

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.