

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report to Cabinet

12 February 2019

TITLE:	Town Centre Regeneration and Investment Programme
PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Councillor Ralphs - Council Leader SMDC
CONTACT OFFICER:	Sarah Porru – Head of Regeneration
WARDS INVOLVED:	

1. Reason for the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Councillors on proposals for the Town Centre Regeneration and Investment Programme and seek approval for the submission of a funding bid to the Future High Street Fund to support improvements to Cheadle Town Centre.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 It is recommended that Councillors:
- 2.1.1 Note the update and actions within the Town Centre Regeneration and Investment Programme
- 2.1.2 Submit an expression of interest to the Future High Street Fund to support regeneration and investment in Cheadle.

3. Executive Summary

High Streets have been affected by major changes in the past decades, and the speed of this change is increasing. Online shopping in particular has become significantly more popular than it was 10 years ago and this is having significant impact on retail stores. As a result, high streets are having to evolve and adapt.

- 3.2 In response to these changes, The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government have made provision for a new £675 million Future High Streets Fund to support and fund local areas' plans to make their high streets and town centres fit for the future. The fund can also help to restore historic high street properties and put historic buildings back into economic use.

3.3 Evidence shows that high streets with a wide choice alongside well designed and planned residential and office space are more resilient to these changes and are adapting more successfully. In contrast, high streets that rely heavily on traditional retail without sufficient office space and housing surrounding the high street have found it harder to adapt to these changes and tend to be the ones that are struggling (Public Health England, British Property Foundation).

3.4 Retail vacancy rates vary across Staffordshire Moorlands towns and there appears to be a link to the level of house-building in the area with those towns experiencing higher levels of development seeing better performing high streets. However, the national average for retail vacancies is 10.1%, and on this basis Leek, Cheadle and Biddulph are all performing worse than average.

Town	Total number of retail units	Number of Vacant retail Units	Vacancy Rate (%)
Leek	241	26	10.8
Cheadle	105	20	19
Biddulph	88	15	17
TOTAL / AVERAGE	434	61	14.1

3.5 In response to this, a draft Town Centre Regeneration and Investment Programme has been prepared for the Moorlands, identifying constraints and opportunities and proactively driving growth in the town centres. It also considers funding opportunities including the recently announced Future High Streets Fund. The programme recognises that each of the Moorlands town’s is different and will therefore require a different approach to maximise growth, increase footfall and bring forward alternative uses for vacant properties.

4. Cheadle

4.1 In recent years Cheadle has shown a rapidly declining retail performance and now has more empty shops than any of the other Moorlands towns. Poor quality and low value stores in the town centre and large number of part time shops (only open 3-4 days a week) give the town a neglected feel & deter investors. Historically low housing development has meant stagnant growth and an ageing population. This results in a lack of variety in the retail offer and high street uses. However, the town has a number of opportunities. St Giles Church offers significant heritage interest, the town centre is attractive and there is a more than sufficient supply of affordable car parking spaces and accessible public facilities. Significant housing growth is planned which will help improve footfall in the town centre, whilst the town’s proximity to the A50 provides opportunities for connectivity improvements. The recently commissioned Cheadle Masterplan will consider opportunities to maximise the above benefits as well as the development opportunities provided by large areas of publicly-owned land in and around the town centre.

- 4.2 The Future High Street fund will support Investment in physical infrastructure, including improving public and other transport access as well as Investment in land assembly, including support for increase the density of residential and workspace around high streets in place of under-used retail units. Having studied the criteria of the Future High Street Fund, and considered the challenges and opportunities presented by each of the Moorlands towns, Cheadle is best placed to be the focus of a submission and would benefit most from programme due its declining high street performance and opportunities for investment on publicly owned land.
- 4.3 The fund will also support the regeneration of heritage high streets (up to £55 million of the overall fund). This has two elements: helping to restore historic high street properties through Historic England, and equipping communities with their own resources to put historic buildings back into economic use. St Giles Church is currently an under-utilised heritage asset that could act as a focal point and increase visitor numbers to the town.
- 4.4 The Government has stated that they are expecting only one bid from each local authority and have made clear that they will not accept bids covering town centre areas that are not facing significant challenges. Places are expected to partner with the private sector in developing their proposals. The deadline for submission to the fund is 22nd March

5. **Leek**

- 5.1 Leek is currently the best performing town in the Moorlands in terms of retail vacancy levels and has benefited from recent investment in public realm and markets. Recent investment totalling in excess of £2.2m includes improvements to the Cattle Market, Butter Market and Market Place as well as Leek Sports Village and local play schemes. Leek also has a strong catchment area driven by agricultural/rural weekly trade and weekend visitors.
- 5.2 However engagement in arts and cultural activity across the district is comparatively low and a recent review of the Councils Arts grants identifies that more could be done to promote arts and culture activity to deliver economic, social, and health benefits. One of the key recommendations of the review is the creation of a cultural strategy for the district. This would be a strategy developed by the sector and supported by the Council rather than a 'Council Strategy'.
- 5.3 Furthermore, Staffordshire Moorlands has also been identified by the Arts Council as 'an area with comparatively low engagement with arts and cultural activity'. As a result the Arts Council has designated Staffordshire Moorlands as one of the areas eligible to bid to join the next Creative People and Places programme.
- 5.4 The Creative People and Places Programme covers arts and culture which means engagement in museums and heritage (both built and natural) and libraries is covered. Activity in the Nicholson Institute and Foxlowe Arts Centre could be included and the districts natural assets could play an important part

in a local scheme. Democratic & Community Services will lead on the development and submission of a bid for inclusion in the Creative People and Places programme.

6. Biddulph

- 6.1 Whilst the town suffers from a low overall shopping retention rate which impacts on associated shopping expenditure, the town centre supermarket free car parking and centrally located services mean the town has the potential for strong footfall and investment in public realm has helped create a visually attractive town centre. Recent investment totalling in excess of £2.5m includes improvements at Biddulph Town Hall, Biddulph Sports village, Biddulph Leisure Centre and play areas at Hot Lane and Newpool.
- 6.2 One of the aims of the Biddulph Neighbourhood plan is to 'promote the local economy aiming for prosperity for all'. Community feedback has focused this element on the quality of the High Street. The plan also seeks to identify all local heritage, culture and encourage tourism responsibly. As part of the Neighbourhood Plan process, AECOM was commissioned to prepare a Masterplan Framework for Biddulph Town Centre and propose land uses for the Mill Triangle Sites which would help to revitalise the Town Centre and improve the urban environment for locals and visitors. This will be considered as part of the emerging Neighbourhood Plan.
- 6.3 The Council already has an agreed approach in place to accelerate the increase in employment space in the town, to increase the number of jobs and start-ups and support the growth of existing businesses. The Council has made a significant investment (£283,000) at Victoria Business Park and recently approved a comprehensive package of measures to accelerate housing delivery in the Staffordshire Moorlands including Wharf Road in Biddulph.
- 6.4 Masterplans are currently being prepared for Tunstall Road and Wharf Road in Biddulph. The masterplans will provide a strategic vision for the development of these sites, unlock barriers to delivery and speed up the rate at which land can be made available. These developments will help increase housing and employment density in the town which in turn will increase footfall in the town centre, leading to vibrant and healthy high street.

7. How this report links to Corporate Priorities

- 7.1 The Town Centre Regeneration and Investment Programme will have implications the following aims of the Corporate Plan:
- Aim One - Help create a safer and healthier environment for our residents to live and work
 - Aim Three – To create a strong economy by supporting further regeneration of towns and villages

8. **Alternative Options**

- 8.1 Option 1 (recommended) – that the Council notes the approach in the Town Centre Regeneration and Investment Programme and approves the submission of a funding bid to the Future High Street Fund to support improvements to Cheadle Town Centre.
- 8.2 Option 2 (not recommended) – that the Council does not approve the submission of a funding bid to the Future High Street Fund to support improvements to Cheadle Town Centre. This is not recommended.

6. **Implications**

6.1 Community Safety - (Crime and Disorder Act 1998)

6.2 Workforce

6.3 Equality and Diversity/Equality Impact Assessment

There are no implications at this stage. The more detailed set of proposals and implementation plan (if the Future High Street Fund bid is successful) could provide opportunities to advance equality and diversity and will be considered at those stages.

6.4 Financial Considerations

6.5 Legal

6.6 Sustainability

6.7 Consultation

6.8 Risk Assessment

Dai Larner
Executive Director (Place)

Web Links and Background Papers

Name of any papers

Location

Council building or web hyperlink

Contact details

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7. Detail

- 7.1 The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government have made provision for a new £675 million Future High Streets Fund to support and fund local areas' plans to make their high streets and town centres fit for the future. It will serve two purposes: it will support local areas to prepare long-term strategies for their high streets and town centres, including funding a new High Streets Taskforce to provide expertise and hands-on support to local areas. It will also then co-fund with local areas projects including:
- Investment in physical infrastructure, including improving public and other transport access; improving flow and circulation within a town / city centre; enabling provision of congestion-relieving infrastructure; other investment in physical infrastructure needed to support new housing and workspace development and existing local communities;.
 - Investment in land assembly, including support for increase the density of residential and workspace around high streets in place of under-used retail units.
- 7.2 The fund will also support the regeneration of heritage high streets (up to £55 million of the overall fund). This has two elements: helping to restore historic high street properties through Historic England, and equipping communities with their own resources to put historic buildings back into economic use - for example as residential buildings, new work spaces or cultural venues, supported by the Architectural Heritage Fund.
- 7.4 Local areas are asked to out how their plans will enable their local high street to adapt to changes in consumer demands and then give details of individual projects with a clear economic benefit. Funding can not be used to expand traditional retail on their high street or for short term enhancements or promotions.
- 7.5 The Government has stated that they are expecting only one bid from each local authority and have made clear that they will not accept bids covering town centre areas that are not facing significant challenges. Places are expected to partner with the private sector in developing their proposals. The deadline for submission to the fund is 22nd March
- 7.6 Creative People and Places is an Arts Council funded programme. It encourages new approaches to inspire and excite people about the arts. Bids to the programme are expected to be for £1 – 2 million and require match funding of 25% (which can come from ticket sales, sponsorship, other grants -including Heritage Lottery grants, volunteer time). Funding can be used to pay for the local programme team, tutors, performers, venues, materials and other costs. The deadline for the 1st Stage submission is 21st March 2019

