

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-056-2020-21

Date of meeting: 21st January 2021



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Finance and Economic Development – Cllr. J Philip

Subject: Ongar Town Centre

Responsible Officer: John Houston (01992 564094).

Democratic Services: Adrian Hendry (01992 564246).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

That Cabinet considers the attached report produced by independent business consultants, Studio 3, on the economic viability of Ongar Town Centre, which includes recommendations to improve short and medium-term sustainability of businesses in the High Street.

Executive Summary:

As part of the Council's work to 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 longer-term recommendations to increase footfall to town centres; support local businesses and identify opportunities for attracting new business to the area.

The second of the studies focussed on Chipping Ongar and its high street and the detailed report produced by Studio 3 is attached to this covering report, which sets out a range of recommendations for action, including quick wins.

Following on from the first report on Waltham Abbey, the Cabinet agreed in the Cabinet on 22nd December 2020, to the appointment of a Towns Centre Manager, a role which will have a direct involvement in all high street developments including those given the go-ahead as a result of this report.

Cabinet is asked to consider the findings of the report and approve delivery of suggested recommendations.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

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 Centre's across the district. The study conducted by Studio 3, is a completely independent view of the status of the economy connected to Ongar High Street and identifies what is necessary to increase footfall; support local businesses and help sustain high street viability in the medium term.

Other Options for Action:

Cabinet could decide not to proceed with the recommendations, 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, Buckhurst Hill and Epping. Officers have already made good progress on this work and across a number of associated projects and now seek cabinet approval to implement a range of initiatives directly related to Ongar High Street.
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 work initially in Waltham Abbey, which was followed by a similar detailed assessment and production of a Regeneration Study and Proposals, for Ongar High Street and the surrounding town centre.
3. The 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 actions to help economic sustainability of the town centre and to improve and enhance resident and general visitor satisfaction.
4. Within the initial assessments undertaken, there are a number of quick wins identified and include; ongoing sweep/clean and litter bins emptying, regular clearance of accumulated rubbish around the recycling bins in Budworth Hall car park and other parts of the town centre, cleaning/redecoration/repair of all street furniture – lamp posts, bollards, railings, planters, litter bins, benches etc, replacement of broken bollards, replace/re-lay broken and uneven paving, town centre parking to become first hour free, tidy green spaces and planters and weed kill high street as necessary, regular parking enforcement to combat overstays, double parking, parking on the pavement.
5. The other significant recommendation in the report, suggests the benefits of establishing a Town Team in Ongar, to enable two-way dialogue to be sought from the towns' residents and businesses, with input encouraged from organisations such as educational establishments, religious groups, social groups (e.g. Scouts etc) together with members of the town council and tourism & visitor groups. It is suggested that the library could be used to establish a Community Hub base to be utilised by groups such as the Town Team.
6. Work has now commenced on a similar appraisal and study for Loughton Town and Broadway Centres by Studio 3 and the remaining town centres will be addressed over the next few months.
7. This report therefore seeks Cabinet approval to proceed with the recommended actions relating to Ongar High Street.

Resource Implications:

The bulk of the recommendations included in the report are to be funded from within existing resources as outlined in the previous report to Cabinet 22nd December 2020.

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 Ongar Town Centre, will improve public safety and wellbeing, through initiatives such as better parking management, rectification of street furniture in and around the high street, and improvement to cleanliness and green spaces will enhance the appearance and welcome of this historic and well-loved centre.

Consultation Undertaken:

Ongoing consultation has taken place with EFDC Officers and local stakeholders, including Ongar Council, Ward Members, businesses, retailers and residents.

Background Papers:

Initial study produced by Studio 3 Business Consultants, including a report on Ongar Regeneration by the Town Council in November 2020, is included with this report.

Risk Management:

None identified.

Equality Impact:

This is attached but throughout the project it is intended to review all implications using the Authorities new research approach to evaluating decisions and the impact of such decisions.

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 Waltham Abbey Town Centre
Officer completing the EqIA: John Houston Tel: Ext 4094 Email: jhouston@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
Date of completing the assessment: 19/11/20

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?</p> <p>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 Sun Street in Waltham Abbey. What outcome(s) are you hoping to achieve (ie decommissioning or commissioning a service)?</p> <p>To increase residents’ footfall and visitors to Sun Street, to create a vibrant and successful town centre</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, in an area that is identified as being disadvantaged and with families living in poverty.</p> <p>Will the policy or decision influence how organisations operate?</p> <p>The decision will help to encourage businesses to operate in new and different ways, in order to attract new customers and improve the aesthetics of Sun Street and the surrounding area.</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?
-----	---

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 Waltham Abbey and with local businesses and retailers and an online consultation is in place until end of December.</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 the community.	med
Disability	Positive – Works to improve the walkway through Sun Street, 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 -Although more people may be encouraged to visit Waltham Abbey Church	
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: Julie Chandler

Date: 19/11/20

Signature of person completing the EqIA: John Houston

Date: 19/11/20

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.