

Report of:	Corporate Director
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Key Decision:	No
Report Track:	Cabinet: 20/06/13

**CABINET
20 JUNE 2013
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.
- 1.2 To obtain approval for a programme of town centre improvements for 2013/14.
- 1.2 To obtain approval for Permission to Spend for schemes to be implemented during 2013/14 financial year.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet note the progress made on town centre issues across the District to date.
- 2.2 That Cabinet approve the programme of further planned improvements to be delivered in 2013 / 14 as set out in 5.24.
- 2.3 That Cabinet provides Permission to Spend on the town centre improvement programme as set out in 5.24.
- 2.5 That subject to Planning Consent being obtained, Cabinet grant Permission to Spend for the £68,000 allocated to the proposed Rugeley Miners Memorial and funded from the 2012/13 Town centre Improvement Fund.

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 and 2013/14.

- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 Permission to Spend is required to take forward the proposed programme in the 2013/14 financial year.

4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

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

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 Hednesford has benefitted from an investment of £50m which will produce approximately 600 jobs of which 300 are delivered via the new Tesco store on Victoria Street which opened on 26th November 2012. The construction of the Aldi store on the Rugeley Road is well underway and is expected to open in August 2013.
- 5.2 The 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 has been successful and the selected contractor is on site and works have commenced on the refurbishment of the tennis courts.
- 5.3 The procurement process to select an operator for the new community facility that replaces the Aquarius Ballroom is complete. CM Leisure has been selected who currently deliver a programme of community events and dance classes from the Civic Ballroom, Cannock. The long lease between the Council and St Modwen has been completed and the sub lease between the Council and CM Leisure is being finalised.

Cannock Chase Business Rates Discount Scheme

- 5.4 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.

5.5 Thirteen new and expanding businesses have had direct financial support via this scheme; all applications are discussed and considered by officers in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Town Centre Regeneration:

- Card Stop (Cannock)
- Café Del Nino (Cannock)
- Soulcare Aesthetics (Cannock)
- Trendy Tanya clothes shop (Cannock)
- Trade to Play games / consoles (Cannock)
- Crested Schoolwear (Cannock)
- Creature Comforts pet shop (Rugeley)
- C Residential estate agency (Rugeley)
- Three Wishes card / gifts shop (Rugeley)
- Raw Menswear (Rugeley)
- Snugfit Windows (Rugeley)
- European Textile Recycling (Rugeley)
- Boyd's Hair Design (Hednesford)

5.6 Café Del Nino was initially refused but following an appeal and review, a partial business rates discount has been provided to support this business in Cannock Town Centre. An offer of support to Carabou Events (Cannock) has not yet been taken up.

5.7 Your Mortgage Solutions applied and were approved but as their business rates are fully discounted by the Small Business Rates Relief Scheme there was no benefit to the business from this discount scheme. This business is now open and trading in Rugeley.

5.8 In total, fifteen approvals have been given and approximately £60,000 of the budget for this scheme has been committed to date. 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 five expressions of interest to the Community Toilet Scheme: Cannock shopping Centre, Bella's café (Hednesford), Station Café (Hednesford) and SOS Hairdressers (Hednesford) and Three Wishes Card and gift shop. 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 and the application from Station Café was refused as it was a unisex toilet.

- 5.11 Three Wishes card and gifts shop have been approved as a member of the Community Toilet Scheme and there has been regular use of the toilet facility provided particularly by older people. The owner of the Three Wishes Card and gift shop has indicated that the Scheme has also helped increase her trade.
- 5.12 Further promotional activity continues with businesses across the District to ensure businesses have all the information about the scheme. Discussions are also in train with Wetherspoon's public house chain. Information has been posted on the Council's website about publicly accessible toilets across the District. Any opportunities to increase the number of publicly accessible toilets will be progressed.

Town Centre Improvement Fund 2012/13

- 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 has been 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 were made to the consultation. A planning application has been submitted by the Society to erect this memorial on the Globe Island, Rugeley. Permission to Spend is required subject to this scheme receiving planning consent in the near future. Expenditure will be on a reimbursement basis.
- 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 town centre. In agreement with the Cabinet Member for Town Centre Regeneration the following improvements have taken place:

- Replacement of all bins
- Painting of all major street furniture in black and gold livery
- Repainting of town centre information boards and new town centre maps
- Upgrading of flooring in and around Beecroft Rd subway access.
- New planting of trees, shrubs and flower beds across town centre.
- Specialist high pressure cleaning of pedestrian paver stones and concrete balls.
- New bike racks installed next to the Bowling Green.

Designated Public Places Order Enforcement

5.18 During 2012, there had 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.

5.19 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. Police enforcement using powers from the DPPO has also taken place.

5.20 More recently, there have been problems with anti-social behaviour at a shelter in Cannock bus station. Seats have been removed temporarily and joint action has been taken by Staffordshire Police and Council officers to deter this behaviour. This is being kept under review.

Retail Lettings

5.21 As a whole, the District has seen positive business growth during 2012/13. An increasing number of new businesses/ business expansions have occurred in 2012/13 and these are listed below. However, more national retail chains closed their shops in the District including Thorntons, Evans and Burtons in Cannock Town centre. This is not, as has previously occurred, because the national chains have gone into administration but because the lease on the premises had come up for renewal and the companies determined that the Cannock branch was not profitable enough to continue trading.

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 – relocations of Carpetright (opened November 2012) and DFS Furniture (opened December 2012)
- Trendy Tanya Clothes shop – opened February 2013
- B&M opened in units previously occupied by Lidl and Littlewoods – May 2013.
- Relocation of William Hill to larger more prominent retail unit on Market Street – June 2013

Hednesford:-

- Gnarly Cycles (opened August 2012)
- Tesco (53,000 sq.ft) opened November 2012
- Costa Coffee – new retail - opened December 2012
- Pets Corner – new retail unit – opened December 2012
- Lloyds Chemist relocation to larger premises –December 2012
- Phones4U – new retail unit opened December 2012
- Barnardo's – new retail unit opened January 2013
- Walsall Carpets – opened March 2013
- Boyd's Hair design – new retail unit opened April 2013
- Whitehouse Butchers – opened April 2013
- Discount UK (part of Poundworld) – opened 14 June 2013.

Rugeley:-

- Three Wishes Gifts and Card shop - opened December 2012
- Creature Comforts Pet shop - opened December 2012
- Relocation of C Residential estate agency to larger premises – January 2013
- Raw Menswear, Rugeley – opened October 2012
- Boutique 128 (part of European Textile Recycling) – opened October 2012

- Expansion of Snugfit Windows (Rugeley) Ltd into retail unit
- Your Mortgage Solutions – opened April 2013

5.22 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 businesses more generally, such as the provision of advice on planning, business rates, licensing, environmental health and property matters. There is on-going dialogue with the three traders associations and car parking charging regime in St. Joseph's carpark has been reviewed and amended as a result of discussions with the Rugeley Traders association.

Town Centre Improvement Fund Programme for 2013/14

5.23 The Council Budget agreed in February 2013 makes provision for a further investment of £200,000 as part of the Town Centre Investment Fund.

5.24 The proposed programme for the use of these funds is as follows:

- Mill Street Underpass – to deep clean, install new flooring surface and make any repairs to tiles - £12,000
- Beecroft Road Underpass Community Arts Project to re-tile inner walls (Changing Places Project) - £10,000 and upgrade flooring - £8,000
- Planting – establish new planting to sloping sides at entrance to Beecroft Rd underpass and make general improvements - £11,000
- Improve lighting in Mill Street and Beecroft Rd underpasses - £10,000
- Replacement of missing and broken block pavers for Cannock Town Centre - £3,950
- Hednesford town – improvements to non-regeneration areas of the town centre such as new bins, road signs, bike racks, planting and cleaning, relocation and preservation of heritage signal building to Hednesford Park (max of £5,000 allocated to this item) - £22,000.
- Trailer mounted machine for street cleansing service graffiti and chewing gum removal - £13,000
- Heath Hayes shopping centres – general programme of environmental improvements including new bins, road signs, planting and cleaning etc - £10,000
- Norton Canes shopping centre – general programme of environmental improvements including new bins, road signs, planting and cleaning - £10,000
- Chadsmoor shopping centre – general programme of environmental improvements including new bins, road signs, planting and cleaning - £10,000
- Road Signage – to replace road signage on key access points to town centres including District boundary points with new in conjunction with Staffordshire Highways - £25,000
- Replacement planting in raised planters (Rugeley) - £21,000

- Enhanced Floral Displays (Rugeley) - £20,777
- Replacement Tree Planting (Rugeley) - £2,250
- Additional Cycle racks – for Cannock town centre, Cannock & Hednesford railway stations and Rugeley bus station - £4,023
- CCTV installation (Civic Centre car parks) - £7,000

The above programme totals £200,000. It should be noted that there is an additional £50,000 proposed to be invested in Rugeley town centre on a programme of environmental improvements and £50,000 for Rugeley conservation areas set out in the Cabinet report in Joint Investment Programme. District Ward Members will be invited to identify any specific suggestions or items in relation to the general environmental improvements for the areas identified above.

Partnership approach

- 5.25 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.
- 5.26 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 them to try and find solutions that would be of benefit to the town centres. The amendment to the St Joseph's parking charge regime is one example of a practical change as a result of these discussions.
- 5.27 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 and Mill Street underpasses. The Council continues to work closely with St Modwen Ltd in respect of the final stage 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

Council at its meeting of the 13 February 2013 approved the Capital Programme for 2013-14 including an allocation of £359,260 for Town Centre Improvements. The allocation included £159,260 from the 2012-13 improvements programme

Provision of £200,000 exists within the approved Capital Programme for the new Town Centre Improvements as referred to in paragraph 5.24.

In accordance with normal accounting treatment of Capital Schemes the nature of some of the expenditure may result in certain elements being charged to the revenue account and equivalent transfers to/ from available reserves will be transferred to ensure there is no cost to the General Fund.

In relation to permission to spend for the Rugeley Miner's Memorial any expenditure will be on a reimbursement basis.

An uncommitted balance of £40,000 exists for the Cannock Chase Business Rates Discount Scheme and the Scheme will remain open during 2013.

Provision of £20,000 exists within the 2013-14 revenue budget for the Cannock Chase Community Toilet Scheme .

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.

7 Appendices to the Report

None

Previous Consideration

Cabinet Reports

Proposals for Town Centre Improvements – 21 June 2012

Update on Town Centre Issues & Improvements – 20 December 2012

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**