

What we said we'd achieve in 2013/14

Priority Outcome: Prosperity – Economic Resilience

Town Centres

Quarter 1

How are we doing so far?

We said we would: Improve town centres through regeneration and management

By:

<p>To maintain a dialogue with the stakeholders in the District's three Town Centres, including the Traders Associations, as a means of supporting specific initiatives in each centre.</p> <p>The agenda of the Town Centre Regeneration Policy Development Committee includes issues raised by the three Traders Associations as a standing item. Officers are in regular contact with each association to progress matters of mutual interest.</p>	
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As Performance Measures:

<p>To achieve a reduction in the number of vacant ground-floor retail units in the District's principal town centre shopping streets.</p> <p>Work has been undertaken to establish a robust baseline to enable this indicator to be regularly monitored using up-to-date figures. Accordingly, the number of vacant units in June 2013 compared to June 2012 is noted below:-</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="231 1612 1252 2009"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>June 2012 Vacant (Total)</th> <th>June 2013 Vacant (Total)</th> <th>Overall Change</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Cannock</td> <td>15 (132)</td> <td>13 (132)</td> <td>-2 (-1.52%)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Rugeley</td> <td>16 (75)</td> <td>8 (75)</td> <td>-8 (-10.66%)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Hednesford</td> <td>4 (67)</td> <td>7 (74)</td> <td>+3 (+3.49%)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Totals</td> <td>35 (274)</td> <td>28 (281)</td> <td>-7 (-2.81%)</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		June 2012 Vacant (Total)	June 2013 Vacant (Total)	Overall Change	Cannock	15 (132)	13 (132)	-2 (-1.52%)	Rugeley	16 (75)	8 (75)	-8 (-10.66%)	Hednesford	4 (67)	7 (74)	+3 (+3.49%)	Totals	35 (274)	28 (281)	-7 (-2.81%)	
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Overall, the number of vacant units in the principal shopping streets across the three town centres has reduced by 7 units since June 2012, a decline of 2.81% of the total units in the same frontages.	
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Quarter 1 Case Study

THE TOWN CENTRE BUSINESS RATES DISCOUNT SCHEME

Background

In April 2012 Cannock Chase Council was identified as one of 100 local authorities who were chosen to receive an allocation of £100,000 from the Government's High Street Innovation Fund. The Fund, which was established in response to the recommendations contained in the Portas Report, was to be used to stimulate investment in locations which had been adversely affected by the recession.

After due consideration by the Cabinet and a period of consultation which involved discussions with local traders associations and the Chamber of Commerce, the Town Centre Business Rates Discount Scheme (TCBRDS) was formally launched in September 2012. The main aim of the TCBRDS is to bring back into use empty retail units within the District's three town centres. A 100% discount on business rates is available for a maximum period of 12 months with a cap at £10,000 per business. This support is on top of any other rates relief the business may be entitled to, such as Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR). The principal requirement of the TCBRDS is that the successful applicant must be either a new business or an expanding one and they are proposing to occupy a currently empty unit in Cannock, Hednesford or Rugeley town centres with the boundaries defined on a series of maps which are available for inspection on the Council's website. Charity shops, betting shops, off licenses and market stalls are specifically excluded from consideration. Applications which include additional financial contributions from a landlord, such as rent free periods, or will secure a use in a prominent ground floor location are given priority.

Progress to Date

In the period since the TCBRDS was launched, four new businesses and ten business expansions have received approval with only one failing to take up the offer of support from the Council. These range from a café, card shops, cosmetic treatments, a pet shop, clothing shops and an estate agency. Over 20 new jobs have been created and many more protected, footfall is on the increase and there are indications that the new business ventures are trading well. Of the 13 approved and implemented schemes six are located in Cannock, six in Rugeley and one is located in Hednesford Town Centre which has seen a number of new retailers opening up in the town without assistance from the TCBRDS via the completion of the regeneration works. Approximately £60,000 of the £100,000 allocation secured by the Council has been committed to support those schemes above, with a further £40,000 still available to new applicants.

A recent survey of vacant units in the three town centres revealed that in the period between June 2012 and June 2013 the number of empty units had gone down in both Cannock and Rugeley with a direct correlation to the take up of assistance from the TCBRDS. One negative aspect of the scheme is that some businesses who have expressed a desire to expand have had to reconsider their plans because it would adversely affect their eligibility for SBRR.

Trader Comments

Angi Cooney from Rugeley Traders Association assisted one of the successful applicants said "the knowledge that they would get help from the Council with their business rates helped two of our traders to move to larger premises within the town centre. As a direct result, the move from a market stall to a retail unit has seen their trade increase by 15%".

Jon Banner from Card Stop in Market Hall Street in Cannock, the Schemes first successful applicant, was featured on the BBC's Midlands Today in November 2012. He was also supportive of the Scheme and welcomed "the role of the Council in bringing new jobs to the town and supporting his family business".