

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-052b-2020/21
Date of meeting: 22 December '20



Portfolio: Leader

Subject: Town Centre Regeneration General Report

Responsible Officer: Houston John Houston (01992 564094).

Democratic Services: Adrian Hendry (01992 564246).

Executive Summary:

As highlighted in the Cabinet report on Waltham Abbey Town Centre, a range of work has also commenced in other areas of the district as part of the Covid Economic Recovery programme and this followed on from initial work undertaken by Directors as part of Safer Spaces delivery.

Initial results have now become available from the Districts annual High Street Vacancy Survey (see Appendix 1) This shows a mixed picture across the districts towns but doesn't record large scale closures as have been apparent in other areas.

This report therefore provides an overview and update for Cabinet on work carried out to date.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

This report does not require a decision or recommendation.

Other Options for Action:

N/a

Report:

1. In September, Studio 3 Business Consultants were engaged by the Council to undertake a range of economic appraisal work relating to the five Town Centres in the District. Waltham Abbey (Sun Street) was identified as the first priority for this work and a separate report and detailed options appraisal for interventions in Waltham Abbey, is included within the agenda for this meeting of Cabinet.

Ongar Town Centre

2. The second highest priority area for focus was agreed as Ongar Town Centre and Studio 3 have undertaken a range of initial work on this area. This includes visits to the town on various days of the week and production of an initial survey of the current retail offer, noting vacancy levels and range of retail provision available.
3. In addition, following on from work undertaken by Directors, Studio 3 have attended an Ongar Town Council meeting and have liaised with the Town Council on their 'Smarten Up Ongar' campaign, with a view to helping this gain momentum going forward.
4. Further meetings have been arranged with key stakeholders in Ongar, including Epping, Ongar Railway and a follow -up meeting with the Town Clerk. However, Covid restrictions

have significantly hampered progress with this work, but it is hoped that if lockdown is lifted in early December, work can continue with vigour then.

Remaining Town Centres

5. As part of the Safer Spaces programme, Directors undertook a range of work with Towns and Parish Councils in Epping, Loughton and Buckhurst Hill. This included implementing safer distancing measures in conjunction with local shops and working with Environmental Health Officers and hospitality businesses to support expansion of services onto pavements and in outdoor spaces. In addition, details were collated of improvements that could be made to each of these High Streets, to improve the aesthetics and attraction of local residents to shop locally.
6. Follow-up visits were made in all areas to assess how these measures were helping sustainability and it was found that some businesses had been able to build their service delivery almost back to normal, but, had then been seriously affected by the first wave of new Covid restrictions. This was undoubtedly worsened by the introduction of the second lockdown and it has not been possible to follow up with businesses since then.
7. During this period, Studio 3 additionally carried out visits to town centres/High Streets in Loughton, Epping and Buckhurst Hill to gain an overview of the vibrancy of each of these and to gauge the level of retail vacancy rates.
8. They have also attended a Loughton Town Partnership meeting involving local retailers, which focusses particularly on Debden Broadway and have raised their concerns about the planned pedestrianisation of Debden Broadway by EFDC at weekends. Their initial thoughts are that this is unnecessary and contrary to the views of local retailers and public who benefit from being able to 'stop and shop' by parking in the Broadway itself. It was also suggested that the funding potentially required for this could be better used.
9. In terms of all the reviews, due account will be taken of the operation buildings in the area as well as any investment properties held, especially the recent purchases in Loughton.

North Weald Airfield

10. As Members are aware, the NWA Masterplanning exercise is still in progress and therefore there is limited work that can be done to progress action on establishing an area for a mini Business Enterprise Zone.
11. However, work has been undertaken to identify suitable sites for this new initiative and to map and locate contacts for all areas around the borders of the Airfield, with a view to seeking opportunities for the creation of a new Business Zone.
12. In addition, meetings have taken place with the National Special Forces Museum and an Airfield tenant, to consider the potential of developing a unique heritage Museum on NWA, that would accommodate a display of artefacts and active aircraft of National importance, utilising historic features already in place, as well as a fully functioning conference centre.
13. Further updates will be provided on all of this work.

Resource Implications:

None related to local Town Centre work at present, although it is anticipated that recommendations for action will be forthcoming that will require financial support.

Legal and Governance Implications:

None at present.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

None at present.

Consultation Undertaken:

Consultation has and continues to be undertaken with stakeholders across the District.

Background Papers:

Waltham Abbey Town Centre Regeneration Study.

Risk Management:

N/a

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: Town Centre Regeneration
Officer completing the EqIA: John Houston Tel: 01992 564 Email: jhouston@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Date of completing the assessment: 20/11/20

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? This is an information item only.
2.2	Describe the main aims, objectives and purpose of the policy (or decision): This report provides an update on work undertaken to support Town Centres across the district. What outcome(s) are you hoping to achieve (ie decommissioning or commissioning a service)? It is anticipated that detailed reports will be produced for each of the Town Centres that will set out a set of recommendations for action by the Council.
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? None at present Will the policy or decision influence how organisations operate? Not at present
2.4	Will the policy or decision involve substantial changes in resources? Not at present
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? The work referred to in this report substantially contributes to Corporate Objectives.

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? N/a
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? N/a
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	N/A	
Disability	N/A	
Gender	N/A	
Gender reassignment	N/A	
Marriage/civil partnership	N/A	
Pregnancy/maternity	N/A	
Race	N/A	
Religion/belief	N/A	
Sexual orientation	N/A	

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: Julie Chandler

Date: 20/11/20

Signature of person completing the EqIA: John Houston

Date: 21/11/20

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.