
REPORT TO:	ENVIRONMENTAL AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES	AGENDA ITEM: 10
DATE OF MEETING:	15th NOVEMBER 2018	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE	
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SUBJECT:	SWADLINCOTE TOWN CENTRE VISION – PROGRESS REVIEW	REF:
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE: EDS 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 15

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 That Members note progress to date in the implementation of the Swadlincote Town Centre Vision & Strategy to date.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To update Members on progress in the implementation of the Swadlincote Town Centre Vision & Strategy 2012. At the mid-point of this strategy, it is timely to review progress against the Vision's Action Plan, highlight outstanding actions and identify priorities for the remaining period.

3.0 Detail

Background

- 3.1 The first Swadlincote Vision & Strategy was produced in 2001. A decade on this was revisited and an extensive programme of research and consultation undertaken. This resulted in the District Council developing and adopting a new Swadlincote Town Centre Vision & Strategy in 2012.

Swadlincote Town Centre Vision & Strategy 2012

- 3.2 The Vision sets out an agreed framework for raising the profile of the town as a centre for retailing, service and leisure, and guiding work to enhance its vitality and viability. It provides the basis for the collaboration of public, private, voluntary and community sectors in pursuit of an enhanced town centre.
- 3.3 The Vision is based upon three Areas for Action – design, promotion and economic restructuring – and a number of principles:
- Comprehensive – a single project cannot regenerate a town centre;
 - Incremental – small projects make a difference;

- Self-help and public-private partnership;
- Identifying and capitalising on existing assets;
- Recognising the wider value of historic buildings and landmarks;
- Improvements and initiatives must be synonymous with quality;
- Changing community attitudes and public perceptions; and,
- Action-orientated – frequent, visible changes.

3.4 During the period since 2012 there have been some significant developments:

Economic Climate

- 3.5 The extended recovery from the economic downturn has featured low levels of wage growth, a decline in personal credit availability and households with constrained disposable incomes. This has had a direct impact on town centres, with a fall in high street spending and the failure of a series of national retail chains. Meanwhile public sector austerity has led to cuts in spending, for example on bus subsidies and to the availability of regeneration funding for public realm works and other projects.
- 3.6 The economic downturn was associated with an acceleration in the growth of online shopping, initially focused on comparison goods but now also convenience goods with the rapid expansion of home delivery services. The mergers of financial institutions alongside the growth in online banking also accelerated the decline in the branch networks of banks and building societies. Meanwhile changing consumer trends have seen a decline in, for example, pubs and bars and a growth in uses such as coffee shops, takeaways and health & beauty services.
- 3.7 The unemployment rate in South Derbyshire is now just one third of that experienced in 2012 and well below national levels. Levels of home and car ownership are well above national averages. The area has seen high levels of business investment and housebuilding, with a very rapidly growing population. Over recent years, numerous independent stores have taken up vacant space in the town centre.

Planning Context

- 3.8 The role of town centres is evolving rapidly with, for example, a growth in leisure and service uses, plus residential demand and a decline of traditional retail. A Swadlincote Town Centre Retail & Leisure Study was independently conducted in 2015. This found that the town centre's retail ranking had improved by +185 places, linked to the edge of centre developments such as The Pipeworks. Swadlincote's share of comparison and convenience goods shopping has improved (since 2005). However, the Study found that there remained an undersupply of comparison good shopping and that there was a need for a qualitative improvement in the convenience shopping offer.
- 3.9 Part 2 of the South Derbyshire Local Plan was Adopted in November 2017. This included a review of the Swadlincote town centre boundary, identification of primary frontages and the highlighting of redevelopment sites. The number of vacant units in the town centre has fallen, despite the boundary of the town centre being expanded. Numbers of charity shops have also dropped. Overall footfall levels in 2015 are similar to 2008. Footfall on market days is typically some 25% higher than on non-market days.

Community Context

- 3.10 Town centre car parks continue to be provided as a free service with a mix of long term and short term provision. On-street and off-street parking enforcement is provided by a third party through a partnership agreement between the District and County Councils. Parking enforcement on the highway is undertaken by Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) on behalf of Derbyshire County Council. The District Council also pays for 12 hours CEO enforcement per week within its own car parks. The current level of parking enforcement is considered proportionate. Issue rates of Penalty Charge Notices are relatively low compared to other towns in the County.
- 3.11 Town centre litter, dog fouling and fly tipping is principally controlled through a programme of proactive street cleaning and reactive responses to complaints. The cleanliness of the town centre has generally remained consistent over the last five years. A recent Overview & Scrutiny Committee report (17 October 2018) on tackling litter has identified various opportunities for improving environmental conditions across South Derbyshire.
- 3.12 Enforcement of environmental crime is undertaken by the Council's Safer Neighbourhood Wardens. The capacity of the Wardens to undertake proactive patrols of the town centre and parks in the urban core has reduced in the last two years as their energies have been directed towards investigations of fly tipping, abandoned vehicles and anti-social behaviour.
- 3.13 Total crime numbers have been stable (2011-2017), though some types are up (eg. anti-social behaviour and shoplifting), whilst others have fallen (eg. criminal damage). There has been targeted partnership work to address young people causing problems in the town centre. The use of the joint tools and powers has a positive effect on the group responsible. However due to the very nature of young people, this is a recurrent issue as the next generation evolve. The targeted work uses Police resources from across South Derbyshire which removes the Neighbourhood Officers from their default neighbourhoods. A sustainable presence would benefit the town centre, providing a permanent and tangible impact on youth Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB). A similar principle applies to town centre drinkers.
- 3.14 Town centre retailers have expressed their dissatisfaction with their ability to get through on 101 to report incidents and the lack of consistent engagement opportunities with the authorities. The Police have Officers allocated to the town centre with a remit around visible patrols and engagement. This visibility is managed alongside their other commitments. From a Council perspective a member of the Clean Team used to be specifically allocated to the town centre and acted as a useful conduit for information, however latterly this direct interface with business operators has been lost. As noted above, the activities of the Council Wardens who similarly undertake engagement, has also changed considerably and consequently, there is a need to find a new informal but effective means to liaise and collaborate with town centre businesses.
- 3.15 Two Criminal Behaviour Orders (CBOs) were obtained on two prolific town centre shoplifters in September 2018. The individuals were banned from entering any town centre premise for a 2 year period. They are also banned from associating with each other. One of the individuals breached their CBO within two days and as a consequence received a 19 week prison sentence.

Swadlincote Centre Local Super Output Area	Sept 14 -Aug 15	Sept 15 -Aug 16	Sept 16 -Aug 17	Sept 17 -Aug 18
ASB Calls	418	434	413	449

Shoplifting	88	69	146	105
Criminal Damage	48	60	50	64
Public Disorder	5	14	9	26
Drug Offences	8	15	14	26

3.16 The above table shows that ASB calls for police service and crime figures have risen over the duration of the past 4 years. Shoplifting has decreased this year and drug offences can be seen as a positive sign as it shows proactive policing. Many of the Public Order Offences will be down to one individual breaching their CBO.

Action Plan

3.17 The Vision included actions to be pursued by the public, private, voluntary and community sectors working in partnership, under the following headings: Protect heritage; Attract investment; Renew public facilities; Develop the market; Encourage more events; Support business development; Enhance the public realm; Promote community safety; Maintain the environment; Market the town; Improve signage; Pursue innovative transport solutions; Identify additional parking; Improve access; Invest in visitor attractions; Integrate town centre management; and Monitor health and vitality.

3.18 Appendix A provides a mid-term review of progress and issues, and projects that are planned, underway or completed. Since 2012 the progress of the partner organisations may be summarised as follows.

3.19 Partners have made progress on matters such as:

- enhancing heritage buildings, improving shop fronts and creating trails that draw on the town's history
- reducing the numbers of vacant premises and charity shops; increasing the number of independent retailers
- providing business support, training events and awards schemes, including through Swadlincote Town Team and the South Derbyshire Business Advice Service
- supporting marketing and events, encompassing public, community and schools activities, including through Swadlincote Tourist Information Centre
- enhancing parks and gardens, including Eureka Park and the Diana, Princess of Wales, Memorial Garden
- developing new residential space in disused buildings and above shops
- developing the market
- developing planning and conservation policies
- progressing development sites, particularly housing schemes on the edge of the town centre
- enhancing visitor attractions and leisure facilities, including Green Bank Leisure Centre
- improving CCTV and undertaking community safety activities

3.20 Continuing challenges for the partner organisations include:

- enhancing public transport services and walking and cycle routes and facilities
- expanding long stay parking provision benefitting town centre workers, though there have been a number of smaller additions
- growing the evening economy, in particular the food and drink offer
- increasing the provision of overnight accommodation

- pursuing public realm and gateway improvements, though a number of smaller schemes have been implemented
- encouraging greater attention to property maintenance and addressing the aesthetic appearance of some parts of the town centre
- tackling highways issues, including junction congestion at peak times, and signage
- addressing some persistent anti-social behaviour issues, whilst recognising that overall crime levels are low; providing additional youth diversion activities
- boosting footfall and encouraging the interlinkage of parts of the town centre
- enhancing the market offer
- encouraging more residents to 'shop locally' and attracting further visitors
- expanding the range of organisations staging community events and enhancing their promotion

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 The Vision's Action Plan is supported through the activities and annual budgets of a number of Services, including Planning, Economic Development, Environmental Health, Cultural, Community Safety, Property and Direct Services.

5.0 Corporate Implications

5.1 The Vision contributes to the Corporate Plan's vision to '*make South Derbyshire a better place to live, work and visit*' and in particular to the themes of:

- Place – Creating vibrant communities to meet residents' needs
- Progress - Encouraging inward investment and tourism opportunities

5.2 The key aims include:

- Facilitate and deliver a range of integrated and sustainable housing and community infrastructure.
- Help maintain low crime and anti-social behaviour levels in the District.
- Connect with communities helping them feel safe and secure.
- Support provision of cultural facilities and activities throughout the District.
- Deliver services that keep the District clean and healthy.
- Work to attract further inward investment.
- Unlock development potential and ensure the continuing growth of vibrant town centres.
- Work to maximise the employment, training and leisure uses of The National Forest by residents and increase the visitor spend by tourists.
- Help to influence and develop the infrastructure for economic growth.
- Provide support to businesses and the not for profit sector and promote innovation and access to finance, including in rural areas.

6.0 Community Implications

6.1 The Vision contributes directly to the South Derbyshire Partnership's Sustainable Community Strategy vision of '*a dynamic and caring South Derbyshire, able to seize opportunities to develop and empower successful communities, whilst respecting and enhancing the varied character and environment of our fast growing and diverse District*'.

6.2 'Sustainable Development' is highlighted as a key theme, with the aim of achieving 'A more prosperous, better connected, increasingly resilient and competitive economy' and 'A better place to live, work and visit at the heart of The National Forest', with measures including unemployment levels in the District and spend by visitors to The National Forest. The aims for 'Safer & Stronger Communities' focus on 'More people feel safe and secure in their home and in the community, particularly those who are most vulnerable' and 'Increased voluntary and community sector activity within the District'.

7.0 Conclusions

7.1 Nationally, town centres are under increasing stress, with the continuing growth of out of town retailing and the rapid acceleration of online shopping. Despite this difficult climate, Swadlincote town centre has continued to progress positively. However if the vitality and viability of the town centre is to be sustained, it will need to remain a focus for the efforts of the public, private and voluntary/community sector partners in Swadlincote.

8.0 Background Papers

Swadlincote Town Centre Vision & Strategy (2012)
South Derbyshire Local Plan – Part 1 (2016) and Part 2 (2017)
South Derbyshire Economic Development Strategy (2016-2020)

Appendix A: Mid-Term Progress Review