

Name of meeting: Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel

Date: 17th July 2019

Title of report: Huddersfield Town Centre Blue Print – Background Data, Vision and Engagement

Key Decision - Is it likely to result in spending or saving £250k or more, or to have a significant effect on two or more electoral wards?	Not applicable
Key Decision - Is it in the Council's Forward Plan (key decisions and private reports?)	Not applicable
The Decision - Is it eligible for call in by Scrutiny?	Not applicable
Date signed off by Strategic Director & name	Karl Battersby – 5th July 2019 Naz Parkar – 5th July 2019
Is it also signed off by the Service Director (Finance)?	
Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Legal Governance and Commissioning?	Not applicable
Cabinet member portfolio	Cllr Peter McBride

Electoral wards affected: Newsome

Ward councillors consulted: None

Public or private: Public

(Have you considered GDPR?) Yes

1. Summary

1.1 This report sets out three key elements for discussion:

- a. Background data on Huddersfield town centre
- b. Objectives of the Town Centre Blue Print
- c. Engagement and consultation process to include:
 - background on engagement undertaken to date in development of the master plan
 - details of the engagement process now being undertaken/timescale
 - the process after the consultation has concluded

2. Information required to take a decision

National Trends

2.1 The latest data from the British Retail Consortium from a surveys in March and April this year shows that national vacancy rates have risen to the highest level in the last four years. The national town centre vacancy rate was 10.2 per cent, a further increase on the previous quarter rate of 9.9 per cent and the highest since April 2015.

2.2 Footfall declined by 0.5% in April, compared to the same point last year when it declined by 3.3%. Of that decline:

- High Street footfall declined by 1.0 per cent. This was a lesser decline relative to the previous year when it fell by 4.0 per cent.
- Retail Park footfall increased by 2.2 per cent, in contrast to April 2018 when footfall decreased by 1.8%.
- Shopping Centre footfall declined by 2.1%, a significant slowdown from a year ago when it decreased by 3.1 per cent.

Huddersfield Trends

2.3 The health of Huddersfield Town Centre is assessed each year. We monitor occupancy rates, usage and floor space. Pedestrian footfall is also monitored. Data shows that the town centre has seen a contraction in the number of shopping, leisure and service units over the last four years. Of the total number of vacant units recorded in 2018, 39 of those were also vacant in 2014. The table below shows the levels of vacant units and floor space across the town and in key locations where there are more concerning levels of vacant premises.

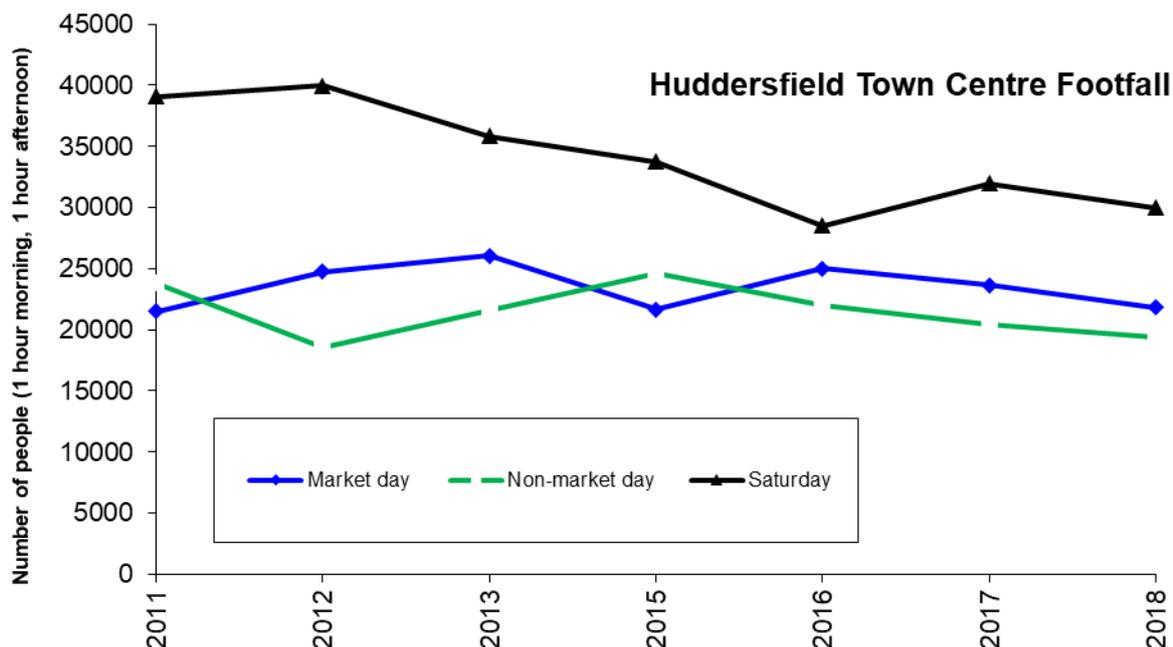
Table 1: Huddersfield town centre vacancy: Rates, floor space and units 2018

Area/Location	Vacancy 2018			Later Additions for 2019
	Units	Floor space m ²	Rate	Floor space m ²
Town Centre (overall)	123	17347	17%	1502
Piazza Shopping Centre	12	3887	43%	1269
Packhorse Centre	9	596	30%	N/A

2.4 In 2018, there were 123 vacant units accounting for 17,347 m² of floor space and representing 17% of all outlets and 13% of total floor space. This is an increase in both these measures since 2014 where comparative figures were 15% and 10% respectively. Initial 2019 data shows an additional increase in vacant floor space of 1,502 m² beyond that in 2018.

2.5 Huddersfield town centre has two market offers. The market has a 25% vacancy in permanent units and the number of stalls has reduced from over 150 in 2010 to below 100 in 2019. Pedestrian footfall to the markets has declined by over 21% since 2015.

Falling Visitor Numbers – Huddersfield 2018



- 2.6 The annual pedestrian survey snapshot captured in the graph above shows visitor numbers are steadily declining with a reduction of 16% since 2011. Most notably, Saturday has seen a decrease in people visiting the town centre of 24%, despite there being a continued presence on football and rugby match days.

Huddersfield Blue Print Objectives

- 2.7 In summary we are trying to create a new town with a focus on 5 key areas. These are:
- a vibrant cultural, art, leisure and night offer,
 - thriving businesses,
 - a great place to live,
 - improved access and
 - enhanced public spaces?

The Blue Print sets out these aspects in more detail. These are documented below in sections 2.8 to 2.17

- 2.8 **A home for all** - We want a town that is inclusive, family friendly, safe - and welcoming for all. In particular, we will encourage more town centre living to bring an energy to the town centre.
- 2.9 **A heart for culture, art and music** - We have a thriving arts, music and cultural community in Huddersfield. To provide a fresh and memorable experience, we believe we need to weave together leisure and cultural opportunities and find a home where events of national acclaim can be staged.
- 2.10 **A place that celebrates its heritage** - We have a wealth of heritage assets that add to the character and beauty of our town centre. We are proud of our heritage and want to celebrate this as part of our regeneration plans. The masterplan provides us with opportunities to promote and reuse our historic buildings to meet future needs whilst protecting those elements that make Huddersfield special.

- 2.11 A regional hub** - The Transport for the North Strategic Transport Plan, (January, 2019) maps Huddersfield as having faster links between Manchester, Bradford and Leeds and recognises the town as a significant destination between major cities. This strategic plan will see upgrades to the Trans Pennine route releasing capacity on existing lines elsewhere. Our vision includes an improved station facility. We want the station and surrounding public realm to provide the first class experience our people and businesses expect.
- 2.12 Open for longer** - We want Huddersfield to offer a kaleidoscope of leisure choices in a safe and welcoming environment which is open for longer. We will build on our already thriving restaurant offer and support a range of new uses to complement this and bring new uses into the town centre. This will include cinemas, food and drink outlets, music venues, and a variety of programmed art and cultural events from morning to evening. We want to encourage family friendly events and open spaces which invite people to stay and enjoy their town. There are already some vibrant areas around the town centre such as Wood Street and the Lawrence Batley Theatre which can be the catalyst to grow a dynamic and modern evening economy.
- 2.13 An integrated and optimistic town** - We recognise in our vision the need to ensure that the town is future focused, resilient and flexible to change. Not only do we need to look at new uses for our town but improve the way these uses are connected and supported. Working with a range of partners the focus of the masterplan will help us to achieve this.
- 2.14 A recognisable brand** - We want to develop a strong, identifiable, cohesive brand for Huddersfield to support our regeneration plans and those of other town centre partners.
- 2.15 Open for business** - We want to encourage more companies to locate in Huddersfield. We will look to attract large employers and provide a framework for grass roots business to grow. Huddersfield must capitalise on the skills and innovation it has, either by the development of new centres of excellence for business and learning, or by providing additional support. We want to be a place for talented and innovative people. City Fibre is already undertaking work to ensure Huddersfield is the first gigabit town in the country and we support this, along with better mobile network coverage across the whole of the town.
- 2.16 Supporting tomorrow's professionals and businesses** - We already have some of the finest academic establishments in the country which offer both learning and research across a broad academic prospectus. The success of the University of Huddersfield is centred on 'inspiring thousands of tomorrow's professionals' in a global market. We want to see the alumni make a home of Huddersfield and be an integral part of what the town is and has to offer through better links between the areas and an enhanced living and working offer.
- 2.17 A quality environment with fewer vehicles** - We are serious about reducing the impact of vehicles and delivering pedestrian friendly places to encourage walking and cycling and to reduce air pollution. We want a well-connected and attractive environment that encourages this. We will explore other ways of reducing the impact of vehicles including the provision of electric charging points. Our public transport will be key to bringing people into the town and we will work with transport providers to make it as attractive as possible.

Blue Print Engagement and Consultation

The Journey So Far

2.18 The Blue Print that was launched in late June 2019 is rooted in stakeholder engagement already. In late 2018 and early 2019 Council Officers ran a series of workshops. These fell into three distinct groups.

- **Town Centre Stakeholders** – such as: local businesses and business related groups; transport providers; Huddersfield BID; the University; emergency services; local housing providers and developers and property owners.
- **Technical Officer Support** – A variety of council services were brought together to input into the Blue Print – these ranged from – culture and arts; planning; highways transport; community safety, regeneration and housing; environmental health and licencing.
- **A Member workshop** – All members were invited to a workshop in March 2019. The session was held in the Town Hall and was attended by 16 Members across the parties.

These sessions helped to shape ideas and inform the direction of the Blue Print.

2.19 The Blue Print was launched at an event on 26th June 2019. There were around 150 to 200 delegates at that event from a variety of backgrounds. This was the opportunity to showcase key ideas to a wider audience and marked the next stage in the consultation/engagement process.

Next Steps

2.20 The next stage of this process will take three formats. These are identified below and will run from 8th July onwards across the town centre and online.

2.21 Using the Place Standard Tool - The Place Standard tool provides a simple framework to structure conversations about a particular place. We have already been using this in smaller communities such as Golcar and Shelley to help shape community/ward based plans in those areas. It allows us to think about the physical elements for example buildings, spaces, and transport links as well as the social aspects. The tool provides prompts for discussions, allowing you to consider all the elements of a place in a methodical way. The tool pinpoints the assets of a place as well as areas where a place could improve.

2.22 The tool can help achieve a number of aims. Communities can use the tool to assess what works about their place and where it needs to improve. This may be part of a wider discussion about regenerating an area, or it might be to support a new place or development which is planned nearby. Local authorities and Community Planning Partnerships can use the tool to help plan their activities and decide on their priorities for action. The development sector can use the tool to find out what communities need and create good places where people want to live.

2.23 It is planned to carry out a series of face to face interviews across the town centre over the next few weeks or so. This will allow us to build up a picture of the wider community's perceptions and values of the town centre. This will help us reflect on the current ideas in the Blue Print and also adjust priorities accordingly.

2.24 With this process we will be using the tool to engage with key sectors. This includes:

- Aunty Pams
- Platform 1
- Welcome Centre
- Room 11 (young people leaving care)
- Basement recovery project
- Greenhead College
- Kirklees College
- University
- Support to Recovery
- Library drop ins
- Brian Jackson House – there are a number of groups that meet there
- Kirklees Visual Impairment Network
- Barnardo's

2.25 To accompany this exercise we have set up a **blue print website** and have posted the blue print online for comment. There will be an online questionnaire which asks key questions around specific elements of the blue print. This exercise will be carried out from the second week of July until the end of September 2019 and will be supported by press releases. The web link can be found below:

<https://www.kirklees.gov.uk/beta/huddersfield-blueprint/index.aspx>

2.26 In addition to the above we have opened a **Blue Print Shop** in the Piazza Shopping Centre where material from the Blue Print is on display to members of the public. This will be staffed so that any queries can be answered. Users will be encouraged to go on line to complete questionnaires and hard copies will be available to be completed at the shop.

2.27 Individual scheme or project consultation – As elements of the blue print become ready for delivery we will consult on projects in advance. We are currently consulting on schemes for Cross Church Street and our Parking Study.

Post Engagement/Consultation

2.28 These processes are extremely important to delivering the right outcomes for Huddersfield Town Centre. Both results from the place standard tool and the online questionnaire will be analysed with a view to shaping the finished Blue Print document. Both exercises will help us gauge public perceptions of the place and of the plan. It will help us to set priorities, understand new ideas and also highlight gaps in our earlier stakeholder work.

2.29 We will report the findings back to cabinet later in the year with a full blue print for endorsement.

3. Implications for the Council

- **Working with People** – The process to date has included working with various groups across Huddersfield Town Centre. This will continue with the proposed Place Standard tool and on line questionnaire.
- **Working with Partners** – In a similar vein partners have been involved to date and will continue to be an important part of the delivery process.

- **Place Based Working** – The Blue Print is a holistic vision for the town centre which will be developed with the town centre communities in mind. It is important that this is kept under review and monitored going forward.
- **Improving outcomes for children** – The aim to have a family friendly town centre with attractions for age groups means that we hope to improve outcomes for this sector.
- **Other (e.g. Legal/Financial or Human Resources)** – None specifically

4. Consultees and their opinions

See sections 2.18 onwards.

5. Next Steps and Timelines

The process outlined in section 2 will be carried out during the remainder of 2019.

6. Officer Recommendations and Reasons

Note report and process.

7. Cabinet portfolio holder's recommendations

Cllr McBride has been consulted on the report and has expressed a desire to attend the Scrutiny meeting on 17th July 2019.

8. Contact officer

Simon Taylor – Head of Development and Master Planning – 01484 221000 – simon.taylor@kirklees.gov.uk

9. Background Papers and History of Decisions

None

10. Service Director responsible

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