CABINET
20 DECEMBER 2012
UPDATE ON TOWN CENTRE ISSUES AND IMPROVEMENTS

1 Purpose of Report

1.1 To update Cabinet on a range of town centre issues and improvements linked to the implementation of Hednesford Town Centre Regeneration, Business Rates Discount Scheme, Community Toilet Scheme, Town Centre Improvement Fund, Designated Public Place Order in Cannock Town Centre and retail lettings in Cannock, Hednesford and Rugeley. This programme of activities is the Council’s response to the Portas Review and aims to support business growth and increase employment opportunities across the District.

2 Recommendations

2.1 That Cabinet note the progress made on town centre issues across the District.

2.2 That Cabinet note the further planned improvements to be delivered in 2013.

2.3 That Cabinet recommend to Council that the £100,000 allocation from English Heritage for 2012/13 be included in the Council’s Capital Programme matched with £50,000 Town Centre Improvement capital resources and £50,000 Staffordshire County Council contribution making a total budget of £200,000.

2.4 Subject to Council approving 2.3, that Cabinet grant Permission to Spend this allocation from English Heritage in the Rugeley Conservation Areas Partnership Scheme.

3 Key Issues and Reasons for Recommendation

3.1 The strategic context for the improvement of the District’s Town Centres is the Portas Review (An Independent Review into the future of our high streets)
published by Government in December 2011. A wide range of recommendations are made in the Review including business rates concession schemes, free controlled parking schemes and a co-ordinated operation management approach for town centres. In response, Cabinet has prioritised action to improve the District’s town centres and a significant financial sum has been allocated to deliver a programme of improvements and initiatives in 2012/13.

3.2 The regeneration of Hednesford town centre has entered its final critical phase; Tesco opened at the end of November 2012 and the new retail units on the Rugeley Road are being let. A new discount food store (Aldi) will start construction in 2013. Applications and decisions have been made in terms of the Town Centre Business rates Discount Scheme, Community Toilet Scheme and the Rugeley Conservation Areas Partnership scheme. Cabinet has determined that free parking will apply to Council car parks in the two Saturdays before Christmas.

3.3 As town centres are a significant priority for Cabinet and Council, a progress update is provided for consideration so that all Members are aware of current delivery and future plans to enhance the offer and environment of the District’s three town centres.

4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

4.1 This report supports the Council’s Corporate Priorities as follows:

(i) Economic prosperity is one of the two main priorities for Cannock Chase District. The programme of Town Centre improvements underway are directly intended to increase the retail offer in our town centres, to increase employment and to increase footfall to sustain and revitalise our town centres.

5 Report Detail

Hednesford Town Centre Regeneration

5.1 The final stage of the regeneration of Hednesford is in progress. The town has benefitted from an investment of £50m and this will produce approximately 600 jobs of which 300 are in the new Tesco store on Victoria Street which opened on 26th November. This has been a complex regeneration and the Council has worked closely with its development partner, St Modwen Ltd. The scheme has involved a major change to the town’s retail offer and has included the relocation and rebuilding of a bingo hall, a factory, an army cadet hall and a residential property. The Council has worked closely with all organisations and individuals affected by these changes.

5.2 There is also a bid submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund for £2.45m to improve the facilities and environment of Hednesford Park which is sited close to the
town centre. It is expected that the Heritage Lottery Fund Board will make a
decision which will be available in January 2013.

5.4 There is strong interest in the new retail units built in Hednesford and the detail is
given below under the Retail Lettings sub heading. The procurement process is
underway to select an operator for the new community facility built as part of the
Tesco store development that replaces the Aquarius community facility.

Cannock Chase Business Rates Discount Scheme

5.5 The Portas Review allocation of £100,000 has been set aside to implement a
Business Rates Discount Scheme for new or expanding businesses who occupy
an empty retail unit in any of the three town centres. Charity shops, betting
shops, off licences or markets are not eligible for support under this scheme. To
date, six applications have been made to this scheme. Two businesses in
Cannock and four businesses in Rugeley are being supported with business
rates discount.

5.6 Card Stop in Cannock town centre has been supported and the business
opened in an empty retail unit during November 2012. C Residential, an estate
agency in Rugeley, is being supported to expand its operations from a retail unit
on Horsefair to much larger premises taking over the ex Globe pub in Rugeley
with an additional two new jobs. A market stall in Rugeley Market is being
supported to expand to a retail unit on Upper Brook Street; the name of the
business is Three Wishes which sells gifts and cards. Creature Comforts is a pet
shop that is being supported to move from a small retail unit to a much larger
retail unit in Market Street. Snugfit Windows (Rugeley) Ltd is a window fitting
company that intends to move to a large retail unit next door to Argos in
Wellington Drive. This will result in one new receptionist job plus potential new
jobs in the future as the company looks to manufacture the windows on these
larger premises instead of importing from abroad as at present. Customers will
be able to discuss their requirements at the new retail unit and view the different
products before purchase.

5.7 The sixth one, Café Del Nino, was initially refused but following an appeal and
review, a partial business rates discount has been offered to support this new
business in Cannock Town Centre.

5.8 In total, approximately £45,000 of the budget for this scheme has been
committed so there is still plenty of scope for new or expanding businesses to
apply for this support which provides either 12 months business rates support or
up to a maximum of £10,000 for each business. Members will recognise that
there can be long lead in times to setting up or expanding new businesses and
the Scheme will remain open during 2013.

Cannock Chase Community Toilet Scheme

5.9 The Council allocated £10,000 to pilot the Community Toilet Scheme as part of
the 2012/13 budget. Following consultation with traders associations, the
Community Toilet Scheme was published in early October 2012. Businesses
who sign up to the scheme must keep their toilets safe, hygienic, easily
accessible and well stocked. The service must be made available for free and with no expectation that users will purchase goods or services.

5.10 There have been four expressions of interest to the Community Toilet Scheme: Cannock shopping Centre, Bella’s café (Hednesford), Station Café (Hednesford) and SOS Hairdressers (Hednesford). The application for Cannock Shopping Centre has been refused as these are already publicly accessible toilets. The owners of Bella’s café and SOS Hairdressers have subsequently withdrawn the expression of interest. Environmental Health is conducting routine assessment on the application from Station Café.

5.11 As part of the pilot scheme, the Council will list all participating businesses on its website, as well as details of all public toilet provision across the District. Work is already being undertaken by Communications to compile a list of all publicly accessible toilets in the District to be placed on the Council’s website so that the public are informed of all types of toilet provision.

5.12 Further promotional activity will take place with businesses across the District to ensure businesses have all the information about the scheme.

Town Centre Improvement Fund

5.13 Council approved the establishment of a Town Centre Improvement Fund of £300,000 for 2012/13. The purpose of this Fund is to promote the District’s Town Centres as attractive and safe places to shop and spend leisure time. Subsequently, Cabinet agreed the schemes that would be funded from this allocation at its meeting on 21 June 2012.

5.14 **Bus Station Improvements (Cannock and Rugeley)** – an investment of £50,000 has been made for the provision of additional pathways on the perimeter of Cannock bus station; new and refurbished crossing points; and the installation of a new bus shelter and loading area for coaches and buses at Cannock Bus station. A small amount of civil works and refreshing of the signs and lines has also been funded at Rugeley bus station. These improvements are all intended to ensure safety is maximised at these bus stations. New signage is also being installed. The bus station arrangements in Hednesford have materially changed as a result of the regeneration and so were not included.

5.15 **Rugeley Miner’s Memorial (Rugeley)** – subject to planning consent for the scheme, the Council has allocated £68,000 for a miner’s memorial in Rugeley. This was as a result of a recommendation from the Town Centre Regeneration Policy Development Committee to Cabinet in 2012 which was subsequently accepted. The Lea Hall and Brereton Collieries Memorial Society has been conducting public consultation on its proposals and has also been engaging with the Highways Authority on technical matters. Over 500 responses have been made to the consultation. Highways Authority is conducting further feasibility work on potential locations. Following this, a planning application needs to be submitted and considered for this scheme to proceed.

5.16 **Match funded investment in Rugeley Town Centre and Talbot Street/Lichfield Street Conservation Areas with English Heritage**: the £100,000 allocated 50/50
by Cannock Chase Council and English Heritage in 2011/12 has been fully utilised. Work is in progress on two of these projects at 8 and 10 Anson Street, Rugeley and discussions in progress on two more. In addition the Council is funding a feasibility study on the Canal warehouse, Mill Lane under the Scheme which is expected shortly. A further £200,000 is available in 2012/13 with £50,000 from the Town Centre Improvement Fund and £50,000 from Staffordshire County Council matching £100,000 from English Heritage. Confirmation of the second allocation of £50,000 from English Heritage was not received until 29 May 2012 and this along with the £50,000 Staffordshire County Council has yet to be formally included in the Council’s Capital Programme. Recommendation 2.3 addresses this point. Expressions of interest have been received from other building owners in the Scheme area. The 2012-13 allocation is hoped to be fully committed at 31 March 2013. For 2013/14, there is the possibility of a grant of £50,000 from Staffordshire County Council so far and discussions will take place with English Heritage in due course about the possibility of match funding.

5.17 Town Centre Environmental improvements – an amount of £132,000 has been set aside for a programme of environmental improvements in Cannock and Hednesford. In agreement with the Cabinet Member for Town Centre Regeneration the following improvements will take place from December 2012 to May 2013.

5.18 A review of the positioning of litter bins along with the introduction of new corporate standard bins will be carried out in Cannock Town Centre. This will replace the variety of different types of bins that exist currently, many of which are defunct. Certain bins in Hednesford will also be replaced for new. Repairs to certain benches around Cannock town centre have been completed from existing Council landlord budgets via Property Services.

5.19 A major painting upgrade of Cannock Town Centre including street furniture/ ballustrades etc. will be completed during 2013 subject to weather conditions. This was last completed during the 1980’s. The painting scheme will be the black and gold livery associated with Cannock Park, the award winning Green Flag park near to the town centre. Quotes are being obtained and discussions about potential timetable in 2013 are in progress. This will refresh the look of Cannock town centre and rejuvenate its physical appearance.

5.20 Town Centre information boards are also being repainted and new town centre maps have been developed and will be installed within the information board casing.

5.21 A community project is being developed to upgrade the Beecroft Road underpass entrance / exit to Cannock town Centre also. Improvements to the flooring and general appearance of the underpass will be undertaken in conjunction with the Highways Authority. An arts project will seek to rejuvenate the inner side walls of the underpass and a local artist will be involved in this work as well as schools. This is due for delivery in 2013.

5.22 Detailed plans are being developed to increase the amount of planting in Cannock town centre reviewing / replacing some of the shrub beds and trees in
the town as well as cleaning certain structures in the town centre by grit blasting. These will occur in 2013.

5.23 Council officers are working closely with Highways Authority on drain clearance and maintenance with particular emphasis in town centres so that the risk of localised flooding is reduced which impacts on businesses. These activities are from existing Council revenue budgets and not part of any capital scheme.

Designated Public Places Order Enforcement

5.24 There has been a persistent problem involving a small group of individuals drinking particularly within a Grade 2 listed bus shelter in the St Luke’s church area of the town centre. Council officers met with Staffordshire Police Chief Inspector for Cannock Chase and a programme of action was drawn up to enforce the pre-existing Designated Public Places Order which provides legal powers to stop anti-social drinking in the town centre. This involved Police, Licensing, Planning, Environmental Services, CCTV and Community Safety.

5.25 On advice of the Police, the Council has removed two metal benches from within the bus shelter and erected a Designated Public Places Order sign in the shelter. CCTV and tannoy system has been used by Council staff to move on anti-social drinkers. Off licences in the area have had a joint visit from uniformed police and Licensing to remind them of their obligations to sell alcohol responsibly. In one instance, this has resulted in an off licence stopping the practice of selling individual cans of lager to these individuals. Police enforcement using powers from the DPPO has also taken place.

5.30 The impact of these measures seems to have stopped anti-social drinking in the town centre. This is being kept under review.

Retail Lettings

5.31 As a whole, the District has seen positive business growth in the last half of 2012. Fourteen new businesses/business expansions will have occurred in the six month period between July and December 2012, with eight of these relating to Cannock.

Cannock :-

- Café del Nino, High Green ** (opened July 2012)
- Celebrity Stores, Bridgtown, Cannock (opened August 2012)
- A Little Bit of Blighty (Vintage hire shop) (open Sept. 2012)
- Fashion Factory (Wyrley Brook Retail Park) – reopened October 2012
- Costa Coffee (opened November 2012)
- Card Stop** (opened November 2012)
- Newly constructed retail premises (Two business expansion / relocations - Carpetright (opened November 2012) and DFS Furniture (opening December 2012)

Total – 8 new businesses / business expansions between July and December 2012
Hednesford:-

- Gnarly Cycles (opened August 2012)
- Newly constructed Tesco – 53,000 sq.ft. – 300 jobs and opens 26th November 2012
- Costa Coffee – new retail - unit opening December 2012
- Pets Corner – new retail unit – open December 2012

Total – 4 new businesses between July and December 2012

Rugeley:-

- Three Wishes Gifts and Card shop **, opening Dec 2012
- Creature Comforts Pet shop **, opening Dec 2012

Total – 2 new business / business expansions between July and December 2012

Whilst there is still much to do to improve the retail offer in our town centres the above represents good progress in what are still difficult trading conditions for most businesses in the District. The Council continues to support new and expanding businesses directly through specific schemes but also more generally, such as the provision of advice on planning, business rates, licensing, environmental health and property matters.

5.32 There are also advanced plans for the following seven businesses to open for trading in 2013:

Hednesford:-

- Lloyds Chemist – relocation to bigger premises (January 2013 tbc)
- Aldi food retail store under construction and planned to be open June 2013
- New Butchers shop – retail unit (open Dec/Jan 2013 tbc)
- Phones 4 U – new retail unit – opening Dec/Jan 2013

Rugeley:-

- New Tesco store planned for 2013 – planning consent secured
- Expansion of Snugfit Windows (Rugeley) Ltd into retail unit **
- Relocation of C Residential estate agency to larger premises ** (2 new jobs) – refurbishment in progress and relocating in 2013

** These businesses are / will be supported directly by the Council’s Town Centres Business rates Discount Scheme.

5.33 It was expected that retail lettings in the newly built units in Hednesford would be strong and this has been borne out to date. There remains significant interest in the remaining new retail units not let. The retail lettings performance in Cannock
is much stronger than expected during the second half of 2012 and indicates that commercial interest in Cannock is increasing compared to 2011 and the first half of 2012.

Free Parking in Town Centres in run up to Christmas / Gritting Trial

5.34 The Council Budget agreed in February 2012 makes provision for free car parking on the two Saturdays before Christmas in Cannock and Rugeley to encourage footfall. Members will already be aware that there is no car parking charges in Council run car parks in Hednesford.

5.35 Cabinet has also agreed that a trial will take place over this Winter to grit town centre car parks.

Partnership approach

5.36 Consultation and discussions have taken place during this period with traders associations with particular reference to the Business Rates Discount Scheme and the Community Toilet Scheme.

5.37 The Town Centre Policy Development Committee has also invited representatives of the three town centre traders associations to discuss their issues and concerns at the Committee and has supported then to try and find solutions that would be of benefit to the town centres. There are recommendations elsewhere for consideration on the Cabinet agenda relating to issues raised by Rugeley Traders Association.

5.38 The actions set out in this report involve officers from across many Council services and close partnership working with a range of other external bodies. Council services include Business Rates / NNDR, CCTV, Community Safety, Economic Development, Environmental Health, Environmental Services, Financial Management, Legal, Licensing, Parks and Open Spaces, Planning Services, Marketing & Communications and Property. Staffordshire Police has provided active support on the enforcement of the Designated Public Places Order in Cannock Town Centre. Staffordshire County Council Highways is also advising and supporting on issues where necessary such as the Beecroft Road underpass. The Council continues to work closely with St Modwen Ltd in respect of the Hednesford regeneration. The Council continues to work closely with English Heritage and Heritage Lottery Fund on Rugeley Conservation Areas and the Hednesford Park bid respectively.

6 Implications

6.1 Financial

The Council has submitted a bid to Heritage Lottery Fund in connection with regeneration of Hednesford Park and the outcome is currently awaited.

The Council received £100,000 allocation from the Portas Review and is implementing a business rates discount scheme as issued publicly in September 2012.
The Council approved 4th July 2012 a supplementary estimate of £10,000 to implement a Community Toilet Scheme.

The Council Capital Programme 2012-13 includes £300,000 for Town Centre Improvements as set out in this report.

The 2012/13 Capital Programme includes £100,000 Rugeley Town Centre Conservation scheme funded from £50,000 S.106 and £50,000 English Heritage grant funding, this money was slippage from 2011-12.

English Heritage also informed the Council 29 May 2012 of £100,000 further 2012/13 allocation. The Council is required to match fund £100,000 resources. This has been achieved by £50,000 Town Centre Improvement General Fund capital resources and Staffordshire County Council will contribute £50,000.

The 2012-13 Capital Programme now needs to include this further allocation of £200,000 being made up of £100,000 English Heritage, £50,000 Staffordshire County Council and £50,000 Town Centre Improvement Fund.

English Heritage may have further funds available for 2013-14, to be confirmed, and Staffordshire County Council have further committed to contribute a further £50,000 in the event that English Heritage make a further allocation.

Consideration should be given as whether existing maintenance budgets are sufficient to maintain replaced street furniture to an expected standard and replace any items needing future replacement e.g. vandalized bins

6.2 Legal

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

6.3 Human Resources

This report outlines a large number of high profile and complex projects. Continued delivery of those projects is dependent upon retaining suitably skilled and qualified staff and ensuring that opportunities for the training and development of those staff continue to be available.

6.4 Section 17 (Crime Prevention)

Action has been taken to prevent and enforce against anti-social drinking in Cannock Town Centre in partnership with Staffordshire Police. The Police Architectural Liaison Officer will be consulted on environmental improvements in town centres.

6.5 Human Rights Act

None.

6.6 Data Protection
None.

6.7 **Risk Management**

The strategic risk is that our town centres suffer from lack of footfall, businesses go into insolvency and jobs are lost. The actions set out in this report are aimed at enhancing all our town centres, to incentivise business growth and increase employment opportunities.

6.8 **Equality & Diversity**

The Council will comply with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 in respect of all decisions made on schemes to improve town centres in the District.

6.9 **Best Value**

Any works associated with Town Centre Improvements will be procured on a Best Value basis according to the Council Financial Regulations.

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### 7 Appendices to the Report

#### Previous Consideration

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#### Background Papers

- The Portas Review – An independent review into the future of our high streets. Published December 2011.
- Town Centres Business Rates Discount Scheme
- Cannock Chase Community Toilet Scheme
- Cannock Chase Community Toilet Scheme Terms and Conditions