

Contact Officer: Carol Tague

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

ECONOMY AND NEIGHBOURHOODS SCRUTINY PANEL

Wednesday 7th November 2018

Present: Councillor Rob Walker (Chair)
Councillor Bill Armer
Councillor Martyn Bolt
Councillor Judith Hughes
Councillor Richard Murgatroyd
Councillor Harpreet Uppal

Co-optees Mark Mercer
Andrew Bird

1 Interests

No interests were declared.

2 Admission of the Public

It was agreed that all agenda items would be considered in public session.

3 The Future of Town Centres in Kirklees

The Panel received a report which provided an overview of the challenges facing the district's town centres and the programmes in place to address these challenges.

Simon Taylor, Head of Development Management, Adele Poppleton, Head of Culture and Vibrancy and Peter Thompson, Economic Resilience Project Manager were in attendance for this item and delivered a presentation which set out information in relation to:-

- Town centre health – national context
- Huddersfield Master Plan
- Current projects in Huddersfield and Dewsbury Town Centres
- Quality, offer and perceptions

The key areas of the Panel's discussion and responses to questions are summarised below:-

- The Panel highlighted the importance of strategic aims and measurable objectives and recommended that the desired outcomes in relation to town centres and how these related to the overall economic strategy for the district, be made clear within the refreshed Kirklees Economic Strategy.

Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel - 7 November 2018

- The objectives set out in the Dewsbury Town Centre's Strategic Development Framework included increasing activity in the Town, increasing attractiveness and improving accessibility.
- The Council received income from council tax as well as business rates and it was hoped to encourage more residential development in the town centre.
- The importance of attracting a diverse population mix, including young professionals, in increasing the vibrancy of an area was highlighted, as was the need for the right cultural offer and night time economy to enable this. The need for the Town's offer to address changes in shopping habits and consumer demand was also acknowledged.
- The recent Royal Society for Public Health report - *Health on the High Street: Running on Empty* and links to deprivation therein were noted. The Panel were informed that consideration was being given to policy development to control certain activities, such as hot food takeaway provision, as part of the Local Plan process.
- Engagement had taken place with business groups, stakeholders and the University as a first step in developing the action plan for the Town. An area action plan would be developed through the Local Plan process and would focus on engagement in more detail. The Panel were informed that a long and in depth consultation process had been undertaken in developing the Dewsbury plan.
- The need to attract inward investment in developing a successful vibrant town centre was acknowledged and it was suggested that incentives be provided to encourage small scale enterprises and entrepreneurs to come and work in the Town centre.
- Successful vibrant town centres across the country had developed through organic growth and it was important to dissect how this had happened. A success factor in a number of small local centres was community ownership and communities being active in shaping the local offer. Rather than being prescriptive, the role of the Council was to be an enabler, encourage entrepreneurial spirit and reduce red tape wherever possible. The Temporary Contemporary initiative at Queensgate Market, which was an exhibition space developed in conjunction with market traders and the University of Huddersfield, was cited as an example of this.
- Whilst Members welcomed major investment opportunities such as the trans-Pennine upgrade, station gateway and A62 Smart Corridor, the importance of accessibility and traffic planning in developing the town centre offer was highlighted. Congestion at home football fixtures was cited as an example of traffic impacting on shopping footfall and people entering the town.

Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel - 7 November 2018

- The opportunities presented by the canal which connected the whole of Kirklees, both in terms of transportation and the potential to develop a unique edge of town centre feature, was acknowledged. It was also noted that work was ongoing to provide better cycling links within the Town.
- A number of measures were noted in regards to making the night time economy more attractive to a broader range of people. The Safer Huddersfield Night Time Economy Group had been established in response to a number of issues that had been reported in the press which had impacted on people's perception of the Town. Partnership working was ongoing with the police, businesses and voluntary sector as was work with partners to move towards achieving purple flag status in relation to the night time economy.

The diversity and spread of the night time offer was also being considered through the masterplan and people's perception of safety through public realm schemes.

- The strength of Huddersfield's existing night time offer, which included a theatre, concert hall and diverse restaurant offer was highlighted, and the need to brand and market this more effectively acknowledged. This would in turn improve people's perception of the town centre.
- With regards to the Scrutiny Panel recommendations from 2015, it was acknowledged that not all recommendations had been fully progressed. Whilst an action plan and vision had been developed for Dewsbury town centre and shared with partners, the journey had only just started in Huddersfield. It was noted that resources and personnel changes had impacted on progress, but the Panel were assured that there would be a re-focus on the recommendations.
- It was acknowledged that Kirklees had a very diverse population and it was important to listen to what people wanted. A piece of work was ongoing in relation to data intelligence to evaluate whether the measurements currently used provided the required information to inform decisions.
- It was recognised that the future of the Town Centre could not be determined by the Council alone and it was important to work in partnership with local businesses. The Panel were informed that the Huddersfield Town Partnership was leading on developing a Huddersfield Business Improvement District (BID). If agreed, a levy would be applied on top of business rates and the businesses would determine how the additional monies would be spent. It was noted that this had been very successful in some areas, but others had seen it as an additional tax burden on small businesses.

It was anticipated that those paying business rates within a defined area, would be balloted in June 2019, to determine if they would be prepared to pay the aforementioned levy.

Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel - 7 November 2018

It was clarified that the BID business plan was not a council document and the process was led by the businesses involved. The Council was represented by Councillors Mather and Stewart-Turner on the Huddersfield BID Steering Group.

The Panel agreed that a working group would be established to look at both the Huddersfield BID and wider partnership working in more detail. With regards to the ballot, the Panel noted that there was one vote per property and a concern was raised that someone who owned multiple properties could sway the vote. It was further noted that the Council had the power of veto. It was agreed that these issues would be considered as part of the working group.

It was not currently planned to develop a Dewsbury BID given the conditions in terms of scale and existing partnership arrangements. Dewsbury was smaller than Huddersfield and rates were lower, which would in turn generate less revenue through a levy.

- The Panel were informed that the Winter Festival would return to St Georges Square in December. With regards to suggestions as to the establishment of a regular food pop-up market, it was noted that consideration was being given through the master-planning work, to evaluate whether the infrastructure, such as access to power, was in place to allow pop-ups to happen. The Council was also keen to minimise red tape wherever possible.
- The Panel welcomed the work that was being undertaken in Dewsbury Town Centre and it was agreed that the scope of the aforementioned working group would be expanded to look at the work in Dewsbury in more detail, given that it was at a more advanced stage than that in Huddersfield Town Centre.
- The role of artists in regenerating an area was highlighted. Whilst North Kirklees and Dewsbury did not currently have a concentration of artists, it was hoped that the work of Creative Scene would help build a critical mass of artists in that area.
- Members were reassured that the Council was working with partners to explore potential opportunities arising from the recent decision of Channel 4 establish their headquarters in Leeds.

RESOLVED -

1. That the Head of Development Management, Head of Culture and Vibrancy and Economic Resilience Project Manager be thanked for attending the meeting;
2. The Panel recommend that the desired outcomes in relation to town centres and how these relate to the overall economic strategy for the district, be made clear within the refreshed Kirklees Economic Strategy; and
3. A working group be established to examine:-
 - a. partnership working in developing the town centre offer;
 - b. work with the Town Centre Partnership in relation to the Huddersfield Business Improvement District (BID); and
 - c. work on Dewsbury Town Centre development.

Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel - 7 November 2018

4 Work Programme 2018/19

The Panel considered a copy of the current programme for 2018/19.

It was agreed that the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Consultation would be added to the work programme for the Panel's meeting on 17 January 2019. It was noted that the consultation was a statutory process and the Strategy would be scheduled for Cabinet and Council in the new year.

In addition to this, the Panel requested an update on the housing and rough sleeping provision for the forthcoming winter period at the next meeting. Reference was also made the review of Council guidelines and report of the consortium of voluntary groups.

With regards to the Council's working group which was undertaking a review of the Open Age Policy and Local Letting Framework, Councillor Hughes reported that it was intended to arrange an open session for elected Members to take them through the application process.

RESOLVED -

1. That the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Consultation Strategy be added to the work programme for consideration at the Panel's meeting on 17 January 2019;
2. The Panel be provided with an update on the housing and rough sleeping provision for the forthcoming winter period at the next meeting; and
3. Further to the aforementioned addition, the work programme was agreed.

5 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Panel would take place at 1000 am on Wednesday 12 December 2018, in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Huddersfield.