

Regeneration, Culture and Adult Education Scrutiny Committee 6 March 2013

Report of the Director of the Urban Environment

Measures to improve Town Centres vitality; Portas Pilot project

Purpose of Report

1. To update the Scrutiny Committee on the pilot project set up to improve vitality in the Borough's centres

Background

2. Along with many traditional Town Centres across the country, the Borough's centres have for a number of years faced an increasing number of challenges to their vitality and role. The common cited reasons for this often mask a more complex set of circumstances; The changing patterns in retailing which have developed highly convenient, easily accessible services which serve today's consumers, along with the enormous growth of online and mobile retailing, the speed and sophistication of major national and international retailers and the recession have all changed the nature of retail activity to the detriment of the traditional High Street.
3. The Council has over the last decade made a number of interventions to seek to improve the fortunes of its Principal and Local Centres and these include:
 - 3.1 The preparation of Area Action Plans and Regeneration Strategies in order to guide and support appropriate and sustainable development
 - 3.2 The creation of the arms length company, New Heritage Regeneration Limited, to coordinate borough wide development, initially in Dudley and Brierley Hill Town Centres in partnership with the Council
 - 3.3 The securing of significant amounts of external funding from Advantage West Midlands, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the European Regional Development Fund, English Heritage and Section 106 receipts towards land acquisition, development and environmental projects
 - 3.4 The creation and/or support of Partnership groups such as the former Brierley Hill Regeneration Partnership, Dudley and Brierley Hill Town Centre Partnerships and Local Centre Partnerships

3.5 The delivery of a Town Centre events programme

4. This Committee have considered reports on the subjects referred to in paragraphs 3.1 to 3.4 on a number of occasions, most recently the 7 January 2013
5. On 17 May 2011 the Prime Minister announced that he had asked Mary Portas, the leading retail marketing consultant, to undertake a review of the high street. The report *The Portas review: an independent review into the future of our high streets* was published on 13 December 2011. The Government's formal response to the recommendations made by Mary Portas in her report was published by the Department for Communities and Local Government on 30 March 2012.
6. The purpose of the Portas review was to identify what the Government, local authorities, businesses and others can do together to promote the development of new models of prosperous and diverse high streets. It forms part of the Government's work on the Growth Agenda and the main aims of the review were to:
 - Examine the case for developing town centres that contribute to promoting economic growth, creating jobs and improving quality of life in local areas
 - Explore new business models for high streets relevant to the modern consumer
 - Recommend what action government, businesses and other organisations should take to create diverse, sustainable high streets where small businesses and independent retailers are able to thrive.
7. A summary of the recommendations to the Portas Report are included in Appendix 1 to this report, and include a number of measures which the Council had already initiated
8. The final recommendation (No. 28) proposed that a number of High Street Pilots be set up to 'test proof of concept' and in February 2012 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) invited applications from local partnerships and consortiums for grant funding under a new Portas Review pilot scheme. The scheme sought to support twelve pilots with funding of up to £100,000 for each. Submissions were invited on the basis of the following criteria:
 - The creation of a "Town Team" that would be able to drive innovation and improvement in the way the current high street is managed, develop a strategic and collaborative approach, and be made up of a wide range of local interests including landlords, retailers, local authorities and local communities.
 - Pilot areas representative of a variety of high streets and town centres and smaller retail areas with a good geographical spread and areas with both high and low average income levels and high and low shop vacancy rates
 - Pilots areas with a transformational vision for their high street and the backing to make it a reality.

- Pilot bids able to demonstrate maximum commitment to the Town Team approach amongst retailers, landlords, the local authority and the local community
 - areas able to demonstrate the potential for improvement
 - The most innovative ideas that will have maximum impact and could be replicated elsewhere.
9. Given the critical mass underway with a number of significant regeneration initiatives in and around the Town Centre (including the Market Place public realm project, the Townscape Heritage Initiative, Dudley College developments, Supermarket proposals and Castle Hill and Zoo project) the Dudley Town Centre Partnership in close liaison with the Council submitted a proposal for this round, and for the second round, however neither was accepted by DCLG
10. However, given the enthusiasm demonstrated by the Dudley Town Centre Partnership for the principles set out in the Pilot Bid, the Partnership agreed to progress without the support of DCLG for its own Pilot Project, and on the 17 December 2012 the Partnership formally adopted the role of the Town Team for Dudley Town Centre and charged a Project Team which meets on a monthly basis with the evolution and delivery of the Action Plan which was included in the DCLG bid.
11. The current Action Plan is included as Appendix 2 to this report

12. Progress to date on the Action Plan includes:

Physical improvements	Improve residential offer in the town centre	Funding bid to the Homes and Communities agency is in preparation in partnership with a Registered Social Landlord
Community and Events	Develop social enterprise in the Town Centre	A Community Engagement specialist has been engaged and presented findings to the Town Team on the 26 February
Filling/Occupying Units	Survey – what and who is missing from the Town Investigate capacity for further free on street parking	Consultation is underway with Dudley College students Consultation on amending time limits is currently underway and proposals for additional on street parking are in preparation
Marketing	Package of support to encourage more take up of market stalls	Outline ERDF approval secured for Market Place project
	Surveys	First footfall survey has been completed Town Centre vacancy survey has been completed and will be repeated on a quarterly basis
	Develop Tourism Strategy	Stakeholder event took place at the end of February to start the preparation of the strategy

Finance

13. The work of the project team is funded from existing resources, and seeks to identify opportunities to generate investment into the Borough through various external funding sources.

Law

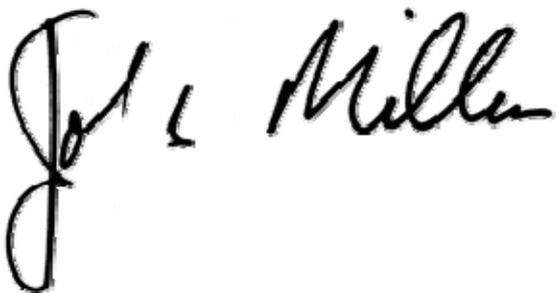
14. Pursuant to Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011, the Council has the general power of competence to do anything that individuals generally may do

Equality Impact

15. Delivery of the proposals in this report would bring significant benefits to the Borough and would have a major positive effect for residents, visitors, businesses, investors and developers and all groups in society

Recommendation

16. That the Committee note the progress made in developing the Portas Pilot for Dudley Town Centre



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List of Background Papers

The Portas Review - An independent review into the future of our high streets. Mary Portas/DCLG December 2011

Appendix 1 – A summary of the recommendations to the Portas Report

1. Put in place a “Town Team”: a visionary, strategic and strong operational management team for high streets
2. Empower successful Business Improvement Districts to take on more responsibilities and powers and become “Super-BIDs”
3. Legislate to allow landlords to become high street investors by contributing to their Business Improvement District
4. Establish a new “National Market Day” where budding shopkeepers can try their hand at operating a low-cost retail business
5. Make it easier for people to become market traders by removing unnecessary regulations so that anyone can trade on the high street unless there is a valid reason why not
6. Government should consider whether business rates can better support small businesses and independent retailers
7. Local authorities should use their new discretionary powers to give business rate concessions to new local businesses
8. Make business rates work for business by reviewing the use of the RPI with a view to changing the calculation to CPI
9. Local areas should implement free controlled parking schemes that work for their town centres and we should have a new parking league table
10. Town Teams should focus on making high streets accessible, attractive and safe
11. Government should include high street deregulation as part of their ongoing work on freeing up red tape
12. Address the restrictive aspects of the ‘Use Class’ system to make it easier to change the uses of key properties on the high street
13. Put betting shops into a separate ‘Use Class’ of their own
14. Make explicit a presumption in favour of town centre development in the wording of the National Planning Policy Framework

15. Introduce Secretary of State “exceptional sign off” for all new out-of-town developments and require all large new developments to have an “affordable shops” quota
16. Large retailers should support and mentor local businesses and independent retailers
17. Retailers should report on their support of local high streets in their annual report
18. Encourage a contract of care between landlords and their commercial tenants by promoting the leasing code and supporting the use of lease structures other than upward only rent reviews, especially for small businesses
19. Explore further disincentives to prevent landlords from leaving units vacant
20. Banks who own empty property on the high street should either administer these assets well or be required to sell them
21. Local authorities should make more proactive use of Compulsory Purchase Order powers to encourage the redevelopment of key high street retail space
22. Empower local authorities to step in when landlords are negligent with new “Empty Shop Management Orders”
23. Introduce a public register of high street landlord
24. Run a high profile campaign to get people involved in Neighbourhood Plans
25. Promote the inclusion of the High Street in Neighbourhood Plans
26. Developers should make a financial contribution to ensure that the local community has a strong voice in the planning system
27. Support imaginative community use of empty properties through Community Right to Buy, Meanwhile Use and a new “Community Right to Try”
28. Run a number of High Street Pilots to test proof of concept

Measures to improve Town Centres vitality; Portas Pilot project

Appendix 2 – Town Team Action Plan

Priority Areas	Activities	Potential Funding	Timescale	Lead/Key Partners
Physical Improvements	Refurbishment of neglected High Street shops 25-30 shop fronts	Vacant shop front budget	2013 Q1+	Council/Dudley College/retailers
	Townscape Heritage Initiative – Phase 2	HLF/Council	2013 Q4	Council /HLF/ owners of premises
	Improve residential offer in town centre	Council/Homes & Communities Agency/Registered Social Landlords	2013 Q3+	Council/Homes & Communities Agency/Registered Social Landlords
Community and Events	Distinctly Dudley! Engage communities visiting Dudley Town Centre	Council//Dudley College	2013 Q2+	Council//Dudley College/Town Team
	Develop social enterprise offer in town centre: 1. Identify current Dudley offer and develop strategy for town	N/A officer time only	2013 Q2	Council
	2. Develop social enterprise hub within the town	Local Enterprise Partnership/Property Improvement Programme	2014 Q1+	To be determined
	3. Develop package of support for new and developing social enterprises	Social Enterprise Fund/Chamber	2014 Q1+	To be determined
	Development of an outdoor gym with community organisation	Community Forum	2013 Q3+	Council/Community Group
	Community proposal management fees	Portas/Town Centre Innovation Fund	2013 Q1	Council
	Filling/Occupying Units	Extend 'meanwhile' strategy - vinyls on empty shops and voluntary & community use of vacant properties	Vacant shop front budget/voluntary/ community/ Dudley College	2013 Q1+

Priority Areas	Activities	Potential Funding	Timescale	Lead/Key Partners
	Package of business support including business health checks, mentoring scheme, loans, finance, free rental period on market stalls & empty shops	Dudley and Stourbridge Colleges/Town Centre Innovation Fund/Rate Relief/Dudley Business First/Local Enterprise Zone	2013 Q2+	To be determined
	Package of support to encourage young entrepreneurs including start up units with business support	Dudley and Stourbridge Colleges/Town Centre Innovation Fund/Rate Relief/Prince's Trust/ Local Enterprise Zone	2013 Q2+	To be determined
	Set up specialist markets including Sundays and evenings Encourage retailers to open on Sundays Package of support to encourage more take up of market stalls	Town centre innovation fund	2013 Q2+	Council/Town Team
	Develop Business Plan for the market place Lighting Strategy	N/A officer time only Arts Council. Implemented through ERDF project Portas	2013 Q3 2013 Q2+	Council/Town Team/ Traders Council/Town Team/ Traders
	Survey - what and who missing from the town Investigate capacity for further free on street parking	No funding required	2013 Q1 Ongoing	Council Council
Marketing	Develop website for Dudley town centre which links to town centre businesses and included a diary of events	Council Revenue from businesses using website Black Country Chamber/LEP	2013 Q1+	Council/Town Team
	IT training for businesses	Dudley College Black Country Chamber European Social Fund	2013 Q2+	Council/Town Team

Priority Areas	Activities	Potential Funding	Timescale	Lead/Key Partners
	Town Centre Rewards Scheme	Revenue from business/Portas	2013 Q2+	Council/Town Team
	Surveys: baseline survey work	Portas	2012 Q2	Council
	business, community & visitors	Dudley Town Centre Public Realm ERDF project	2013 Q2; 2014 Q2	Council
	Marketing & communications strategy including radio, newspapers, posters/flyers etc	Council	Ongoing	Council/Town Team
	Develop tourism strategy	Council	2013 Q3	Council/Town Team
	Public art project and spin off creative work	Arts Council/ Lottery/ Community Forum/Dudley College	2013 Q3+	Council/Town Team Dudley College/ Community Groups/Arts Council/Lottery
	Strengthen our High Street campaign	Marketing budget	2013 Q1+	Council/Town Team
	Annual Event	Marketing budget/Portas Retailers/other businesses/ landlords	2013 Q1+ 2014 Q1+	Council/Town Team
	Local environment improvements to the town centre	Community Forums	2013 Q2+ 2014 Q2+	Council/Town Team
	Tying in with national events	Dudley Town Centre events budget	Ongoing	Council/Town Team
	Treasure Trails	Council/ Community Group/Dudley College	2013 Q2 & 2014 Q2	Council/Community Group/Dudley College
	Develop 'Traders Charter' and hold launch event	Council/Dudley Business First	2013 Q3 2014 Q3	Council/Town Team/ Traders
	Introduce Retailer of the Year award	Council/Dudley Business First	2013 Q3 2014 Q3	Council/Town Team
	Introduce Dudley Ambassadors	Ambassador scheme - ERDF/Council	2013 Q4+	Council/Town Team / attractions
	Develop town centre tourist information hub linked to the Ambassadors	Vacant shop front budget/ Community Forum	2013 Q4+	DMBC/DTC Partnership/ attractions

