CREATING PLACE (Pages 63 - 80)

Housing Services (C-005-2021-22) – a new proposals embracing an innovative and forward-thinking 'Place Approach' for larger Council estates such as Limes Farm.

12. RECOMMENDATION OF THE SUPPLIER FOR THE PROPOSED HOUSING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (Pages 81 - 92)

Housing Services (C-002-2021-22) – to provide an opportunity to use technology to reshape the service to be digital by default.

Appendix 1 will follow as a supplementary and will be a private document.

13. QUALIS QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORT - QUARTER 2 - 2020-21 (Pages 93 - 110)

Finance, Qualis Client and Economic Development – (C-004-2021-22) - This report presents the second Quarter's monitoring report for the Qualis trading year 2020/21 and covers the period from 1 February to 31 March 2021.

14. TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION - LOUGHTON BROADWAY, LOUGHTON HIGH ROAD, BUCKHURST HILL & EPPING TOWN CENTERS (Pages 111 - 214)

Finance, Qualis Client & Economic Development (C-005-2021-22) - to assist the economic recovery and sustainability of local High Streets across the district, Business Consultants were appointed to undertake a series of independent economic reviews.

15. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, together with paragraphs 6 and 24 of the Council Procedure Rules contained in the Constitution requires that the permission of the Chairman be obtained, after prior notice to the Chief Executive,

before urgent business not specified in the agenda (including a supplementary agenda of which the statutory period of notice has been given) may be transacted.

In accordance with Operational Standing Order 6 (non-executive bodies), any item raised by a non-member shall require the support of a member of the Committee concerned and the Chairman of that Committee. Two weeks' notice of non-urgent items is required.

16. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

Exclusion

To consider whether, under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press should be excluded from the meeting for the items of business set out below on grounds that they will involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the following paragraph(s) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended) or are confidential under Section 100(A)(2):

Agenda Item No	Subject	Exempt Information Paragraph Number
Nil	Nil	Nil

The Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, which came into effect on 1 March 2006, requires the Council to consider whether maintaining the exemption listed above outweighs the potential public interest in disclosing the information. Any member who considers that this test should be applied to any currently exempted matter on this agenda should contact the proper officer at least 24 hours prior to the meeting.

Background Papers

Article 17 of the Constitution (Access to Information) define background papers as being documents relating to the subject matter of the report which in the Proper Officer's opinion:

- (a) disclose any facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the report is based; and
- (b) have been relied on to a material extent in preparing the report and does not include published works or those which disclose exempt or confidential information and in respect of executive reports, the advice of any political advisor.

The Council will make available for public inspection one copy of each of the documents on the list of background papers for four years after the date of the meeting. Inspection of background papers can be arranged by contacting either the Responsible Officer or the Democratic Services Officer for the particular item.

EPHING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL CABINET MINUTES

Committee: Cabinet **Date:** 20 April 2021

Place: Virtual Meeting on Zoom **Time:** 7.00 - 8.24 pm

Members Present: C Whitbread (Chairman), N Avey, N Bedford, A Patel, J Philip, S Kane and H Whitbread

Other Councillors: R Baldwin, R Bassett, P Bolton, S Heap, S Heather, J Lea, C McCredie, S Murray, S Neville, C C Pond, C P Pond, M Sartin, D Stocker, D Sunger, B Vaz, J M Whitehouse and D Wixley

Apologies:

Officers Present: G Blakemore (Chief Executive), N Dawe (Chief Operating Officer), A Small (Strategic Director Corporate and 151 Officer), S Jevans (Qualis Group Managing Director), N Richardson (Service Director (Planning Services)), J Warwick (Service Manager (Contracts)), H Thorpe (Property Maintenance Operational Assets and Compliance), F Edmonds (Climate Change Officer), T Carne (Corporate Communications Team Manager), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer), L Kirman (Democratic Services Officer) and S Mitchell (PR Website Editor)

170. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Leader of Council made a short address to remind everyone present that the meeting would be broadcast live to the internet, and would be capable of repeated viewing, which could infringe their human and data protection rights.

171. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1. Pursuant to the Council's Member Code of Conduct, Councillor R Bassett declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 8 – 'Delivery of Bakers Lane Leisure Centre', by virtue of being a member of the Qualis Board. The Councillor had determined that his interest was non-prejudicial and that he would stay in the meeting for the consideration of the item.

2. Pursuant to the Council's Member Code of Conduct, Councillor R Bassett declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 12 – 'Qualis Quarterly Monitoring Report Q1 2020/21', by virtue of being a member of the Qualis Board. The Councillor had determined that his interest was non-prejudicial and that he would stay in the meeting for the consideration of the item.

172. MINUTES

Decision:

That the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 11 March 2021 be taken as read and would be signed by the Leader as a correct record.

173. REPORTS OF PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

The Commercial and Regulatory Services Portfolio Holder, Councillor Patel, updated the meeting on council owned assets on Loughton High Road and the Broadway. In December 2019 EFDC purchased the freehold for some properties in Centric Parade and 202 to 226 High Road Loughton, consisting of 18 retail premises, office premises and 9 residential flats. This parade had been hit by the effects of the Covid lockdown and 6 shops had become vacant and 2 had come to an arrangement for lower rental costs during this period. We now had offers for three of the four vacant shops. The premises on the High Road were also being let or were in the process of being let. All this has been achieved during lockdown.

As for the Broadway we have let 6 out of 7 units in the Landmark building, with the remaining unit under offer. In respect of the 68 shops on the Broadway, except for one shop (now under offer) all shops remain occupied. This was a good news story for the council, and he thanked the estates team for finding tenants during this last lockdown period.

The Customer and Corporate Support Services Portfolio Holder, Councillor S Kane, updated members on the current problems had by members on their iPads. This was due to a problem that Microsoft was having with Outlook and its connection with Apple products. They were working to resolve this as soon as possible.

The Finance and Economic Development Portfolio Holder, Councillor J Philip updated the meeting on the reopening of shops after this latest lockdown. They had made the carparks free for the first week to facilitate the public to get used to using the shops again. Speaking to the public and shopkeepers, officers found that this was much appreciated and made it a successful first week back.

174. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND REQUESTS TO ADDRESS THE CABINET

The Cabinet noted that no public questions or requests to address the Cabinet had been received for consideration at the meeting.

175. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee reported that the following items of business had been considered at its meeting held on 15 April 2021:

The Committee had received an annual progress report on the work undertaken by the Epping Forest Youth Council supported by the Community, Culture and Wellbeing Team. Four Youth Councillors gave an informative presentation on the activities of the Youth Council.

Our second presentation covered local mental health services for young people, which complemented the Youth Councillors' work on mental health issues. Ms S Garner, the Assistant Director, Southend, Essex and Thurrock Children and Young Peoples Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Collaborative/Programme Director Joint Commissioning SEND (Essex)), outlined the emotional wellbeing and mental health services available for young people.

The Overview and Scrutiny 2020/21 draft Annual Report on the work undertaken by the parent committee and the Select Committees during the past municipal year was discussed. The Committee also reviewed the Corporate Plan Key Action Plan 2020/21 quarter 4. The report only detailed project and KPI status by exception.

The Cabinet's agenda was reviewed but there were no specific issues identified on any of the items being considered.

An extra meeting of the Committee had been organised for 8 June 2021. This was to allow members the opportunity to pre-scrutinise Cabinet business before its decision deadline of 21 June. This would include Qualis' four-year business plan for 2021-2025, the business case for the transfer of Corporate Asset management service to Qualis and the Pyrles Lane site.

176. DELIVERY OF BAKERS LANE LEISURE CENTRE

The Environmental and Technical Services Portfolio Holder introduced the report on the proposed Baker's Lane Leisure Centre. He noted that at the meeting on 21 January 2021, Cabinet agreed that the new leisure centre in Epping was delivered by its incumbent contractor Places Leisure. This included the purchase of all designs and plans from Qualis once planning permission for the new facility was obtained.

To date, all the work Places Leisure had done with Qualis had been on a voluntary basis and in a spirit of partnership as the Council's leisure centres provider. Following the Cabinet decision to have the new centre delivered by Places Leisure it was necessary to make the required amendments to the Contract to reflect this. To progress this project to the next stage and Places Leisure needed the services of specialist consultants and legal advisers. It was standard practice that these costs were covered by the client, in this case the Council, as was the case for the delivery of Waltham Abbey Leisure Centre.

The contract with Places Leisure results in a net annual income of £1.3 million. This had been severely impacted by Covid-19. However, as restrictions ease and user confidence increases it was expected that income levels would rise. It was too early, primarily due to the impact of Covid-19, to agree additional income from the new Centre. It was recommended that a final agreement on additional income to the Council was brought to Cabinet for approval later in the year.

Councillor Philip noted that funding for this work was already in the budget and he noted that recommendation 5 had already carried out the preparatory work for the five sites in Epping; overview had been delegated to the two Portfolio Holders, the Leader and the section 151 officer to look at the repayment to Qualis for their work that had been already completed.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse asked what the timescale was for progressing this work if planning permission was granted in June. The Contracts Service Manager, Mr Warwick said this would be a phased approach. Once Planning Permission had been granted, they would look to start the procurement exercise as part of the phased development of the Epping sites. The Multi Storey car park at Cottis Lane was the first phase, as soon as this was completed then we would commence construction of the Leisure Centre, so looking at summer 2022 to start construction. The build period likely to be between 18 to 24 months.

Councillor Whitbread commented that this was a great project for our Council, and he was looking forward to working with our partners, Places Leisure, who did a brilliant job in Waltham Abbey. This would be a great benefit to all the local communities around Epping and an asset to our district.

Decision:

- (1) The Cabinet noted the progress made on delivery of the Epping Leisure Centre at Bakers Lane, Epping;
- (2) The Cabinet delegated to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Technical the authority to agree the Deed of Variation to the contract with Places Leisure for delivery of the new centre, adjustments to the agreement to take account of the sale of current Epping Sports Centre at Hemnal Street to Qualis and the right to continue to use this facility until the new Bakers Lane facility was ready;
- (3) The Cabinet allocated £600,000 from existing Capital Programme provision for the Bakers Lane Leisure Centre, as agreed by Council in February, to progress detailed designs and further site survey work in order to arrive at cost certainty;
- (4) In recognising that Qualis owned a number of regeneration sites in Epping Town and the delivery of the Bakers Lane site was interdependent on Qualis progress; the Cabinet agreed to work with Qualis in a strategic delivery partnership, with Qualis occupying the role of Infrastructure Manager with the responsibility of coordination for the delivery of all five sites in Epping Town and communications across the sites and agree an appropriate day rate retainer fee to reflect this;
- (5) The Cabinet delegated authority to the Section 151 officer to repay to Qualis costs incurred by them in preparing and submitting a planning application and outline design for the Bakers Lane Leisure Centre that is to be used by Places Leisure; the amount to be based on the actual justifiable costs incurred and upon consultation with the Leader of the Council, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Technical and Portfolio Holder for Finance; and
- (6) That the final form of contract variation covering Management Fee income from the new Centre be brought to a future Cabinet for consideration.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To agree to have a Deed of Variation in the Contract with Places Leisure and approve budget to enable the necessary design and legal processes to enable Places Leisure to take over the scheme from Qualis and continue work at pace for the delivery of the new leisure centre.

The procurement advice received from Anthony Collins Solicitors was that Places Leisure should tender the construction contract through the Find a Tender Service (FTS formerly OJEU) which will mitigate any risk of challenge as well as demonstrate best value for the Council.

Other Options for Action:

It was possible to delay decisions until the outcome of the planning application. However, the slippage in programme would delay delivery of the new leisure centre. Commencement of the construction of the new leisure centre was entirely contingent on the completion of the Multi Storey Car park at Cottis Lane and associated highway works.

177. ACCEPTANCE OF TENDER - CONTRACT 102, CONTROLLED DOOR ENTRY SYSTEMS

In the absence of the Housing and Community Services Portfolio Holder the Leader of the Council introduced the report on the acceptance of tender for controlled entry systems.

In order to undertake the repair, planned maintenance and installation of audio-controlled door entry systems to Council-owned properties during the financial year 2021-22 and over the following 4-year period, it was necessary to undertake a procurement exercise based on the Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT) taking cost and quality into account to satisfy the requirements of the Council's Procurement Rules.

The tender sum includes the planned Capital Programme of installing new audio-controlled door entry installations to 26 blocks of flats and upgrading the existing audio-controlled door entry installations to 42 blocks of flats over the next 5-year period.

Decision:

The Cabinet agreed:

- (1) That, Openview Security Systems Ltd be awarded a 1-year contract renewable annually for up to a maximum of 4-further years, for the repair, planned maintenance and installation of audio-controlled door entry systems to Council-owned properties in the sum of £1,022,194.64 with an overall weighted price and quality score of 90% being the most economically advantageous tender received;
- (2) That, should it not be possible to enter into contract with Openview Security Systems Ltd, that SCCI Alphatrack Ltd be awarded the contract as the reserve contractor, being the second most economically advantageous tender received, with a Tender Sum of £1,410,280.01;
- (3) That the overall value of the works be limited to the sum included in Housing Revenue Account for maintenance works and the sum within the Capital Programme for the installation and upgrades of audio-controlled door entry systems on an annual basis; and
- (4) That, this contract be designated as a serial contract to facilitate the annual adjustment to the tendered rates in accordance with the BCIS ALLCOS Resource Cost Index of All Construction: Repair and Maintenance Work #7419.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

The existing framework agreement for the repair, planned maintenance and installation of audio-controlled door entry systems to Council-owned properties with the current contractor was nearing the end of its term. Therefore, this was a new contract and the results of the tender exercise needs to be approved in accordance with Councils Procurement Rules. Undertaking a competitive tender exercise was not only a requirement of the Councils Procurement Rules, but there was also a requirement under Section 20 of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002 where works were undertaken on communal areas of Council owned and managed blocks of flats.

To ensure the existing audio-controlled door entry systems installed at around 400-blocks are maintained and remain in full operation to ensure the safety and the security of the communal areas of the Councils sheltered housing schemes and general needs blocks of flats.

To ensure suitably accredited specialist contractors are available to provide an emergency response in the event of a failure of the audio-controlled door entry systems installed in the Councils sheltered housing and general needs blocks of flats.

To upgrade existing audio-controlled door entry systems that are installed with old technology such as key based access, obsolete control systems and with access doors that are beyond economic repair. Futureproofing the design and specification for upgrades and new audio-controlled door entry systems include a video ready design which allows the upgrade from audio-control to video with minimal costs, assisted door opening for physically challenged occupiers and a mobile Cloud based system for the management of access key tokens.

The new framework agreement will be let with a high degree of flexibility incorporated in the contract conditions, this will enable Housing and Property Services and Quality Management to issue Works Orders based on operational requirements to a specialist contractor as and when required.

Other Options for Action:

The main alternative options considered were:

- (1) To re-tender the contract on an annual basis. However, this would be time consuming and inefficient. Re-tendering would not guarantee more competitive tenders.
- (2) To re-tender the works based on price alone. However, this would not necessarily return a more competitive tender and would not identify or quantify a quality commitment from the lowest tenderer.
- (3) To seek quotations for the repair, planned maintenance and installations of audio-controlled door entry systems on an ad-hoc basis by raising individual Works Orders for the work. However, this is very time consuming and is not cost effective as it would not generate the cost savings associated with economies of scale. Also, the volume of the repair and maintenance of existing audio-controlled door entry systems per annum would breach the Council's Procurement Rules C2 (9b) with the works exceeding £25,000 in value during one financial year.

178. GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

The Planning and Sustainability Portfolio Holder, Councillor Bedford introduced the report on the Green Infrastructure Strategy.

The Council's emerging Local Plan sets out policies in relation to the provision and enhancement of Green and Blue Infrastructure, the protection of the District's ecological assets and achieving high quality design. To support these policies and address the requirement to provide suitable avoidance or mitigation measures to manage any potential impacts of growth on protected sites, including the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC), the Council had developed a Green Infrastructure Strategy ('the Strategy'). The Strategy would ensure that high quality Green and Blue Infrastructure, including the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural

Green Space (SANG) and Infrastructure Enhancement Projects, was delivered alongside the growth proposed in the District as part of the emerging Local Plan.

This report sets out the changes proposed to be made to the draft Green Infrastructure Strategy that was agreed by Cabinet for the purposes of consultation on 15 April 2020. The consultation was undertaken in June and July 2020.

Councillor Philip had a couple of questions. One came from one of his residents to which he had made councillor Bedford aware of. The second question came from the Chairman of the Theydon Bois Parish Council that they were surprised to learn that the Woodland Trust had not been included in the consultation and asked that they have sight of the proposal before it was approved. Councillor Bedford said that he would send a full response to the resident's question sent to Councillor Philip. This was about a walking route from Debden to Theydon Bois which a lot of councillors and officers had walked and making it more accessible to everyone. As for the comment on the Woodland Trust, the strategy did mention that it would have ongoing consultation with partners, including the Woodland Trust, and he would ask officers to look into this. Councillor Philip asked if a recommendation could be altered to take this into account by adding, at the end of recommendation 1, "subject to review with the Woodland Trust". This was agreed.

Councillor Heap said that it had been a hard read and asked who was in the Quality Review Panel and did any of them write the report. And, there was mention of charging residents of Loughton, Buckhurst Hill and Theydon Bois, but Chigwell was not included, and asked why should we be taxed living here in an urban environment. Councillor Bedford said the quality review panel was an independent body giving independent advice. As for Loughton and Buckhurst Hill they contribute to it as it was done by distance from the SAC, so those closest to the SAC would contribute more. Mr N Richardson confirmed that was the case and that Chigwell was that bit further away.

Councillor Chris Pond said that this report was better than its first version and had been done reasonably well. He assumed that this would be part of the documents we would submit as part of the Local Plan. He agreed with Councillor Bedford that we did need to help people access and enjoy our countryside but was surprised to hear that the Woodland Trust had not been consulted. In considering the Woodland Trust site of the Theydon Bois woods (on page 175 of the supplementary agenda), he noted that it was to the east of the built up area, but he considered a better way into the area would be to make use of the Loughton Shores linking up with the woods by reinstating a bridge or subway linking up the two areas. Councillor Bedford agreed and asked Councillor Pond to supply a more detailed plan on what he had just said, they would consider it, as it sounded to him to be an ideal way to link the two areas together.

Councillor Wixley said that he had discussed this route at the last council meeting before lockdown and had asked Councillor Bedford to accompany him to walk this route. His offer was still there. On this route there was unfortunately a precarious footbridge that had partially fallen away. He then noted that the Loughton Shores mentioned were owned by Essex County Council so we may need to negotiate with them as well.

Councillor Wixley carried on to say that page 170 of the supplementary agenda mentioned two cricket clubs saying the one to the north was not as indicated the Loughton Cricket Club. That was not correct, it should be South Loughton Cricket Club, and this should be corrected. The other thing he wanted to bring up was in reference to improvements to Roding Valley Recreation Ground, and he indicated

that he may have an interest here as he chaired the recreation Committee on this for the Town Council, responsible for this section of the recreation ground. He wanted to know if this support included financial support, as they had a number of projects there, they would like to get on with but could not at present. He would like to know if financial support was available and when it would be available. SANGs had been mentioned and wondered that when they were chosen, if Jessel Green could receive protection as a Trust Status, which he knew had been applied for. As for Blue infrastructure, there was no reference made to the Environmental Agency who are responsible for cleaning up the brooks.

Councillor Bedford noted his comments and wondered if Country Care could be asked to fix the broken bridge mentioned. The name of the Cricket Club can be amended on the report. He was not in a position to comment on town council financial support. The Rodding Valley Recreation Ground was part of the improvement body for the SANG area. Councillor Wixley noted that the footpath with the broken footbridge was probably the responsibility of ECC and Country Care would have to talk to them.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse said that there was a lot to like in this, he noted that there was also an athletics club that used the Rodding Valley Recreation Ground. The South Epping SANG, the diagram was not specific and need to be clear about what they were to be used for. And also, it was not well explained why the Town Centre developments in Epping did not have provision for a green space. Clarity on this would be helpful. Councillor Bedford noted the athletics club mentioned. The South Epping site was not site specific and was not coming until 2028 and we would look at it in the future. And, Epping was right next to the forest and it would be getting a new leisure centre. But your comments would be taken on board.

Councillor McCredie noted that Country Care was now back at work and could help with repairing the bridge.

Councillor Heap suggested that the Council borrowed the £1million needed, but was told by Councillor Philip that the council did not need to borrow the money. We had a structure for a levy on developments occurring in those areas as part of the Local Plan. It was not an additional tax burden on the residents of those areas.

Councillor Lea thought that the money from the developers would eventually come down to the residents via the house prices for local people. Councillor Philip replied that the overall contribution per dwelling would not significantly affect the purchase price to a future resident.

Decision:

(1) The Cabinet agreed the Green Infrastructure Strategy as a material planning consideration for the preparation of Strategic Masterplans, Concept Frameworks, pre-application advice, assessing planning applications and any other development management and implementation related purposes within the District; for submission to the Local Plan Inspector; and used to inform the Council's update to the Habitats Regulations Assessment to support the emerging Local Plan, subject to review with the Woodland Trust;

(2) The Cabinet agreed that contributions would be sought from residential developments in the parishes of Loughton, Buckhurst Hill and Theydon Bois towards site specific projects to mitigate the impact of recreational pressure on Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation in the sum of £716 per dwelling;

(3) The Cabinet agreed the Green Infrastructure Strategy as a framework for guiding partnership working and investment in green and blue infrastructure as part of the Council's response to the Climate Emergency; and

(4) The Cabinet agreed that the Planning Services Director, in consultation with the Planning Portfolio Holder be authorised to make minor amendments to the Green Infrastructure Strategy, including any mapping and links and the addition of a glossary, prior to publication.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

- To give the Strategy planning weight by endorsing it as a material consideration in the planning process This would ensure that development proposals would achieve the Council's ambitions for the provision of Green and Blue Infrastructure, and that clear parameters were established for the development of masterplans and concept frameworks, the provision of pre-application advice, the assessment of planning applications and any other development management and implementation related purposes within the District.
- To comply with the Council's general obligations as a competent authority under the Habitats Directive [article 6(3)] and the Species and Habitats Regulations 2018 [Regulation 9(1)].
- To respond to the Local Plan Inspector's Advice dated 2 August 2019 (ED98) following the hearing sessions of the Local Plan examination in relation to mitigating the effects of recreational pressure upon the Epping Forest SAC.

Other Options for Action:

Not to agree the Strategy and endorse it as a material consideration in the planning process would mean that there would be no mechanism to support the delivery of development proposals and achieve the vision and objectives set out in the Council's emerging Local Plan, or the application of the policies within it. In addition, there would be no overarching framework in place to achieve the implementation of important initiatives intended to support the Council's response to the Climate Crisis.

179. CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN

The Planning and Sustainability Portfolio Holder introduced the report on the Climate Change Strategy.

The draft Climate Change Action Plan states the steps to be taken to deliver on the Climate Emergency that was declared on 19 September 2019 with the motion to do everything within the Council's power to make Epping Forest District Council area carbon neutral by 2030. The plan aligned with the corporate objectives of keeping the district moving sustainably and enabling residents to access new opportunities for employment, to reduce the carbon footprint across the district and within our council.

This report provided members with a summary of the objectives and purpose of the Climate Change Action Plan. The intention was that following public consultation and any updates arising, that the final action plan would return to the Cabinet to endorse the adoption of the plan.

The Climate Change Action Plan examined the main sources of carbon emissions both within the Councils' own operations and across the District. It outlined direct

action the Council were taking to reduce emissions of its own activities. As well as steps that could be taken to facilitate and influence emissions reductions in the wider District, enabling the area to become carbon neutral by 2030. The plan would be regularly updated to account for further developments in national legislation, regulation, technology, and policy. Where activities and monitoring were to be confirmed these would be updated following consultation feedback.

Councillor Philip was glad to see the council was moving forward with this and it would be improved with the consultation within the district. That could be more interactive as Covid restrictions opened up.

Councillor Patel was also glad to see this and asked how we would be consulting with our residents? He was told that it would be through the normal channels, online and sent out to Town and Parish councils. It would be similar to the sustainability consultation process and we would also be consulting with the Youth Council and members of the general public. There would also be a special meeting of the Local Councils Liaison Committee. Councillor Patel said that we needed better ways to consult with our residents now we had Covid and should also bring in Junior Schools into this.

Councillor Neville was glad to see this extensive document. It was still a work in progress, but at present we lacked ways to monitor our progress; e.g. such as number of the public using busses or homes being refitted, or monitoring pollutants etc. He noted that we did not have indications of our carbon emissions as yet and asked when we would. He was told that officers were working with consultants to look at those emissions this month.

Councillor Chris Pond thought that litter pollution was a particular problem during lock down and noted that the period of a six week consultation was on the low side but would watch this with great interest. Councillor Bedford said that they would look to see if they could extend the period.

Councillor Wixley referred to electric vehicle charging points and the infrastructure mentioned in the report. He noted that we were working with Essex Highways to provide on street charging points but equally vital was to have discussions with the utility companies; had any taken place? Councillor Bedford said that this would be down to the County as it was their highways. We were looking at banks of charging points in our car parks. We needed to be reasonable about what we could provide and where. We would try and get in as many charging points as we could, but we had to consider public safety and network capacity.

Councillor Philip noted that in Theydon Bois they had the worst power supply in the region and had concerns about the supply network and charging points could cause problems.

Decision:

- (1) The Cabinet agreed that the Draft Climate Change Action Plan be approved for public consultation for a six-week period in June 2021; and
- (2) Agreed that the Planning Services Director, in consultation with the Planning Portfolio Holder be authorised to make minor amendments to the Draft Climate Change Action Plan.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To ensure that members are kept up to date on the progress of the draft Climate Change Action Plan

Other Options for Action:

Not to agree the draft Climate Change Action Plan can be published for a 6-week consultation, which would mean that a delay in providing a plan to address the declared Climate Emergency.

180. QUALIS QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORT - Q1 2020/21

The Commercial and Regulatory Service Portfolio Holder, Councillor Patel introduced the quarterly Qualis monitoring report. He noted that the Governance framework for Qualis, as agreed by Cabinet in February 2020, set the requirement that Qualis should report to Epping Forest District Council on its performance on a quarterly basis. This report had also gone to the Stronger Council Select Committee on 13 April for their information and comments.

This report presented the Qualis first Quarter's monitoring report for the Qualis trading year 2020/21 and covered the period from 1 November to 31 January 2021.

With Housing Maintenance services having transferred to Qualis in Quarter 4 (end of September 2020) of the previous trading year, this quarter represented the first whole quarter of both service delivery activity, commercial investment and regeneration work.

Qualis had also requested permission from EFDC as its shareholder to change their financial year end date to the end of September and we had agreed to this request. Therefore, to accommodate this their next quarter's report would only cover two months, February and March 2021.

Councillor Philip welcomed the changes to their financial year as it would help us in our budget preparation and hopefully, they would now start making a positive impact on our budget.

Councillor Wixley was interested in the Pyles Lane site mentioned in the report; what was being proposed for this site? He was told that these were just preparatory and investigatory works on the site.

Councillor Wixley asked what the work was for. He was told to find out if there were any hidden problems for future development.

Councillor Wixley noted that Housing Repairs had been transferred to Qualis – could we have a consumer satisfaction survey carried on their work. Councillor H Whitbread answered that there had been no specific research done on this; but in general, from customer feedback received, it had been good. Councillor Patel added that Qualis would monitor the satisfaction of residents in line with how the council used to monitor this. S Jevans said that they did measure customer satisfaction. The last recorded month was a 95% satisfaction and they also had a customer insight officer dedicated to following up complaints. This would be shown on our KPIs. Councillor C Whitbread asked if these results went to any Select Committees for review. Officers were not sure if it did. Councillor C Whitbread said that it needed to be seen by a relevant Select Committee, particularly around the areas of Housing as this was an important part of what we did.

Councillor Murray noted that with more and more services being transferred to Qualis he would like to see performance report going to the relevant Select Committee. Councillor C Whitbread said that he too was keen to see this maintained and he was sure that Councillor H Whitbread and relevant officer would pick up on this.

Decision:

The Cabinet discussed and commented on the Qualis quarter 1(2020/21) monitoring report.

181. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was noted that there was no other urgent business for consideration by the Cabinet.

182. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

The Cabinet noted that there was no business for consideration which would necessitate the exclusion of the public and press from the virtual meeting.

CHAIRMAN

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee:	Council Housebuilding Cabinet Committee	Date:	Tuesday, 16 March 2021
Place:	Virtual Meeting on Zoom	Time:	7.00 - 7.40 pm
Members Present:	H Whitbread (Chairman), N Avey, N Bedford, A Patel and J Philip		
Other Councillors:	S Heap, S Murray and D Wixley		
Officers Present:	D Fenton (Service Director (Housing Revenue Account)), R Hoyte (Service Manager - Development) and J Leither (Democratic Services Officer)		

29. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman made a short address to remind everyone present that the meeting would be broadcast live to the internet, and would be capable of repeated viewing, which could infringe their human and data protection rights.

30. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Cabinet Committee noted that there were no substitute members.

31. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct.

32. MINUTES

Resolved:

That the minutes of the Council Housebuilding Cabinet Committee meeting held on 08 December 2020 be taken as read and would be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

33. COUNCIL HOUSEBUILDING PROGRESS REPORT - PHASES 3-5

The Chairman, Councillor H Whitbread introduced Rochelle Hoyte to the Cabinet Committee and advised that Rochelle was the new Service Manager for Housing Development.

R Hoyte presented the Council Housebuilding Progress Report – Phases 3-5 and recommended that they be noted by the Cabinet Committee.

She advised that the report set out the progress that had been made across phases 3 to 5 of the Housebuilding programme that were either completed, on-site or were currently being procured.

Phase 4

Phase 4.1 consisted of 16 units which had been contracted and the start on site was all underway. Millfield, Ongar started on 30 November 2020 and Pickhill, Waltham Abbey had been added to Phase 4.1, the start on site was due in March 2021;

Phase 4.2 consisted of 22 units which had been contracted, the start on site was achieved in January 2021.

Phase 4.3 consisted of 15 units. The consent approval was received for Woollard Street, Waltham Abbey in February 2021, contract signing and possession was still to be achieved in March 2021, with start on site anticipated July/August 2021.

Phase 4.4 consisted of 28 units (an additional 12 units) were awaiting consent. Ladyfields, Loughton and Chequers Road (B), Loughton were still within planning and work was being undertaken to discuss how these can be progressed as quickly as possible. Since the approval of the APMS, it was anticipated that any schemes within the planning system would have reached a determination by May 2021 as planners had requested an extension of time until this period. The tender process will follow and a consideration may be needed for an interim committee approval as it was likely that the previous forecast of June 2021 would be missed, the tender process would follow in August/September 2021 with contracts and possession achieved in October 2021, with the contractor being able to carry out their Design and Build due diligence and discharge their pre-commencement conditions by December 2021 to continue with the plan to start on site in January 2022.

Councillor H Whitbread was pleased to report that Cyril Hawkins Close in North Weald had now been completed. She advised that she had visited the site and the new family homes looked really smart, residents had started to move in and there was plenty of parking.

D Fenton, Director of HRA Functions advised the Cabinet Committee that a planned street party to celebrate the opening of the road would be organised for July 2020.

Councillor J Philip asked if the Council had ever had a Council Housebuilding project that had come in under budget.

R Hoyte stated that she was not aware of the details of the previous phases 1-3, but advised that Cyril Hawkins Close came in over budget due to contamination and Covid-19 restrictions. She also advised that the Council had a new programme called ProVal, this was a financial viability tool which allowed you to appraise developments. The Council will be using ProVal on all schemes to see if the scheme was viable and therefore whether to take the scheme forward as a development project or not. This programme would give the Council better control over the finances of the scheme.

Councillor J Philip asked if the officers could prepare a report of all the Council Housebuilding schemes that had been done, the costs predicted for each scheme and how much the schemes actually cost. He recalled that almost every scheme that had been done come out over budget and this would mean that the budget was not being set properly.

Councillor Whitbread stated that some of the historic garage sites did lead to some issues with delays for contamination reasons and hopefully as we move into the later phases we will be looking at sites, other than garage sites and with the use of ProVal the predicted cost would be more accurate.

Councillor A Patel stated that the Council have started work on discharging the planning conditions on the garage sites in Buckhurst Hill and across the district and in terms of the displacement of the residents renting the garages, in the earlier stages of the House Building programme it was agreed that the garage residents would be offered other garages as close to those sites as possible, he asked what was next for the Council, although more garage and brownfield sites had been identified how long could the Council sustain the Council House Building Programme.

R Hoyte advised that in Phase 5 officers were looking at 14 sites in total with various development opportunities and each site would be looked at with a feasibility study for which we will use ProVal, our consultants will give us scope on what was possible to build. Regarding garage sites and displacement, Officers would identify if there were other parking facilities nearby and could anything be done about offering parking to these residents before we would continue with a garage site scheme.

D Fenton advised that there was a number of commercial assets that officers were looking at which belonged to the general fund and Rochelle and her team were working on those including a number of pubs which adds to the list. There were also a number of other larger scale opportunities that officers would be looking at but were not yet in a position to disclose those sites.

Councillor H Whitbread stated that she was pleased to see that other options were being considered as the Council House Building Programme was a great success and the Council want to see this programme continue to deliver affordable housing for the people of the district.

Councillor N Bedford referred to Phase 4.1 Queensway, Ongar (page 54 of the agenda) and expressed concerns under the heading 'Reports and Investigations' there was nothing flagged up for contamination of the ground, yet when you go to the next page under the heading 'Forthcoming Actions' in red it reads 'potential asbestos under slab'. If we compare this site to a North Weald site that ran approximately £400,000 over budget because of asbestos contamination. Taking this into account why does the Queensway site only have contingency budget set of £28,000.

R Hoyte advised that she had looked at sites that had already been started and stated that the contingency budgets should have been set much higher. Surveys were done ahead of the builder going onto site and things like contamination were not picked up as this was not found until the start on site digging had taken place and contamination was then uncovered. The contingency should cover these problems but unfortunately they were not set correctly, now the Council has ProVal this would enable a more cost effective plan with the correct contingency set. Going forward this was one of the top priorities to get the costings correct and therefore staying within budget for each site.

Councillor N Bedford stated that Officers should use North Weald as a benchmark of what the contingency should be for each site. The Queensway, Ongar site was about a quarter of the size of the North Weald site therefore a contingency around the sum of £100,000 should be set for Queensway and not the £28,000 that it was currently.

Councillor J Philip stated that he understood where Councillor Bedford was coming from but that he was not sure that it was applicable to all sites and that we should use the new ProVal system going forward and keep a track of how that system would work.

R Hoyte advised that not only new schemes were being run through ProVal but schemes that had already been completed were being put in to see what the difference was and help to influence decisions going forward.

Councillor S Murray asked if there were any plans for the official opening of the Joan Davis House, he realised this scheme was a while ago but due to Covid it had been cancelled.

He also stated that Ward Members should be consulted on sites in their wards before they were put into practice as they know the local areas and could advise on historical and local information on potential sites that may not be known to Officers.

Councillor H Whitbread agreed that an official opening of the Joan Davis House in Burton Road, The Broadway, Loughton should be marked as it was a good development and asked officers to look into arranging that post purdah.

R Hoyte advised that she was in discussions around having webinars with Ward Members so that schemes and sites could be discussed before that got to a planning status.

Councillor D Wixley advised that part of Burney Drive was in his Ward and he would like to know where the site was as he could not envisage a scheme going ahead in that area.

He stated that although the Kirby Close development was not in his Ward as a District Councillor it was as a Town Councillor. He had noticed that work was ongoing on that site and referred to a service road which run behind the site and informed the Cabinet Committee that the grass verges were being ruined by people parking on them or driving over them and asked officers if this was anything to do with the contractors.

R Hoyte advised that a number of the grass verges around Kirby Close have been covered up and the contractors were only using them for access and turning points and any damaged verges will be restored once the site was finished. She advised that she would visit the site and speak to the contractors and would get back to Councillor Wixley.

Councillor S Heap referred to the garage site in Hornbeam Close and advised that the area around that garage site was heavily populated and to remove these garages would have an enormous impact as at least 11 of the garages have cars parked in them and it would be an enormous detrimental impact to the area. He further advised that there was also an ongoing drainage issue in that area.

He further asked about the development in Pick Hill and added that there had been a huge amount of destruction of the trees being taken down and was that a part of the Councils development or was it a private developer.

R Hoyte advised that they were at the very early stages of looking at Hornbeam Close, to see what would work there, if anything at all was possible and that she would discuss any findings with the Ward Members.

D Fenton stated that Phase 5 of the Council House Building Programme was not just about building it was about creating great places where people wanted to live. The House Building programme were partnering with the Asset team, the Land team, Safer Communities and Communities and Wellbeing to create a place approach. For example Hornbeam Close, the aim was not just to build but to alleviate the parking

stress by creating more parking spaces and improving the area in terms of the environment and climate.

R Hoyte added that as well as a higher level of due diligence that her team would also be looking at landscaping and any play areas that could be built into the scheme. Near the site in Hornbeam Close there was an empty play area and that she was currently looking into who owned that site and if the Council could improve the play area. It was not only about new builds it was having regard for the residents that were already currently living there so they were as much a part of the community as any new residents that move to the area.

Councillor S Murray advised that play areas in the district were the responsibility of Town and Parish Councils and therefore if the Council were to get involved in some areas and not others this could have a detrimental effect on the Town and Parish Councils.

Councillor S Heap asked if Town and Parish Councils could be involved in the discussions as well as the Ward Councillors as they could bring far more knowledge about the local area sites that the Council propose to bring forward.

R Hoyte advised that they were looking at options regarding the play areas so as part of the development we could work with the Town and Parish Councils to maybe make a contribution towards such play areas.

She stated that she could see no reason why Town and Parish Councils could not be invited to the meetings of new schemes along with the Ward Councillors.

Decision:

- (1) That the contents of the Progress Report on Phases 3 to 5 of the Council House Building Programme be noted and presented to the Cabinet in line with the Terms of Reference of the Council Housebuilding Cabinet Committee.

Reason for Decision:

Set out in its Terms of Reference, the Council House Building Cabinet Committee was to monitor and report to the Council, on an annual basis, progress and expenditure concerning the Council House Building Programme. The report set out the progress made since reported at the last meeting on the 08 December 2020.

Other Options Considered and Rejected:

This report was on the progress made over the last 12 months and was for noting purposes only. There were no other options for action.

34. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Cabinet Committee noted that there were no other matters of urgent business for consideration.

35. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

The Cabinet Committee noted that there was no business for consideration which necessitated the exclusion of the public and press from the virtual meeting.

CHAIRMAN

Report to Cabinet

Report reference: C-001-2021-22

Date of meeting: 21 June 2021



Portfolio: Housing Services - Councillor H Whitbread

Subject: Refurbishment Scheme (Older Persons Sheltered Housing Schemes)

Officer contact for further information: Deborah Fenton – Director HRA Functions

Democratic Services Officer: Adrian Hendry, 01992 564246

Appendix 1- Examples of newly furnished older persons housing schemes

Appendix 2- Example of Leasing Plan

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- 1. That Cabinet approves the proposed renewal and remodelling of the communal areas of the Council's sheltered housing schemes using Buckingham Interiors. As a pilot in the first instance at Frank Bretton Court; and**
- 2. That Cabinet note the method of funding will be based on a costed options appraisal using either leasing or borrowing against the HRA. This is currently being carried out by Arlingclose Noting that the full cost of the scheme will be covered via a service charge which is eligible for Housing Benefit subsidy.**

Executive Summary

Following our recent review from ARK, and the Covid outbreak we have reviewed what is important to residents. One of the areas is the value of the communal lounges. As such we have developed a programme to renew the 'look' of our communal areas, taking an interior design approach. During our thinking stage, it was important that we undertake this in a cost-efficient manner and where residents could have input. As such, officers have researched the options to refurbish the communal areas of our sheltered housing stock to include the upgrade of fixtures, fittings, and redecoration. Officers have started work with an organisation called Buckingham Interiors. Buckingham Interiors is part of FRC Group which has been supplying contract furniture and associated services to the social housing sector for more than 30 years. Operating from three national distribution sites, and with a team of over 120 staff, FRC Group holds contracts for furniture supply, ranging from specialist services such as dementia friendly schemes to housing for people with support needs. In addition, they work with temporary housing and homelessness services, local welfare response services and furnished tenancies. Their customers include Birmingham City Council, Manchester City Council and the AGMA group of local authorities, Places for People Group, Optivo, Torus, North Tyneside Council, Thirteen, Citizen, Orbit, Network Homes, EMH Group, Cheltenham Borough Homes, Nottingham City Homes, Stroud District Council and many others.

Officers recognise the impact Covid has had on residents, particularly around those who have not been able to go out for many months. The remodelling of the lounge will provide a renewed feel to the scheme and will have many social benefits. Officers also plan to approach partners with the aim of making our sheltered housing schemes a hub so that older people living in the local community can access activities held at the scheme.

Reason for decision:

Members are being asked to approve the renewal of fixtures and fittings at our schemes beginning with a pilot at Frank Bretton House, this is important as it fits with our social recovery work and a report has already been to overview and security(O&S) for review

Options considered and rejected:

Officers considered whether to carry out a smaller scale upgrade, however this was rejected due the importance of providing a communal area which is bright and flexible. Especially given covid and the need for our vulnerable tenants to meet and socialise indoors.

Report:

1. Background

Epping Forest District Council invited ARK to undertake a review of its sheltered housing. The principal focus of this assignment was to review the performance and sustainability of the Councils sheltered housing schemes. This involved several carefully sequenced steps including:

- a) A 'document review' to understand the context of each sheltered scheme and the dynamics within its local housing market and neighbourhood.
- b) A review of competing provision.
- c) A review of stock information including costs, repairs history and void times.
- d) A staff workshop to assess the quality and performance of the sheltered schemes.
- e) Undertaking on-site inspections of each sheltered scheme; and
- f) Carrying out an option appraisal.

2. Proposal – Furnishing Older Persons Housing

FRC Group is a registered social enterprise and charity which reinvests it's surpluses to support people living in furniture poverty and to create meaningful training, and employment programmes for people to gain work in the logistics and warehousing industry.

They have won several awards and are continually looking for new ways to create practical solutions to get furniture to those in need and create sustainable livelihoods and futures for people. Following the appointment of Buckingham Interiors, they would provide an interior design service which would consist of mood boards. The mood boards contain samples of fabric, curtaining, carpet etc. and this would be used to form the basis of extensive consultation with residents. EFDC will be funding the decoration of each scheme based on the specification of colours provided by Buckingham Interiors design team. Examples of the work undertaken by Buckingham interiors and the look we will achieve for our sheltered schemes can be found in **appendix 1**.

3. Leasing Scheme

As stated in the recommendations there are 2 ways of financing the upgrading of schemes. EFDC could lease the furniture from Buckingham Interiors over a period of 5 years. After which we can take ownership of the furniture or opt to refurbish the scheme again. This leasing scheme has been undertaken by other local councils and housing providers and it would allow EFDC to provide an interior design within its sheltered housing schemes which is to a high standard without a capital outlay. Lease finance is arranged according to customers' requirements for the value and term of the finance. The typical is a 5-year lease term, with an interest rate which is currently around 5%. In simple terms, the lease finance allows housing

providers to invest in full refurbishment projects and then align the repayment of those costs over a period in which they are also receiving service charge income from the tenants. Ownership of the goods is retained by the leasing company until the end of the lease term. At that time, the customer can choose to make one final payment (equal to previous monthly payments) to take ownership; or they can return the goods at the end of the lease term.

A new component would be added to the service charge to cover the cost of leasing the furniture plus an administration fee and 10% for replacement furniture (damage or breakages). There will be no financial detriment to current tenants in Frank Bretton Court as a result of the scheme. This is because the leasing of furniture is subject to housing benefit subsidy, therefore, those tenants on housing benefit would have the cost covered by their benefit entitlement. All residents at Frank Bretton House are claiming Housing Benefit. Further information on the leasing option can be found in Appendix 2.

4. Borrowing

With borrowing money at an all-time low this may be the best option for both the Council and the residents. Like the leasing scheme it will allow EFDC to provide an interior design within its sheltered housing schemes which is to a high standard without a capital outlay. A low rate of interest which is currently around 1% is paid back over a 5-year period and would mean a lower charge for residents.

As with the leasing scheme a new component would be added to the service charge to cover the cost of the furniture plus an administration fee and 10% for replacement furniture (damage or breakages). There will be no financial detriment to current tenants in Frank Bretton House as a result of the scheme. This is because borrowing money is also subject to housing benefit subsidy, therefore, those tenants on housing benefit would have the cost covered by their benefit entitlement. All residents at Frank Bretton House are claiming Housing Benefit.

Borrowing is the preferred option of the Council's Finance team as the accounting is much easier than leasing. This option will also enable us to purchase the furniture outright.

With leasing or borrowing, it is important we get the best possible interest rate because if the pilot at Frank Bretton House is a success EFDC may wish to progress the refurbishment of other schemes, there is a possibility some of these residents may not be on Housing Benefit and will have to pay the service charge for the refurbishment of their scheme.

5. Examples of Costings

The costs of the refurbishment will be determined by the footprint of the scheme for flooring, the number of windows to be dressed and both the number of rooms to be furnished and the level of furnishings / artwork etc to be provided. A very broad ballpark figures for an 'average' scheme scope. A total of £82,000 ex VAT, roughly broken down to:

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| • Non slip flooring / contract standard carpets | £45,000 ex VAT |
| • FR window coverings | £9,000 ex VAT |
| • Furniture to lounge, entrance/ corridor breakout spaces | £16,000 ex VAT |
| • Safety framed artwork throughout | £7,000 ex VAT |
| • Internal Direction and Safety Signage | £5,000 ex VAT |

In terms of the service charge costs, it is likely to be in the region of £8-£17 per week depending of the size of the scheme

4. Procurement

To ensure EFDC achieves value for money, officers have consulted 2 frameworks which are used for the purpose of refurbishing schemes and providing furniture. As such Buckingham interiors are the sole provider on the Procurement Hub framework which is suitable for circumstances where customers wish to use leasing or borrowing as their finance option. This framework has just been relaunched for a new four-year term.

Buckingham Interiors are also sole provider on the Consortium Procurement framework, top ranked provider on Procurement for Housing framework and a ranked provider on ESPO, NEPO and G15 which are suitable for circumstances where customers wish to purchase items outright. Customers can also buy outright through the Procurement Hub framework

The scope of works includes interior design, which includes paint colours, flooring finishes, window coverings, furniture, artwork etc. This is suited to communal spaces for older people's housing, is fresh and modern, is compliant with fire regulations and compliant with the specification of fit for purpose products e.g. non slip flooring surfaces, safety glazed artwork, furniture styles which aid mobility, antimicrobial fabrics, medium risk settings fire compliant fabrics and upholstery foams (i.e. higher level of fire retardancy than required in domestic settings), and aids safe use of spaces by people who may be experiencing visual impairment and early stages of dementia.

Projects will be led by a Business Development Manager who will coordinate all elements of the work and be on hand to work with the EFDC team throughout the planning, implementation and review processes. Installation work is all carried out by specialist installers, coordinated by a dedicated Project Manager. There is also a full aftercare service which includes advice on care, cleaning, maintenance and registration of warranties.

Consultation undertaken:

Buckingham interiors will be supporting our officers to consult with the residents on colours and styles. Residents may also (subject to covid restrictions) be able to try out the chairs and furniture being considered for their scheme. A paper was submitted to O & S for review.

Resource implications:

It is proposed that 2 sheltered housing schemes are renovated each year. The cost to the Council would be the internal decorations of the sheltered schemes for which there is existing budget provision.

Legal and Governance Implications:

Buckingham Interiors are on a number of frameworks and officers have consulted with the procurement team to ensure the policy requirements are met.

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications:

The furniture provided by Buckingham Interiors is manufactured in the UK. In addition, support would be given to help us put to good use, our old furniture, either by donating it to local good causes such as the re-use scheme or recycling it through FRC Groups recycling scheme.

Background Papers:

NA

Impact Assessments:

Attached

Risk Management:

Should the project not go ahead there is a risk that the schemes will become more difficult to let resulting in rent loss.

Examples of schemes refurbished by Buckingham interiors – Appendix 1

Overview

In the initial meeting between Buckingham Interiors and Plus Dane, 4 mood boards were selected alongside a Plus Dane Furniture range that was chosen by the Buckingham Interiors and Plus Dane's senior staff. These were later presented to residents at each scheme by our in house experts.

Our resident consultations involved taking samples of the furniture and the mood boards to each scheme. We then ran through the various options with the residents. This allowed the residents to be fully involved in the whole process of refurbishing their schemes. There was a complete buy in from the residents throughout the three schemes, who interestingly voted unanimously in favour of one mood board at each scheme. For example, all residents at Vienna Court chose the New England mood board to base the interior design off.





Brief

B3 Living have nine dedicated schemes for older people in Hertfordshire. The schemes are not difficult to let but B3 Living wanted to refurbish the properties to provide better homes for their residents. B3 Living had a full budget available to modernise and upgrade the structure of the properties and they were looking for innovative ways to fund new fixtures and fittings, and to provide better homes. The client needed a full interior design service and new fixtures and fittings with new furniture for the communal living and dining areas, and the reception.



Overview

We delivered a full resident and staff consultation with a detailed interior design service. We designed a complete scheme, including wall and floor coverings, and suggested structural changes to divide communal rooms to meet the residents' needs. We liaised with contractors and gave them the paint and flooring schedules. We provided furniture for the communal lounge, dining area, games area and bistro / computer area and all corridors. This included tub chairs, bistro and dining tables, easy chairs and sofas, plus sideboards and artwork.



Feedback

Deborah Fenton, B3's Head of Support and Rehousing said:
"We were delighted to find out that Buckingham Interiors design service was not only cost effective, but also created a beautiful scheme. By leasing the furniture, we are now looking at the option of developing further schemes with Buckingham."

Maureen Preedy Independent Living Team Leader at B3 said:
"Buckingham Interiors completed the brief on time and on budget, and we're really pleased with it."

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BUCKINGHAM
interiors

FRC GROUP

0151 702 0570 | sales@frcgroup.co.uk

Page 31
Buckingham Interiors Leasing





Why Lease?

What is Leasing?

How does it work?

How do I arrange a lease?

The Fine Print



Why Lease?

If you need new furniture for your properties but do not have the necessary capital to invest, Buckingham Interiors can help with a furniture leasing package.

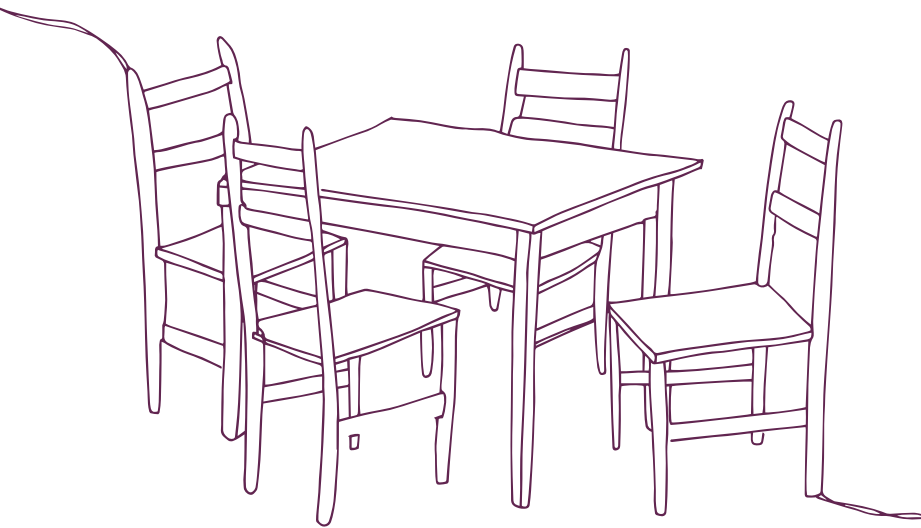
Buckingham Interiors provides our usual high quality contract furniture and furnishings with our one-stop service and express delivery, while our leasing partner provides the funds to pay for it, to be repaid over a two to five year agreement period. Our leasing scheme offers low fees and fair credit terms with the option to buy the furniture for a small additional sum at the end of the agreement.

For more information, call the sales team on **0151 702 0570** or email **sales@frcgroup.co.uk**



What is Leasing?

A lease is a financing arrangement that gives you access to credit for the purchase of goods. Through FRC's leasing partner you can make monthly payments over an agreed term rather than pay the full cost of the goods when you first receive them. Paying this way will also spread the VAT payments over the term of the lease.



How does it work? 1/4

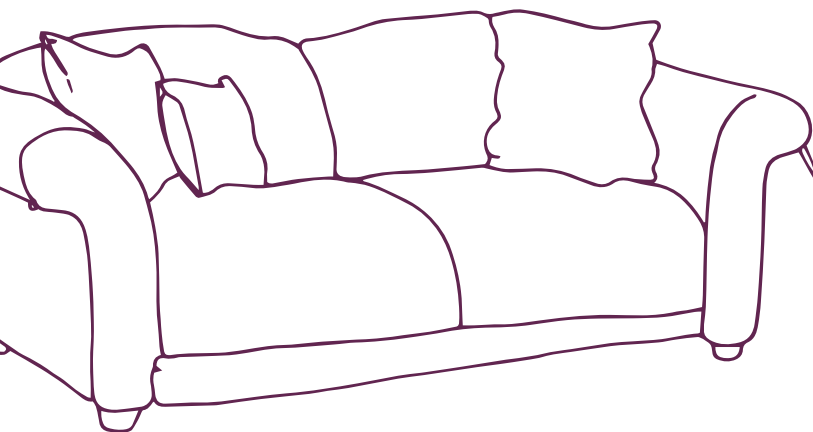


How does it work? 2/4

Lease finance is available for customers purchasing furniture, appliances, floor coverings, window coverings and small household items. You can lease packages of goods or individual items, subject to an agreed minimum value of £2,000

The finance available is a finance lease for a fixed period of two, three, four or five years. At the end of the lease term you can buy the goods leased for a small final fee, equivalent to a 1 month lease payment.

Monthly repayments and annual fees can be paid through Direct Debit. Approximately ten days after receiving your goods the first payment will be drawn.



How does it work? 3/4

End of term options

On completion of your agreed lease term with our leasing partner you will have the following options available:

1. Return the package of goods and walk away.
2. Replace the package of goods with brand new items on a new lease agreement.
3. Buy the leased package of goods, for a one off payment of an amount equal to your monthly lease repayments and take full ownership of the goods.

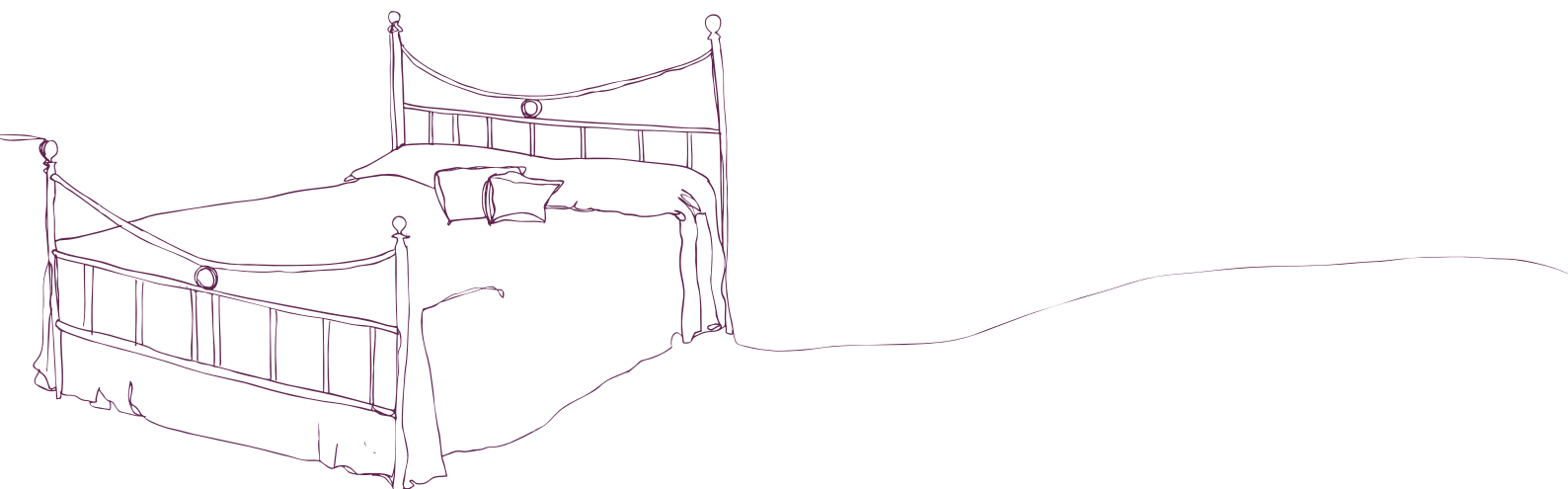
Are there any charges or fees?

There is an initial acceptance fee to set up a lease agreement and an annual fee in each year of the lease term. These fees are approximately £150 for the acceptance fee and an annual fee of £50. Fees are subject to periodic change but will be agreed with you before entering into any agreement.

What if I change my mind?

The lease is a non-cancellable agreement. Once the lease agreement has been signed you are liable to make the payments for the full term.

When ordering goods from FRC that will be paid for through a lease, you will be liable to pay for the goods you have ordered either by signing the lease agreement to initiate the lease term, or if this does not happen by paying in full for the goods that have been ordered.



How does it work? 4/4

Typical lease repayment illustration

The tables below provide some example illustrations of repayments for varying values of goods, with fees. Bespoke lease terms will be agreed with you to meet your particular needs.

Monthly repayments

Time Period	Value of goods				
	€5,000	€10,000	€20,000	€50,000	€100,000
2 Years	£231	£462	£924	£2,309	£4,618
3 Years	£162	£324	£649	£1,622	£3,244
4 Years	£129	£258	£517	£1,292	£2,584
5 Years	£108	£215	£430	£1,076	£2,151

In addition to the monthly repayment the following fees apply to each lease:

Document Fee (one off, at set up): £150 **Annual Administration Fee:** £50

Total lease cost

Time Period	Value of goods				
	€5,000	€10,000	€20,000	€50,000	€100,000
2 Years	£5,792	£11,333	£22,416	£55,666	£111,082
3 Years	£6,139	£11,978	£23,657	£58,692	£117,084
4 Years	£6,552	£12,753	£25,156	£62,366	£124,382
5 Years	£6,853	£13,306	£26,212	£64,930	£129,460

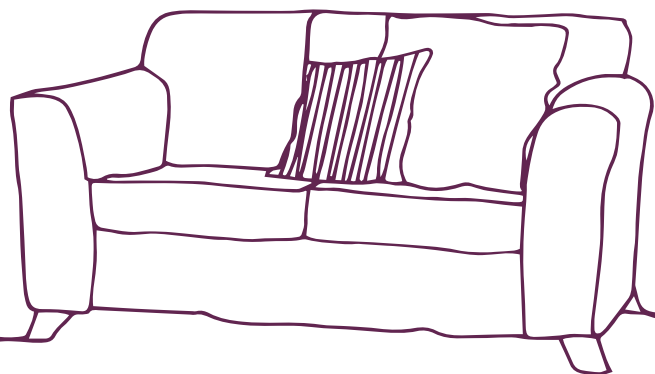
How do I arrange a lease?

Lease finance is available subject to a credit check by our leasing partner. If you are interested in using lease finance in the future, speak to your FRC Sales Contact. Following a credit check, we will provide detailed quotes based on your pattern of purchasing.

The initial process of signing up to a lease will require the signature of a Director of your company, this can sometimes be a named individual so ensure that you allow sufficient time to gain this approval. Subsequent leases can be authorised by a list of approved signatories that are approved by the Directors.

Who can sign up to lease agreements?

Lease agreements can be entered into by Directors of a company. Directors can also approve a list of staff members to be mandated signatories for lease agreements.



The Fine Print

During the lease period, who owns the goods?

The goods are owned by the lease finance provider during the term of the lease. Ownership of the goods transfers to the customer when they have completed the lease term and then made one final payment to Buckingham Interiors to take ownership.

You are responsible for maintaining the items during the lease period. All goods will be covered by manufacturer's warranties for faults during the warranty period. You may choose to take out insurance on the products for the period of the lease, you may already have sufficient cover in your insurance policy or you may choose to self-insure by setting aside a budget to pay for any necessary repairs or replacements caused by misuse of goods or tenant damage.

Can I move items to another property?

Yes however you should keep adequate records of where the items are being kept.

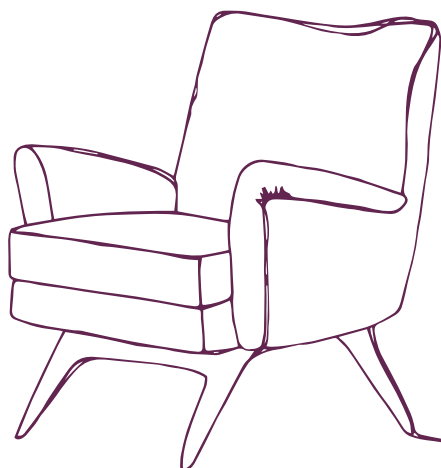
How is VAT applied to leasing?

Rather than pay VAT on the full value of the goods in one go, VAT is applied to each monthly repayment, allowing you to spread the VAT payment over the term of the lease.

Next Steps

Contact the Buckingham Interiors sales team to arrange a visit and find out exactly how our leasing scheme could work for you.

Email sales@frcgroup.co.uk
or call **0151 702 0570**.



B3 Living : Case Study

Brief

B3 Living have nine dedicated schemes for older people in Hertfordshire. The schemes are not difficult to let but B3 Living wanted to refurbish the properties to provide better homes for their residents.

B3 Living had a full budget available to modernise and upgrade the structure of the properties and they were looking for innovative ways to fund new fixtures and fittings, and to provide better homes.

The client needed a full interior design service and new fixtures and fittings with new furniture for the communal living and dining areas, and the reception and corridors.

Overview

We delivered a full resident and staff consultation with a detailed interior design service. We designed a complete scheme, including wall and floor coverings, and suggested structural changes to divide communal rooms to meet the residents' needs. We liaised with contractors and gave them the paint and flooring schedules.



We provided furniture for the communal lounge, dining area, games area and bistro / computer area and all corridors. This included tub chairs, bistro and dining tables, easy chairs and sofas, plus side-boards and artwork. This was all part of our interior design package and was provided as part of a furniture leasing scheme with B3 Living.

Feedback

Deborah Fenton, B3's Head of Support and Rehousing said: *"We were delighted to find out that Buckingham Interiors design service was not only cost effective, but also created a beautiful scheme. By leasing the furniture, we are now looking at the option of developing further schemes with Buckingham."*

Maureen Preedy Independent Living Team Leader at B3 said: *"Buckingham Interiors completed the brief on time and on budget, and we're really pleased with it."*





Buckingham Interiors, Unit 12-14, Atlantic Way, Brunswick Dock, Liverpool, L3 4BE

www.buckinghaminteriors.co.uk | sales@frcgroup.co.uk | 0151 702 0570

Company Registration Number: 2296329 Registered Charity Number: 700731

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Equality Impact Assessment

1. Under s.149 of the Equality Act 2010, when making decisions, Epping District Council must have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty, ie have due regard to:
 - eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and other conduct prohibited by the Act,
 - advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not,
 - fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
2. The characteristics protected by the Equality Act are:
 - age
 - disability
 - gender
 - gender reassignment
 - marriage/civil partnership
 - pregnancy/maternity
 - race
 - religion/belief
 - sexual orientation.
3. In addition to the above protected characteristics you should consider the cross-cutting elements of the proposed policy, namely the social, economic and environmental impact (including rurality) as part of this assessment. These cross-cutting elements are not a characteristic protected by law but are regarded as good practice to include.
4. The Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) document should be used as a tool to test and analyse the nature and impact of either what we do or are planning to do in the future. It can be used flexibly for reviewing existing arrangements but in particular should enable identification where further consultation, engagement and data is required.
5. Use the questions in this document to record your findings. This should include the nature and extent of the impact on those likely to be affected by the proposed policy or change.
6. Where this EqIA relates to a continuing project, it must be reviewed and updated at each stage of the decision.
7. All **Cabinet, Council, and Portfolio Holder reports must be accompanied by an EqIA**. An EqIA should also be completed/reviewed at key stages of projects.
8. To assist you in completing this report, please ensure you read the guidance notes in the Equality Analysis Toolkit and refer to the following Factsheets:
 - Factsheet 1: Equality Profile of the Epping Forest District
 - Factsheet 2: Sources of information about equality protected characteristics
 - Factsheet 3: Glossary of equality related terms
 - Factsheet 4: Common misunderstandings about the Equality Duty
 - Factsheet 5: Frequently asked questions
 - Factsheet 6: Reporting equality analysis to a committee or other decision making body

Section 1: Identifying details

Your function, service area and team: **Housing & Property Services**

If you are submitting this EqIA on behalf of another function, service area or team, specify the originating function, service area or team: **NA**

Title of policy or decision: **Renewal of Schemes**

Officer completing the EqIA: **Deborah Fenton** Tel: **07988860412** Email: **dfenton@eppingforestdc.gov.uk**

Date of completing the assessment: 9/6/21

Section 2: Policy to be analysed

2.1	Is this a new policy (or decision) or a change to an existing policy, practice or project? No
2.2	Describe the main aims, objectives and purpose of the policy (or decision): N/A What outcome(s) are you hoping to achieve (ie decommissioning or commissioning a service)? N/A
2.3	Does or will the policy or decision affect: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• service users• employees• the wider community or groups of people, particularly where there are areas of known inequalities? No Will the policy or decision influence how organisations operate? No
2.4	Will the policy or decision involve substantial changes in resources? No
2.5	Is this policy or decision associated with any of the Council's other policies and how, if applicable, does the proposed policy support corporate outcomes? No

Section 3: Evidence/data about the user population and consultation¹

As a minimum you must consider what is known about the population likely to be affected which will support your understanding of the impact of the policy, eg service uptake/usage, customer satisfaction surveys, staffing data, performance data, research information (national, regional and local data sources).

3.1	What does the information tell you about those groups identified?
3.2	Have you consulted or involved those groups that are likely to be affected by the policy or decision you want to implement? If so, what were their views and how have their views influenced your decision? Tenant and Leaseholders panel has been consulted with. Focus groups and resident meeting will be starting within the next month.
3.3	If you have not consulted or engaged with communities that are likely to be affected by the policy or decision, give details about when you intend to carry out consultation or provide reasons for why you feel this is not necessary: N/A

Section 4: Impact of policy or decision

Use this section to assess any potential impact on equality groups based on what you now know.

Description of impact	Nature of impact Positive, neutral, adverse (explain why)	Extent of impact Low, medium, high (use L, M or H)
Age	Neutral – the paper is for information only and will not impact on any groups	L
Disability	As above	L
Gender	As above	L
Gender reassignment	As above	L
Marriage/civil partnership	As above	L
Pregnancy/maternity	As above	L
Race	As above	L
Religion/belief	As above	L
Sexual orientation	As above	L

Section 5: Conclusion

		Tick Yes/No as appropriate	
5.1	Does the EqlA in Section 4 indicate that the policy or decision would have a medium or high adverse impact on one or more equality groups?	No X	
		Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	If ' YES ', use the action plan at Section 6 to describe the adverse impacts and what mitigating actions you could put in place.

Section 6: Action plan to address and monitor adverse impacts

What are the potential adverse impacts?	What are the mitigating actions?	Date they will be achieved.
None	N/A	N/A/De

Section 7: Sign off

**I confirm that this initial analysis has been completed appropriately.
(A typed signature is sufficient.)**

Signature of Head of Service: Deborah Fenton

Date: 9/6/21

Signature of person completing the EqlA: Deborah Fenton

Date: 9/6/21

Advice

Keep your director informed of all equality & diversity issues. We recommend that you forward a copy of every EqlA you undertake to the director responsible for the service area. Retain a copy of this EqlA for your records. If this EqlA relates to a continuing project, ensure this document is kept under review and updated, eg after a consultation has been undertaken.

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Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-003-2021/21

Date of meeting: 21 June 2021



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Housing Services – Cllr Holly Whitbread

Subject: New Policy – Disposal of HRA Assets

Responsible Officer: Deborah Fenton
Director – HRA Functions (01992 564221).

Democratic Services: Adrian Hendry (01992 564246).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

To approve the new policy on the disposal of small land sites and individual properties

Executive Summary:

EFDC owns approximately 12,000 assets including properties and garages. In addition to these the Council owns other assets such as parcels of land, pathways, un-adopted roads, alleyways and grassed areas on residential estates. In order to make best use of our HRA assets there are circumstances where a disposal would be of benefit to the Council and would lead to a net overall benefit. An example of this could be a one off property which requires structure works which are not cost effective to carry out. Or small pieces of land which add little or no value to the council.

To ensure that the sale of land or assets meets the highest standards of Governance, a policy has been written to set out the framework in which these disposals will take place.

The policy also gives us the opportunity to increase the availability of self build plots. The Self-build and Custom Housebuilding register came into effect through the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015 amended by the Housing and Planning Act 2016, to promote the Government's Right to Build Scheme supporting individuals and associations wishing to build their own homes.

The Capital receipts will be ringfenced to the HRA and will be used to further enhance our estates to 'creating places where people want to live'.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

This report sets out to introduce our policy on the Disposal of HRA Assets. Such a policy is viewed as good practice and will fit with our Asset Management Strategy which will be available for approval by this Cabinet in the new financial year. This policy has been presented to O & S

Report

Parcels of land below 80 Square metres

EFDC receive applications for the purchase of land from different sources, these could be groups of tenants, individuals or local businesses. The Council will consider applications to purchase parcels of land from adjacent owners, however, the Council also reserves the right to consider applications from other parties where there are no management or other issues that would cause inconvenience to the Council, if the land was to be sold and the disposal was economically favourable. In some circumstances, the sale of a small piece of land attached to garden may save on resources should as grass cutting.

Each application will be given due consideration before a decision is made.

Single Dwellings

There may be situations where it is considered a good use of Council assets to proactively dispose of assets, this policy applies to the sale of single dwellings only.

The criteria for the disposal of a single dwelling is:

- Where there is significant structural damage which makes the property not economically viable;
- Where the cost of increasing the SAP rating would result in a cost which would be far beyond any income, we would receive; and
- The market value is substantial and liquidating the asset will help us to provide more homes and improve communities.

In cases where a property may not be economically viable, a financial appraisal will be carried out over the period of the business plan. The aim of this will be to understand the Net Present Value of the property and the Internal Rate of Return. This will be carried out by either an internal or external professional who has had the necessary training to do so.

Valuations

Where land is sold, the value of land will be fully assessed, and a valuation be obtained from a qualified RICS valuer, this could be undertaken by either an internal or external professional. Land may be marketed or auctioned to obtain best consideration. Any valuation will be based on commercial use and not the proposed use.

Legal Framework

In general, the Council is required to achieve the 'best consideration reasonably obtainable' when it is disposing of land. Section 123 imposes a duty on the Council to achieve a particular outcome (namely the best price reasonably obtainable): it is not a duty to conduct a process (e.g. to have regard to factors). If the disposal is under the 1972 Act, there is neither express power to include covenants on a disposal, nor a prohibition.

Allocation of funds

The recycling of capital receipts is ringfence for capital projects, specifically house building or the purchase of property. However in certain circumstances the receipts can be used for other capital projects within the HRA which bring benefits such as cost savings. Any projects such as these will be subject to approval by the Portfolio Holder.

Resource Implications:

The work will be carried out by our in-house Land and Estate Team.

Legal and Governance Implications:

Section 122 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

Better use of our assets creating places where people want to live.

Consultation Undertaken:

Housing and Property colleagues were consulted and agree with the contents of the policy

Background Papers:

Minute No: E/H/004/2002-3

Minute No: H/034/2005-06

Minute No: HSG-029-2009/10

Minute No: 116

Risk Management:

Should the policy not be approved there would be a risk that the Council would not have the ability to make 'best use' of Housing Stock.'

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Equality Impact Assessment

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 - Factsheet 5: Frequently asked questions
 - Factsheet 6: Reporting equality analysis to a committee or other decision making body

Section 1: Identifying details

Your function, service area and team: **Housing & Property Services**

If you are submitting this EqlA on behalf of another function, service area or team, specify the originating function, service area or team: **NA**

Title of policy or decision: **Disposal of HRA Assets**

Officer completing the EqlA: **Deborah Fenton** Tel: **07988860412** Email: **dfenton@eppingforestdc.gov.uk**

Date of completing the assessment: 9/6/21

Section 2: Policy to be analysed

2.1	Is this a new policy (or decision) or a change to an existing policy, practice or project? No
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3.1	What does the information tell you about those groups identified?
3.2	Have you consulted or involved those groups that are likely to be affected by the policy or decision you want to implement? If so, what were their views and how have their views influenced your decision? Officers have been consulted with. The paper has been to O&S
3.3	If you have not consulted or engaged with communities that are likely to be affected by the policy or decision, give details about when you intend to carry out consultation or provide reasons for why you feel this is not necessary: N/A

Section 4: Impact of policy or decision

Use this section to assess any potential impact on equality groups based on what you now know.

Description of impact	Nature of impact Positive, neutral, adverse (explain why)	Extent of impact Low, medium, high (use L, M or H)
Age	Neutral – the paper is for information only and will not impact on any groups	L
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Gender	As above	L
Gender reassignment	As above	L
Marriage/civil partnership	As above	L
Pregnancy/maternity	As above	L
Race	As above	L
Religion/belief	As above	L
Sexual orientation	As above	L

Section 5: Conclusion

		Tick Yes/No as appropriate	
5.1	Does the EqlA in Section 4 indicate that the policy or decision would have a medium or high adverse impact on one or more equality groups?	No X	
		Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	If ' YES ', use the action plan at Section 6 to describe the adverse impacts and what mitigating actions you could put in place.

Section 6: Action plan to address and monitor adverse impacts

What are the potential adverse impacts?	What are the mitigating actions?	Date they will be achieved.
None	N/A	N/A/De

Section 7: Sign off

**I confirm that this initial analysis has been completed appropriately.
(A typed signature is sufficient.)**

Signature of Head of Service: Deborah Fenton

Date: 9/6/21

Signature of person completing the EqIA: Deborah Fenton

Date: 9/6/21

Advice

Keep your director informed of all equality & diversity issues. We recommend that you forward a copy of every EqIA you undertake to the director responsible for the service area. Retain a copy of this EqIA for your records. If this EqIA relates to a continuing project, ensure this document is kept under review and updated, eg after a consultation has been undertaken.

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Report to Cabinet

Report reference: C-005-2021-22

Date of meeting: 21 June 2021



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Housing Services - Councillor H Whitbread

Subject: Regeneration of HRA assets – Creating ‘Place’

Officer contact for further information: Deborah Fenton – Director Housing and Property

Democratic Services Officer: Adrian Hendry, 01992 564246

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- 1. That Cabinet approves the proposed approach to regenerating and protecting our assets;**
- 2. That Cabinet note our pilot scheme (Limes Farm Estate) which forms part of our overall Capital Expenditure for our improvement and works programme for the next year; and**
- 3. That Cabinet receives a further paper in September outlining a 5-year capital plan, which will form part 1 of our Estate Regeneration plan, this will be subject to agreement of the budget which will take place in line with EFDC budget setting time table.**

Executive Summary

An innovative and forward-thinking approach is being proposed to develop a ‘Place Approach’ to the regeneration of our Estates.

A review has been carried out to inform the future planning of our asset and property management programme. There are 2 specific reasons for this. Firstly, the Social Housing White Paper expressly discusses the need to take a combined approach to upgrading and developing communities. Much research has been carried out about the value of taking a holistic and ‘Place’ approach and treating the whole community, rather than specific asset management improvements, such as painting and outside of a building in isolation. In addition to this, officers have adopted a new approach which is about ‘creating places where people want to live’. As such, officers have formed a project group which has assessed the estates and developed a priority list. This paper sets out our approach and details the importance of protecting our assets in addition to the value of taking a ‘Place’ approach.

This paper meets with our social recovery plan.

Reason for decision

Members are asked to approve our approach to estate regeneration and note the benefits to both the customers and the organisation. Furthermore, that Cabinet note the future requirements of the Social Housing White paper in regards to communities and note our approach is in line with this.

Members are also asked to note our approach to the project which is to initially use Limes Farm as a pilot scheme. This will form the basis of our approach going forward and allow us to test our process.

Options considered and rejected:

Officers considered whether to carry on with our current approach which is to carry out work in an isolated manner based on 'time due' only basis. This was rejected as it does not follow our vision which is to 'create places where people want to live'

Report:

1. Background

Epping Forest District Council has managed assets using a cyclical approach in the past, this means developing a programme where elements are replaced after a prescribed number of years. Although this is a manner which is sometimes used to determine programmes, there is a move towards an emphasis on creating 'Place', which includes protecting our assets.

In taking a Place approach officers can not only address the aesthetics and protect the 'life' of the building but can also provide other elements which together create places where people want to live. The value of creating 'Place' is now being favoured over a cyclical approach as this methodology underpins our vision to work with residents and other stakeholders to create communities. Furthermore, the impact for the community is huge as all elements are dealt with and actioned at the same time, dramatically improving both the estate and the area.

In terms of creating a community there are key elements which influence the way people feel about where they live. These include:

- Actual and perceived levels of ASB and Crime
- Open spaces
- Community Cohesion
- Refuge areas
- Parking
- Lighting
- Access to leisure

Taking a Place approach can have far reaching benefits for communities. The examples below which are from international studies clearly highlight the benefits.

1. *Scientific recognition of the benefits of community involvement for mental health has translated to a range of mental health campaigns across the world. For example, Australia's long-running Act-Belong-Commit campaign encourages people to be mentally healthy by getting involved with a local community group and committing to a meaningful cause, such as through volunteering (Act-Belong-Commit, n.d.).*

2. *At a national level, Iceland embarked on a plan to reduce teenage alcohol and drug consumption by providing more access to community sporting groups. The results of the campaign were ground-breaking. Following the initiative, the percentage of teenagers who reported excessive alcohol consumption in the previous month dropped from 42% in 1998 to 5% in 2016. Likewise, the percentage who reported ever using cannabis dropped from 17% to 7%, and cigarette use fell from 23% to 3% (Young, 2017).*

Officers are already working together in terms of focusing on the wider social recovery of the district. Epping Forest already has a well-established Health & Wellbeing Board and excellent working relationships with key partners. The three overarching themes are identified as: Positive Communities, Positive Activity and Positive Mental Health.

Programme

To develop our programme officers from the following disciplines were brought together to form a project team:

Discipline	Contribution to project
Estates and Land	<p>Lead on the Council's resident involvement and communication strategy with local residents in respect of the project. To reconstitute a formal Residents Association for the Estate, to create Block / Road Champions and a resident Focus Group to assist with two-way communication between residents and the Council, to ensure that every resident from the Limes Farm estate is heard and has an opportunity to be involved as little or as much as they wish.</p> <p>To arrange and facilitate public meetings, consultations and community events as might be necessary to support the project.</p> <p>To understand the needs, wants and aspirations of our residents and to create a list of estate enhancement opportunities which can be fed into the project, with the intention of realising as many of these aspirations as we are able, subject to feasibility and the resources available.</p>
Neighbourhood Services	<p>To inform on the current challenges faced by the Neighbourhoods Team in relation to our estates and properties.</p> <p>To form a view on best practice during and completion of the project with a view</p>

	to designing our ASB and providing safer estates for our residents
Community, Culture and Wellbeing	Using an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, work directly with the community to build healthy, happy, cohesive and resilient communities. Work with wider agencies to enhance the health & wellbeing offer through proactive partnership working.
Development	Working as a part of the project team to review and access estates to develop the priority list. Complete site inspections of other estates to be able to offer advice on construction and input in the design stages.
Asset management	Undertake regular Stock Condition Surveys to external and communal areas of blocks of flats and internally to individual flats.

Methodology

To understand which estates should be prioritised the team agreed that the state of the asset should be the first consideration.

This was agreed to be most important as the state of the asset is key to meeting some of the basic needs such as a safe, dry home. Further to this the team then reviewed the levels of crime and ASB on estates. The team then used this to shape a picture of our top estates requiring regeneration. Therefore, using both quantitative and qualitative data.

Other important contributing factors included

Factor	Impact
Compliance with the 5 key areas Electrical testing, Gas Safety, Asbestos, Fire Safety, Lifts.	<p>Electrical Testing - All electrical installations should be inspected and certified in accordance with NICIEC Regulations. For rented accommodation, the maximum period recommended between the inspections is five years with a certificate issued to evidence to this.</p> <p>Gas Safety - The Council (and all Landlords) have a legal duty to ensure all gas appliances, even the tenants own appliances, are inspected by a qualified Gas Engineer every 12-months, and a certificate issued to evidence this.</p>

	<p>Asbestos - The Council has a duty to maintain an Asbestos Register. The 'duty to manage' asbestos is included in the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012.</p> <p>Fire Safety - All blocks have a Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) and an action plan of remedial action is being managed. All FRA are reviewed regularly or if there has been a significant change which has affected the fire risk or the fire safety measures in the block.</p> <p>Lifts - The Council has a legal responsibility to make sure that any lifts are maintained and in safe working order. The regulations state that any passenger lifting equipment requires servicing and a thorough inspection every six months irrespective of how frequently it is used.</p>
ASB and Perceived ASB	<p>ASB statistics are taken into account when deciding how much resource we will need to dedicate to one area, The Police stats play a large part in this process so we are able to garner such information as the levels of car crime, general ASB and basic crime stats.</p> <p>We will also look at the amount of current cases managed within that area and if there are similar themes to the types of ASB we are dealing with.</p> <p>The perception of ASB on our estates is always greater than the actual in reality, often contributed to by the reputation of an estate. This can be exacerbated by a lack of investment in key security measures and general upkeep of the stock.</p> <p>The deprivation of certain estates play a large part in levels of ASB, which can lead to petty crimes and drug related activity, as young people can be drawn into a life of crime at an early age.</p> <p>We have seen a conscious rise in more serious crime being committed on our</p>

	<p>estates and in our housing stock, which is following an upward trend, particularly on estates with county line affiliations.</p>
<p>Outdoor spaces</p>	<p>We are fortunate that many of our estates are surrounded by large opens spaces which are kept neat and tidy. During the pandemic our outdoor spaces have become particularly important to us, and we have seen a surge of interest from residents wishing to see gardening, tree planting and growing projects in their local areas. Not only do these projects make our estates look more aesthetically pleasing, they help the environment, support education, health and wellbeing and bring communities together.</p> <p>The physical and mental health and wellbeing of our residents is paramount. Our estates contribute to this by providing spaces where people can enjoy exercise and can get out and about. Some estates do not enjoy local amenities and would benefit from improvements such as play areas, outdoor gyms, landscaping and community facilities, which provide opportunity for communities to come together and support community cohesion.</p> <p>A number of our estates suffer from a other issues. Pavements and roads are often in poor condition. It is common to find tree roots pushing up pavements, presenting a risk in terms of trips, slips and falls. In some areas, pavements have been covered over by vegetation and have become unusable. Also there is sometimes inadequate refuse provision, which contributes to fly tipping.</p> <p>The cleanliness of an estate also affects the way we feel about living there. Not all of our estates enjoy a cleaning & caretaking service. These areas fall to residents to maintain themselves. These areas often look neglected and reflect badly on the Council and contribute to customer dissatisfaction. Further, inadequate clothes drying provisions on</p>

	<p>many estate creates a raft of unintended consequences.</p> <p>The quality of signage on an estate can have a big impact on its overall feel. A beautifully designed building can be made to look less attractive through the addition of poor signage. Replacing signage and improving wayfinding would have a positive impact on some estates.</p> <p>A key priority for most residents is feeling safe and secure in their home and the wider estate. Whilst some estates benefit from CCTV, many estates do not. Further, our estates often lack secure provisions for pram and cycle storage and a number of flat blocks still do not have secure door entry systems.</p>
Community opportunities	<p>Wider participation in positive activities, both physical and cultural, on and around the estates, will improve the health, wellbeing and quality of life of local residents and address identified health inequalities.</p> <p>Improved community cohesion and resilience through engagement in such activities and working with EFDC CCW team and Community Champions</p> <p>Residents will have improved mental wellbeing through community engagement initiatives</p> <p>Enhanced local environment, including tackling and improving anti-social behaviour</p>

Limes Regeneration - Our current progress to date

At Limes Farm the project team have begun consulting residents on the proposed works, what these will include and how they can get involved. As a result of our initial engagement a new Residents Association with block champions has been setup giving the project a direct communication channel to the residents that live there.

With the proposed works being external the project will focus on ensuring the estate is watertight, structurally sound and compliant. For example, window replacements, balcony/walkway repairs, controlled access upgrades and fire risk assessments works. In addition, a large focus will be put on potential regeneration opportunities and how we can create a warmer, more connected place for our residents to live. Initial

discussions with residents have included proposals such as, new tree planting initiatives, new outdoor play areas and better estate signage. These will be explored further as the scheme develops.

The high-level timeline for the Major Works at Limes Farm Estate is as follows:

- Tender and appoint Design consultant – 4 Weeks
- Concept and Technical design phase – 6 Weeks
- Section 20 Stage 1 (Notice of Intent) – 5 weeks
- Tender and Appoint Principal Contractor – 4-6 Weeks
- Section 20 Stage 2 (Notice of Estimates) – 5 weeks
- Construction programme – 52 Weeks

Whilst at a very early stage, the project team have been working with residents to better understand the needs, wants and aspirations of for the estate. There are already a number of key themes emerging from our meetings to date, which include better bin provision, pathway repairs, landscaping, tree planting, better signage / wayfinding, the full reinstatement of the football pitch, a dog walking area and a green gym.

As the project progresses, our new Residents Association, Block / Road Champions and customer Focus Group will help us to ensure meaningful two-way communication between residents and the Council, ensuring that every resident from the Limes Farm estate is heard and has an opportunity to be involved (as little or as much as they wish). Furthermore, has the opportunity to influence and shape the improvements made to their estate, for the benefit of the whole community, following a similar approach to the one adopted in our new Scheme, 'More than Bricks and Mortar' as agreed by Cabinet last year.

At the heart of this recommendation, as is the case for More than Bricks and Mortar, is a clear statement of intent about the Council's commitment to affirm our estates as integral to the Council's long term vision for the District, where our estates are viewed as privileged parts of the District and to celebrate our estates as great places where people want to live. This is particularly key at a time when due to the Coronavirus pandemic residents are spending larger amounts of their time at home.

Next Steps

Using our methodology officers have identified several other estates which would benefit from this approach. These discussions are in their infancy and further capital funding would need to be sort and agreed by Cabinet. Furthermore, work will need to be carried out to source some capital funding from other sources. Cabinet can expect a paper regarding this towards the end of the year.

Furthermore officers are in the process of considering the appropriate approach with regards to capital works and the contribution from leaseholders. A paper will be presented to Cabinet in due course.

Consultation undertaken:

Officers have been extensively consulting with residents at the Limes Farm Estate.

In terms of our wider piece we will also be working with:
Local Schools
Police
Local community groups

Resource implications:

Our Capital expenditure has been agreed for 21/22. To facilitate the progress of our plans a project manager has been employed. This is budgeted for.

Legal and Governance Implications:

There are several Leaseholders living on the estate. A paper is currently being prepared to recommend a strategy for working with those residents in terms of S20 legislation and future costs.

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications:

The regeneration would include several initiatives to help alleviate fuel poverty and support the green agenda

Background Papers:

NA

Impact Assessments:

Attached

Risk Management:

Should the programme not go ahead there is a risk that our assets will become unrepairable and this result in a huge cost for EFDC. Furthermore, indirect cost will increase as crime, ASB and other related social problems increase.

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Equality Impact Assessment

1. Under s.149 of the Equality Act 2010, when making decisions, Epping District Council must have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty, ie have due regard to:
 - eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and other conduct prohibited by the Act,
 - advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not,
 - fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
2. The characteristics protected by the Equality Act are:
 - age
 - disability
 - gender
 - gender reassignment
 - marriage/civil partnership
 - pregnancy/maternity
 - race
 - religion/belief
 - sexual orientation.
3. In addition to the above protected characteristics you should consider the cross-cutting elements of the proposed policy, namely the social, economic and environmental impact (including rurality) as part of this assessment. These cross-cutting elements are not a characteristic protected by law but are regarded as good practice to include.
4. The Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) document should be used as a tool to test and analyse the nature and impact of either what we do or are planning to do in the future. It can be used flexibly for reviewing existing arrangements but in particular should enable identification where further consultation, engagement and data is required.
5. Use the questions in this document to record your findings. This should include the nature and extent of the impact on those likely to be affected by the proposed policy or change.
6. Where this EqIA relates to a continuing project, it must be reviewed and updated at each stage of the decision.
7. All **Cabinet, Council, and Portfolio Holder reports must be accompanied by an EqIA**. An EqIA should also be completed/reviewed at key stages of projects.
8. To assist you in completing this report, please ensure you read the guidance notes in the Equality Analysis Toolkit and refer to the following Factsheets:
 - Factsheet 1: Equality Profile of the Epping Forest District
 - Factsheet 2: Sources of information about equality protected characteristics
 - Factsheet 3: Glossary of equality related terms
 - Factsheet 4: Common misunderstandings about the Equality Duty
 - Factsheet 5: Frequently asked questions
 - Factsheet 6: Reporting equality analysis to a committee or other decision making body

Section 1: Identifying details

Your function, service area and team: **Housing & Property Services**

If you are submitting this EqlA on behalf of another function, service area or team, specify the originating function, service area or team: **NA**

Title of policy or decision: **Regeneration of Limes**

Officer completing the EqlA: **Deborah Fenton** Tel: **07988860412** Email: **dfenton@eppingforestdc.gov.uk**

Date of completing the assessment: 9/6/21

Section 2: Policy to be analysed

2.1	Is this a new policy (or decision) or a change to an existing policy, practice or project? No
2.2	Describe the main aims, objectives and purpose of the policy (or decision): N/A What outcome(s) are you hoping to achieve (ie decommissioning or commissioning a service)? N/A
2.3	Does or will the policy or decision affect: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• service users• employees• the wider community or groups of people, particularly where there are areas of known inequalities? No Will the policy or decision influence how organisations operate? No
2.4	Will the policy or decision involve substantial changes in resources? No
2.5	Is this policy or decision associated with any of the Council's other policies and how, if applicable, does the proposed policy support corporate outcomes? No

Section 3: Evidence/data about the user population and consultation¹

As a minimum you must consider what is known about the population likely to be affected which will support your understanding of the impact of the policy, eg service uptake/usage, customer satisfaction surveys, staffing data, performance data, research information (national, regional and local data sources).

3.1	What does the information tell you about those groups identified?
3.2	Have you consulted or involved those groups that are likely to be affected by the policy or decision you want to implement? If so, what were their views and how have their views influenced your decision? Tenant and Leaseholders panel has been consulted with. Focus groups and resident meeting are ongoing.
3.3	If you have not consulted or engaged with communities that are likely to be affected by the policy or decision, give details about when you intend to carry out consultation or provide reasons for why you feel this is not necessary: N/A

Section 4: Impact of policy or decision

Use this section to assess any potential impact on equality groups based on what you now know.

Description of impact	Nature of impact Positive, neutral, adverse (explain why)	Extent of impact Low, medium, high (use L, M or H)
Age	Neutral – the paper is for information only and will not impact on any groups	L
Disability	As above	L
Gender	As above	L
Gender reassignment	As above	L
Marriage/civil partnership	As above	L
Pregnancy/maternity	As above	L
Race	As above	L
Religion/belief	As above	L
Sexual orientation	As above	L

Section 5: Conclusion

		Tick Yes/No as appropriate	
5.1	Does the EqlA in Section 4 indicate that the policy or decision would have a medium or high adverse impact on one or more equality groups?	No X	
		Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	If ' YES ', use the action plan at Section 6 to describe the adverse impacts and what mitigating actions you could put in place.

Section 6: Action plan to address and monitor adverse impacts

What are the potential adverse impacts?	What are the mitigating actions?	Date they will be achieved.
None	N/A	N/A/De

Section 7: Sign off

**I confirm that this initial analysis has been completed appropriately.
(A typed signature is sufficient.)**

Signature of Head of Service: Deborah Fenton

Date: 9/6/21

Signature of person completing the EqIA: Deborah Fenton

Date: 9/6/21

Advice

Keep your director informed of all equality & diversity issues. We recommend that you forward a copy of every EqIA you undertake to the director responsible for the service area. Retain a copy of this EqIA for your records. If this EqIA relates to a continuing project, ensure this document is kept under review and updated, eg after a consultation has been undertaken.

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**Epping Forest
District Council**

Report to Cabinet

Report reference: C-002-2021-22

Date of meeting: 21 June 2021

Portfolio: Housing Services - Councillor H Whitbread

Subject: Recommendation of the supplier for the proposed Housing Management System

Officer contact for further information: Deborah Fenton – Director HRA Functions

Democratic Services Officer: Adrian Hendry, 01992 564246

Appendix 1 – Budget (confidential)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- 1. That Cabinet agrees the recommendation to proceed and appoint Civica to provide our new Housing Management system; and**
- 2. That Cabinet note the methodology used to appoint the successful supplier.**

Executive summary

EFDC is currently using OHMS housing management system. It is usual practice to review system on a periodic basis to assess currently suitability. It was agreed in 2019 that a soft market test be undertaken to understand the products which are now available, and how they may meet the needs of a progressive service in a fast-moving environment. Our review revealed that we could purchase a product which was capable of:

- Negating the need for manual processes and spreadsheets
- Enabling agile and mobile working in the field (mobilising the housing officer)
- Enabling housing services to be delivered digitally
- Build / rebuild super user expertise within Housing
- Easier production of regulatory and statutory returns, reducing staff effort
- Greater customer insight through analytics enabling mitigation of tenant risks, focused service delivery and resource optimisation
- Increased staff satisfaction and productivity
- Operational and management information providing early warning indicators of issues and supporting business decisions
- Measurable process efficiency – ability to reflect more streamlined ways of working
- Reduction in arrears (rents and service charges)
- Significant reduction in time taken to process estimates and actuals for service charges

This would provide an excellent opportunity to use technology to reshape our service to be digital by default, and enable the team to concentrate resources on those most needing the support. In addition, providing a system which meets the aspirations of both our staff and customers.

A new housing management system would result in significant savings, particularly the administration of payments and tenancy changes which are carried out by business services. It will also remove the risk around processes being applied incorrectly or mistakes being made, as these processes will be automated.

Report:

1. Background

EFDC uses OHMS as its current Housing Management system. OHMS was implemented nearly 20 years ago and is supported and maintained by Northgate Public Sector (NPS). Although Northgate has no plans to retire OHMS or announce its end of life, it is not being developed beyond essential legislative changes and lacks some of the functionality that you would expect to find in a modern system. Equally there are a number of OHMS modules that were never implemented and there are a number of key processes that are conducted manually and/or supported by spreadsheets. A lack of integration with other core systems is a key issue. The lack of integrated processes adds a huge risk to the organisation, particularly around our new requirements to meet the Rent Regulations.

We are also in the planning stage for developing a programme for regenerating our assets, a new system will enable us to manage our assets appropriately, using intuitive information. In addition, it is vital we have a system which can support us in doing this, and therefore allow for clear transparency between this and the HRA business plan.

In addition, our approach to working with customers is 'progressive', as such officers need a system which is able to compliment such work. An example of this is the 'one view of a customer' approach which allows housing officers to take more of a holistic view of the needs and challenges a customer may have.

2. Procurement Process

In 2020 EFDC began the process of an EU compliant procurement, this was undertaken to determine how EFDC business requirements for the next 5-10 years could best be met. The desired outcomes and objectives of this procurement were to identify a supplier and a solution.

Following this a full procurement exercise was undertaken, the steps of which are highlighted below. The process has now been completed and based on our scoring methodology, Civica are being recommended as our preferred provider. The process followed the EFDC standard procurement methodology. This involves defining key parts of the process and apportioning weighting. The allocation of weighting used was developed by EFDC and is in line with industry averages.

Category	% Weighting
Functional	31.50%
ICT	13.50%
Project	9.00%
Strategy	4.50%
Commercial	9.00%
Price	22.50%
Demonstrations	10.00%
Totals	
Rank	

Scoring Methodology – Functional score

The officers, supported by our retained IT consultant developed the specification, this formed a key part of the tender document as it sets out the functionality required across all modules of the system. The tender document was published in line with legislation, 5 providers put forward expressions of interest. Due diligence was carried out and this reduced the eligible suppliers to 3. A comprehensive process was then undertaken.

Scoring Methodology – Functionality

The specification identified over 800 functional requirements which were assessed and scored by representatives from each module area. Clarifications were sought from the suppliers throughout.

Scoring Methodology – ICT Scores

Interviews and demonstration sessions were used to score the ICT section of the project. This part of the process includes how the service is managed and delivered, information security, disaster recovery, backups, data integration / interfacing capabilities and reporting. This is very important as it can form the future functionality of the product for example cloud-based vs based in house.

Scoring Methodology – Project

This is key to the implementation of the project and includes the structure of the project plan, the methodology project and recommendations around the actual implementation of the project (including resourcing).

Scoring Methodology – Strategy

The part of the scoring represents the future road map, this forms part of the demonstration session. This is important as housing management systems are used to facilitate the legislative returns, as such EFDC needed assurance that the road map is future proof. A further example of this would be the potential changes to the Decent Homes Programme, there would be a need to align the system to the new requirements.

Scoring Methodology – Commercial

This section included 31 contract conditions which suppliers were required to reflect in their proposed agreement or provide a satisfactory alternative form of words. These contract conditions included service level agreements and a provision for service credits.

Scoring methodology - Demonstrations

Each of the suppliers underwent 2.5 days of demonstrations to officers, based on the original specification. Each element of the specification was given a score by each officer. Following this a selection of reference calls were made to organisations using the system. As before, this was carried out in a structured manner to allow for transparency.

Decision making process

The final part of the procurement involved pulling the scores together from all 7 categories, this then provides the lead officer with a final score and thus a

recommendation can be made.

Outcome

Following the exercise which has been carried out to the above specification, the provider which ranked number 1 was Civica. Therefore, this forms the basis of our recommendation to Cabinet.

Reason for decision:

Members are asked to approve the appointment of Civica as the preferred provider for the Housing Management System.

Options considered and rejected:

Officers considered whether to carry on with our current system, however this would not suit the business needs of EFDC.

Consultation undertaken:

As part of the procurement process, officers were consulted.

Resource implications:

A budget was approved as part of the DDF, this included staffing resources to implement the system. A budget paper is provided in Appendix 1

Legal and Governance Implications:

All procured requirement have been met. The project has and will continue to be monitored using EFDC Governance programme.

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications:

NA

Background Papers:

DDF application report

Impact Assessments:

Attached

Risk Management:

A risk matrix is in place and will form part of the implementation moving forward.

Equality Impact Assessment

1. Under s.149 of the Equality Act 2010, when making decisions, Epping District Council must have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty, ie have due regard to:
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 - fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
2. The characteristics protected by the Equality Act are:
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 - disability
 - gender
 - gender reassignment
 - marriage/civil partnership
 - pregnancy/maternity
 - race
 - religion/belief
 - sexual orientation.
3. In addition to the above protected characteristics you should consider the cross-cutting elements of the proposed policy, namely the social, economic and environmental impact (including rurality) as part of this assessment. These cross-cutting elements are not a characteristic protected by law but are regarded as good practice to include.
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 - Factsheet 4: Common misunderstandings about the Equality Duty
 - Factsheet 5: Frequently asked questions
 - Factsheet 6: Reporting equality analysis to a committee or other decision making body

Section 1: Identifying details

Your function, service area and team: **Housing & Property Services**

If you are submitting this EqlA on behalf of another function, service area or team, specify the originating function, service area or team: **NA**

Title of policy or decision: **Housing Management System**

Officer completing the EqlA: **Deborah Fenton** Tel: **07988860412** Email: **dfenton@eppingforestdc.gov.uk**

Date of completing the assessment: 9/6/21

Section 2: Policy to be analysed

2.1	Is this a new policy (or decision) or a change to an existing policy, practice or project? No
2.2	Describe the main aims, objectives and purpose of the policy (or decision): N/A What outcome(s) are you hoping to achieve (ie decommissioning or commissioning a service)? N/A
2.3	Does or will the policy or decision affect: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• service users• employees• the wider community or groups of people, particularly where there are areas of known inequalities? No Will the policy or decision influence how organisations operate? No
2.4	Will the policy or decision involve substantial changes in resources? No
2.5	Is this policy or decision associated with any of the Council's other policies and how, if applicable, does the proposed policy support corporate outcomes? No

Section 3: Evidence/data about the user population and consultation¹

As a minimum you must consider what is known about the population likely to be affected which will support your understanding of the impact of the policy, eg service uptake/usage, customer satisfaction surveys, staffing data, performance data, research information (national, regional and local data sources).

3.1	What does the information tell you about those groups identified?
3.2	Have you consulted or involved those groups that are likely to be affected by the policy or decision you want to implement? If so, what were their views and how have their views influenced your decision? Officers have been consulted with.
3.3	If you have not consulted or engaged with communities that are likely to be affected by the policy or decision, give details about when you intend to carry out consultation or provide reasons for why you feel this is not necessary: N/A

Section 4: Impact of policy or decision

Use this section to assess any potential impact on equality groups based on what you now know.

Description of impact	Nature of impact Positive, neutral, adverse (explain why)	Extent of impact Low, medium, high (use L, M or H)
Age	Neutral – the paper is for information only and will not impact on any groups	L
Disability	As above	L
Gender	As above	L
Gender reassignment	As above	L
Marriage/civil partnership	As above	L
Pregnancy/maternity	As above	L
Race	As above	L
Religion/belief	As above	L
Sexual orientation	As above	L

Section 5: Conclusion

		Tick Yes/No as appropriate	
5.1	Does the EqIA in Section 4 indicate that the policy or decision would have a medium or high adverse impact on one or more equality groups?	No X	
		Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	If ' YES ', use the action plan at Section 6 to describe the adverse impacts and what mitigating actions you could put in place.

Section 6: Action plan to address and monitor adverse impacts

What are the potential adverse impacts?	What are the mitigating actions?	Date they will be achieved.
None	N/A	N/A/De

Section 7: Sign off

**I confirm that this initial analysis has been completed appropriately.
(A typed signature is sufficient.)**

Signature of Head of Service: Deborah Fenton

Date: 9/6/21

Signature of person completing the EqIA: Deborah Fenton

Date: 9/6/21

Advice

Keep your director informed of all equality & diversity issues. We recommend that you forward a copy of every EqIA you undertake to the director responsible for the service area. Retain a copy of this EqIA for your records. If this EqIA relates to a continuing project, ensure this document is kept under review and updated, eg after a consultation has been undertaken.

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Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-004-2021/22

Date of meeting: 21 June 2021



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Finance, Qualis Client & Economic Development – Cllr J Pilip

Subject: Qualis Quarterly Monitoring Report – Q2 2020/21

Responsible Officer: Andrew Small (07548 145665).

Democratic Services: Adrian Hendry (01992 564246).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

Considering any comments made by Overview and Scrutiny, discuss this report and agree any actions required;

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The Governance framework for Qualis, as agreed by Cabinet in February 2020, included the requirement that Qualis should report to Epping Forest District Council on its performance Quarterly.
- 1.2. This report presents the second Quarter's monitoring report for the Qualis trading year 2020/21 and covers the period from 1 February to 31 March 2021. This reflects a shortened quarter due to the change in the Qualis year end. This report was considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 8th June and their comments will be reported verbally to this meeting.
- 1.3. Attached to this report as Appendix A is the Qualis Board monitoring report for Quarter 2 as agreed by the Qualis Board on 29 April 2021.
- 1.4. Performance is measured against the business plan targets for 2020/21. The Board report highlights performance against these using the recognised Red, Amber, Green reporting system (RAG).
- 1.5. **Noting the objectives flagged as Amber and the explanations provided, Qualis has again performed in line with expectations during the second Quarter.**

2. Introduction

- 2.1. The Qualis Shareholder agreement, as agreed by Cabinet on February 2020 includes the following paragraph,

'The Company shall procure that quarterly management accounts and reports (including a balance sheet, profit and loss account and cash flow statement) containing such information as EFDC may reasonably require are provided to EFDC and EFDC's Representative.'

- 2.2. The Cabinet resolution also requires that the Council's S151, as the key conduit between Qualis and the Council, provides a commentary to the Council on the performance of Qualis at each Quarter review.
- 2.3. In compliance with this requirement Qualis has provided the Council with the Quarters' Management Accounts for the Council's consideration together with the commentary below from the Council's S151 officer.
- 2.4. As reported previously, Qualis requested, and the Council agreed, to a change in their year-end reporting date and this shortens their trading year by one month. To facilitate this change one of their reporting quarters needs to be squeezed during 20/21 and Qualis has elected that this be done in Quarter 2, so that their reporting dates aligns, by an offset of 6 months to the Council's own year-end. As a consequence, this Qualis Board report only covers a 2 month period.

3. Commentary on the Trading Performance

- 3.1. The Qualis 1st year of operation was non-typical in that Qualis needed to create a management and staffing structure, secure finance and acquire both assets and services to manage before it could properly trade. Whilst this process remains ongoing Qualis had acquired both commercial property and the Housing Maintenance Service by the end of its first operational year.
- 3.2. Whilst the first year was financially dominated by outgoings, the second year should be a balance of income and expenditure with a small forecast profit targeted within the single year Business Plan presented to Council in December. So, this year's monitoring should be more typical of a trading company, recognising that revenue earnings will still gradually be built up over time.
- 3.3. The Qualis report attached at Appendix A meets the requirements placed upon Qualis within the Shareholder agreement. The Board report presents the Balance Sheets, P&Ls and a Cash Flow explanation. It also RAG rates key quarterly deliverables against the Business Plan.
- 3.4. **Cabinet should note that majority of the deliverables for Quarter 2 are flagged as Green with the exceptions highlighted below.**
- 3.5. **Cash (Moved to Green from Amber last Quarter)** – Qualis reports as having a Cash balance at the end of the first quarter which is £3.2 million higher than its £12.3 million target. This is primarily due to Qualis securing the first tranche of the construction loan from the Council in order to fund the on-going work to secure planning permission for the regeneration sites.
- 3.6. **Qualis Living (Flagged as Amber)** - The cash balance remains high as Qualis has yet to secure the final (£10 million) commercial property investment from the balance of the £30 million funding loaned to Qualis in September 2020. Whilst Qualis targeted acquiring an acquisition before this date, it is important that an acquisition is carefully selected for fit, security and return and shouldn't be unduly pressured in order acquiring a property that sits outside of their acquisition strategy in order to meet business plan cash targets. The delay in securing the third commercial property is the reason that this KPI is flagged as Amber.
- 3.7. **Income and Expenditure (Remaining as Amber)** – The Board report includes

cumulative losses up to the end of the 2nd quarter of £473,551 (analysed in the table in 3.9) compared to a business plan expectation of a loss of £197,295. This is an improvement on the cumulative loss reported last Quarter of £696,837. The reason given being largely associated with accrued expenditure on development sites which Qualis is unable to charge to its Balance Sheet as 'Work in Progress' until planning consent is given. Once Planning consent is awarded, this cost will be removed from the Profit and Loss account. Achievement of Planning consent has taken longer than originally anticipated but now has a scheduled date set for the combined applications to be considered by the District Development Committee in July. Should Planning consent not be obtained this cost will remain a charge in the Profit and Loss account until permission is resolved. The increase in the carried cost of 'Work in Progress' masks improvements in Qualis Management revenues associated with the Housing Maintenance contract, and lower interest costs in Qualis Living.

3.8. **Roundhills and Pyrles Lane Delivery Plans to Board (Moved to Green from Amber last Quarter)** – The business cases have been reviewed by the Board and, in the case of Roundhills, some additional work is being undertaken. In respect of the Pyrles Lane site, Qualis has shared early thinking with the Council and another item appears on this agenda seeking views in relation to options for this site.

3.9. The table below sets out the actual net income and expenditure against that expected for each of the Qualis companies.

Qualis Company	Expected £	Actual £	Variance £	Last Report £
Group	29,047	28,272	-755	20,003
Commercial	18,303	-745,770	-764,073	-434,909
Management	45,042	106,272	61,230	-237,511
Living	-289,686	137,675	427,361	-44,420
Total	-197,294	-473,551	-276,257	-696,837

3.10. The Balance Sheet position, showing Fixed Assets and accumulated net worth of Qualis, is set out in the table below. Fixed Assets are individually identified as the Council charges these for security purposes against the loans provided. The Net Worth position reflects the accumulation and carry forward of set-up costs to be offset by future planned profits.

Qualis Company	Fixed Assets £	Net Worth (Q2) £	Last Report £
Group	48,844	44,652	36,383
Commercial	-	-1,717,507	-1,406,645
Management	74,588	-246,681	-509,464
Living	20,793,122	-45,241	-227,337
Total	20,871,415	-1,964,777	-2,107,063

3.11. Delivery of the £238,039 surplus contained in the single year Business Plan will largely depend upon successfully obtaining planning consent for the Epping regeneration sites. In all other respects the Qualis Business Plan objectives are being met and showing good performance against the individual targets set out in the Qualis Board report including progress on bringing forward the redevelopment sites in the District.

4. Change of Accounting Date

- 4.1. Qualis advised the Council that they wished to change their reporting date by 1 month, bringing it forward to the 30th September from the 31st October. This is considered a minor change and aligns better with the Council's budget preparation timetable and so has been agreed. As a consequence, the quarterly reporting cycle will also need to change to align to this revised date and so this quarter is only 2 months, covering February and March 2021. This will not affect the performance, only the dates it is reported

5. Resource Implications

- 5.1. The Epping Forest District Council 2020/21 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan approved in February 2020 included assumptions on the returns and income generated from Qualis.
- 5.2. The assumptions included are as follows;

Loan Purpose	Amount and Term	Interest Payments Per Annum £
Working Capital Loan	£5 million for 5 years	£225,000
Asset Purchase	£30 million 20 years	£1,800,000
EFDC Asset Purchase	£22 million 30 years	£1,605,000
Less EFDC Borrowing Costs		-£1,306,337
Net Receipts		£2,323,663

- 5.3. These assumptions were made pre Covid-19 and the information that underpinned these has now changed. For example, interest rates are now lower and the market value of assets to be transferred has reduced on the latest valuation and taken longer to complete.
- 5.4. Both these factors will reduce the expected gains to Epping Forest District Council and therefore add to the Council's ultimate cost of Covid-19 during 2020/21. Revised assumptions, factoring in the delays resulting from Covid19, have been used in preparing the Councils Medium Term Financial Plan for 2021/22.

6. Legal and Governance Implications

- 6.1. None contained within this report.

7. Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications

- 7.1. None.

8. Consultation Undertaken

- 8.1. None

Background Papers

Group Company Governance Document – Cabinet 6 February 2020

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Qualis Group

Incorporating, Qualis Group, Qualis Living, Qualis Management, Qualis Developments

Finance and Performance Monitoring Quarterly Report

Year 2, Quarter 2, (1st Feb 2020 – 31st Mar 2021)

Noting that all figures are cumulative from 1st November 2019 and that quarter 2 is a two-month period so that Qualis' half-year coincides with EFDC's full year ending 31st March.

Subject: Finance and Performance Monitoring

Author: Nick Dawe, Finance Director (finance)
Paul Hewitt, Operations Director (performance)
Sacha Jevans, Managing Director (summary)

Decisions Required: To approve the report and note the actions.

1. To note the figures and performance highlighted in this report that are to plan or will be on plan by the end of the financial year.
2. To support the key actions detailed in Section 7 or this report.
3. To agree that this report should be passed to Epping Forest District Council in line with the shareholder agreement (with any agreed amendments).
4. To note that detailed operational progress is now recorded on the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) Report. The Board may wish to share the KPI report quarterly with the shareholder.



Qualis Group

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1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The Qualis Group Board regularly receives updates on financial and operational issues at its monthly Board Meetings.
- 1.2 In line with the shareholder agreement, the Qualis Group Board receives a quarterly Finance and Performance Report that tracks the success of the Group against the shareholder (EFDC) agreed Annual Business Plan and Annual Budget.
- 1.3 This formal monitoring will include any Board and subsequently shareholder approved amendments to the Business Plan and Annual Budget.
- 1.4 The quarterly Qualis Finance and Performance Report will be passed to EFDC to allow scrutiny and to be noted.
- 1.5 The report covers only a two-month period to allow the synchronisation between Qualis' half-year and EFDC's full-year, i.e. 31st March.

2. Monitoring finance and operational performance indicators

- 2.1 The key performance indicators set out below are those proposed to be used for monitoring purposes in the future. They are top level indicators of the financial health and operation delivery of the Qualis group of companies.
- 2.2 In line with standard practice, the following colour coded performance flags are used:

Colour	Overall Performance	Detailed Measure
	Cyan, exceptional performance	For finance; over twice the expected figure, for operations, over one month ahead of target delivery.
	Green, good performance	For finance; positive performance up to twice the expected figure, for operations, up to one month ahead of target delivery.
	Amber, poor performance but will be remedied next quarter	For finance; negative performance variance of between 5% and 10% of the expected figure, for operations, one and three months behind target delivery.



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	Red, poor performance but will be remedied in two further quarters	For finance; negative performance variance of between 5% and 10% of the expected figure, for operations, one and three months behind target delivery.
	Black, poor performance requiring immediate board level intervention	For finance; negative performance variance in excess of 10% of the expected figure, for operations, over three months behind target delivery.

3. Key performance indicators

Finance KPI	Measure	Target £	Actual £	
Cash	Cash held by Qualis Group of companies, target versus actual	12,348,957	15,548,957	=
Income and Expenditure	Total income and expenditure position of Qualis Group of companies, target	- 197,295	- 473,551	=
Balance Sheet	Net balance sheet worth of Qualis Group of companies, target versus actual		- 1,964,777	=



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Operational KPI	Target	Actual	
Qualis Commercial , submission of Epping sites for planning	2 to be submitted by December 2020, remaining 3 by end of March 2021	Submitted to timescale	+
Qualis Commercial , consideration of full business case by Qualis Board for Roundhills	Re-set for April		+
Qualis Commercial , consideration of full business case by Qualis Board for Pyrles Lane	Re-set for May	In train	
Qualis Living , secure start portfolio position	Third asset from £30m loan to be secured by December 2020	Third asset not yet secured but balance for portfolio and long-term income guarantee	-
Qualis Management , deliver phase 1 Business Plan targets	To be achieved by end of May 2021	Achieved by the end of January 2021	+
Qualis Group	Secure external asset loan by end of May 2021	In train	

4. Budget and business plan amendments this quarter

4.1 There have been no agreed amendments to the budget in respect of an increase in the quantum of income and cost. The adjustments have occurred as a result of the planned usage of the Contingency Reserve and are detailed on the following page.

The proposed adjustments for Q2 are estimated as follows.



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Adjustments for Quarter 2	Line	Action	WTE Impact	£ Impact
Health and Safety IT		Add		20,000.00
Mainstream IT, Optins and System	Estimate	Add		150,000.00
Benefits Broker	Estimate	Add		5,000.00
Insurance Broker	Estimate	Add		5,000.00
Extension of Auditors Term	Estimate	Add		9,000.00
Community Interest Company Set-up	Estimate	Add		3,000.00
Community Interest Company Primera	Estimate	Add		6,000.00
Community Interest Company Other	Estimate	Add		10,000.00
Net Impact	Estimate	Reduce		- 208,000.00
Total			0.00	-

5. Detailed financial performance, cash

5.1 The actual cash held by Qualis at the end of March was £15,548,957 against a target expectation of £12,358,957. The difference is because though two investment properties had been secured and are earning income, a prudent investment in the third asset has yet to be secured. The performance is shown as green as more cash is held than predicted, but the cost of borrowing this money is 4% whereas the interest earned on cash balances, is 1%.

5.2 Qualis was set-up based on loans supplied by EFDC as these provided certain and affordable funding to Qualis whilst giving EFDC immediate benefit from the margin made in loans. The loans drawn down in the first year are as follows:

- £6m working capital loan (5-year term, repayments of principal and interest half yearly).
- £30m asset investment loan (10-year term, principal repaid on maturity and interest half-yearly).



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5.3 Work is continuing with EFDC regarding the finalisation of the remaining loans totalling £85m to cover asset purchases from EFDC and the subsequent development of these sites with an initial loan of £6m having been agreed, called down and received and included in this report.

6 Detailed financial performance, balance sheets

6.1 Reflecting the leveraged position of Qualis and the fact that income earning assets have yet to be purchased and the Housing Maintenance Service has yet to transfer. Please note that these are the interim balance sheets pending a review of the income and expenditure position and the finalisation of loans.

6.2 It should be noted that the costs of development projects are by convention treated as “work in progress, i.e., an asset.

6.3 All loans pass through Qualis Group and therefore any uncalled balance remains shown at group level even if the destination of the loan is eventually another company on the Qualis group of companies.

6.4 Qualis Group

		Actual £	Actual £
Assets		48,844	
Current Assets		41,827,116	
Current Liabilities		581,309	
Current Assets Less Current Liabilities			41,245,807
Long Term Assets			
Long Term Liabilities			41,250,000
Total			44,651
Profit and Loss Reserve			16,380
Profit and Loss Account			28,271
			44,651



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6.5 Qualis Commercial

		Actual £	Actual £
Assets		-	
Current Assets		3,781,709	
Current Liabilities		5,499,216	
Current Assets Less Current Liabilities			- 1,717,507
Long Term Assets			
Long Term Liabilities			-
Total			- 1,717,507
Profit and Loss Reserve			- 971,737
Profit and Loss Account			- 745,770
			- 1,717,507

6.6 Qualis Management

		Actual £	Actual £
Assets		74,588	
Current Assets		1,695,021	
Current Liabilities		2,016,290	
Current Assets Less Current Liabilities			- 246,681
Long Term Assets			-
Long Term Liabilities			
Total			- 246,681
Profit and Loss Reserve			- 352,953
Profit and Loss Account			106,272
			- 246,681



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6.7 Qualis Living

		Actual £	Actual £
Assets		20,793,122	
Current Assets		- 73,953	
Current Liabilities		20,764,410	
Current Assets Less Current Liabilities			- 45,241
Long Term Assets			
Long Term Liabilities			-
Total			- 45,241
Profit and Loss Reserve			- 182,916
Profit and Loss Account			137,675
			- 45,241

7 Detailed financial performance, income and expenditure.

7.1 The income and expenditure summary for the individual companies that form the Qualis Group of companies is summarised below. Noting that the figures are cumulative to the end of Quarter 2.



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7.2 Qualis Group

	Target Cumulative YTD £	Cumulative Actual £	Variance £
Income	843,449	750,410	- 93,039
Expenditure	814,403	722,138	- 92,264
Net +Profit / -Loss	29,047	28,272	- 775
Tax Liability		-	-
	29,047	28,272	- 775

Key issues to note:

- No specific issues of concern however planned investment in IT and further work on health and safety, governance and risk arrangements should be noted.

7.3 Qualis Commercial

	Target Cumulative YTD £	Cumulative Actual £	Variance £
Income	628,389	- -	628,389
Expenditure	610,087	630,041	19,954
Net +Profit / -Loss	18,302	- 630,041	- 648,343
Loan Interest	-	115,729	115,729
Profit After Loan	18,302	- 745,770	- 764,072



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Key issues to note:

- Operational costs incurred in delivering projects the costs that cannot be treated as “work in progress” until planning is gained. At this point, and if the planning submission is successful these costs will be transferred to work in progress and be treated as project costs. The position is unchanged as planning determination is not expected until July 2021.

7.4 Qualis Management

	Target Cumulative YTD £	Cumulative Actual £	Variance £
Income	2,648,892	2,908,042	259,150
Expenditure	2,603,850	2,801,770	197,920
Net +Profit / -Loss	45,042	106,272	61,230

Key issues to note:

- The service continues to operate at a profit and a further extension of services as planned is in active discussion with EFDC as per the original business case.



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7.5 Qualis Living

	Target Cumulative YTD £	Cumulative Actual £	Variance £
Income, (less hand-through)	787,500	625,739	- 161,761
Expenditure	227,186	188,064	- 39,122
Net +Profit / -Loss	560,314	437,675	- 122,639
Loan Interest	850,000	300,000	- 550,000
Profit after Loan	- 289,686	137,675	427,361

Key issues to note:

- Delay in acquiring properties has resulted in operational underspend and no income receipt although it should be noted that two properties were acquired in October with a gross yield in excess of 6%. Originally a second loan of £30m was assumed to add to interest costs but this second loan has not been secured or called down.

8. Key Actions for completion in the next quarter

Action	Responsible Manager(s)	Target Date	Resource Implications Over Budget
Qualis Management Complete fine tuning of Housing Maintenance SLA and final confirmation of operational and financial KPIs.	BJ	March 2021	None



Qualis Group

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Qualis Living Secure third investment property in Phase 1 of portfolio build	PH	May 2021, (moved from December and March)	Will increase income to budget levels.
Qualis Living Secure further loan of £30m as per approved Business Plan	ND	May 2021	None
Qualis Commercial Complete asset purchases from EFDC for Phase 1 properties	CI	April 2021(moved from March 2021)	None
Qualis Commercial Finalise remaining loans of £85m with EFDC as per the approved Business Plan.	ND	June 21, for remainder of loan as initial £6m was secured at the end of March 2021	None
Qualis Commercial Confirm impact of EFDC retaining ownership of Bakers, recovering costs spent to date and confirm project management role	PH/ND	March 2021, (EFDC decision awaited)	Receipt of approximately £1m expected.

9. Summary statement from the managing director

The Qualis group of companies continue to deliver its objectives and systems for reviewing financial and operational performance are in place. Qualis should achieve all its target by the end, (of the slightly shortened) financial year on the 30th September 2021.

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-006-2021-22

Date of meeting: 21 June 2021



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Finance, Qualis Client and Economic Development

Subject: Economic Development Town Centre Regeneration, Loughton Broadway, Loughton High Road, Buckhurst Hill and Epping town centres

Senior Leadership Team: Nick Dawe (07939449512)

Responsible Officer: John Houston (01992 564094).

Democratic Services: Adrian Hendry (01992 564246).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

1. To note the reports which were produced by an external consultant, and indicate, short-term, medium-term, and long-term actions that are suggested to ensure that the town centres can best deal with current challenges and opportunities and can adapt to make use of future opportunities.
2. To agree with the short-term recommendations which are immediate actions to deal with High Street reopening as per the reports previously considered for Waltham Abbey and Loughton.
3. To note that the short-term recommendations and actions will be managed in detail using clear project management techniques that will identify, timescale, responsible officer, key actions, and evaluation criteria.
4. To note that the immediate actions proposed can be carried out by using current operational budgets, (as with Waltham Abbey and Ongar) and specific grants and funds already set aside in Epping Forest District Council/s 2021/22 Budget and from the legitimate use of other general initiative budgets set aside, e.g., tree planting and climate change.
5. To note that the proposed medium-term and long-term options, and alternate ideas will be developed over time and will by necessity to be partnerships between enterprise, town and parish councils, other public bodies, and Epping Forest District Council itself.
6. To note that medium-term and long-term actions will necessitate full business cases, budget provision and inclusion where necessary in Qualis Business Plans
7. To require Planning to update their guidance for town centres to assist with encouraging an appropriate “look and feel” to the Town Centres.
8. To note the relationship between this project and other key projects, e.g., Development Plans Climate Change Action Plan, Sustainable Travel, Community Hubs, Investment Asset plans and Qualis Business Plans.

Executive Summary:

The Cabinet proactively commenced a series of actions in July 2020, to ensure the authority was in the best position to respond to the challenges and opportunities of Covid 19. One of the agreed actions was to weld together a Covid 19 response with the Council's priority to enable and assist the economic recovery and sustainability of local High Streets across the district.

Studio 3 Business Consultants were appointed in September, to undertake a series of independent economic reviews. The purpose of these being to identify quick wins and to consider medium and longer-term recommendations to increase footfall to town centres; support local businesses and identify opportunities for attracting new business to the area.

The first of the studies focussed on Sun Street in Waltham Abbey and the second on Ongar. These have both been considered by Cabinet and approved, with work against recommendations subsequently commenced. The recommendations from the independent consultants provide an external view of projects and initiatives that could deliver resilient and vibrant high streets for the future. In order for the council to develop a detailed plan of work to be led by the new town centre project manager, Overview and Scrutiny Committees views were sought on the desirability and feasibility of these recommendations together with suggestions on prioritisation.

Reasons for Proposed Decisions:

This report forms part of the Council's Covid Economic Recovery Programme, which has been designed to help support and improve economic viability of town centres across the district. The study conducted by Studio 3, is a completely independent view of the status of the economy in the six town centres and identifies what is necessary to increase footfall; support local businesses and help sustain high street viability in the medium and longer term.

Other Options for Action:

Overview and Scrutiny could suggest amendments to the recommendations in the attached reports, or, to agree to some and not others.

Report:

1. The Council's Covid Economic Recovery Programme agreed by Cabinet in July, includes a wide range of work to help support local business recovery and the future sustainability of local town centres. These include Waltham Abbey, Ongar, Loughton Broadway and High Road, Buckhurst Hill and Epping. Officers have already made good progress on this work in Waltham Abbey and Ongar and now seek overview and scrutiny's comments on a range of initiatives related to the Loughton Broadway/High Road, Buckhurst Hill and Epping town centres.
2. As part of the Council's Safer Spaces initiative, work was undertaken by Directors within the designated high streets and Waltham Abbey and Ongar were assessed as requiring priority intervention. This work was followed up by the appointment of Studio 3 Business Consultants in mid- September who were commissioned to undertake a detailed assessment and production of a Regeneration Study and Proposals, for each of the district's town centres.
3. Each final study contains details of the efficacy of current town management; the retail and business 'offer' and viability; appearance of the town; access and transport and the consultation undertaken with local residents and businesses. It additionally provides a list of recommended immediate actions that the Council should enable (with partners) , actions to help economic sustainability of each town centre and to improve and enhance resident and general visitor satisfaction over the medium-term and long-term, that will by

necessity involve partnership working and contribution (and be subject to separate business-plan consideration if required). .

4. Within the initial assessments undertaken, there were a number of 'quick wins' identified across all centres which were also in line with similar actions already underway in Waltham Abbey and Ongar. These are currently being actioned through the Council's Street Rangers and include re-levelling of pavement slabs, clearance of rubbish, repair and renovation of street furniture. This work is being funded through the Local High Streets DDF fund agreed by Cabinet in April (post Covid list) and existing street management budgets. To assist in understanding the nature of work and to demonstrate progress to date, a list of what has been delivered so far is shown at Appendix A.
5. As can be seen in the reports, many of the recommended actions require officer time to liaise and work with Town Councils and other local stakeholders, including residents and businesses. One of the key recommendations in the initial reports was for the appointment of a Towns Centre Manager post, and this has now been actioned with the new manager taking up the post at the beginning of May 2021.
6. As well as the quick-wins and actions common across all the centres, each location also presents unique issues and opportunities which are contained within the reports. For Loughton Broadway these include Growing the market, introducing a shuttle bus service linking to the Retail Park and relocating the library from New City College to the Broadway. For Loughton High Road these include additional seating and cycle racks, restoring the farmers market, additional planters, and new cycle paths. For Buckhurst Hill these include curating the area as a '20-minute neighbourhood', new pedestrian areas and traffic calming measures, establishing a regular speciality market, review of signage to shopping areas, consideration to extending and improving the Kings Place Play Area, reviewing accessibility for cyclists and reviewing public transport connections and bus routes from Buckhurst Hill Station. For Epping these include protecting the retail heart of the town centre from residential development, additional planters, considering the addition of a children's play area, reviewing the market provision and its promotion, encouraging, and facilitating street performers, considering an e-scooter trial, and reviewing bus and cycle lane provision. Additional recommendations across all four areas include: free wifi services, the establishment of Town Leadership Teams, the creation of community hubs and reviewing the use of A-boards and other shop paraphernalia extending onto the pavements.
7. This report therefore seeks Overview and Scrutiny committee's views on the recommended actions within the reports relating to the four remaining centres of Loughton Broadway, Loughton High Road, Buckhurst Hill and Epping.

Resource Implications:

The bulk of the recommendations included in the report are to be funded from within existing resources. A DDF sum of £65,000 was agreed by Cabinet for Local high Streets Regeneration work over 2020/21 and recurrent in following years but was deferred in the Post Covid exercise.

It should be noted that all recommended actions for immediate action are to be met from existing budgets and specific grants and or funding set aside in the 2021/22 Budget including where appropriate calls on particular programme funds (an example being tree planting cost being sourced from the £500,000 climate initiative budget.

Available Resources 2021/22	Amount £	Note
Economic Resilience Fund	500,000	Government Grant, not infrastructure spend
Town Centre Manager	50,000	Cabinet approved DDF Funding (funding for two further years)
Environmental Improvements	250,000	Budget, capital, similar sum in 2022/23
Total	£800,000	

Committed Spend 2021/22	Amount £	Note
Town Centre Manager and associated team-working costs	70,000	Cost is for one, year post is extendable for two further years
Loyalty Card	10,000	Allows for further expansion of scheme if Cabinet approval is given
Digital Trading and Training	10,000	Allows for further expansion of scheme if Cabinet approval is given
Town Centre various immediate works Waltham Abbey	20,000	Completion costs, other spend in 2020/2. Mainly capital infrastructure costs
Town Centre various immediate works Ongar	20,000	Completion costs, other spend in 2020/2. Mainly capital infrastructure costs
Town Centre various immediate works Loughton Broadway	40,000	Completion costs, other spend in 2020/2. Mainly capital infrastructure costs
Town Centre various immediate works Loughton High Road	40,000	Completion costs, other spend in 2020/2. Mainly capital infrastructure costs
Town Centre various immediate works Buckhurst Hill	40,000	Completion costs, other spend in 2020/2. Mainly capital infrastructure costs
Town Centre various immediate works Epping	40,000	Completion costs, other spend in 2020/2. Mainly capital infrastructure costs
Contingency	10,000	Completion costs, other spend in 2020/2. Mainly capital infrastructure costs
Total	300,000	

Uncommitted Funding as at 31/05/21	Amount £	Note
Balance of funds	500,000	Mainly grant sums that can be used more flexibly if not drawn down against specific projects

To provide an example of the works undertaken to date, these are shown below, with Epping High Street being (partially) a bid against specific resources available from Essex County Council (source from Government).

High Street Enhancement Works To Date			
Town Centre	Action	Quantity	Cost
Buckhurst Hill			
Cycling signs	Reset and replaced posts	2	-
Railing	replaced and reset	1	-
Granite loading bay	Replaced and reset	1	£3000
Debden Broadway Phase 1 (Project commenced 4/06/2021)			
Bollards	Supply and install metal bollards	20	£13000
	To dig out the old and reset new, reinstate slabs around bollards	20	
Paving	16 sqm Saxon slabs - lift repair, replace	16 sqm	
	18sqm tactile paving - lift, repair, replace	18 sqm	
	4 sqm natural stone slabs - lift, repair, replace	4 sqm	
Trees	Dead pits - tree team to fill.	5	
Epping High Street			
Pavement widening scheme	National Covid 19 Funding (in part)		£75000
Bollards	Bollard Painting/Repair	30	£1000
Bins	Replacement	14	£3000
Bike loops	Sanded and painted	6	-
Tree pits	Paving / 4 x tree pit reset	25 sqm	£4200
Paving	Reset/Replace	37 sqm	
Conservation Railings	Sanded and painted	14	-
Bench (water Fountain)	Metal work sanded and painted	1	-
Civic	Tree pit reset and new tree	1	£150
Loughton			
Bollards	Bollard Painting/Repair	20	-
Bike Loops	Remove and replace – 10 loops	1	£2440
Ongar			
Bollards	Bollard Painting/Repair	52	£1000
Conservation Railings	Sanded and painted	12	-
Paving	Reset/Replace	1	-

Waltham Abbey			
Bollards	Bollard Painting/Repair	70	£1000
Market Square and Sun Street Gates	4 sets ordered awaiting iron work	4	£11000
Bike Loops	Remove and replace – 10 loops	1	£2650
	Bike loops - sanded and painted	4	-
Benches	repair, paint sand new wood installed and paint metal	3 of 7 completed	£1400
Bins	Replacement	13	£3000
Tree Replacement		2	£300
	Repair/renew blockwork around tree pits outside carpet shop	2	-
Paving repairs	Sun street and market square	15	-
Lamp columns	Paint and repair - with contractor	23	£6000
Total estimated spend to date			£128,740

Legal and Governance Implications:

All work undertaken in town centres will be coordinated and approved with respective Town and Parish Clerks and Councils and reported to FDC's Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet Committees.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

It is anticipated that work proposed for the four town centres, will improve public safety and security during evenings, through initiatives such as replacement of defective lamp posts in and around the town centre and traffic calming measures and will improve cleanliness, with effective rubbish clearance. Recommendations are also included for additional planters and enhancement of existing green areas.

Consultation Undertaken:

Ongoing consultation has taken place with EFDC Officers and local stakeholders, including Town Councils, Ward Members, Businesses and retailers and residents.

Background Papers:

Detailed Regeneration Study & Proposals for Loughton Broadway, Loughton High Road, Buckhurst Hill and Epping, produced by Studio 3 Business Consultants, are included with this report.

Risk Management:

Through SMART planning approach to actions and regular Cabinet review.

Equality Impact Assessment

1. Under s.149 of the Equality Act 2010, when making decisions, Epping District Council must have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty, ie have due regard to:
 - eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and other conduct prohibited by the Act,
 - advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not,
 - fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
2. The characteristics protected by the Equality Act are:
 - age
 - disability
 - gender
 - gender reassignment
 - marriage/civil partnership
 - pregnancy/maternity
 - race
 - religion/belief
 - sexual orientation.
3. In addition to the above protected characteristics you should consider the cross-cutting elements of the proposed policy, namely the social, economic and environmental impact (including rurality) as part of this assessment. These cross-cutting elements are not a characteristic protected by law but are regarded as good practice to include.
4. The Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) document should be used as a tool to test and analyse the nature and impact of either what we do or are planning to do in the future. It can be used flexibly for reviewing existing arrangements but in particular should enable identification where further consultation, engagement and data is required.
5. Use the questions in this document to record your findings. This should include the nature and extent of the impact on those likely to be affected by the proposed policy or change.
6. Where this EqIA relates to a continuing project, it must be reviewed and updated at each stage of the decision.
7. All **Cabinet, Council, and Portfolio Holder reports must be accompanied by an EqIA**. An EqIA should also be completed/reviewed at key stages of projects.
8. To assist you in completing this report, please ensure you read the guidance notes in the Equality Analysis Toolkit and refer to the following Factsheets:
 - Factsheet 1: Equality Profile of the Epping Forest District
 - Factsheet 2: Sources of information about equality protected characteristics
 - Factsheet 3: Glossary of equality related terms
 - Factsheet 4: Common misunderstandings about the Equality Duty
 - Factsheet 5: Frequently asked questions
 - Factsheet 6: Reporting equality analysis to a committee or other decision making body

Section 1: Identifying details

Your function, service area and team: Economic Development

If you are submitting this EqIA on behalf of another function, service area or team, specify the originating function, service area or team: N/A

Title of policy or decision: Economic Regeneration of Loughton Broadway, Loughton High Road, Buckhurst Hill and Epping town centres

Officer completing the EqIA: John Houston Tel: Ext 4094 Email: jhouston@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

Date of completing the assessment: 3/05/21

Section 2: Policy to be analysed

2.1	<p>Is this a new policy (or decision) or a change to an existing policy, practice or project? New</p>
2.2	<p>Describe the main aims, objectives and purpose of the policy (or decision):</p> <p>The main aims of the decision and recommendations is to enable action to be taken to improve the viability and long -term sustainability of Loughton Broadway, Loughton High Road, Buckhurst Hill and Epping .</p> <p>What outcome(s) are you hoping to achieve (ie decommissioning or commissioning a service)?</p> <p>To increase residents' footfall and visitors to the district's town centres, to create a vibrant and successful destinations</p>
2.3	<p>Does or will the policy or decision affect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• service users• employees• the wider community or groups of people, particularly where there are areas of known inequalities? <p>The decision affects members of the public, local businesses and retailers.</p> <p>Will the policy or decision influence how organisations operate?</p> <p>The decision will help to encourage businesses to collaborate and operate in new and different ways, and improve the aesthetics of these centres in order to attract new customers and increase dwell time.</p>
2.4	<p>Will the policy or decision involve substantial changes in resources?</p> <p>Funding required to progress proposals is already earmarked within the Economic Development budget as a DDF item for Local high Streets Regeneration.</p>

2.5	Is this policy or decision associated with any of the Council's other policies and how, if applicable, does the proposed policy support corporate outcomes?
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Section 3: Evidence/data about the user population and consultation¹

As a minimum you must consider what is known about the population likely to be affected which will support your understanding of the impact of the policy, eg service uptake/usage, customer satisfaction surveys, staffing data, performance data, research information (national, regional and local data sources).

3.1	<p>What does the information tell you about those groups identified?</p> <p>Data tells us that health inequalities and low income are issues affecting residents living in Waltham Abbey and that education achievement is lower than other places in the district and Essex. There are also considerable numbers of key workers living in Waltham Abbey , who have limited income and access to local services.</p>
3.2	<p>Have you consulted or involved those groups that are likely to be affected by the policy or decision you want to implement? If so, what were their views and how have their views influenced your decision?</p> <p>Open consultation has been undertaken with people shopping in the areas and with local businesses and retailers. Consultations have also taken place with elected representatives in each area.</p>
3.3	<p>If you have not consulted or engaged with communities that are likely to be affected by the policy or decision, give details about when you intend to carry out consultation or provide reasons for why you feel this is not necessary:</p> <p>As above</p>

Section 4: Impact of policy or decision

Use this section to assess any potential impact on equality groups based on what you now know.

Description of impact	Nature of impact Positive, neutral, adverse (explain why)	Extent of impact Low, medium, high (use L, M or H)
Age	Positive – As the decision will help to improve local amenities and develop a better sense of place for each community.	med
Disability	Positive – Works to improve the walkways will reduce potential for trip hazards and better signage and lighting will help people with poor eyesight feel safer.	med
Gender	Neutral	
Gender reassignment	Neutral	
Marriage/civil partnership	Neutral	
Pregnancy/maternity	Positive – for reasons above	med
Race	Neutral	
Religion/belief	Neutral	
Sexual orientation	Neutral	

Section 5: Conclusion

		Tick Yes/No as appropriate	
5.1	Does the EqIA in Section 4 indicate that the policy or decision would have a medium or high adverse impact on one or more equality groups?	No	
		Yes	If 'YES', use the action plan at Section 6 to describe the adverse impacts and what mitigating actions you could put in place.

Section 6: Action plan to address and monitor adverse impacts

What are the potential adverse impacts?	What are the mitigating actions?	Date they will be achieved.

Section 7: Sign off

**I confirm that this initial analysis has been completed appropriately.
(A typed signature is sufficient.)**

Signature of Head of Service: Nick Dawe

Date:

Signature of person completing the EqIA: John Houston

Date:

Advice

Keep your director informed of all equality & diversity issues. We recommend that you forward a copy of every EqIA you undertake to the director responsible for the service area. Retain a copy of this EqIA for your records. If this EqIA relates to a continuing project, ensure this document is kept under review and updated, eg after a consultation has been undertaken.

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To note: Loughton High Road

The attached report has been commissioned by EFDC Officer from a specialist external consultant.

Work on this report was carried out between December 2020 and April 2021 so some of the observations may refer to issues and conditions that existed at that time and may have been subsequently addressed.

The report is often linked with development proposals focused on the immediate actions required to improve the town centres. Further reports will be brought forward, often associated with more significant investment and development to cover the medium and long-term improvement of the town centres.

The immediate resources required to address priority town centre issues were identified in the EFDC 2021/22 Budget or will be supported by specific Covid 19 recovery grants made available by the Government.

It is intended as with the Waltham Abbey and Ongar town centre reports, that all approved recommendations will be project managed in detail, assigned to managers, given timelines, supported by identified resources and their delivery and impact monitored.

The reports have been produced after extensive consultation. This consultation with local members and other key partners will continue.

Although not specifically mentioned in this report, work on the ground will be linked with other initiatives such as sustainable transport with sub projects of demand responsive transport, cycling routes, electric car charging points and various greening and tree planting initiatives being taken forward as per our Green Infra-structure Policy and climate change action plan.

High Road, Loughton

Regeneration Study and Proposals

“The most successful high streets and town centres will need to change to reflect the communities they serve by transforming themselves into community hub, playing to their strengths of offering human interaction and a unique sense of place and community”

HM Government response to an enquiry into High Streets and Town Centres in 2030 (presented to Parliament in 2019)



Prepared by: Paul Messenger
Studio 3 Ltd
Email: pm@studio-3.co.uk

Date: 16 February 2021

AUTHORS NOTE:

The contents of this report and the recommendations made are based on Studio 3 Ltd's view of the town centre as a whole and the actions which should be taken to regenerate the towns and increase their general attractiveness to residents, visitors and businesses. Absolutely no consideration has been given as to whether the suggested actions and/or any related costs are the responsibility of the County, District, Town/Parish Councils or any other body.

What is crucial is that the different Councils, Town Partnerships, businesses and residents come together to agree priorities and for each organisation to put in place the necessary actions within their remit/responsibility to make the required improvements.

The regeneration of our town centres is the responsibility of all stakeholders. Key to these changes are the businesses, residents and Town/Parish Councils themselves. They are closest to the town and really know and understand the town and the needs and requirements of the local community. Their counsel and guidance should both therefore be provided and encouraged at all times.

The reinvention of our town centres will only be achieved by a joint and collaborative approach utilising the knowledge, expertise and skills of a range of people, bodies and organisations. No single person or organisation can achieve this on their own and everyone has their own specific part to play. It is essential that any plans have the buy in of all connected persons and that all parties support each other through the process.

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Foreword

Epping Forest District Council is reviewing a number of its town centres with the objective of regenerating them and making them a better and more attractive place to live, work, visit and play. There have been numerous projects over the years to generally improve the amenities, however the UK as a whole is now in the midst of a new era which will undoubtedly change high streets up and down the country. Covid 19 has unexpectedly changed the way we live and also as a result, our relationship with our local high street and/or town centre. More people are now shopping locally, and more people are working from home, which in turn is encouraging them to use their local amenities on a more regular basis. The Grimsey Review advises that high streets need to be re-invented as unique community hubs, designed around health, education, culture, housing, leisure and arts and crafts, along with retail shops. If towns can get it right, consumers should emerge from the pandemic with a stronger sense of community and a desire to support their local town centre. Strong high streets can build communities, keep crime at bay and foster civic pride and togetherness.

A YouGov poll revealed that only 9% of Britons want life to return to “normal” after the coronavirus outbreak is over. The positive from the above is that this is a great time to engage with our local communities and reinvent our town centres while the focus is on them and before things automatically revert to the “old” normal.

The Grimsey Review goes on to advise that for town centres and high streets to thrive and rediscover their community purpose we need to see:

Localism - A massive shift in power to local communities and a renewed focus on localism. Local people must be empowered to redesign their own high streets and have a say on the businesses, services and amenities that occupy it.

Leadership - Local leaders should be valued and recognised. Candidates for leadership roles should be selected for having a broad range of dynamic and collaborative skills in order to get the best out of communities. Local leaders who embrace change and are brave enough to imagine a new world have a better chance of succeeding.

Fewer cars, more green spaces - fewer streets and a huge expansion of green space, parks and town squares. Our towns must no longer be designed around the car as people learn to appreciate the benefit of open spaces.

Other important takeaways from the Grimsey Review that should be considered is the fact that there is a growing view among young adults that businesses need to be accountable to more than their bottom line and for the wellbeing of people and communities. It goes on to confirm that 72% of millennials (aged 24 to 38) would rather spend their money on an experience or an event than buying things and that this is reflected in the shift towards leisure, arts, culture and dining on the high streets. Deloitte’s 2019 Millennial Survey showed that millennials will patronise and support companies that align with their values and make a positive impact on society. Generation Z’s (aged 5 to 23) are also socially focussed with their opinions on companies formed by their ethics, practices and social impact.

The Grimsey Review confirms that town and high street plans should put sustainability and the environment at the heart of everything; should base their development on quality of life and experiences and not blind

mass consumerism; should recognise and reward great local leadership; and allow local communities to develop their places to compete for people to live, work, visit and play.

Introduction

Loughton is the largest town within Epping Forest District Council's area with an estimated population of circa 33,000 people (Source: UK Office for National Statistics) and an average house price of £606,898 (Source: Zoopla). It is a lovely town set on the east side of Epping Forest. It provides a wide range of residential property across various neighbourhoods, is home to two main shopping areas, a retail park and an industrial estate. Loughton is close to the M11 with easy access to central London and has London Underground available from Debden and Loughton stations with access to Liverpool Street in 30 minutes. Although one town, Loughton is split into 2 main shopping areas – The Broadway (known locally as Debden Broadway) and the High Road. Each of these have their own characteristics, anomalies and requirements. As a result, I have chosen to split the study into two and report on each separately. This report concentrates on the High Road.

On the whole, Loughton is an affluent area, has a unique character and is a popular and vibrant place to live. It has a real community feel to it with a wide range of clubs, associations and community-based activity. In current Covid times Loughton is attractive as a town as it is pretty self-sufficient.

I am concerned that the current scale and mix of retail may be difficult to sustain in the longer term. The northern end of the High Road is home to over 160 mixed use shops. Although there is currently a vacancy rate of slightly lower than the national average, it can be seen that some of the national chains/brands have already withdrawn and I am concerned that this may be the beginning of a downward spiral. Unusually, the High Road has 6 banks. These I think will gradually close as, with the growth in digital banking, branch networks are no longer required. In addition to empty units, this will undoubtedly lead to a reduction in footfall. I do not see this town as a destination other than for locals yet the High Road houses 23 restaurants. I cannot see that these can all be viable. This will no doubt lead to further closures and more empty shops. Finally, I am aware that the quality of retailers now opening on the High Road does not meet the requirements of the area's more affluent consumers and that they will therefore shop elsewhere. I really think that the District and Town Councils, together with other local stakeholders and the Loughton High Road Town Centre Partnership, need to get together urgently to discuss this and put together a long-term plan for the town's future development and success.

Loughton is a great town to develop and adapt to the changing needs mentioned above. It already has a superb town centre, community space and activities and an abundance of green spaces. The town needs to ensure that it is modelled around the community, to make a more vibrant and relative space, and its residents and businesses encouraged and empowered to make the transformation into a town they can continue to be proud of. Success is about breathing life back into the High Road and The Broadway, about giving residents and visitors reasons to visit the town centre other than just the shops and making the experience enriching and the town centre a place to be seen in.

It is felt that the emphasis should be very much on developing a town, in the first instance, for residents and businesses. This regeneration and renewed enthusiasm in the town will result in a town centre that local people can be proud of with a brighter more buoyant market, new shops and a range of interesting activities and events. This in turn will provide for a more interesting place for visitors and make it somewhere they will be happy to dwell and as a result frequent more of the town's shops, businesses and attractions.

1 Quick Wins

There are a number of matters which could be addressed quickly and cheaply and could make considerable improvements to the High Road:

- ***Sweep/clean the High Road on an ongoing basis and ensure that litter bins are emptied and litter is cleared from the street/pavement.***
- ***Arrange for the cleaning/redecoration/repair of all street furniture – lamp posts, bollards, railings, planters, litter bins, benches etc.***
- ***Replace/re-lay broken and uneven pavement – particularly to the northern end of the High Road.***
- ***Tidy green spaces/ tree surrounds etc and weed kill as necessary.***
- ***Consideration should be given to the addition of further cycle racks/hoops.***
- ***Consideration should be given to the provision of further planters to soften/add character to the central retail section of the High Road.***

2 Town Management

2.1 Town Centre Leadership

Town centre regeneration is about localism and local leadership and the way to make this work is to provide local leadership with its finger on the pulse and with a connection to the local community. Therefore, and accepting that this project is being driven by Epping Forest District Council, it is suggested that buy in, action and leadership should be provided by Loughton Town Council with the support of a Town(s) Centre Manager appointed by the District Council.

All Town Councillors are local and as a result should be able to bring the local community and businesses together and develop a strong visionary plan to reinforce the distinctive heritage of the town, assist in making the town centre a real community hub and making Loughton a far more attractive town for locals and visitors alike. The role of an independent Town Centre Manager will be critical to providing professional expertise and an unbiased view on what is needed locally.

The great thing about Loughton is that it already has great community spirit and an extremely active residents' association. I am certain that all of these working together with the Town and District Councils will produce excellent results.

Recommendations:

- 1) Engage with Loughton Town Council (LTC).***
- 2) Obtain LTC commitment to the scheme and to providing leadership and support.***
- 3) Work with LTC and Loughton Residents' Association to establish and action a realistic plan.***

2.2 Town(s) Centre Manager

It is suggested that the Council commits to the appointment of a Town Centre Manager initially on a two-year fixed term basis. The manager would act as a single point of contact to receive ideas, thoughts and views from local stakeholders and as such, would be known and trusted by businesses, retailers and residents alike. They would work with the Town Council to ensure that standards are adhered to and that the town is as vibrant and attractive to local people and visitors as possible. A review of the post would be undertaken after 12 months to assess progress against the Town Centre action plan and the success of interventions and extended if necessary.

NB. As a part of its regeneration, Stockton-on-Tees council pulled together a multi-disciplinary team of market management, street licensing, civil enforcement and business support to manage the town centre. Stockton is a much larger town than Loughton, however the principles of hands-on organisation and management are much the same.

Recommendations:

- 4) Write Job profile and agree responsibilities for Town Centre Manager post.***
- 5) Post to be part of EFDC's Economic Development team within Strategic Planning Directorate.***
- 6) Town Team establishment to be priority.***

2.3 Establishment of a Town Team

To achieve the required changes, considerable two-way dialogue needs to be sought from the town's residents and businesses. Buy-in from the community is important to ensure there is a need or requirement for any proposed changes and that as a result these are carried out with the support of the town. Loughton already has an active residents' association and two Town Forums – one for The Broadway and one for the High Road and it is thought that these could be used as a catalyst for pulling together a formal Town Team.

It is important that the Town Team is made up of a cross section of the community including residents, businesses and retailers. A fair representation of age, sex and race should be included and input should be encouraged from organisations such as educational establishments, religious groups, social groups (e.g. Scouts etc) together with members of the town council and tourism and visitor groups.

Recommendations:

- 7) Decide with LTC the make-up of a Town Team and what it will be called.***
- 8) If utilising current Town Partnerships, engage with and obtain commitment and support from Chairmen and Town Forums as a whole.***
- 9) Arrange initial meeting to establish parameters and put in place a plan for town team development and action.***
- 10) EFDC to work with LTC and Loughton High Road Town Centre Partnership (LHRTCP) to establish vision and format for a new 21st century High Road.***

2.4 Attracting New Businesses and Brands

In conjunction with the Town Team, work could be done to identify key brands, businesses and/or other organisations to attract to the High Road and then steps taken to secure them. As the landlord for some sections of the High Road is Epping Forest District Council, there is a great opportunity for the Council to encourage a good mix of retailers ensuring that the needs and requirements of the community are met. In addition thought could also be given to holding an empty unit for short term rental for pop-up shops, start-up ventures, new/irregular non high street retailers to test the water for their market and for more experiential and art-based activities including exhibitions, shows, demonstrations etc.

As mentioned elsewhere in this report, EFDC has a plan for one of the parades of shops in the High Road. Details of the proposed tenant(s) should be sought and consideration given to their suitability to the town. (Note- At the time of writing there were vacancies that have since been let as of June 2021)

Recommendations:

- 11) Put in place a programme to encourage new businesses.***
- 12) Target prospective businesses.***
- 13) Communicate requirements to commercial agents.***
- 14) Consider use of an empty unit for non-conventional retailing i.e. pop ups, start-ups, experiential etc.***
- 15) Seek confirmation of proposed use of EFDC's parade of shops.***

3 Town Offer

3.1 High Road, Loughton

Loughton and the High Road could prove to be a perfect example of the "20 minute neighbourhood". There is everything at hand within a 20-minute public-transport trip, bike ride or walk from home – work, shopping, education, healthcare, community facilities, recreation and sport. There is also a fantastic community spirit supported by numerous community groups, church groups, clubs and associations.

The High Road is a mixed-use road ranging from mixed retail to churches, to community organisations, to offices and also residential use. There is a mixture of property ranging from Lopping Hall dating back to 1884, to 1960s parades of shops, the more recent development of the M&S Food Store in the 2000s and various developments in between.

The northern, retail end, of the High Road is quite busy and dynamic and has a great atmosphere. I visited the High Road on a warm September lunchtime last year and experienced a Mediterranean type atmosphere with people sitting outside restaurants, bars and coffee shops, eating, drinking and socialising.

Having said this, I have concerns about the High Road and its future. I would suggest that it could be on the verge of falling into decline and that as a result its retail footprint could reduce significantly as will its footfall and therefore its viability as a town centre. My reasons for these thoughts are as follows:

- Some of the larger brand names and national chains have vacated fairly spacious premises and these at the time of writing now remain empty. These brands are generally anchor stores to High Streets and serve to draw in footfall which other retailers, coffee shops and restaurants benefit from. Once one or two of these anchor stores go, it puts pressure on other brands who will tend to follow, which then puts pressure on the remaining high street.
- Extremely unusually for a town of the size of Loughton, the High Road is home to six banks. With increased digital banking and the reduced need for in-person banking and therefore a branch network, we are seeing banks withdraw from high streets. Again, banks bring footfall, so any loss of banks from the High Road would further impact its viability. I understand that HSBC has already advised of its withdrawal from Loughton in August 2021.
- Loughton has 23 restaurants in the High Road. As it isn't particularly a tourist/visitor destination and I don't believe that any of these restaurants would be classed as destination type restaurants, they need therefore to rely on Loughton's local population to keep them in business. Even without Covid, I would suspect that there are insufficient potential customers to keep all but the very best restaurants going, so would expect to see further empty retail outlets as a result.
- A large percentage of the population in and around Loughton are high net worth individuals with substantial spending power. The type of shops however that this community would frequent in Loughton are reducing and being replaced with less attractive alternatives.
- Westfield Stratford, with its attractive range of retail outlets, is only a 20-minute train journey from Loughton.

In short, my view is that Loughton High Road needs immediate and urgent attention to maintain it as a popular, busy and attractive town centre. EFDC as the District Council and also a landlord of a large section of the High Road is in prime position to lead this work and in conjunction with Loughton Town Council, the Loughton Residents' Association and the Loughton High Road Town Centre Partnership together with residents and businesses, turn the High Road into a busy, vibrant and dynamic town centre and destination for the 21 Century.

3.2 Retail

Loughton High Road's retail offer is large and consists of over 160 shops. Its current vacancy rate (February 2021) is circa 10% which is slightly lower than the national average however some of the vacant units are owned by EFDC and are being kept purposefully vacant with a plan which at the current time EFDC is unable to disclose due to commercial sensitivity.

The High Road is very much mixed use with a fantastic selection and variety of shops. As could be expected, the largest uses in the High Road are restaurants at 14% of units and Hair and Beauty at 13%. There are 2 supermarkets – Sainsbury's and Morrisons and an M&S Food Store. Other larger users are estate agents at 7%, takeaways at 6%, opticians at 4% and unusually high, banks at 4%.

With fairly wide pavements at various points along the High Road, there is good opportunity for street trading and outdoor cafes, restaurants etc.

As previously explained, I am concerned that it will be difficult to maintain the High Road in its current form and feel that careful consideration needs to be given to its make-up and role in modern society. There are

one or two shops which I feel would be attractive to Loughton's more affluent residents. These would include Gail's Bakers and The Ginger Pig butchers, together with one or two restaurants. My view is that work needs to be done to attract more of the same. Although I understand that McDonalds has pulled out of its proposed development, I would suggest that this is the type of retailer the High Road doesn't want.

Another varying element of high streets is the progression of the weekend and evening economies. We now live in a seven day a week world with extended working hours. Businesses need to adjust to the needs and requirements of their customers, and this may now include opening longer/different hours, opening on Sundays etc. The town centre manager could discuss these matters with retailers and see if there is any scope for taking these considerations further with a view to increasing footfall and also, subsequently, trade.

With EFDC being the landlord for large sections of the High Road and also some of the larger units, there is a great opportunity to shape and control the types of tenants, shops and uses moving forward. In partnership with the existing traders the High Road could be developed to offer an innovative and distinctive mixed use together with a range of pop up and temporary shops and also various experiential and community-based services.

At the current time people are tending to shop nearer to home and using their local town centres as opposed to going to the larger out of town shopping centres. Retailers should take advantage of this and go that extra mile to ensure a clean, safe and welcoming environment offering a comprehensive range of products and services. If customers can see the benefit of shopping local and enjoy it, they are less likely to change their habits when the pandemic is brought under control.

Recommendations:

16) EFDC to confirm details of their plans for the High Road and incorporate this within proposals.

17) Town Centre Manager to work with LHRTCP and retailers to increase the attractiveness and draw of the retail centre with a view to increasing the viability of the High Road and work towards aforementioned vision and redesign.

3.3 Epping Forest Retail Park

The Epping Forest Retail park situated near Debden Station will undoubtedly have some impact on the High Road and its retailers, however I feel that overall this effect would be minimal. This is due mainly to the make up of the retail park and its range of tenants, which I don't think will particularly pull trade away from the High Road.

If the High Road can be redeveloped as a unique and experiential shopping destination, then the retail park will provide an additional attraction to the area with the more every day type retailers.

Recommendations:

18) High Road should consider developing a place and offer which is complimentary to the retail park with a view to adding a further dimension to Loughton .

3.4 High Road Market

The Grimsey Review highlighted the importance of markets and their positive effect on residents. In a report by the Institute of Place Management (2015) it explained why markets are economically, socially and

politically critical for town centres. The report also confirmed that markets can generate footfall increases of circa 25% and have been shown to increase retail sales with market visitors spending money in other shops. The report then goes on to explain that markets provide low barriers to entry and as result can encourage new businesses and nurture retail innovation.

Loughton has been holding a farmers' market every second Sunday of the month since 2002. This market is extremely popular with local people. It has become a community event and has also been pulling in people from outside the immediate area. Although currently cancelled due to Covid, it is a welcome addition to the town and moving forward should be encouraged, supported and if possible extended.

A busy and successful market will serve as an additional draw to the High Road and make it more of a destination, whilst at the same time providing additional footfall for High Roads retailers.

Recommendations:

- 19) EFDC to work with LTC and LRA to support and drive the market.**
- 20) Consideration to be given to expanding the market and/or introducing other feature markets i.e. Antiques, French, Italian etc. and doing this in conjunction with The Broadway.**

3.5 Signage

The biggest issues in respect of signage are the lack of signs from the station to the town centre and also to Epping Forest, which must be one of the town's biggest attractions. There is also a lack of signage from the High Road to Loughton Broadway.

Recommendations:

- 21) Generally review town signage and implement new signage as required.**
- 22) Increase signage from the station to the High Road and Epping Forest.**
- 23) Increase signage from the High Road to The Broadway.**

3.6 Tourism/Visitors

Loughton isn't a great tourist/visitor destination, although it does have easy and close access to Epping Forest. The one thing that could be done to attract more visitors is to remodel the town and make it a busy and bustling High Road with lots of interesting and experiential shops and venues, together with trendy boutiques and niche outlets and also destination restaurants, bars and cafes and the Mediterranean café culture which goes with it.

Recommendations:

- 24) EFDC/LTC to work with Loughton High Road Town Centre Partnership to put on key events to increase visitor interest in the Town.**
- 25) Loughton High Road Town Centre Partnership to encourage support and participation from local retailers and businesses for any High Road events.**

3.7 Loughton High Road Community hub

Within Loughton, it is suggested that 2 community hubs are set up – one centrally in the High Road and another on The Broadway. These could be used to establish a place where public opinions could be shared and discussed and a centre of community well-being for the area with exhibition space and also perhaps

space for workshops, demonstrations, pop up shops etc. This community hub could also provide functions such as a Police help desk, mini job centre and other community based initiatives. Provision of these increased services will encourage more people into the town centre and will lead to them using other elements of the town centre at the same time.

I would normally recommend that the community hub is set up in the Library. This may be a consideration for the High Road, although it is slightly “off pitch” in Traps Hill. Having said this, if the Library was to be used then work should be done to ensure that the High Road is advised of and able to participate in any events and activities.

It is noted from my various conversations that outside of the specific clubs and associations based in Loughton, there is a lack of facilities for young people. This is something that could also be considered by the community hub.

Recommendations:

- 26) Set up community hub in line with the model being proposed for Waltham Abbey and Epping.**
- 27) Publicise community hub.**
- 28) Pull together program of events and activities for the year.**

3.8 Public Facilities

If the High Road is going to meet people’s needs, it should be reviewed to ensure that there are the required public facilities. These facilities would include adequate seating for all sections of the community in all areas, open, clean and functional public toilets, adequate lighting at all times across all areas of the town centre, bike racks/hoops in easily accessible places and strategically placed dog poo bins.

Recommendations:

- 29) Review benches and seating on the High Road and ensure they are adequate for the needs of the town.**
- 30) Review bike racks/hoops within the town centre and at other destinations and ensure they are adequate for the needs of the town.**
- 31) Review dog poo bins in High Road and other areas as appropriate and ensure they are adequate to the needs of the town.**
- 32) Ensure that all areas are adequately lit in and around the High Road, including car parks to the rear of the shops and footpaths etc.**

3.9 Wi-fi and Digital Presence

The digital age and the need for connectivity is increasingly important for numerous sections of the community and as a result I would suggest free wi-fi availability within the High Road.

It should be acknowledged that people are now shopping differently and that circa 30% of retail sales are being done online (Office of National Statistics, Aug 2020). This figure is up from 21.9% at the beginning of March 2020 and the beginning of the Covid 19 lock down. Regardless of the pandemic, online sales will continue to grow, and retail expert KPMG predicts the figure rising to 50% by 2025. As a result, retail businesses need to adjust their business models accordingly and develop their offer for both markets.

As a part of adding a wi-fi option to the High Road a social media presence should be developed enabling online and offline businesses. Mobile technologies and virtual shopping should be used to enhance the consumer town centre experience and in turn increase footfall.

Consideration should be given to bringing in a third-party contractor such as Maybe (www.maybetech.com) to develop social media/town centre/retailer collaboration.

Recommendations:

- 33) Put in place free WI-FI along the northern, "town centre" end of the High Road and publicise.**
- 34) Agree way forward in respect of social media strategy/presence and execute accordingly.**
- 35) Arrange for assistance and support for retailers in establishing an online presence.**

3.10 Epping Forest District Council

It was suggested by various parties that neither EFDC nor LTC were particularly receptive to working with the town centres on various initiatives. Moving forward, it is important that all parties work together to make the town as viable as possible for residents, visitors and the businesses.

It's not in my remit to comment on specific matters raised concerning EFDC/LTC but would hope that the appointment of a Town Centre Manager would build and maintain relationships with both the High Road and The Broadway and the town's businesses.

Recommendations:

- 36) EFDC Town Centre Manager to be actively involved in building and maintaining relationships with the High Road and The Broadway and their tenants.**

3.11 Pedestrianisation

I know that thought had been given to pedestrianising large chunks of the High Road. My thought on this is that it would be a lot of effort for little gain and that overall it may lead to a reduction in footfall. The High Road has plenty of space with wide pavement areas, various greens and service roads to some parades of shops that can be used, subject to permissions, for town centre events, activities and initiatives.

If the town centre becomes a busy hub and destination and shopping habits change then the idea of pedestrianisation may become viable. For the time being however it is something I would discount completely.

4 Appearance

The High Road has a long retail centre at the northern end, made up of various developments built over a long period of time. This has resulted in a mixture of designs and architecture and a selection of varying shopfronts and shop front design. Although adding interest to the High Road, it can also make it look untidy and disjointed and highlight retailers who aren't doing so well or have no consideration for the look of their business as a part of the general street scene.

My view is that the Councils should work with landlords and retailers to generally improve the street side view of the High Road and its aesthetics. The licensing/planning teams could also play a more active role by

ensuring that new and replacement shop fronts are fairly uniform and in keeping with the requirements and feel of the town and that applications for street trading licenses are granted confirming strict terms and conditions in respect of space allowable, trading times, collection of litter, A-boards etc. Considerations should be given to some form of demarcation outside each store over which seating, A-boards and other retail paraphernalia, is allowed.

Recommendation:

37) EFDC to work with landlords and retailers to improve the appearance of the High Road.

38) EFDC planning/licensing teams to consider appropriateness of new/replacement shops/shop fronts to town design and police street trading licenses.

4.1 Street Scene

Work has been done to develop the High Road roughly between M&S and The Drive. The High Road north of The Drive however is in desperate need of attention with uneven and broken pavements, road surfaces in disrepair and old-fashioned lamp posts, which I understand are unable to supply power for that end of the High Road's Christmas lights.

Recommendation:

39) Refurbish road and pavement surfaces at northern end of High Road and replace street lights with modern alternatives.

4.2 Trees and Planters

Tree lined pedestrian routes and landscaped areas all contribute to civic pride and generally make a town more attractive. Although there are a number of trees along the High Road and some planters suspended from lamp posts, I am concerned that overall the area looks fairly bleak and quite hard. The addition of further planters would be a great improvement. In addition, I understand that a number of trees have been removed in the past. Consideration should be given to replacing these and also potentially adding some more.

Recommendations:

40) Review current "green" townscape and work to develop and improve.

5 Access

Town centres need to recognise that Co2 emissions have to be reduced and as a result there is much more emphasis on ensuring a reduced reliance on cars. To this end, town centres need to ensure their accessibility via other methods of transport and provide for these methods accordingly. In addition to reducing carbon emissions this will also encourage the use of the town centre by a wider range of the community via various methods of transport.

Simply stopping car access and reducing or taking away parking spaces, doesn't resolve this problem. Undoubtedly people will still want to access the High Road by car however there is a balance to be had between encouraging pedestrian, cycling and public transport access and then gradually reducing provision for motor vehicles as other methods of travel develop and gain traction.

For generations urban areas have been designed exclusively around the car. This now has to change and town centres developed to provide attractive, walkable and cyclable physical space.

5.1 Cycling

In a town the size of Loughton, all residents should be able to access the town centres, the retail park, the towns various green and public spaces, leisure centre and attractions via a network of secure, safe and clearly marked cycle paths and routes.

In addition, the town should also provide for cycle racks/hoops at the various easily accessible destinations to enable the bikes to be safely secured.

Recommendations:

41) Review cycling accessibility in Loughton particularly around main roads, shopping hubs, attractions and green spaces and make arrangements to provide a network of secure, safe and clearly marked cycle paths and routes.

5.2 Car Parks and Parking

I have not come across a lot of comments or complaints about parking in the High Road. My only observation here is that perhaps the pay-and-display parking on the High Road could provide 30 minutes free.

It was pointed out that there was very little parking for shop staff – perhaps parking permits could be issued by the Council in certain parking areas.

Recommendations:

42) Make parking on the High Road 30 minutes free of charge.

43) Consider parking permits for retailers in certain parking areas.

6 Consultation

6.1 Market Research

In addition to thoughts and expertise of the author, consultation for this report has been obtained from the following:

Epping Forest District Council

Loughton Town Council

Loughton Residents' Association

Loughton Broadway Town Centre Partnership

Debden Traders' Association

Loughton High Road Town Centre Partnership

Various councillors and other prominent/influential Loughton (Debden) residents

Various Broadway and High Road Retailers

Independent Landlords
Various Loughton residents

It is accepted that additional research will be required from residents, retailers and businesses to move the ideas in this report forward. It is felt however that if the initiative is going to be Community/Town Council driven then the research should be carried out more locally.

7. Sources of Additional Support

High Streets Task Force (www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk) – supporting communities and local government to transform their high streets.

Maybe (www.maybetech.com) – A smarter approach to social media

Action List	Priority
<i>EFDC/Highway Rangers to complete “quick wins”</i>	1
<i>Discuss with and establish Town Leadership Team</i>	1
<i>Form Town Team/refocus Town Centre Partnerships</i>	1
<i>Appoint Town Centre Manager</i>	1
<i>EFDC, LTC, LRA and LHRTCP to discuss future of Loughton High Road and develop longer term plan</i>	1
<i>Establish community hub</i>	1
<i>Provide for additional seating, bike racks/hoops, dog poo bins as appropriate</i>	2
<i>Talk to retailers re shop fronts, A-boards, pavement trading etc</i>	1
<i>Review Street Trading/Market licenses for the High Road and action accordingly</i>	1
<i>Review High Road market and put in place plans to re-establish and grow it</i>	1
<i>Put in place plans to review town cycle paths and implement findings</i>	2
<i>Review parking charges as per report and implement recommendations</i>	1
<i>Review town WI-FI proposal and put in place findings</i>	2
<i>Develop town centre social media presence</i>	2
<i>Complete research on thoughts and considerations of residents and businesses – incorporate and implement where appropriate</i>	1
<i>Review new businesses required on the High Road and take steps to attract</i>	3
<i>Review the “green” street scene on the High Road, consider the addition of planters</i>	

<i>etc and action accordingly</i>	1
<i>Carry out all general maintenance/refurbishment recommendations</i>	2

Draft

To note: Loughton Broadway

The attached report has been commissioned by EFDC Officer from a specialist external consultant.

Work on this report was carried out between December 2020 and April 2021 so some of the observations may refer to issues and conditions that existed at that time and may have been subsequently addressed.

The report is often linked with development proposals focused on the immediate actions required to improve the town centres. Further reports will be brought forward, often associated with more significant investment and development to cover the medium and long-term improvement of the town centres.

The immediate resources required to address priority town centre issues were identified in the EFDC 2021/22 Budget or will be supported by specific Covid 19 recovery grants made available by the Government.

It is intended as with the Waltham Abbey and Ongar town centre reports, that all approved recommendations will be project managed in detail, assigned to managers, given timelines, supported by identified resources and their delivery and impact monitored.

The reports have been produced after extensive consultation. This consultation with local members and other key partners will continue.

Although not specifically mentioned in this report, work on the ground will be linked with other initiatives such as sustainable transport with sub projects of demand responsive transport, cycling routes, electric car charging points and various greening and tree planting initiatives being taken forward as per our Green Infra-structure Policy and climate change action plan.

The Broadway, Loughton Regeneration Study and Proposals

“The most successful high streets and town centres will need to change to reflect the communities they serve by transforming themselves into community hubs, playing to their strengths of offering human interaction and a unique sense of place and community”

HM Government response to an enquiry into High Streets and Town Centres in 2030 (presented to Parliament in 2019)



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AUTHORS NOTE:

The contents of this report and the recommendations made are based on Studio 3 Ltd's view of the town centre as a whole and the actions which should be taken to regenerate the towns and increase their general attractiveness to residents, visitors and businesses. Absolutely no consideration has been given as to whether the suggested actions and/or any related costs are the responsibility of the County, District, Town/Parish Councils or any other body.

What is crucial is that the different Councils, Town Partnerships, businesses and residents come together to agree priorities and for each organisation to put in place the necessary actions within their remit/responsibility to make the required improvements.

The regeneration of our town centres is the responsibility of all stakeholders. Key to these changes are the businesses, residents and Town/Parish Councils themselves. They are closest to the town and really know and understand the town and the needs and requirements of the local community. Their counsel and guidance should both therefore be provided and encouraged at all times.

The reinvention of our town centres will only be achieved by a joint and collaborative approach utilising the knowledge, expertise and skills of a range of people, bodies and organisations. No single person or organisation can achieve this on their own and everyone has their own specific part to play. It is essential that any plans have the buy in of all connected persons and that all parties support each other through the process.

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Foreword

Epping Forest District Council is reviewing a number of its town centres with the objective of regenerating them and making them a better and more attractive place to live, work, visit and play. There have been numerous projects over the years to generally improve the amenities, however the UK as a whole is now in the midst of a new era which will undoubtedly change high streets up and down the country. Covid 19 has unexpectedly changed the way we live and also as a result, our relationship with our local high street and/or town centre. More people are now shopping locally, and more people are working from home, which in turn is encouraging them to use their local amenities on a more regular basis. The Grimsey Review advises that high streets need to be re-invented as unique community hubs, designed around health, education, culture, housing, leisure and arts and crafts, along with retail shops. If towns can get it right, consumers should emerge from the pandemic with a stronger sense of community and a desire to support their local town centre. Strong high streets can build communities, keep crime at bay and foster civic pride and togetherness.

A YouGov poll revealed that only 9% of Britons want life to return to “normal” after the coronavirus outbreak is over. The positive from the above is that this is a great time to engage with our local communities and reinvent our town centres while the focus is on them and before things automatically revert to the “old” normal.

The Grimsey Review goes on to advise that for town centres and high streets to thrive and rediscover their community purpose we need to see:

Localism - A massive shift in power to local communities and a renewed focus on localism. Local people must be empowered to redesign their own high streets and have a say on the businesses, services and amenities that occupy it.

Leadership - Local leaders should be valued and recognised. Candidates for leadership roles should be selected for having a broad range of dynamic and collaborative skills in order to get the best out of communities. Local leaders who embrace change and are brave enough to imagine a new world have a better chance of succeeding.

Fewer cars, more green spaces - fewer streets and a huge expansion of green space, parks and town squares. Our towns must no longer be designed around the car as people learn to appreciate the benefit of open spaces.

Other important takeaways from the Grimsey Review that should be considered is the fact that there is a growing view among young adults that businesses need to be accountable to more than their bottom line and for the wellbeing of people and communities. It goes on to confirm that 72% of millennials (aged 24 to 38) would rather spend their money on an experience or an event than buying things and that this is reflected in the shift towards leisure, arts, culture and dining on the high streets. Deloitte’s 2019 Millennial Survey showed that millennials will patronise and support companies that align with their values and make a positive impact on society. Generation Zs (aged 5 to 23) are also socially focussed with their opinions on companies formed by their ethics, practices and social impact.

The Grimsey Review confirms that town and high street plans should put sustainability and the environment at the heart of everything; should base their development on quality of life and experiences and not blind

mass consumerism; should recognise and reward great local leadership; and allow local communities to develop their places to compete for people to live, work, visit and play.

Introduction

Loughton is the largest town within Epping Forest District Council's area with an estimated population of circa 33,000 people (Source: UK Office for National Statistics) and an average house price of £606,898 (Source: Zoopla). Loughton is a lovely town set on the east side of Epping Forest. It provides a wide range of residential property across various neighbourhoods, is home to two main shopping areas, a retail park and an industrial estate. The town has a real community feel to it with a wide range of clubs, associations and community centre-based activity and in current Covid times is attractive as a town as it is pretty self-sufficient.

Although one town, Loughton is split into 2 main shopping areas – The Broadway (known locally as Debden Broadway) and the High Road. Each of these have their own range of characteristics, anomalies and requirements. As a result, I have chosen to split the study into two and report on each separately. This report concentrates on The Broadway.

The Broadway is a striking 1950s shopping parade with flats above laid out as a sweeping but gentle crescent with wide pavements and a generous central reservation. It sits within its own residential catchment area, is close to the London Underground station of Debden and also junction 5 of the M11. In addition, it is also home to 2 industrial areas and the Epping Forest Retail Park. Within easy access of The Broadway are numerous schools, New City College and E15 Acting School, part of Essex University.

The Epping Forest Retail Park has undoubtedly had an impact on trade on The Broadway and although it was originally meant to be fashion-led has become very much mixed use, with only 3 of the 12 outlets being fashion based and the remainder including a supermarket, greeting cards shop, pet shop, interiors shop, coffee shop and bakers.

Having said that, The Broadway is fairly well tenanted with only 4% of the shops being physically empty – well under half of the national average. Speaking to the landlord it would appear that the empty shops are actually under offer and/or awaiting fit out – which would mean that, remarkably in the current climate and in comparison to high streets up and down the country, The Broadway is 100% tenanted. We now therefore, need to establish that The Broadway is meeting the needs and requirements of its customer base and take steps to increase the footfall.

It is felt that The Broadway has a great deal of potential to be made a much more attractive space and appeal to a wider and increasingly larger percentage of both visitors and residents.

1 Quick Wins

There are a number of matters which could be addressed quickly and cheaply and could make considerable improvements to The Broadway:

- ***Sweep/clean The Broadway on an ongoing basis and ensure that litter bins are emptied and litter is cleared from the street/pavement.***
- ***Arrange for the regular clearance of all accumulated rubbish around the bin areas to the rear of the shops.***
- ***Arrange for the cleaning/redecoration/repair of all street furniture – lamp posts, bollards, railings, planters, litter bins, benches etc.***
- ***Replace broken/previously removed bollards.***
- ***Replace/re-lay broken and uneven paving.***
- ***A reconsideration of future parking charges to encourage short stay shopping should be considered, noting that during Covid 19 a 20p parking scheme was in orce.***
- ***Tidy green spaces and planters and weed kill as necessary.***
- ***Arrange for regular parking enforcement to combat overstays, double parking, parking on the pavement etc.***
- ***Arrange for resurfacing of central reservation – it is suggested that this be filled in to make it into a hardstanding (similar to the central area) and that substantial planters, in size and strength, are positioned at regular intervals along The Broadway. These will deter vehicles from mounting the central reservation, whilst at the same time adding greenery and colour to enhance the streetscape. It will also allow for a central reservation with protection for pedestrians to easily cross the road.***

2 Town Management

2.1 Town Centre Leadership

Town centre regeneration is about localism and local leadership and the way to make this work is to provide local leadership with its finger on the pulse and with a connection to the local community. Therefore, and accepting that this project is being driven by Epping Forest District Council, it is suggested that buy in, action and leadership should be provided by Loughton Town Council with the support of a Town(s) Centre Manager appointed by the District Council.

All Town Councillors are local and as a result should be able to bring the local community and businesses together and develop a strong visionary plan to reinforce the distinctive heritage of the town, assist in making the town centre a real community hub and making Loughton a far more attractive town for locals

and visitors alike. The role of an independent Town Centre Manager will be critical to provide professional expertise and an unbiased view on what is needed locally.

The great thing about Loughton is that it already has great community spirit and an extremely active residents' association. I am certain that all of these working together with the Town and District Councils will produce excellent results.

Recommendations:

- 1) Engage with Loughton Town Council (LTC) and the town centre partnership.**
- 2) Obtain LTC commitment to the scheme and to providing leadership and support.**
- 3) Work with LTC and Loughton Residents' Association to establish and action a realistic plan.**

2.2 Town(s) Centre Manager

It is suggested that the Council commits to the appointment of a Town Centre Manager initially on a two-year fixed term basis. The manager would act as a single point of contact to receive ideas, thoughts and views from local stakeholders and as such, would be known and trusted by businesses, retailers and residents alike. They would work with the Town Council to ensure that standards are adhered to and that the town is as vibrant and attractive to local people and visitors as possible. A review of the post would be undertaken after 12 months to assess progress against the Town Centre action plan and the success of interventions and extended if necessary.

NB. As a part of its regeneration, Stockton-on-Tees Council pulled together a multi-disciplinary team of market management, street licensing, civil enforcement and business support to manage their town centre. Stockton is a much larger town than Loughton, however the principles of hands on organisation and management are much the same.

Recommendations:

- 4) Write job profile and agree responsibilities for shared Town Centre Manager post.**
- 5) Post to be part of EFDC's Economic Development team within Strategic Planning Directorate.**
- 6) Town Team establishment to be priority.**

2.3 Establishment of a Town Team

To achieve the required changes, considerable two-way dialogue needs to be sought from the town's residents and businesses. Buy-in from the community is important to ensure that there is a need or requirement for any proposed changes and that as a result these are carried out with the support of the town. Loughton already has an active residents' association and two Town Forums – one for The Broadway and one for the High Road and it is thought that these could be used as a catalyst for pulling together a formal Town Team. The Broadway also has the Debden Traders Association representing the interests of the retailers.

It is important that the Town Team is made up of a cross section of the community including residents, businesses and retailers. A fair representation of age, sex and race should be included, and input should be encouraged from organisations such as educational establishments, religious groups, social groups (e.g. Scouts etc) together with members of the town council and tourism and visitor groups.

Within Loughton, it is suggested that 2 Community Hubs are established – one centrally perhaps in the High Road or failing that, in the library and another on The Broadway. These could be used to create a place

where public opinions could be shared and discussed and provide a centre of community well-being for the area. This idea may link with other potential changes and developments in the Broadway.

Recommendations:

- 7) Decide with LTC the make-up of a Town Team and what it will be called.**
- 8) If utilising current Town Forums, engage with and obtain commitment and support from Chairmen and Town Forums as a whole.**
- 9) Arrange initial meeting to establish parameters and put in place a plan for town team development and action.**

2.4 Attracting New Businesses and Brands

In conjunction with the Town Team, work could be done to identify key brands, businesses and/or other organisations to attract to The Broadway and then steps taken to secure them. With the landlord on The Broadway being Epping Forest District Council, there is a great opportunity for the Council to encourage a good mix of retailers ensuring that the needs and requirements of the community are met. In addition, thought could also be given to holding an empty unit for short term rental for pop-up shops, start-up ventures, new/irregular non-high street retailers to test the water for their market and for more experiential and art based activities including exhibitions, shows, demonstrations etc.

Recommendations:

- 10) Put in place a programme to encourage new businesses.**
- 11) Target prospective businesses.**
- 12) Communicate requirements to commercial agents.**
- 13) Consider use of an empty unit for non-conventional retailing i.e. pop-ups, start-ups, experiential etc.**

3 Town Offer

3.1 The Broadway

The Debden area of Loughton and The Broadway could prove to be a perfect example of the “20 minute neighbourhood”. There is everything at hand within a 20 minute public-transport trip, bike ride or walk from home – work, shopping, education, healthcare, community facilities, recreation and sport. There is also a fantastic community spirit particularly encouraged by longstanding shopkeepers providing old fashioned service and support on The Broadway, at the centre of the area.

Unusually, The Broadway is home to a bank and also has a new post office on its way. It has wide, attractive boulevard pavements which could lend themselves nicely to a café culture, street trading and markets. If done properly The Broadway could become a real destination for locals and visitors alike.

The Broadway is a striking development and an example of 1950s architecture at its best and something that should be cherished and maintained. A local elected member suggested it be made a conservation area which I would whole heartedly support. This would provide a framework for the area’s conservation and also ensure that it is maintained and that any works carried out were done in the best interests of the area and the development.

Having spoken to various people about The Broadway, please find below a selection of the comments:

- The Broadway is unique – not like a High Road - has own demographic.
- The Broadway needs more shops appealing to younger people.
- The Broadway is a nice place.
- It has a good community vibe.
- A big social place with lots of local people.
- Street needs more colour – planters and flower beds.
- Needs to be brighter, more colourful/interesting.
- Shops need to be more inviting.
- Some shops are nice and done up well.
- Mainly independent shops.
- The Broadway needs – a wet fish shop, children’s clothes, fashion, shoes, sportswear. These could be in a market.
- Longer trading hours required.
- Lots of greasy spoons, takeaways etc.
- Shops need to tidy up their frontages – pull out canopies, promote street trading, more finger on the pulse retailing.
- There are lots of hardware shops.

Recommendations:

14) Consider updating planning and other guidance to preserve and build-on the uniqueness of the Broadway area.

15) Consider reinstating the 4 flag poles to the flats above Brickclamps Path together with any other original details

3.2 Retail

The retail offer on The Broadway consists of 63 shops spread across a sweeping crescent. It has a variety of shops and includes a number of cafes, restaurants and take-away outlets. Unusually, The Broadway is home to a bank, is about to get a new Post Office, and there is also a Sainsbury’s supermarket just off The Broadway. The current vacancy rate is well below the national average and in fact having spoken to the Landlord, EFDC, the 4 empty units are under offer.

The Epping Forest Retail park is nearby, which although initially proposed as a fashion-led retail park has now morphed into a mixed use retail park including a supermarket. This is undoubtedly having some impact on the footfall at The Broadway, although I suspect it is also drawing a large percentage of its footfall from outside of the immediate area. The good news is that all of the customers on the retail park are also potentially customers for The Broadway. We just need to work out what would entice them to The Broadway, what types of shops would complement and/or compete with the retail park and/or what sort of environment would provide an additional draw for retail park customers.

Work should be done with retailers, perhaps through the Debden Traders’ Association, to consider these matters and alter/improve the retail offer accordingly.

Another varying element of high streets is the progression of the weekend and evening economies. We now live in a seven day a week world with extended working hours. Businesses need to adjust to the needs and

requirements of their customers, and this may now include opening longer/different hours, opening on Sundays etc. The town centre manager could discuss these matters with retailers and see if there is any scope for taking these considerations further with a view to increasing footfall and also, subsequently, trade. With EFDC being the landlord for The Broadway, there is an ability to shape and control the types of tenants and retail offers. In partnership with the existing traders The Broadway could be developed to offer an innovative and distinctive mixed-use together with a range of food and experiential and community-based services.

At the current time, people are tending to shop nearer to home using their local town centres as opposed to going to the larger out-of-town shopping centres. Retailers should take advantage of this and go that extra mile to ensure a clean, safe and welcoming environment offering a comprehensive range of products and services. If customers can see the benefit of shopping locally, and enjoy it, they are less likely to change their habits when the pandemic is brought under control.

Some businesses in The Broadway have undoubtedly changed their business model to meet their customer's needs as a result of the pandemic. There are also excellent examples of good old-fashioned retailing, excellent customer service and community togetherness. These tend to result in regular and loyal customers who keep coming back and spread the word to their friends – a great way of building business.

Recommendations:

- 16) Town Centre Manager to work with Debden Traders' Association and EFDC to increase the attractiveness and draw of shops with a view to increasing the viability of The Broadway.***
- 17) LTC and EFDC to ensure a clean, safe and welcoming environment.***

3.3 Epping Forest Retail Park

It should be accepted that the Epping Forest Retail Park is a reality and consideration should be given to the benefits the retail park can bring to The Broadway, and what can be done to make the most of them. The biggest benefit has to be the increased footfall brought into the area and consideration should be given to encouraging some of this footfall to The Broadway.

It is understood that in normal, non-Covid times, congestion on the retail park is significant and that it can take a considerable amount of time to enter the retail park and park and then to exit the retail park at the end of a visit. My suggestion therefore would be to utilise The Broadway parking and put on a complimentary park and ride service from the centre of The Broadway to the retail park and back. In addition to relieving the stress of parking on the retail park, it would also encourage customers to frequent the shops, restaurants and services provided by The Broadway. The shuttle bus providing this service could be funded/part funded by the retail park. In addition to park-and-ride services for the retail park, the shuttle bus would also provide a complimentary travel service for employees from the industrial estate to travel to and from The Broadway and also for pedestrians looking to access the retail park from The Broadway. As I understand it, there is one bus which goes from The Broadway to the retail park, but to return you have to get the same bus route which does a journey around Loughton before returning to The Broadway. This shuttle bus would solve this problem.

Recommendations:

- 18) Consider a shuttle bus/park and ride service between The Broadway and Epping Forest Retail Park potentially linked with the demand responsive transport work currently being undertaken across the District.***

3.4 The Broadway Market

The Grimsey Review highlighted the importance of markets and their positive effect on residents. In a report by the Institute of Place Management (2015) it explained why markets are economically, socially and politically critical for town centres. The report also confirmed that markets can generate footfall increases of circa 25% and have been shown to increase retail sales with market visitors spending money in other shops. The report goes on to explain that markets provide low barriers to entry and as result can encourage new businesses and nurture retail innovation.

The situation in respect of market and street trading is confused and unclear on The Broadway . As it stands a Market Licence is held by Debden Traders' Association (DTA) for Saturdays and Sundays between certain hours. The idea of the licence being held by DTA is that they can control market traders and the types of stalls, to ensure that they don't compete with the retailers. From what I understand the market used to run on certain days of the week and that in actual fact there were a minimum and decreasing number of stall holders. The other issue I don't fully understand is that the licence doesn't allow DTA to sub-let the space, so I don't fully understand how the space can be let to stall holders. This same licence is also used to allow retailers to "street trade" outside their shops.

My view is that these licences need to be sorted out and split into 2 clear categories. One would be a street trading licence for the retailers – allowing them to retail directly outside their shops for seven day per week and setting out clear parameters as to the conditions making this allowable. The second would be a market licence on set day(s) to enable any remaining trading space not used by retailers to be utilised by stall holders as a market. This licence could be managed by DTA but would require an ability for the space to be sub-let.

It would be logical for the market to be held at weekends. It would also be good to split speciality markets (such as farmers' markets) with Loughton High Road, to ensure that there is no competition and to spread trade around the town.

A busy and successful market will serve as an additional draw to The Broadway and make it more of a destination, whilst at the same time providing additional footfall for The Broadway retailers.

Recommendations:

- 19) DTA in conjunction with the Town Manager to consider its needs and requirements in respect of licensing.**
- 20) DTA to decide on suitable market day(s).**
- 21) EFDC to discuss with DTA and put in place suitable licences/solutions to meet requirements.**
- 22) Review market layout and pitches utilising the space on The Broadway and ensuring adequate parking arrangements for traders.**
- 23) Put in place a calendar of feature markets i.e. Farmers, Antiques, French, Italian etc.**

3.5 Signage

A common comment was that there was insufficient signage to the Broadway. Having looked around, I tend to agree.

Recommendations:

- 24) Review signage to The Broadway and implement new signage as required.**
- 25) Repair/clean up any existing signage.**
- 26) Increase signage from retail park to The Broadway.**
- 27) Increase signage from station to The Broadway – particularly footpath signage.**
- 28) Put in place signage at the Chigwell Road end of The Broadway, perhaps incorporating an over street arch with wording along the lines of “Welcome to The Broadway” to make The Broadway more of a feature and destination.**

3.6 Tourism/Visitors

I am not sure that The Broadway can be classed as a tourist or visitor attraction, however I feel that it can become an extremely important element of the Epping Forest Retail Park and provide an additional and attractive shopping area for visitors to the retail park by providing a wider range of retail offerings and village type feel with vibrant café culture and experiential market, exhibitions and attractions. The Broadway can become a part of the Epping Forest Retail Park as a destination and benefit from it accordingly.

If we can encourage people to dwell in The Broadway as a part of their trip to the retail park they can add real value to a local economy in terms of spending on food and drinks and also other retail.

Clearly people need to know about The Broadway, so clear signage from the retail park is essential, together with signage promoting the previously proposed park-and-ride service and also general marketing and advertising of The Broadway and its range of services.

If holding any events on The Broadway, it would be good to include the retail park and also Crate Loughton – a creative hub at Oakwood Hill - so all areas of the community can share their customers and benefit accordingly.

Recommendations:

- 29) The Loughton Broadway Town Centre Partnership to reach out to Epping Forest Retail Park and Crate Loughton to build a relationship with other local retailers.**
- 30) Town Centre Manager to encourage the DTA, Loughton Broadway Town Centre Partnership, Epping Forest Retail Park and Crate Loughton to work together for their mutual benefits.**
- 31) Loughton Broadway Town Centre Partnership to work with DTA to put on key events and liaise with the retail park and Crate Loughton where appropriate.**
- 32) Loughton Broadway Town Centre Partnership to encourage support and participation from local retailers and businesses for any Broadway events.**

3.7 The Broadway Community Hub

The key to a community hub, much the same as in the “20-minute neighbourhood” is to have a full range of services and facilities within easy reach of each other. This comprises homes, shops, businesses, green spaces, schools, medical centres, play areas etc together with function space within which community events can take place.

Although I understand that Loughton is one town, it is very much split into two, between the High Road and The Broadway - The Broadway very much having its own residential catchment area. As a result, I feel that an active community hub in or around The Broadway is essential. This was available in The Broadway until a few years ago, when it eventually ran out of funding.

It is appreciated that there is a great community spirit around The Broadway and also that community facilities are already provided by the Oakwood Hill Community Centre. To this end perhaps some form of link could be established between the services offered by the Oakwood Hill Community Centre and a further hub formed on The Broadway. This hub could form a part of a Broadway Library and would also be used to coordinate events and activities within the town centre and be a resource for services including perhaps a Police help desk, a mini job centre and a place for locals to impart their thoughts, observations and complaints. Provision of these increased services will encourage more people into the town centre and will lead to them using other elements of the town centre at the same time. St Johns Church has a shop/community base on The Broadway. It would also be worth considering the service offered by this to ensure that it does not compete with our own hub.

It is noted from my various conversations that outside of the specific clubs and associations based in Loughton, there is a lack of facilities for the youth. This is something that could also be considered by the community hub and community centre.

Recommendations:

- 33) Set up community hub base within The Broadway to a similar model to those being developed at Waltham Abbey and Epping.**
- 34) Publicise community hub.**
- 35) Pull together program of events and activities for the year.**
- 36) Liaise with Oakwood Hill Community Centre and St Johns shop and jointly promote community events, activities and services**

3.8 Library

The library for The Broadway and Deben had now been established in New City College with the College set to take over its running. It would appear that this is causing considerable anxiety to local and older residents who at one time would have used a library but now choose not to. The issues are partly to do with having to cross the main road - Chigwell Lane - to get to it, but more importantly due to the feeling of intimidation for older people having to use a library in a college.

Libraries are of great importance to all elements of the community and for many areas form the base for a community hub. For older users, libraries are of particular importance as they have a role in supporting older people to live independently and remain actively engaged in the world of learning and the wider community. They are an important source of access to computers and digital literacy training helping seniors to connect with family, friends, health information and government services. Libraries should also provide a safe, comfortable and inviting setting at which older members of the community are treated with courtesy and respect and can socialise with like-minded people.

In short, and particularly as there are so many older residents around The Broadway and its immediate area, I feel that a library should be brought to The Broadway. It can be a part of a community hub and again will assist in enticing more people onto The Broadway for other purposes.

Recommendation:

- 37) Research appetite for a library service on The Broadway and action accordingly.**

3.9 Public Facilities

If the Broadway is going to meet people's needs, it should be reviewed to ensure that there are the required public facilities. These include adequate seating for all sections of the community in all areas, open, clean and functional public toilets, adequate lighting at all times across all areas of the town centre, bike racks/hoops in easily accessible places and strategically placed dog poo bins.

Recommendations:

- 38) Review benches and seating on The Broadway and ensure it is adequate for the needs of the town.**
- 39) Review bike racks/hoops within The Broadway and at other destinations and ensure they are adequate for the needs of the town.**
- 40) Review dog poo bins in The Broadway and other areas as appropriate and ensure they are adequate to the needs of the town.**
- 41) Ensure that all areas of The Broadway, including car parks to the rear of the shops and footpath to the station are adequately lit.**

3.10 Wi-fi and Digital Presence

The digital age and the need for connectivity is increasingly important for numerous sections of the community and as a result I would suggest free wi-fi availability within The Broadway.

It should be acknowledged that people are now shopping differently and that circa 30% of retail sales are being done online (Office of National Statistics, Aug 2020). This figure is up from 21.9% at the beginning of March 2020 and the beginning of the Covid 19 lock down. Regardless of the pandemic, online sales will continue to grow, and retail experts KPMG predict the figure rising to 50% by 2025. As a result, retail businesses need to adjust their business models accordingly and develop their offer for both markets.

As a part of adding a wi-fi option to the town centre a social media presence should be developed enabling online and offline businesses. Mobile technologies and virtual shopping should be used to enhance the consumer town centre experience and in turn increase footfall.

Consideration should be given to bringing in a third-party contractor such as Maybe (www.maybetech.com) to develop social media/town centre/retailer collaboration.

Recommendations:

- 42) Put in place free WI-FI within The Broadway and publicise.**
- 43) Agree way forward in respect of Social Media strategy/presence and execute accordingly.**
- 44) Arrange for assistance and support for retailers in establishing an online presence.**

3.11 New City College

New City College is a welcome addition to the area and generally increases the mix of people around the town centre. The large numbers of students coming into the area can, on occasions, cause friction on The Broadway. They can also cause some apprehension for the more elderly residents.

The College have been receptive to representations made to them and now have security officer patrols on The Broadway to monitor student behaviour. The College have agreed to join the Loughton Broadway Town Centre Partnership and are keen to work to become reintegrated within the local community.

Recommendations:

45) EFDC/LTC to work with Loughton Broadway Town Centre Partnership to include New City College in their initiatives and activities and encourage their participation and inclusion.

3.12 Epping Forest District Council

Unusually, EFDC, as well as being the District Council is also the landlord for The Broadway. As you would expect, there have been a large number of comments in respect of rents, rates, service charges, upkeep of common areas, control of shop uses etc. It was also suggested that communications from EFDC are poor. Having said this, the Loughton Broadway Town Centre Partnership have confirmed that they have good relations with EFDC and find it helpful, when required.

It's not in my remit to comment on some of the matters raised concerning EFDC, but I would hope that the appointment of a Town Centre Manager would build and maintain relationships with The Broadway and its tenants.

Recommendations:

46) EFDC Town Centre Manager to be actively involved and build/maintain relationships with The Broadway and its tenants.

3.13 Pedestrianisation

I know that thought had been given to pedestrianising The Broadway at weekends and that the idea has been set aside due to a lack of funds. My thought on this is that it would be a lot of effort for little gain and that overall it may lead to a reduction in footfall. The Broadway has plenty of space. It has wide pavements, a wide covered area in the centre and a generous central reservation. Currently, people like to drive, stop outside the shops, get what they want and go – they don't want to park and then have to walk, especially when they expect their actual time shopping to take minutes.

If The Broadway can become a busy hub and destination, and shopping habits change, then the idea of pedestrianisation may become viable. For the time being however it is something I would discount.

4 Appearance

Although a striking and attractive 1950s development, The Broadway could benefit from further work and improvement. The "Quick Wins" listed above go some way to achieving this, however there are a number of other issues requiring attention to restore this attractive parade and make it a place that people want to go to, want to be seen in and are proud to be a part of.

Unfairly, The Broadway has a reputation as the poor relation to the High Road and unfortunately appears to have been treated accordingly. Now, with more people working from home and more people spending money locally and rediscovering their local high streets and independent stores, the Broadway should come into its own and every effort should be made to make it as attractive and viable as possible.

4.1 General Maintenance and refurbishment

In addition to the Quick Wins listed above, consideration needs to be given to a number of general maintenance issues which would have a major impact on the appearance of The Broadway:

Recommendations:

- 47) Refurbishment/redecoration of the areas directly above and between the shop fronts.***
- 48) Refurbishment/redecoration of the doorways and doors to the flats on The Broadway.***
- 49) Repair and redecoration to the trunking carrying wiring, just above door height, to the flats on both sides of The Broadway and running the full length.***
- 50) Refurbishment/redecoration of Brickclamps Path – particularly the walk through under the flats. It is noted that there is a memorial situated here following the death of a local student – my feeling is that this should be sympathetically reviewed.***
- 51) The flats on the north side of The Broadway have a varying selection of fencing and other materials attached to the railings above the shops, presumably to give the flats individual and private outside space. There is also a “Jesus is Lord” sign, numerous satellite dishes, a trampoline, a gazebo, sheds, garden umbrellas etc. These make The Broadway look extremely untidy and tatty. Consideration should be given to what is acceptable and steps taken to put guidelines in place.***

4.2 Shop Fronts

The shop fronts along The Broadway are, on the whole, attractive and neat with only a few exceptions. As Epping Forest District Council is the landlord on The Broadway, some control could be brought in through leases and tenancy agreements to ensure that shop fronts are maintained and appropriate to the development. The making of The Broadway into a conservation area would also assist in this, ensuring that it remains as attractive as possible.

Recommendations:

- 52) Consult with retailers and consider options in respect of shop fronts and making/keeping them attractive and in the overall style of The Broadway.***

4.3 A-Boards and other retail paraphernalia

A number of retailers have A-boards and other retail paraphernalia, external trading/retail displays on the pavement outside their shops. Although I understand the need for this, if not carefully managed these can block access and generally make the place look untidy. The market licence/street trading licence should lay out conditions and spaces for use – the Council should monitor this and ensure that all conditions are being complied with, particularly to ensure that The Broadway remains as attractive and as accessible as possible.

Considerations should be given to some form of demarcation outside each store over which seating, A-boards and other retail paraphernalia, if allowed.

Recommendations:

53) Review town centre policy and regulations for trading from the front of premises, retail displays and A-boards on the pavement and enforce accordingly.

4.4 Trees and Planters

Tree lined pedestrian routes and landscaped areas all contribute to civic pride and generally make a town more attractive. I understand that throughout the summer months there are hanging baskets along The Broadway planted with flowers, which I am sure contribute greatly to the streetscape. Having said this, I am concerned that overall, the area looks fairly bleak and quite hard. There are a number of trees planted along The Broadway, however I think that the planting could be greatly improved with the addition of more trees and a number of planters, together with the redevelopment and planting of the central reservation.

Recommendations:

54) Review current “green” townscape and work to develop and improve.

5 Access

Town centres need to recognise that Co2 emissions have to be reduced and as a result there is much more emphasis on ensuring a reduced reliance on cars. To this end, town centres need to ensure their accessibility via other methods of transport and provide for these methods accordingly. In addition to reducing carbon emissions this will also encourage the use of the town centre by a wider range of the community via numerous methods of transport.

Simply stopping car access and reducing or taking away parking spaces, doesn't resolve this problem. Undoubtedly people will still want to access the Broadway by car. However there is a balance to be had between encouraging pedestrian, cycling and public transport access to The Broadway and then gradually reducing provision for motor vehicles as other methods of travel develop and gain traction.

For generations urban areas have been designed exclusively around the car. This now has to change and town centres developed to provide attractive, walkable and cyclable physical space.

5.1 Cycling

In a town the size of Loughton, all residents should be able to access the town centre, the retail park, the town's various green and public spaces, leisure centre and attractions via a network of secure, safe and clearly marked cycle paths and routes.

In addition, the town should also provide for cycle racks/hoops at the various destinations to enable bikes to be safely secured.

Recommendations:

55) Review cycling accessibility in Loughton particularly around main roads, shopping hubs, attractions and green spaces and make arrangements to provide a network of secure, safe and clearly marked cycle paths and routes.

5.2 Trains

Debden underground station, provides regular commuter and other services in and out of London and assists in making the Debden area of Loughton a popular commuter town.

5.3 Buses

The Broadway provides for a busy bus hub with numerous routes arriving and departing from the end of The Broadway. My only observation here is that the bus that goes to the Epping Forest Retail Park doesn't come directly back and that to return you have to take the same bus on an elongated trip around Loughton.

As suggested elsewhere in this report consideration should be given to a direct park-and-ride/shuttle bus service from The Broadway to the retail park and back. This would provide easy access to the retail park and may also encourage employees at the businesses on the industrial estate to come onto The Broadway to shop and for lunch/breaks etc.

5.4 Car Parks and Parking

Although use of other methods of transport into the town centre is important, it is inevitable that a section of the community will continue to use a car for a variety of reasons. As a result, parking is a bone of contention with many, and varying views are held by different sections of the community.

A number of people have highlighted the loss of a number of parking spaces in The Broadway and would generally recommend their reinstatement – this however I feel is not necessary, particularly as there is adequate longer-term parking at the rear of the shops. It was also suggested that the parking on The Broadway should be made parallel parking – this idea I have again discounted as it would undoubtedly mean the loss of further parking spaces.

In and around The Broadway, my feelings are as follows:

Firstly, it is generally felt that the 1-hour free parking on The Broadway itself is about right. I would however reduce this to 30 minutes and make the parking pay and display/pay by phone and perhaps increase the overall parking time to 2 hours maximum – with no return within 3 hours. I would also increase parking enforcement with a view to discouraging double parking, parking on the pavement, parking in disabled bays, parking on double yellow lines and parking of overly large vehicles which may block the road.

In respect of the parking to the rear of The Broadway, I would make this first 30 minutes free and then normal rates thereafter.

I have been advised that all-day parking behind The Broadway is cheaper than all day parking in the station car park. This I would seek to rectify by either increasing the all-day parking charge or removing the ability to park all day. I feel that all-day parking by station users would have a minimal impact on footfall on The Broadway and reduces the amount of available spaces for shoppers.

In addition, there would appear to be an issue with access to the car park behind the shops on the southern side of The Broadway. The walkway from The Broadway, through to the car park appears to be controlled by Jimmy's Barbers next to it. Currently the barbers shutter when closed also closes off access to the walkway to the car park. While this may be acceptable in normal trading conditions during lockdown no access whatsoever was available.

It has also been suggested that the lighting to the rear car parks needs to be reviewed. These are fairly dark areas and as a result provide a hang out/loitering space and make it uncomfortable to access the car parks in the evenings.

Although parking arrangements outside The Broadway are beyond my remit, I acknowledge the comment raised that resident permit holder parking needs to also be considered in the immediate residential area.

Recommendations:

- 56) Make parking on The Broadway pay and display.**
- 57) Reduce free parking on The Broadway to 30 minutes and make maximum stay 2 hours, not to return within 3 hours.**
- 58) Make parking to the rear of The Broadway 30 minutes free with normal parking charges applying thereafter.**
- 59) Increase cost of all-day parking behind The Broadway to exceed cost of station parking.**
- 60) Increase parking enforcement.**
- 61) Review car park access arrangements by Jimmy's Barbers and take steps to rectify.**
- 62) Review lighting to car park areas and ensure adequately lit and secure spaces.**

6 Consultation

6.1 Market Research

In addition to thoughts and expertise of the author, consultation for this report has been obtained from the following:

Epping Forest District Council
Loughton Town Council
Loughton Residents' Association
Loughton Broadway Town Centre Partnership
Debden Traders' Association
Loughton High Road Town Centre Partnership
Various councillors and other prominent/influential Loughton (Debden) residents
Various Broadway and High Road Retailers
Independent landlords
Various Loughton residents

It is accepted that additional research will be required from residents, retailers and businesses to move the ideas in this report forward. It is felt however that if the initiative is going to be Community/Town Council driven then the research should be carried out more locally.

7. Sources of Additional Support

High Streets Task Force (www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk) – supporting communities and local government to transform their high streets.

Maybe (www.maybetech.com) – A smarter approach to social media

Action List	Priority
<i>EFDC/Highway Rangers to complete “quick wins”</i>	1
<i>Consider making The Broadway a Conservation Area and take steps to put in place</i>	2
<i>Discuss with and establish Town Leadership Team</i>	1
<i>Form Town Team/refocus Town Centre Partnerships</i>	1
<i>Appoint Town Centre Manager</i>	1
<i>Establish Community Hub</i>	2
<i>Provide for additional seating, bike racks/hoops, dog poo bins as appropriate</i>	2
<i>Talk to retailers re shop fronts, A- boards, pavement trading etc</i>	1
<i>Review Street Trading/Market licenses for The Broadway and action</i>	1
<i>Review Broadway Market and put in place plans to re-establish and grow it</i>	2
<i>Research appetite for Broadway Library (perhaps as part of Community Hub) and action accordingly</i>	2
<i>Put in place plans to review town cycle paths and implement findings</i>	2
<i>Consider introduction of park and ride/shuttle bus service to retail park from The Broadway</i>	1
<i>Review parking charges per report and implement findings</i>	1
<i>Review town WI-FI proposal and put in place findings</i>	2
<i>Develop town centre social media presence</i>	2
<i>Complete research on thoughts and considerations of residents and businesses – incorporate and implement where appropriate</i>	1
<i>Review new businesses required on The Broadway and take steps to attract</i>	3
<i>Review the “green” street scene on The Broadway, consider the addition of planters etc and action accordingly</i>	1

<i>Carry out all general maintenance/refurbishment recommendations</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Increase parking enforcement</i>	<i>2</i>

Draft

To note: Buckhurst Hill

The attached report has been commissioned by EFDC Officer from a specialist external consultant.

Work on this report was carried out between December 2020 and April 2021 so some of the observations may refer to issues and conditions that existed at that time and may have been subsequently addressed.

The report is often linked with development proposals focused on the immediate actions required to improve the town centres. Further reports will be brought forward, often associated with more significant investment and development to cover the medium and long-term improvement of the town centres.

The immediate resources required to address priority town centre issues were identified in the EFDC 2021/22 Budget or will be supported by specific Covid 19 recovery grants made available by the Government.

It is intended as with the Waltham Abbey and Ongar town centre reports, that all approved recommendations will be project managed in detail, assigned to managers, given timelines, supported by identified resources and their delivery and impact monitored.

The reports have been produced after extensive consultation. This consultation with local members and other key partners will continue.

Although not specifically mentioned in this report, work on the ground will be linked with other initiatives such as sustainable transport with sub projects of demand responsive transport, cycling routes, electric car charging points and various greening and tree planting initiatives being taken forward as per our Green Infra-structure Policy and climate change action plan.

Buckhurst Hill

Regeneration Study and Proposals

“The most successful high streets and town centres will need to change to reflect the communities they serve by transforming themselves into community hubs, playing to their strengths of offering human interaction and a unique sense of place and community”

HM Government response to an enquiry into High Streets and Town Centres in 2030 (presented to Parliament in 2019)



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AUTHORS NOTE:

The contents of this report and the recommendations made are based on Studio 3 Ltd's view of the town centre as a whole and the actions which should be taken to regenerate the towns and increase their general attractiveness to residents, visitors and businesses. Absolutely no consideration has been given as to whether the suggested actions and/or any related costs are the responsibility of the County, District, Town/Parish Councils or any other body.

What is crucial is that the different Councils, Town Partnerships, businesses and residents come together to agree priorities and for each organisation to put in place the necessary actions within their remit/responsibility to make the required improvements.

The regeneration of our town centres is the responsibility of all stakeholders. Key to these changes are the businesses, residents and Town/Parish Councils themselves. They are closest to the town and really know and understand the town and the needs and requirements of the local community. Their counsel and guidance should both therefore be provided and encouraged at all times.

The reinvention of our town centres will only be achieved by a joint and collaborative approach utilising the knowledge, expertise and skills of a range of people, bodies and organisations. No single person or organisation can achieve this on their own and everyone has their own specific part to play. It is essential that any plans have the buy in of all connected persons and that all parties support each other through the process.

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Foreword

Epping Forest District Council is reviewing a number of its town centres with the objective of regenerating them and making them a better and more attractive place to live, work, visit and play. There have been numerous projects over the years to generally improve the amenities, however the UK as a whole is now in the midst of a new era which will undoubtedly change high streets up and down the country. Covid 19 has unexpectedly changed the way we live and also as a result, our relationship with our local high street and/or town centre. More people are now shopping locally and more people are working from home, which in turn is encouraging them to use their local amenities on a more regular basis. The Grimsey Review advises that high streets need to be re-invented as unique community hubs, designed around health, education, culture, housing, leisure and arts and crafts, along with retail shops. If towns can get it right, consumers should emerge from the pandemic with a stronger sense of community and a desire to support their local town centre. Strong high streets can build communities, keep crime at bay and foster civic pride and togetherness.

A YouGov poll revealed that only 9% of Britons want life to return to “normal” after the coronavirus outbreak is over. The positive from the above is that this is a great time to engage with our local communities and reinvent our town centres while the focus is on them and before things automatically revert to the “old” normal.

The Grimsey Review goes on to advise that for town centres and high streets to thrive and rediscover their community purpose we need to see:

Localism - A massive shift in power to local communities and a renewed focus on localism. Local people must be empowered to redesign their own high streets and have a say on the businesses, services and amenities that occupy it.

Leadership - Local leaders should be valued and recognised. Candidates for leadership roles should be selected for having a broad range of dynamic and collaborative skills in order to get the best out of communities. Local leaders who embrace change and are brave enough to imagine a new world have a better chance of succeeding.

Fewer cars, more green spaces - fewer streets and a huge expansion of green space, parks and town squares. Our towns must no longer be designed around the car as people learn to appreciate the benefit of open spaces.

Other important takeaways from the Grimsey Review that should be considered is the fact that there is a growing view among young adults that businesses need to be accountable to more than their bottom line and for the wellbeing of people and communities. It goes on to confirm that 72% of millennials (aged 24 to 38) would rather spend their money on an experience or an event than buying things and that this is reflected in the shift towards leisure, arts, culture and dining on the high streets. Deloitte’s 2019 Millennial Survey showed that millennials will patronise and support companies that align with their values and make a positive impact on society. Generation Z’s (aged 5 to 23) are also socially focussed with their opinions on companies formed by their ethics, practices and social impact.

The Grimsey Review confirms that town and high street plans should put sustainability and the environment at the heart of everything; should base their development on quality of life and experiences and not blind mass consumerism; should recognise and reward great local leadership; and allow local communities to develop their places to compete for people to live, work, visit and play.

Introduction

Buckhurst Hill is a gorgeous town just south of Loughton. The main shopping centre in Queens Road is slightly off the beaten track and as such would only be visited if you had a specific reason to go there. The town has a great feel, good community spirit, a busy little shopping centre and benefits from 2 London Underground stations. It has 2 community halls, a great deal of outside leisure space and is also on the edge of Epping Forest. Buckhurst Hill has an estimated population of circa 11,380 people (2011) (Source: UK Office for National Statistics) and an average house price of £603,477 (Source: Zoopla).

Queens Road, the main shopping street, stretches for just over half a mile and along its length includes residential, retail, offices and some industrial/business units. The main section of the retail offer is at the bottom, easterly end, of Queens Road. Buckhurst Hill is a fairly affluent area which lends itself nicely to supporting the eclectic array of independent retailers and businesses.

Although the centre has a great deal going for it, it could also do with some love and attention to keep its unique personality, maintain and/or increase its Village like feel and keep itself fresh and relevant for locals and their everyday needs and requirements. In addition, it is felt that by developing its village vibe and encouraging an alfresco and continental feel the area could also become more of a destination which could increase its buzz and in turn provide additional footfall and ultimately trade for the numerous shops and businesses.

Literally just outside London, Buckhurst Hill is a gem and probably one of the best kept secrets within the Epping Forest district. Its support and development are crucial to its continued and future success. The area lends itself nicely to being developed as a proper 20-minute neighbourhood, along much the same lines as Walthamstow Village. It has everything a family needs within a short walk and priority can easily be given to pedestrians and cyclists, particularly at the eastern end of Queens Road.

Buckhurst Hill town centre is already a unique location and would benefit from regeneration with a minimal amount of time, effort and money. It has an active, interested and passionate Parish Council and Residents' Society and on the whole the people who live there love it and would undoubtedly support an improved town centre.

1 Quick Wins

There are a number of matters which could be addressed quickly and cheaply and could make considerable improvements to the centre of Buckhurst Hill:

- *Sweep/clean Queens Road on a regular basis and ensure that litter bins are emptied and litter is cleared from the street/pavement.*
- *Arrange for the clear marking of parking bays along Queens Road – particularly in areas where road improvements/alterations have been made requiring the removal of previous markings.*
- *Arrange for the cleaning/redecoration/repair of all street furniture – lamp posts, bollards, railings, planters, litter bins, benches etc.*
- *Repair/replace broken and/or bent signage.*
- *Replace broken/previously removed bollards.*
- *Replace/re-lay broken and uneven paving along the length of Queen Street, make good lifted areas around tree bases.*
- *Arrange for relaying of road surfaces/filling of potholes along Queen Street, as required.*
- *Re-lay/replace uneven cobbled areas at the bottom of Queen Street, particularly in the loading bay at the junction with Kings Avenue.*
- *Tidy and upkeep green spaces along Queens Road and weed kill as necessary – particularly at the western end of Queens Road and also at the entrance to Andrews Close.*
- *Arrange for regular parking enforcement to combat overstays, double parking, parking on the pavement etc. in Queens Road and also Station Way.*
- *Add dog poo bins at appropriate intervals and further bike hoops as required along length of Queens Road.*
- *Weed kill areas in Station Way, outside the parade of shops and around the station forecourt area.*
- *Make good all broken and uneven paving in front of the shops in Station Way.*
- *Refurbish/replace railings outside shops in Station Way.*
- *Landscape green spaces outside station in Station Way.*
- *Add benches, planters/baskets etc to parade of shops/station entrance in Station Way.*
- *Replace broken bollards and add further bollards as required to area around the station entrance road in Station Way.*

2 Town Management

2.1 Town Centre Leadership

Town centre regeneration is about localism and local leadership and the way to make this work is to provide local leadership with its finger on the pulse and with a connection to the local community. Therefore and accepting that this project is being driven by Epping Forest District Council, it is suggested that buy in, action and leadership should be provided by Buckhurst Hill Parish Council with the support of a Town(s) Centre Manager appointed by the District Council.

All Parish Councillors are local and as a result should be able to bring the local community and businesses together and develop a strong visionary plan to reinforce the distinctive heritage of the town, assist in making the town centre a real community hub and making Buckhurst Hill a far more attractive town for locals and visitors alike. The role of an independent Town Centre Manager will be critical to provide professional expertise and an unbiased view on what is needed locally.

The great thing about Buckhurst Hill is that it already has great community spirit and an extremely active Residents' Society. I am certain that all of these working together with the Parish and District Councils will produce excellent results.

Recommendations:

- 1) Engage with Buckhurst Hill Parish Council (BHPC).***
- 2) Obtain BHPC commitment to the scheme and to providing leadership and support.***
- 3) Work with BHPC and Buckhurst Hill Residents' Society to establish and action a realistic plan.***

2.2 Town(s) Centre Manager

It is suggested that the Council commits to the appointment of a shared Town Centre Manager initially on a two-year fixed term basis. The manager would act as a single point of contact to receive ideas, thoughts and views from local stakeholders and as such, would be known and trusted by businesses, retailers and residents alike. They would work with the Town Council to ensure that standards are adhered to and that the town is as vibrant and attractive to local people and visitors as possible. A review of the post would be undertaken after 12 months to assess progress against the Town Centre action plan and the success of interventions, and extended if necessary.

NB. As a part of their regeneration, Stockton-on-Tees council has pulled together a multi-disciplinary team of market management, street licensing, civil enforcement and business support to manage their town centre. Stockton is a much larger town than Buckhurst Hill, however the principles of hands-on organisation and management are much the same.

Recommendations:

- 4) Write Job profile and agree responsibilities for Town Centre Manager post.***
- 5) Post to be part of EFDC Economic team that reports direct to the Chief Operating Officer.***
- 6) Town Team establishment on a virtual basis, to be priority.***

2.3 Establishment of a Town Team

To achieve the required changes, considerable two-way dialogue needs to be sought from the town's residents and businesses. Buy-in from the community is important to ensure that there is a need or requirement for any proposed changes and that as a result these are carried out with the support of the town. Buckhurst Hill already has an active Residents' Society and there is also a Town Partnership representing the businesses in Queens Road. Although the Town Partnership is not currently very active, it could potentially be revitalised and brought back into life and could be developed to include the retailers in Station Way and Loughton Way. It is thought that these, in conjunction with the Parish Council, could be used as a catalyst for pulling together a formal Town Team.

It is important that the Town Team is made up of a cross section of the community including residents, businesses and retailers. A fair representation of age, sex and race should be included and input should be encouraged from organisations such as educational establishments, religious groups, social groups (e.g. Scouts etc) together with members of the Parish Council and any tourism and visitor groups.

Recommendations:

- 7) Decide with BHPC the make-up of a Town Team and what it will be called.***
- 8) If utilising current Town Forums and Residents' Society, engage with and obtain commitment and support from the Chairmen accordingly.***
- 9) Arrange initial meeting to establish parameters and put in place a plan for Town Team development and action.***

2.4 Attracting New Businesses and Brands

In conjunction with the Town Team, work could be done to identify key brands, businesses and/or other organisations to attract to Buckhurst Hill and then steps taken to secure them. Thought could also be given to approaching landlords of empty units and considering the viability of making them available for short term let - for perhaps pop-up shops, start-up ventures, new/irregular non-high street retailers to test the water for their market and for more experiential and art-based activities including exhibitions, shows, demonstrations etc.

Recommendations:

- 10) Put in place programme to encourage new businesses.***
- 11) Target prospective businesses.***
- 12) Communicate requirements to commercial agents.***
- 13) Consider use of empty units for non-conventional retailing i.e. pop ups, start-ups, experiential etc.***

3 Town Offer

3.1 Queens Road

Queens Road is very much the centre of Buckhurst Hill. It is a lovely road stretching for approximately half a mile and made up of a combination of retail/food and beverage, residential and offices/commercial premises. Although there are shops at various intervals along Queens Road, the main retail section is at the eastern end. Queens Road is the main shopping area in Buckhurst Hill and is also home to a Waitrose and within a short walk, Buckhurst Hill London Underground Station. There are small parades of retail in Station Way and Loughton way, however these are very much convenience type stores with, I would suggest, a very local appeal. The Lower Queens Road also has a very small parade of shops including an extremely popular bike shop.

Buckhurst Hill has a great Village feel to it and to my mind it is important that this village atmosphere is maintained and in fact should be capitalised on. What really makes this place is the combination of uses, its “local” feel and the wide range of retail choice and differentiation. As a fairly affluent area, it is well set to be able to support a range of more upmarket, niche and specialised offers – to some extent this is already demonstrated by the presence of a quality butcher, specialist wine shop, designer clothing retailers, specialist watch shop, speciality coffee shops and now at the western end of Queens Road, a new grocer and deli.

I have some concern that as time goes on some of the lovely period houses in Queens Road will be demolished and replaced with modern blocks of flats and also that retail units may be converted to residential use. This I would suggest should be carefully monitored with steps taken if necessary, to restrict the ability for this type of work to take place if required. Part of the success of Queens Road is its combination of uses. To flood it with increased residential housing and reduced retail will kill off the uniqueness and attractiveness of the shopping area and turn Buckhurst Hill into another bland outer London suburb with insufficient parking.

Like Walthamstow Village, Buckhurst Hill lends itself nicely to becoming a “20-minute neighbourhood” with a real community feel and buzzy and attractive high street. In Buckhurst Hill there are easily accessible facilities for all sections of the community - shopping, education, healthcare, community facilities, recreation and sport - all within a 20 minute journey, either on foot, by cycle or by public transport. The car could really become a second priority and as a result the sense of local community could grow as locals get to know each other and share the benefits of their local neighbourhood and shopping centre.

Recommendations:

- 14) Consideration should be given to how the new local plan can help to protect the makeup and appearance of Queens Road.***
- 15) Consider the restriction of further residential development in Queens Road and protect retail offer from conversion to residential use.***
- 16) Get buy-in from BHPC, Buckhurst Hill Residents’ Society, local residents and businesses to the benefit of formally converting to a “20-minute neighbourhood” and take appropriate action.***

3.2 Retail

The retail offer on Queens Road consists approximately 110 individual shops spread along its half mile length. With the exception of Waitrose, Costa (x2), Prezzo and Ladbrokes, all are independent and offer a varying range of products and services. Queens Road currently has a retail vacancy rate of 5% which is under half of the national average. Hair and beauty take up a massive 21% of the retail units and unusually in the current climate there are 8 independent fashion retailers (7% of the retail units). As would be expected there are no

banks in Buckhurst Hill, however there are 4 post offices – one at either end of Queens Road, one in Station Way by Roding Valley station and one in Loughton Way.

Queens Road has attracted a number of newer niche retailers. These include a nice butcher, a quality wine shop, a trendy florist, speciality watch shop and an upmarket men's fashion retailer to name but a few. These shops have stylish shopfronts, are nicely fitted out and add to Queens Road in terms of both appearance and the quality and speciality of their product and/or service. There is also an emerging coffee culture with a number of trendy coffee shops and cafes. To make more of Buckhurst Hill, add to its buzzy village feel and make it a destination, Queens Road needs to attract more of these types of businesses and the Council needs to support them by ensuring a bright, clean and attractive public realm. It has been suggested that the town is crying out for retailers such as a fishmonger, baker, gift shops, a shoe shop and a hardware store. It was also suggested that the town centre should be home to a plastic free refill shop and also a speciality whole food/organic shop.

I am concerned that with the majority of the retail offer at the eastern end of Queens Road this area receives the majority of the town centre focus. My feeling is that extra effort should be made to include all sections of Queens Road in any initiatives and also in the interests of a single town community that the retailers in Station Way and Loughton Way are also taken into consideration. This whole town approach would mean including all retailers in any Christmas lights and decoration initiatives and also inviting all retailers to be a part of any town centre activities, initiatives, markets etc.

A varying element of high streets is the progression of the weekend and evening economies. We now live in a seven day a week world with extended working hours. Businesses need to adjust to the needs and requirements of their customers and this may now include opening longer/different hours, opening on Sundays etc. The town centre manager could discuss these matters with retailers and see if there is any scope for taking these considerations further with a view to increasing footfall and also, subsequently, trade. At the current time people are tending to shop nearer to home and using their local town centres as opposed to going to the larger out of town shopping centres. With Waitrose as an anchor store, Buckhurst Hill lends itself nicely to this and it is important that retailers also take advantage of it and go that extra mile to ensure a clean, safe and welcoming environment and a comprehensive range of products and services. If customers can see the benefit of shopping locally and enjoy it, they are less likely to change their habits when the pandemic is brought under control.

Recommendations:

- 17) EFDC and BHPC to maintain and increase the attractiveness and draw of the Buckhurst Hill public realm.***
- 18) Town Centre Manager to work with retailers and encourage their attractiveness and viability.***
- 19) Seek the appetite and interest of Station Way and Loughton Way retailers in being included in any town centre initiatives.***

3.3 Pedestrianisation

In the interests of promoting the 20-minute neighbourhood and making Buckhurst Hill town centre a more attractive place to visit, shop and socialise, I would recommend making the eastern end of Queens Road from the junction at Kings Place/Kings Avenue to the junction at Princes Road/Victoria Road, available for pedestrian and cyclist access only between agreed hours – this could be between say 10:00am and 22:00pm, to enable access for deliveries etc. at other times.

The road layout should be redesigned, with parking spaces, kerbs etc. being removed and the area redesigned to provide for further planters, benches and bicycle hoops. A central, clear road way should be left for access purposes.

Recommendations:

20) Takes steps to redesign layout of eastern end of Queens Road and make available for pedestrian and cycle access only between agreed hours.

3.4 Speciality Market

The Grimsey Review highlighted the importance of markets and their positive effect on residents. In a report by the Institute of Place Management (2015) it explained why markets are economically, socially and politically critical for town centres. The report also confirmed that markets can generate footfall increases of circa 25% and have been shown to increase retail sales with market visitors spending money in other shops. The report then goes on to explain that markets provide low barriers to entry and as result can encourage new businesses and nurture retail innovation.

With a view to increasing the viability of Queens Road and again, adding to its village feel it is considered that it would be an ideal venue for a regular, weekend, flower/plant market (or other speciality market). This market could be laid out at the eastern, pedestrianised end of Queens Road and if done properly could become a real destination for locals and visitors alike – similar to the Columbia Road flower market.

Recommendations:

21) Take steps to put on a regular, weekend, flower/plant market and advertise accordingly.

3.5 Library

Buckhurst Hill library is a lovely building sitting in the middle of the shopping area at the western end of Queens Road. I understand that it has been threatened with closure and although currently under reprieve there are various discussions in connection with its possible relocation to another part of the town.

It is considered that in fact, the library should be left exactly where it is and developed to also make it into a Community hub for the town. Redeveloping the library and renovating it to make it fit for modern day should be a priority and consideration should be given to how its uses can be widened to provide a range of community-based uses and activities

Its location at the western end of Queens Road would assist in increasing footfall to that part of town which in turn would assist retailers and other businesses to flourish and also help pull both ends of Queens Road together as more of a cohesive shopping centre.

In addition to the benefits to the community in developing the library and a possible community centre, I am also concerned for the building's fate if it is let go. The site would undoubtedly be developed for residential use and potentially this beautiful, historic arts and crafts building could be lost which would have an immense effect on the characteristics of Buckhurst Hill town centre and Queens Road. For Buckhurst Hill and Queens Road to survive, it needs to maintain its unique and quirky character, its variety of buildings and its mixed-use including community, retail, business and residential uses. Without it, Buckhurst Hill will become just another faceless suburb.

Recommendations:

- 22) Consult with library owners/operators and obtain commitment/make arrangements for its continued use.**
- 23) Carry out required maintenance work and also modifications required to make the building safe and accessible for all users.**

3.6 Community hub

The idea of the “20-minute neighbourhood” is to have a full range of services and facilities within easy reach of each other. This comprises homes, shops, businesses, green spaces, schools, medical centres, play areas etc together with function space within which community events can take place. As discussed above, the library, I feel, would provide an ideal location for a community hub and a space for community events. Utilising the library would also ensure that this lovely building is maintained for the benefit of the community for many years to come.

The community hub could provide for local exhibitions, demonstrations, lectures and talks, social space for mums’ groups, youth activities, perhaps a Police drop in desk, a mini job centre for local employment and as a meeting space for community themed meetings, consultations and discussions. It would be a useful and safe space for older residents and generally aid a stronger sense of community and wellbeing.

The events run at this Community hub would also bring continued footfall to the western end of Queens Road which would in turn benefit retailers and businesses at that end of the road.

Recommendations:

- 24) Review benefits of Community hub and put together program of events.**
- 25) Publicise Community hub and program of events.**

3.7 Tourism/Visitors

Although Buckhurst Hill is not a particular tourist/visitor attraction, it is a lovely town with a real Village feel. If the town centre can be developed to include more niche, exclusive and experiential retailers and also become known for a fantastic flower (or other speciality) market I could see it becoming a destination for visitors, which would of course increase its attractiveness and viability. If the library could also be developed as a Community hub offering a variety of exhibitions, demonstrations and classes, this would add another dimension to the town centre and also encourage people to make more of the western end of Queens Road.

Recommendations:

- 26) Promote Buckhurst Hill as a destination.**
- 27) Develop town offer to make town centre more attractive to visitors**

3.8 Signage

The signage to Buckhurst Hill shops/Queens Road at the junction with High Road should be revised to make it larger and more prominent and also to ensure that it is both clearly legible and not lost in the undergrowth.

Likewise, larger and more prominent signage for Buckhurst Hill shops, parking and the station should also be placed at the junction of Palmerston Road and Victoria Road.

Lower Queens Road, just by the underpass from Queens Road has a small parade of shops, including a popular bike shop and launderette. It is felt that more could be made of these shops if they were clearly signposted from Queens Road – from Waitrose and/or the junction of Queens Road and Victoria Road and at the entrance of the underpass.

Recommendations:

- 28) Review signage to Buckhurst Hill shops/Queens Road from High Road and make more prominent.***
- 29) Review signage at Palmerston Road and make more prominent.***
- 30) Add signage to promote shopping parade on eastern side of the railway.***

3.9 Public Facilities

Buckhurst Hill should be reviewed to ensure that there are the required public facilities. These facilities would include adequate seating for all sections of the community in all areas, open, clean and functional public toilets, adequate lighting at all times across all areas of the town centre, bike racks/hoops in easily accessible places and strategically placed dog poo bins.

Recommendations:

- 31) Review benches and seating in Buckhurst Hill and ensure adequate for the needs of the town.***
- 32) Review bike racks/hoops within the town centre and at other destinations and ensure adequate for the needs of the town.***
- 33) Review dog poo bins in town centre and other areas as appropriate and ensure adequate to the needs of the town.***
- 34) Ensure that all areas of Buckhurst Hill, including car parks, alleyways, underpass etc are adequately lit.***
- 35) Review provision of public toilets and ensure they are adequate for the town.***

3.10 Kings Place Play Area

Kings Place Play Area is the nearest playground to the town centre. Although well positioned in a fairly central location it is restricted by the types of play equipment, to fairly young children. The issue with this is that the park doesn't therefore serve a useful purpose where parents have different age children or where children are slightly older. In the interests of a 20-minute neighbourhood and having all of the facilities required within close and easily accessible proximity, it would be good if the playground could be enlarged and provided with equipment aimed at older age groups.

Recommendations:

- 36) Review Kings Place Play Area, address any maintenance issues and consider increasing the size and equipment range to cover a wider range of age groups.***

3.11 Wi-fi and Digital Presence

The digital age and the need for connectivity is increasingly important for numerous sections of the community. As a result I would suggest free wi-fi availability on Queens Road.

It should be acknowledged that people are now shopping differently and that circa 30% of retail sales are being done online (Office of National Statistics, Aug 2020). This figure is up from 21.9% at the beginning of March 2020 and the beginning of the Covid 19 lock down. Regardless of the pandemic, online sales will continue to grow, and retail experts KPMG predicts the figure rising to 50% by 2025. As a result, retail businesses need to adjust their business models accordingly and develop their offer for both markets.

As a part of adding a wi-fi option to the town centre a social media presence should be developed enabling online and offline businesses. Mobile technologies and virtual shopping should be used to enhance the consumer town centre experience and in turn increase footfall.

Consideration should be given to bringing in a third-party contractor such as Click It Local or Maybe (www.maybetech.com) to develop online, social media/town centre/retailer collaboration.

I understand that there is a Buckhurst Hill website being developed – this would assist in the visibility of Buckhurst Hill and it is important that all retailers are represented.

Recommendations:

- 37) Put in place free WIFI within Queens Road and publicise.**
- 38) Consider benefits of Click It Local scheme. Secure and promote accordingly.**
- 39) Agree way forward in respect of Social Media strategy/presence and execute accordingly.**
- 40) Arrange for assistance and support for retailers in establishing an online presence.**

4 Appearance

As previously stated, Buckhurst Hill is a hidden gem. It has a lovely Village feel, a close local community and appears to have the genuine love of everyone who lives and works there. Queens Road is very attractive and has an unusual split of retail, residential and other business use. Having said this, it could do with some attention to maintain its attractiveness and also its continued appeal.

Maintaining and increasing the attractiveness of the public realm makes a massive difference to a town centre. It encourages people to visit and also increases their dwell time, which in turn benefits the local shops and businesses. Making a town into something that residents can be proud of and somewhere they are pleased to be seen increases their loyalty and encourages support and engagement.

4.1 General Maintenance and refurbishment

The majority of the general maintenance issues are covered in the Quick Wins earlier in this report.

Recommendations:

- 41) Review Quick Wins and arrange for work to be completed.**

4.2 Shop Fronts

The uniformity of shops fronts along a retail centre can markedly increase the attractiveness of the road and also increase the attractiveness and t draw to individual stores. Although some shops in Queens Road are attractive and in good repair, there are also a large number which require redecoration and/or complete refit. Although this type of work is generally the responsibility of the landlord and/or the leaseholder I feel that it would be a real benefit to Buckhurst Hill if shopfronts were standardised and in keeping with the general feel of the town. To do this would undoubtedly assist the retailers in attracting business, increase the attractiveness of the public realm and improve the town centre for everyone's benefit.

It would be good to agree a uniform approach to shop front and signage presentation along Queens Road and ensuring this is adhered to. Failing that, careful consideration should be given by the Council in allowing changes to shop fronts and/or shop signage and in ensuring that any proposals are in keeping with the area. Perhaps to promote this, consideration could be given to providing some form of incentive or match funding scheme to assist retailers in the cost of refitting their shop fronts.

Recommendations:

- 42) Consult with BHPC, Town Partnership and retailers to consider options in respect of shop fronts and making/keeping them attractive and in the overall style of Queens Road.**
- 43) Consider uniform scheme and approach to the design and style of town centre shop fronts and signage.**
- 44) Consider incentive/match funding scheme to encourage updating of existing shop fronts and signage.**

4.3 A-Boards and other retail paraphernalia

A number of retailers have A-boards and other retail paraphernalia, external trading/retail displays on the pavement outside their shops. Although I understand the need for this, if not carefully managed these can block access and generally make the place look untidy. Street trading licences should provide for these and lay out the conditions and spaces for use – the Council should monitor this and ensure that all conditions are being complied with, particularly to ensure that Queens Road remains as attractive and accessible as possible.

Considerations should be given to some form of demarcation outside each store over which seating, A-boards and other retail paraphernalia, if allowed, cannot overstep.

Recommendations:

- 45) Review town centre policy and regulations for trading from the front of premises, retail displays and A-boards on the pavement and enforce accordingly.**

4.4 Bin Collections

Council should ensure that all businesses have the required trade waste licences and that these bins are emptied as required. It is not acceptable for retail and commercial properties to leave their bins and accumulated rubbish on pavement areas between collections.

Recommendations:

46) Ensure businesses have the required trade waste agreements.

47) Ensure pavement areas are clear of accumulated rubbish and bins.

4.5 Station Way

Although the shops in Station Way are a small parade, they play an important role in the local community and also no doubt for commuters using the station. The public realm around the station and these shops does however feel a little run down and appears to be an unremembered and unimportant part of Buckhurst Hill, which is a shame. Although there are yellow lines and marked parking spaces, cars park everywhere here including on the pavement. This is reducing and impeding pedestrian access and also making the whole area look unattractive and more like a car park.

My view is that this part of Buckhurst Hill needs to be brought up to date and given a new lease of life. This would be of great benefit to both shopkeepers and local residents.

Most of my suggested works are listed in the Quick Wins section above, however I would recommend that the Town Team, when formed, consider the role of this part of the town and actions taken to enhance it.

Recommendations:

48) Review Station Way shopping parade and station entrance and put in place plans to enhance the area and increase its appearance and attraction.

4.6 Trees and Planters

Tree lined pedestrian routes and landscaped areas all contribute to civic pride and generally make a town more attractive. There are a number of trees and planters along the shopping sections of Queens Road, however I feel these should be reviewed and increased as required. Particular attention should be given to the very eastern end of Queens Road, running up to the railway which is particularly characterless and also various other parts of Queens Road running all the way to the top, perhaps in locations where the pavement widens and/or where further bollards may otherwise have been considered. The addition of a 20-minute neighbourhood style pedestrianised area at the eastern end of Queens Road (as mentioned above) would also have a requirement to increase the planting to make the area softer and more attractive.

I understand that there is currently an arrangement with retailers to water and generally look after planters outside their shops. If the provision of planters etc is going to be extended consideration should be given to whether this should continue and/or Council landscape teams should take this over.

As mentioned elsewhere in this report, the green space outside the entrance to the station in Station Way needs tidying up and could be made to look particularly attractive with some form of planting considered along the two parades of shops in Station Way.

Recommendations:

- 49) Review current “green” townscape and work to develop and improve.**
- 50) Increase numbers of planters/hanging baskets etc along Queens Road.**
- 51) Review current arrangements with retailers in respect of watering etc and see if and/or how this arrangement should be amended.**
- 52) Review green space outside station in Station Way and make plans to landscape and add planters/baskets etc along parade of shops in Station Way.**

5 Access

Town centres need to recognise that Co2 emissions have to be reduced and as a result there is much more emphasis on ensuring a reduced reliance on cars. To this end, town centres need to ensure their accessibility via other methods of transport and provide for these methods accordingly. In addition to reducing carbon emissions this will also encourage the use of the town centre by a wider range of the community via various methods of transport.

Simply stopping car access and reducing or taking away parking spaces, doesn't resolve this problem. Undoubtedly people will still want to access Buckhurst Hill town centre by car however there is a balance between encouraging pedestrian, cycling and public transport access and then gradually reducing provision for motor vehicles as other methods of travel develop and gain traction.

For generations urban areas have been designed exclusively around the car. This now has to change and town centres developed to provide attractive, walkable and cyclable physical space.

5.1 Junction of Queens Road and Princes Road (Western End)

Princes Road has been made one way and exits from a wide junction at the western end on to Queens Road. I have been advised that a large number of people ignore the one-way system and drive the wrong way down Princes Road to access properties at the western end and the various closes off of Princes Road – saving them the time of driving through and round the town centre. This clearly is dangerous for pedestrians and other road users who think it's a one-way street and are only expecting traffic coming from the eastern end.

Firstly, consideration should be given to the appropriateness of this road remaining one way. On the basis that the one-way system remains, I would recommend that the junction at the eastern end is reduced in size to one single lane and that the space taken is used to extend the pavement areas. This extended pedestrian area could be planted out, provide additional benches and also a street trading space for the restaurant and other retailers adjacent to it. This provision would make Princes Road very much one-way whilst also adding to the public realm and increasing the attractiveness of the eastern end of Queens Road.

Recommendations:

- 53) Review viability of one-way system in Princes Road.**
- 54) Consider extending the pavement at the junction of the western end of Princes Road and Queens Road, thus reducing the exit from Princes Road to a single one-way lane.**
- 55) Arrange for benches and planting to extended pavement space and allow street trading for adjoining restaurants and retailers.**

5.2 Speeding in Queens Road

It is understood that a number of cars travelling down Queens Road, do so at considerable speed. This clearly presents a safety issue for all other road users. I am not a great fan of speed humps/sleeping policeman due to the noise they cause, the damage they can cause to some vehicles and also as a result of their general need for upkeep. Queens Road at certain points is wide enough to accommodate chicanes to slow the traffic down. These chicanes could initially be put in on a temporary basis to test their effectiveness perhaps by using substantially sized planters.

Recommendations:

56) Consider using chicanes as an aid to slowing down the traffic in Queens Road. Temporary chicanes could be constructed using large planters and placed at appropriate intervals.

5.3 Cycling

Cycling is increasingly being promoted and encouraged and it is important that all residents of a town should be able to access the town centre, the town's various green and public spaces, leisure centre and attractions easily and safely by bike. In addition, the town should also provide for cycle racks/hoops at the various destinations to enable the bikes to be safely secured.

My feeling in Buckhurst Hill is that the majority of roads are fairly quiet and that as a result there is minimal need for dedicated cycling lanes. Having said this, a detailed review should be carried out to confirm the same and on roads or routes where traffic is busy and/or congested provision for safe and secure cycle lanes should be made.

Recommendations:

57) Review cycling accessibility in Buckhurst Hill particularly around main roads and make arrangements for the provision of safe, secure and clearly marked cycle paths and routes.

5.4 Buses

Buckhurst Hill has bus routes running along High Road, Palmerston Road and on the eastern side of the railway in Buckhurst Way/Albert Road/Loughton Way with all routes stopping at Buckhurst Hill Station. There aren't any buses that run through the town centre, although the walk from Buckhurst Hill station to Queens Road is less than 5 minutes. This lack of town centre transport could put some sections of the community off accessing Queens Road and its amenities. With this in mind, consideration should be given to either extending existing bus routes, perhaps to the Queens Road car park (lower) or alternatively providing some form of local round trip mini bus service covering the whole length of Queens Road.

Recommendations:

58) Consider public transport connection to Queens Road and weigh up local need for extending existing bus services or putting on an alternative option.

5.5 Trains

Buckhurst Hill and Roding Valley London Underground stations provide regular commuter and other services in and out of London and assist in making Buckhurst Hill a popular commuter town.

5.6 Car Parks and Parking

Parking is potentially an issue in Buckhurst Hill, particularly for residents. From what I understand more resident parking permits have been issued than there are resident parking spaces. I'm not sure what the answer is to this and how it could be addressed. I do know however that if more flats are built and houses are allowed to be extended and considerably increased in size then in the current climate the numbers of resident owned cars in Buckhurst Hill will continue to increase, as will the parking issue.

Consultation could be used to seek opinions of residents on remote parking. Consideration could then be given to providing residents' only spaces in the Queens Road south car park and, if necessary, extending the car park/making it a 2-storey car park.

Clearly if the town centre is going to become more of a destination an increased number of visitor spaces will also be required.

All new parking should include provision of electric charging points.

Recommendations:

- 59) Consult with BHPC, BHRS, residents and businesses on parking requirements and provision of remote resident parking.***
- 60) Review usage of Queens Road south car park and consider provision of a number of residents' only spaces.***
- 61) Consider the alteration of Queens Road south car park to make more spaces or make 2- storey, depending on previous considerations.***

6.1 Market Research

In addition to the thoughts and expertise of the author, consultation for this report has been obtained from the following:

Epping Forest District Council
Buckhurst Hill Parish Council
Buckhurst Hill Residents' Society
Buckhurst Hill Town Partnership
Various councillors and other prominent/influential Buckhurst Hill residents
Various Buckhurst Hill retailers
Various Buckhurst Hill residents

It is accepted that additional research will be required from residents, retailers and businesses to move the ideas in this report forward. It is felt however that if the initiative is going to be Community/Parish Council driven then the research should be carried out more locally.

7. Sources of Additional Support

High Streets Task Force (www.highstreettaskforce.org.uk) – supporting communities and local government to transform their high streets.

Click It Local (www.clickitlocal.co.uk) – online shopping/delivery service

Maybe (www.maybetech.com) – A smarter approach to social media

Action List

Priority

<i>EFDC/Highway Rangers to complete “quick wins”</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Appoint Town Centre Manager</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Discuss and establish Town Leadership Team - form Town Team and/or refocus Town Centre Partnership</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Complete research on thoughts and considerations of residents and businesses – incorporate and implement where appropriate</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Take steps to protect make up and appearance of Queens Road, particularly from residential development</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Discuss vision for Queens Road and target new and specific retailers and businesses</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Review the “green” street scene and public realm on Queens Road, consider the addition of planters etc and action accordingly</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Consider reducing western end of Princes Road to a single lane, extending the pavement areas and landscaping accordingly</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Carry out all general maintenance/refurbishment recommendations</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Consult on feasibility of keeping Queens Road Library, carrying out maintenance and renovation works and also turning it into a community hub</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Establish Community hub and put together a program of initiatives and events</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Take steps to form BH as a 20-minute neighbourhood and action accordingly</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Plan revised, pedestrian layout for Lower Queens Road</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Establish regular speciality flower market and publicise</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Consider use of planter chicanes in Queens Road to slow down the traffic</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Consider options in respect of the style and general appearance of shopfronts and consider schemes to encourage retailers/landlords to u date their shops</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Talk to retailers re shop fronts, A-boards, pavement trading etc</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Review signage to Buckhurst Hill shops from High Road and Palmerston Road</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Put in place signage from Queens Road to shops in Lower Queens Road</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Review provision of public facilities within town centre, including seating, bike racks/hoops, dog poo bins, toilets, lighting of public areas etc and act on findings</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Develop town offer to make BH more of a destination</i>	<i>3</i>

<i>Review trade waste licenses and ensure public areas are clear of accumulated rubbish</i>	2
<i>Review retailers in Station Way and Loughton Way and see how they can be included in town plan and town initiatives</i>	2
<i>Review town WIFI proposal and put in place accordingly</i>	2
<i>Develop town centre social media on line presence</i>	2
<i>Review parking arrangements and consider options for increasing resident parking</i>	3
<i>EFDC and BHPC to consider improvements to the public realm in Station Way shopping parade and put in place a suitable improvement plan.</i>	2
<i>Review Kings Place Play Area and consider plans to extend the size and increase the equipment for older age groups</i>	2
<i>Review cycling accessibility in BH and ensure suitable to the needs of the community</i>	2
<i>Review bus/public transport connection to Queens Road and ensure that it is adequate. Consider extending existing bus routes from BH Station or adding alternative town centre shuttle</i>	3

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To note: Epping

The attached report has been commissioned by EFDC Officer from a specialist external consultant.

Work on this report was carried out between December 2020 and April 2021 so some of the observations may refer to issues and conditions that existed at that time and may have been subsequently addressed.

The report is often linked with development proposals focused on the immediate actions required to improve the town centres. Further reports will be brought forward, often associated with more significant investment and development to cover the medium and long-term improvement of the town centres.

The immediate resources required to address priority town centre issues were identified in the EFDC 2021/22 Budget or will be supported by specific Covid 19 recovery grants made available by the Government.

It is intended as with the Waltham Abbey and Ongar town centre reports, that all approved recommendations will be project managed in detail, assigned to managers, given timelines, supported by identified resources and their delivery and impact monitored.

The reports have been produced after extensive consultation. This consultation with local members and other key partners will continue.

Although not specifically mentioned in this report, work on the ground will be linked with other initiatives such as sustainable transport with sub projects of demand responsive transport, cycling routes, electric car charging points and various greening and tree planting initiatives being taken forward as per our Green Infra-structure Policy and climate change action plan.

Draft

Epping

Regeneration Study and Proposals

“The most successful high streets and town centres will need to change to reflect the communities they serve by transforming themselves into community hubs, playing to their strengths of offering human interaction and a unique sense of place and community”

HM Government response to an enquiry into High streets and Town centres in 2030 (presented to Parliament in 2019)



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Date: 31 March 2021



AUTHORS NOTE:

The contents of this report and the recommendations made are based on Studio 3 Ltd's view of the town centre as a whole and the actions which should be taken to regenerate the towns and increase their general attractiveness to residents, visitors and businesses. Absolutely no consideration has been given as to whether the suggested actions and/or any related costs are the responsibility of the County, District, Town/Parish Councils or any other body.

What is crucial is that the different Councils, Town Partnerships, businesses and residents come together to agree priorities and for each organisation to put in place the necessary actions within their remit/responsibility to make the required improvements.

The regeneration of our town centres is the responsibility of all stakeholders. Key to these changes are the businesses, residents and Town/Parish Councils themselves. They are closest to the town and really know and understand the town and the needs and requirements of the local community. Their counsel and guidance should both therefore be provided and encouraged at all times.

The reinvention of our town centres will only be achieved by a joint and collaborative approach utilising the knowledge, expertise and skills of a range of people, bodies and organisations. No single person or organisation can achieve this on their own and everyone has their own specific part to play. It is essential that any plans have the buy in of all connected persons and that all parties support each other through the process.

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Foreword

Epping Forest District Council is reviewing a number of its Town centres with the objective of regenerating them and making them a better and more attractive place to live, work, visit and play. There have been numerous projects over the years to generally improve the amenities, however the UK as a whole is now in the midst of a new era which will undoubtedly change high streets up and down the country. Covid 19 has unexpectedly changed the way we live and also as a result, our relationship with our local High street and/or Town centre. More people are now shopping locally and more people are working from home, which in turn is encouraging them to use their local amenities on a more regular basis. The Grimsey Review advises that High streets need to be re-invented as unique Community hubs, designed around health, education, culture, housing, leisure and arts and crafts, along with retail shops. If towns can get it right, consumers should emerge from the pandemic with a stronger sense of community and a desire to support their local Town centre. Strong High streets can build communities, keep crime at bay and foster civic pride and togetherness.

A YouGov poll revealed that only 9% of Britons want life to return to “normal” after the coronavirus outbreak is over. The positive from the above is that this is a great time to engage with our local communities and reinvent our Town centres while the focus is on them and before things automatically revert to the “old” normal.

The Grimsey Review goes on to advise that for Town centres and High streets to thrive and rediscover their community purpose we need to see:

Localism - A massive shift in power to local communities and a renewed focus on localism. Local people must be empowered to redesign their own High streets and have a say on the businesses, services and amenities that occupy it.

Leadership - Local leaders should be valued and recognised. Candidates for leadership roles should be selected for having a broad range of dynamic and collaborative skills in order to get the best out of communities. Local leaders who embrace change and are brave enough to imagine a new world have a better chance of succeeding.

Fewer cars, more green spaces - fewer streets and a huge expansion of green space, parks and town squares. Our towns must no longer be designed around the car as people learn to appreciate the benefit of open spaces.

Other important takeaways from the Grimsey Review that should be considered is the fact that there is a growing view among young adults that businesses need to be accountable to more than their bottom line and for the wellbeing of people and communities. It goes on to confirm that 72% of millennials (aged 24 to 38) would rather spend their money on an experience or an event than buying things and that this is reflected in the shift towards leisure, arts, culture and dining on the High streets. Deloitte’s 2019 Millennial Survey showed that millennials will patronise and support companies that align with their values and make a positive impact on society. Generation Z’s (aged 5 to 23) are also socially focussed with their opinions on companies formed by their ethics, practices and social impact.

The Grimsey Review confirms that town and High street plans should put sustainability and the environment at the heart of everything; should base their development on quality of life and experiences and not blind mass consumerism; should recognise and reward great local leadership; and allow local communities to develop their places to compete for people to live, work, visit and play.

Introduction

Epping is a busy, bustling, historic market town with a number of listed buildings, situated to the north of Epping Forest and completely surrounded by countryside. It is nestled just north of the M25, west of the M11 and a 40-minute London Underground Central line journey from London's Liverpool Street. Although a relatively small town with a population of 11,461 (Source Office of National Statistics 2016) it has a large central High street and in addition to serving the community of Epping is also a main shopping area and Town centre for a number of nearby villages. Epping is a fairly affluent area, it has an average property price of £622,458 (Source: Zoopla March 2021), but is also surrounded by a number of multi- million-pound properties. Although not the largest, Epping is an important town within the Epping Forest district. It has real character and historical interest and it is important that work is done to ensure the town maintains its position and attractiveness.

I am pleasantly surprised by Epping. It has a great feel to it, a real sense of community and a wide range of shops and businesses. As a result of Covid, more people have been working from home and I think this can be seen in Epping as even with Covid restrictions the High street is fairly busy. This is undoubtedly assisted by having a Tesco and Marks and Spencer Simply Food in the town centre, which encourages people to use other Town centre facilities at the same time. This I think reinforces the importance of anchor retailers in Town centres and highlights the disadvantages of allowing supermarkets to build in remote, out of Town centre locations.

There are a number of exciting developments proposed within the town centre which I feel will help to rejuvenate the town and keep it relevant and up to date. Having said this I am pleased to see that they have been planned in an area just off of the High street which will mean that they don't take away from the historic Town centre and as a result should maintain the town's character whilst adding new life and vibrancy.

Interestingly, Epping town centre has almost as many shops in it as Loughton High Road, yet with a population of about a third of Loughton. In the current climate, much the same as Loughton, this concerns me. Epping still has three banks and a number of branded retailers and restaurants. This I suspect could change in the near future as banks and brands withdraw from the smaller High streets and resulting in lesser attraction for consumers to the Town centre. This however will in some way be countered by the building of a new leisure centre and also a retail and cinema complex in the Town centre, which will hopefully maintain footfall.

I think the future for Epping is bright but the town shouldn't be complacent. The town centre needs to be worked on to ensure its continued vibrancy, life and attractiveness. It also needs to ensure its retail offer remains suitable to the wide needs of the community and also to the visitor economy. The town has residents which appreciate and love where they live, active town teams such as Epping in Bloom and a passionate and engaged Town Council – all of which want to improve the Town centre and make Epping a better place to live, work and play.

1 Quick Wins

There are a number of matters which could be addressed quickly and cheaply and could make considerable improvements to the centre of Epping:

- ***Sweep/clean the High street on a regular basis and ensure that litter bins are emptied and litter is cleared from the street/pavement.***
- ***Decide whether adjustments to the public realm as a result of Covid considerations should be made more permanent and action asap. This is now being actioned.***
- ***Plastic barriers, cones etc need to be removed to increase the attractiveness of the public realm this relates to both High street and the junction of High street and Station Road. This is now being actioned.***
- ***Remove all unnecessary temporary signage – which again makes the public realm look untidy.***
- ***Arrange for the cleaning/redecoration/repair/replacement of all street furniture – lamp posts, bollards, railings, planters, litter bins, benches etc.***
- ***Add further benches and bike hoops along High street to meet the needs of all sections of the community.***
- ***Add dog poo bins at suitable intervals.***
- ***Review planting in public realm and add planters/hanging baskets etc as appropriate along the length of the High street.***
- ***Consider additional heritage type signage from the station to Epping Forest, to the Town centre, to The Epping Way and also town entrance signs welcoming people to Epping.***

2 Town Management

2.1 Town centre Leadership

Town centre regeneration is about localism and local leadership and the way to make this work is to provide local leadership with its finger on the pulse and with a connection to the local community. Therefore and accepting that this project is being driven by Epping Forest District Council, it is suggested that buy-in, action and leadership should be provided by Epping Town Council with the support of a Town(s) Centre Manager appointed by the District Council.

All Town Councillors are local and as a result should be able to bring the local community and businesses together and develop a strong visionary plan to reinforce the distinctive heritage of the town, assist in making the Town centre a real community hub and making Epping a far more attractive town for locals and visitors alike. The role of an independent Town centre Manager will be critical to provide professional expertise and an unbiased view on what is needed locally.

Epping already has a strong local community, great community spirit and an active and motivated Town Council. I am certain that these working together with the District Council will produce excellent results.

Recommendations:

- 1) Engage with Epping Town Council (ETC) and the town centre partnership.***
- 2) Obtain ETC commitment to the scheme and to providing leadership and support.***
- 3) Work with ETC to establish and action a realistic plan.***

2.2 Town(s) Centre Manager

It is suggested that the Council commits to the appointment of a shared Town Centre Manager. The manager would act as a single point of contact to receive ideas, thoughts and views from local stakeholders and as such, would be known and trusted by businesses, retailers and residents alike. They would work with the Town Council to ensure that standards are adhered to and that the town is as vibrant and attractive to local people and visitors as possible. A review of the post would be undertaken after 12 months to assess progress against the Town centre action plan and the success of interventions and extended if necessary.

NB. As a part of its regeneration, Stockton-on-Tees council pulled together a multi-disciplinary team of market management, street licensing, civil enforcement and business support to manage their Town centre. Stockton is a much larger town than Epping, however the principles of hands on organisation and management are much the same.

Recommendations:

- 4) Write Job profile and agree responsibilities for Town centre Manager post.***
- 5) Post to be part of EFDC's Economic team within Strategic Planning Directorate.***
- 6) Town Team establishment to be priority.***

2.3 Establishment of a Town Team

To achieve the required changes, considerable two-way dialogue needs to be sought from the town's residents and businesses. Buy-in from the community is important to ensure that there is a need or requirement for any proposed changes and that as a result these are carried out with the support of the town. Epping has an active Town Council and also a Town Partnership representing the businesses in the town. It is thought that these, in conjunction with the District Council, could be used as a catalyst for pulling together a formal Town Team.

It is important that the Town Team is made up of a cross section of the community including residents, businesses and retailers. A fair representation of age, sex and race should be included and input should be encouraged from organisations such as educational establishments, religious groups, social groups (e.g. Scouts etc) together with members of the Town Council and any tourism and visitor groups.

Recommendations:

- 7) Decide with ETC the make up of a Town Team and what it will be called.***
- 8) If utilising current Town Partnership, engage with and obtain commitment and support from the Chairman accordingly.***
- 9) Arrange initial meeting to establish parameters and put in place a plan for Town Team development and action.***

2.4 Epping Town Partnership

Epping has a Town Partnership which has been established for a number of years. It has in the past run a number of successful Town centre events and was particularly active in Town centre initiatives and activities. In more recent times and also due to Covid, it's activity level has reduced.

Having spoken to the Chairman, she can clearly see the benefit to both the traders and the town of having a successful Town Partnership and would be happy with support from the Town and District Councils to reform and revitalise it.

Recommendations:

- 10) Town centre Manager to work with Town centre Partnership to reform and re-establish the organisation.***

2.5 Attracting New Businesses and Brands

In conjunction with the Town Team, work could be done to identify key brands, businesses and/or other organisations to attract to Epping and then steps taken to secure them. Thought could also be given to approaching landlords of empty units and considering the viability of making them available for short term let - for perhaps pop-up shops, start-up ventures, new/irregular non-High street retailers to test the water for their market and for more experiential and art-based activities including exhibitions, shows, demonstrations etc.

Recommendations:

- 11) Put in place programme to encourage new businesses.**
- 12) Target prospective businesses.**
- 13) Communicate requirements to commercial agents.**
- 14) Consider use of empty units for non-conventional retailing i.e. pop-ups, start-ups, experiential etc.**

3 Town Offer

3.1 High street

The high street in Epping is central to the town with the main high street and shopping area extending for approximately half a mile. Its central location makes it accessible for residents from the majority of the town and also potentially reduces and/or removes the need for residents to have to drive. The town is made up of a selection of buildings from various eras. Some are older historic and listed buildings whereas others are much more modern. They come together to form a somewhat disjointed yet somehow charming Town centre.

Epping High Street is a busy mixed-use centre with a variety of retailers, restaurants and cafes and numerous businesses above and behind the shops. The town benefits tremendously from supermarket anchors, Tesco and M&S Simply Food within the town centre. These will undoubtedly aid footfall to the remaining retailers as will the central position of offices and other businesses.

There is a great community feel to Epping and it seems everyone has a vested interest in maintaining its viability and ensuring its continued and future success. It's a nice town to live in and a town to be proud of. There will be changes as the town develops and the retail element will go through some transition as a result of changing shopping habits and consumer needs, however I am certain that with careful management Epping will thrive and maintain its position as an attractive and sought-after town.

3.2 Retail

The retail offer on Epping High street consists of approximately 160 individual shops spread along its half a mile length. In addition to the anchor supermarkets of Tesco and M&S Simply Food, there is a Next and a FatFace, three banks and a few branded restaurants amongst the 24 available (14%). As is normal in this day and age the other larger supplier on the High street is hair and beauty providers. These account for 19 units or 12% of the high street. Currently there are 16 empty units which equates to a 10% vacancy rate. This is slightly lower than the national average.

As stated elsewhere in this report, the viability of Epping Town centre is supported tremendously by the central location of Tesco and even better location wise, M&S Simply Food. For consumers using these retailers, it is very easy and convenient for them to avail themselves of the products and services of other retailers in the High street and/or to meet friends for a coffee/lunch etc at the same time.

Within the main body of the High street there is a good mix of retailers, however there is little which would differentiate Epping High street from other High streets and therefore make the town more of a destination. There are some more unusual upmarket retailers, such as Coles Fine Clothing for Men, Roy Cain Tailoring and Church's Butchers. These niche and quality retailers can really differentiate a High street and providing there is enough of them, can replace the need for branded/chain stores to attract footfall and keep the town busy. The same goes for restaurants and coffee shops.

There are some trendy and upmarket outlets, such as the Roza restaurant and Fred and Dougs coffee shop and popular niche restaurants such as Harry's Pie and Mash and although not currently in a permanent shop,

the Brick Lane Bagel Company. These are however few and far between. To keep the town viable and relevant it is important that the town does what it can to attract more of these types of brands and build a reputation for a wide selection of quality, independent and niche shops, bars, coffee shops and restaurants.

Undoubtedly as the digital age changes the way we shop and banks and branded chains are withdrawing from smaller high streets, it is important that the High street adjusts to meet the needs and requirements of its shoppers. High streets now need to be more experiential, more social and more of a community hub and in support, they need to have retailers offering unique products, services and possibly more important, experiences, together with a selection of hospitality options providing a range of relaxed and comfortable environments. Retailers may also have to review their operating times to suit their customers – this could mean evening and weekend opening and perhaps longer operating hours.

Epping High street will undoubtedly change and I suspect, lose a large amount of its shops. I think that it is important to recognise this and also to identify and protect the retail heart of the town – which in my mind runs from St Johns Church northwards towards the Council offices. If retail units become empty and are not let they can easily transfer to residential use. This can fragment a High street the size of Epping and I feel, unless the retail centre is protected, will take away from its unique character.

Recommendations:

- 15) Identify retail centre of the town and consider taking steps to protect from conversion to residential use.**
- 16) EFDC and ETC to maintain and increase attractiveness and draw of Epping Town centre public realm.**
- 17) Town centre Manager with support of Town centre Partnership to discuss needs of the town with retailers and seek views on needs and requirements to maintain retail viability.**
- 18) Build wish list of new Town centre retailers and pursue.**

3.3 New Developments

The proposed development of the Cottis Lane and Bakers Lane car parks is seen as being a real positive addition to the town. The biggest and most attractive element of these developments is the fact that they are situated right in the heart of the Town centre, providing easy access to the high street. This will encourage town centre usage and will benefit the retail centre and its shops, restaurants and bars as a whole.

The developments will also bring more visitors to the town to avail themselves of the new facilities. The big draws will be the new leisure centre and particularly the swimming pool in Bakers Lane and the addition of a cinema in the Cottis Lane development. It is worth highlighting that it has been suggested to me by various Epping residents that an “Everyman” type cinema and environment would attract a wider section of the community than a normal cinema. This I think I would agree with as it would make trips to the cinema more of an occasion and encourage shopping and other hospitality prior to and following the film. I am comforted that there aren’t too many additional retail outlets within the new development and that the High street will remain the substantial draw for the retail offer.

Once the developments are complete and particularly the Cottis Lane development it will be important that the standard of the public realm connecting with the development and running into the high street is brought up to the same standard. This will ensure connection and flow and tie the High street into the development making it feel like a single and continuous space.

I see that the proposed St John Road, Hemnall Street and Condor building residential developments are also a big positive for the town. They will bring new life to Epping, increase the mix of residents and will hopefully bring a new and perhaps younger dynamic, which again should encourage and drive retailers and assist greatly in the continued success of the town.

It has been suggested that there is no playground space in and around Epping Town Centre. This would be a great addition to the new development and provide an additional attraction for younger families to the high street. Additionally, I would recommend ensuring adequate bike parking facilities in the Bakers Lane and Cottis Lane developments, bike storage facilities in the residential developments and provision of dog poo bins across all areas.

Recommendations:

- 19) Review plans for the new Town centre developments and consider adding a children's play area.**
- 20) Ensure that plans are made to refurb the High street to the same standard as the new development, tying in the High street so it flows and feels like a single space.**
- 21) Ensure adequate bike parking/bike storage facilities across all developments**
- 22) Ensure addition of dog poo bins across all areas.**
- 23) If not done already considered make the cinema an "Everyman" type concept.**

3.4 Market

The Grimsey Review highlighted the importance of markets and their positive effect on residents. In a report by the Institute of Place Management (2015) it explained why markets are economically, socially and politically critical for Town centres. The report also confirmed that markets can generate footfall increases of circa 25% and have been shown to increase retail sales with market visitors spending money in other shops. The report then goes on to explain that markets provide low barriers to entry and as result can encourage new businesses and nurture retail innovation.

The Town Council has been working hard to maintain the Town's Charter market on Mondays. It is trying to keep the market more traditional with a wide range of stalls selling a selection of goods. It has also worked to change the style of the stalls, moving away from the old metal frames to more modern gazebo type stalls, making the market look more attractive and also taking less time to set up and break down. Although the market continues it is not the size, nor as vibrant as it has been in the past. This appears to be a common problem across the district and I feel needs further consideration and attention.

The addition of speciality markets on perhaps a monthly basis at weekends would add greatly to the towns ambience and increase the attractiveness of the town for both residents and visitors alike.

Recommendations:

- 24) Town centre Manager to work with ETC to review the current market and take steps to develop.**
- 25) Consider addition of weekend speciality markets and take steps to secure.**
- 26) Town centre Manager to review markets district-wide and look for a revised approach to their operation, also taking the specific opportunity offered by the regional market at North Weald Airfield.**

3.5 Library

The library continues to play an important part of local Town centres. Epping is no exception. As a part of the redevelopment plans, it is intended that the library be kept, but potentially relocated to an alternative location. The options are under consideration.

If it is intended to emphasise the community hub aspects and if relocation occurs, ensure it is located in building that provides space and support for a variety of community hub activities, such as those envisaged for the Waltham Abbey Community Hub development

Recommendations:

27) EFDC/ETC to consult on space requirements and needs of a new library and work to secure a suitable location.

28) Consideration should be given to establishing the library as a Community hub and provision made for this accordingly.

3.6 Community hub

A town centre community hub would provide a central location specifically designed to provide a range of services for residents and businesses. It could include such things as a mini job centre for local employment opportunities, a Police helpdesk, town centre information point and a place where locals could come to discuss and highlight issues, concerns or thoughts they may have. The community hub could provide space for local exhibitions, culture/arts, demonstrations, lectures and talks, social space for mums groups, youth activities and as a meeting space for community themed meetings, consultations and discussions. It would be a useful and safe space for older residents and generally aid a stronger sense of community and wellbeing.

A logical home for a community hub would be a colocation with library, voluntary and other public service bodies, e.g. The Civic Building. The events run at the community hub would bring continued footfall which, providing it was positioned in the town centre, would in turn benefit local retailers and businesses. It is noted that the Town Council operate a number of facilities for community use and due consideration should be given to the option of using these as well.

Recommendations:

29) Continue with the Community hub development of the Civic Centre.

30) Review benefits of Community hub and put together program of events.

31) Publicise community hub and program of events.

3.7 Playgrounds

There are a number of playgrounds around Epping, some of which are better than others. I am aware that an organisation called the Epping Playground Association has been formed and is actively funding for updated facilities at the Lower Swaines recreation ground playground. I feel that these play areas are an essential element of a town's make up and encourage community and social interaction. As a result, it is important that both the Town and District Councils are actively involved in their ongoing development and support.

Currently there are no play areas within Epping Town Centre. However, a play area is something which could be included within the new Town centre developments and I feel would be of great assistance in ensuring a Town centre offering something for families and for the community as a whole.

Recommendations:

32) Consider addition of a childrens' play area to the new Town centre developments.

3.8 Tourism/Visitors

Although Epping is a lovely town with a great deal of character, charm and historic interest, it is not particularly a tourist/visitor destination.

Clearly with the introduction of a new sports centre/swimming pool and a cinema this will change tremendously and also add some further footfall to the evening economy.

The Epping Ongar Railway is a major attraction to the area and in the year pre-Covid carried approximately 45,000 passengers. Although it is called the Epping Ongar Railway it doesn't currently link up with Epping and instead runs from North Weald to Ongar with a vintage bus service operating from Epping to North Weald. The railway track does run to Epping, however there are a number of engineering and other practical hurdles that need to be addressed to extend the service to Epping. If the heritage railway could run from Epping this would increase the attraction tremendously and could potentially double passenger numbers – which of course would also increase footfall to Epping Town centre and benefit the economy as a whole. With this in mind, I would recommend EFDC maintains relationships with the Epping Ongar Railway and supports them in extending their operating service.

Recommendations:

- 33) EFDC to support Epping Ongar Railway in its plans to increase the operating service.**
- 34) Develop town offer to make Town centre more attractive to visitors.**

3.9 Signage

Signage within Epping could be greatly improved and should be reviewed accordingly. Examples would be from the station to Epping Forest, from the station to the town centre and to the Epping Way to name but a few. Also signage welcoming people to Epping. All new signage should be of a heritage type and compatible with the historic character of the town.

Recommendations:

- 35) Review all signage in and around Epping and ensure it s suitable to the needs and requirements of the town.**
- 36) Ensure any new signage is in keeping with the character of the town.**

3.10 Public Facilities

Epping should be reviewed to ensure it offers the required public facilities. These include adequate seating for all sections of the community in all areas, open, clean and functional public toilets, adequate lighting at all times across all areas of the Town centre, bike racks/hoops in easily accessible places and strategically placed dog poo bins.

Recommendations:

- 37) Review benches and seating in Epping and ensure it is adequate for the needs of the town.**
- 38) Review bike racks/hoops within the town centre and at other destinations and ensure they are adequate for the needs of the town.**
- 39) Review dog poo bins in town centre and other areas as appropriate and ensure they are adequate to needs of the town.**
- 40) Ensure that all areas of Epping, including car parks, alleyways, etc are adequately lit.**
- 41) Review provision of public toilets and ensure they are adequate for the town.**

3.11 Wi-fi and Digital Presence

The digital age and the need for connectivity is increasingly important for numerous sections of the community. As a result I would suggest free wi-fi availability on Epping high street and across the new leisure and retail developments.

It should be acknowledged that people are now shopping differently and that circa 30% of retail sales are being done online (Office of National Statistics, Aug 2020). This figure is up from 21.9% at the beginning of March 2020 and the beginning of the Covid 19 lockdown. Regardless of the pandemic, online sales will continue to grow, and retail expert KPMG predicts the figure rising to 50% by 2025. As a result, retail businesses need to adjust their business models accordingly and develop their offer for both markets.

As a part of adding a wi-fi option to the town centre a social media presence should be developed enabling online and offline businesses. Mobile technologies and virtual shopping should be used to enhance the consumer Town centre experience and in turn increase footfall.

Consideration should be given to bringing in a third-party contractor such as Click It Local and Maybe (www.maybetech.com) to develop online, social media/Town centre/retailer collaboration.

Recommendations:

- 42) Put in place free WI-fi within the High street and new leisure and retail developments, and publicise.**
- 43) Consider benefits of Click It Local scheme. Secure and promote accordingly.**
- 44) Agree way forward in respect of social edia strategy/presence and execute accordingly.**
- 45) Arrange for assistance and support for retailers in establishing an online presence.**

4 Appearance

Epping is an extremely attractive town. It has a very definite town centre, a good community feel and from the people I have spoken to has the genuine affection of everyone who lives and works there. The main High street has a real mixture of properties. Although built across different eras, the Town centre comes together well and its mixture of property gives the feel of a town that has developed over time, is lived in and well used and appreciated. There is a nice green space half-way along the High street at the end of Station Road and at the northern end the High street tapers out onto another lovely green and war memorial. The new developments will add a further and more modern aspect to the Town centre, but if done sympathetically should generally increase the overall attractiveness of the town, whilst maintaining its character.

Maintaining and increasing the attractiveness of the public realm makes a massive difference to a Town centre. It encourages people to visit and also increases their dwell time, which in turn benefits the local shops and businesses. Making a town into something that residents can be proud of and somewhere they are pleased to be seen increases their loyalty, encourages their support and engagement and of course helps build a strong and cohesive community. It is important therefore that the public realm is continually reviewed, that maintenance issues are addressed and that the residents and businesses take a pride in its appearance.

4.1 General Maintenance and refurbishment

The majority of the general maintenance issues are covered in the Quick Wins earlier in this report.

Recommendations:

46) Review Quick Wins and arrange for work to be completed.

4.2 Widening of pavement area.

As a part of the Safer Spaces work by EFDC, a number of parking spaces have been removed to make a wider pavement space for Covid safe pedestrian separation. The areas are currently separated using plastic barriers which are both untidy and unsightly. Moving forward, it has been decided that a more permanent temporary pavement area be established and that it will remain there until a potential removal date of December 2021.

The loss of parking spaces doesn't appear to be making a particular difference to Town centre parking and only accounts for a small percentage of the overall parking spaces. As a result, I see this scheme, particularly in the main stretch of High street from St Johns Church to the Council offices, as an excellent way of testing the ground for a permanent extension of the pavement and also as a way of encouraging shops to extend their business to include both on-street trading and on-street hospitality. The widened area could also be used as a performance space for street musicians and buskers, adding to the overall atmosphere. This will all add to the attractiveness of the town centre, increase the feeling of community and make the town more of a destination to visitors.

Recommendations:

47) Encourage retailers to extend their business to include street trading.

48) Review benefit/appropriateness of extended pavement space and consider making permanent. This is now taking place.

49) Consider encouraging musicians and street performers into the high street

4.3 Shop Fronts

The uniformity of shops fronts along a retail centre can markedly increase the attractiveness of the road and also in doing so increase the attractiveness and therefore draw to individual stores. The majority of shops in the High street are attractive and in good repair, however there are some which require redecoration and/or complete refit. To do this would undoubtedly assist the retailers in attracting business, increase the attractiveness of the public realm and therefore improve the town centre for everyone's benefit.

It would be good to agree at Council level a uniform approach to shop front and signage presentation along the High street and to ensure that this is adhered to. Careful consideration should be given by the Council in allowing changes to shop fronts and/or shop signage and in ensuring that any proposals are in keeping with the area.

Recommendations:

50) Consult with ETC, ETCP and retailers to consider options in respect of shop fronts and making/keeping them attractive and in the overall style of the town.

51) EFDC to give careful consideration to design and style of Town centre shop fronts and signage.

4.4 A-Boards and other retail paraphernalia

A number of retailers have A-boards and other retail paraphernalia, external trading/retail displays on the pavement outside their shops. Although I understand the need for this, if not carefully managed these can block access and generally make the place look untidy. Street trading licences should provide for these and lay out the conditions and spaces for use – the Council should monitor this and ensure that all conditions are being complied with, particularly to ensure that the High street remains as attractive and as accessible as possible.

Considerations should be given to some form of demarcation outside each store over which seating, A-boards and other retail paraphernalia, if allowed, cannot overstep.

Recommendations:

52) Review Town centre policy and regulations for trading from the front of premises, retail displays and A-boards on the pavement and enforce accordingly.

4.5 Trees and Planters

Tree lined pedestrian routes and landscaped areas all contribute to civic pride and generally make a town more attractive. Epping already has an active Epping in Bloom scheme, with a team of local volunteers improving the appearance of the public realm and also adding the interest of a community garden in the Town centre. I feel though that this could be built on considerably and that perhaps the District and Town Councils could work with Epping in Bloom to extend the scheme further.

There are a number of trees along Epping high street and also from St Johns Church, running south, a large expanse of grass borders and verges. From St Johns Church running north however there is very little until you reach the planters at the very end of the shops, by the Council offices. My feeling is that the public realm along this stretch could be greatly improved with the addition of some planters, hanging baskets etc. This landscaping should also be followed along the same theme and design into the new developments.

Recommendations:

53) Review current “green” townscape and work with Epping in Bloom to develop and improve.

54) Add further planters/hanging baskets etc along the High street north of St Johns Church.

5 Access

Town centres need to recognise that Co2 emissions have to be reduced and as a result there is much more emphasis on ensuring a reduced reliance on cars. To this end, Town centres need to ensure their accessibility via other methods of transport and provide for these methods accordingly. In addition to reducing carbon emissions this will also encourage the use of the Town centre by the wider community via various methods of transport.

Simply stopping car access and reducing or taking away parking spaces, doesn't resolve this problem. Undoubtedly people will still want to access Epping town centre by car, however there is a balance to be had between encouraging pedestrian, cycling and public transport access and then gradually reducing provision for motor vehicles as other methods of travel develop and gain traction.

For generations urban areas have been designed exclusively around the car. This now has to change and Town centres developed to provide attractive, walkable and cyclable physical space.

5.1 Parking

Parking in Epping is undoubtedly a problem. There are insufficient parking spaces for the number of cars using the town and even through the pandemic, car parks and high street parking have been heavily used. With further residential development planned and additions of a new leisure centre and cinema/retail developments encouraging more people to use the town there will be an even greater need for parking. It is appreciated that we are trying to encourage a lesser reliance on cars, however with the introduction of cleaner electric cars, I think it will be some time before we see a reduction in car numbers and as a result Town centre parking will continue to be in demand.

Having discussed this matter with all the stakeholders, residents and businesses, there is no clear answer. I think that commuter parking should be discouraged other than in the station car park. I would suggest that commuters bring no benefit to the town and that a reduction in street parking for commuters would increase the street parking available for residents and short-term visitors. This could be enforced using parking restrictions such as permit holder parking and "permit holders only 1-2pm", zone parking, use of pay and display in a greater number of areas and increasing the cost of longer-term parking. Another option would be to consider making the Epping Station car park into a multilevel car park, thus doubling or more, the number of spaces.

The other option is to find alternative ways for residents to access the town centre – see below.

Recommendations:

- 55) Review parking provision in and around Epping and consider schemes to aid resident and business parking.**
- 56) Review parking arrangements to discourage commuter parking**
- 57) Consider option of making station parking multi level.**

5.2 Electric Scooter Scheme

Consideration should be given to implementing an electric scooter rental scheme to help support a 'green' alternative to local travel that is convenient, clean and affordable and helps to mitigate reduced public transport capacity and allow for social distancing as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic. E-scooters can reduce reliance on car trips, reduce congestion and improve air quality.

The Department for Transport (DfT) expanded trials of rental e-scooters and legislation was introduced to allow e-scooters to use highways and cycle routes. Only e-scooters in an approved trial are legal. Privately owned scooters will still be illegal on public networks.

It may be worth consulting Buckinghamshire Council which introduced this service on a 12-month trial in Aylesbury and High Wycombe. The scheme is operated by Zipp Mobility. The scooters have defined parking areas and also a defined operating area, outside which they cease to run.

This would be a great scheme to assist in discouraging car usage in Epping. Scooters could be made available at the station and at various locations in and around the Town centre. If successful, consideration could be given to extending the scheme to other areas within the District.

Recommendations:

- 58) EFDC to consult with ETC on viability of introducing an E-Scooter scheme.**
- 59) EFDC to contact Buckinghamshire Council and discuss trial findings and benefits.**
- 60) Introduce scheme for Epping on a trial basis.**

5.3 Cycling

Cycling is increasingly being promoted and encouraged and it is important that all residents of a town should be able to access the town centre, the towns various green and public spaces, leisure centre and attractions easily and safely by bike. In addition, the town should also provide for cycle racks/hoops at various destinations to enable the bikes to be safely secured.

My feeling in Epping is that the majority of roads are fairly quiet and that as a result there is minimal need for dedicated cycling lanes. Having said this, High Road/High street (B1393) in and out of Epping is a busy route. Although some of the road has tracks running alongside it within the safety of the forest, some sections could do with the addition of a dedicated cycle lane.

Recommendations:

- 61) Review cycling accessibility in and around Epping - particularly around main roads and the B1393 and make arrangements for the provision of safe, secure and clearly marked cycle paths and routes where necessary.**

5.4 Buses

There are numerous bus services in and around Epping connecting the town with towns like Harlow, Loughton, Waltham Abbey and Ongar. From what I understand these aren't reliable or punctual services. At a time when we want to reduce car usage and encourage public and other forms of transport the benefit of a reliable bus service is important and key. As a result I would suggest that the bus routes and their timetables are reviewed to ensure they are meeting the needs of the community.

Recommendations:

- 62) Review bus routes and timetables to ensure they are meeting the needs of the community.**

5.5 Trains

Epping is the final stop on the London Underground Central Line and provides regular commuter and other services in and out of London with Liverpool Street 40 minutes away and Stratford 20 minutes away. The Central Line makes Epping a busy commuter town not only for residents, but also as it is at the end of the line, for a number of commuters who drive from neighbouring towns and villages to access it.

6 Consultation

6.1 Market Research

In addition to thoughts and expertise of the author, consultation for this report has been obtained from the following:

Epping Forest District Council
Epping Town Council
Epping Town Partnership
Qualis Group Ltd
Epping Ongar Railway
Various councillors and other prominent/influential Epping residents
Various Epping retailers
Various Epping residents

It is accepted that additional research will be required from residents, retailers and businesses to move the ideas in this report forward. It is felt however that if the initiative is going to be Community/Town Council driven research should be carried out more locally.

7. Sources of Additional Support

High streets Task Force (www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk) – supporting communities and local government to transform their High streets.

Click It Local (www.clickitlocal.co.uk) – online shopping/delivery service

Maybe (www.maybetech.com) – A smarter approach to social media

Action List	Priority
<i>EFDC/Highway Rangers to complete “quick wins”.</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Appoint Town centre Manager.</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Discuss and establish Town Leadership Team - form Town Team and/or refocus Town Centre Partnership.</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Complete research on thoughts and considerations of residents and businesses – incorporate and implement where appropriate.</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Identify the retail heart of Epping and take steps to protect it from residential development.</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Discuss vision for the High street and target new and specific retailers and businesses.</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Review the “green” street scene and public realm on the High street, consider the addition of planters etc and action accordingly.</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>EFDC and ETC to work with Epping in Bloom to extend scheme.</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Continually review town centre public realm, maintain and increase its attractiveness.</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Review plans for town centre development and see if a children’s play area can be included.</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Ensure that provision is made to develop the town centre in line with new developments - to make the space flow continually and tie the old and new together as one.</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Carry out all general maintenance/refurbishment recommendations.</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Ensure adequate public facilities throughout the town, including public toilets, benches, street furniture, bike parking, dog poo bins etc.</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Review market provision with TC and assess what should be done to promote it.</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Review future library provision, the space required and the range of services offered.</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Review with ETC, the requirement for a community hub, consider its location and services provided.</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Review attraction of Epping to visitors, together with the services offered by the Epping Ongar Railway and take action to increase visitor numbers.</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Put in place a free wi-fi service in the Town centre and increase the towns digital presence through the promotion of Click It Local, Maybe Tech etc.</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Arrange for removal of unsightly temporary barriers, signage etc and complete more permanent temporary works.</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Encourage safe street trading and hospitality.</i>	<i>1</i>

<i>Consider encouraging street musicians/performers into the Town centre.</i>	2
<i>Review Town centre policy on A Boards and other pavement retail paraphernalia and ensure pavements are kept tidy and accessible to all.</i>	2
<i>Review parking arrangements in Epping. Take steps to assist with parking for residents and businesses and to discourage commuter parking.</i>	2
<i>Consider benefits of an E-Scooter scheme, review Bucks Council trial and if appropriate, roll out.</i>	1
<i>Review cycling accessibility in Epping. Consider addition of cycle lanes on the B1393, ensure adequate cycle parking in and around Epping.</i>	1
<i>Review bus routes and times to ensure they are meeting the needs of the community.</i>	3

Draft

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