

Executive

Town Centre Innovation Fund

3 December 2012

Report of Head of Strategic Planning and the Economy

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To consider the use of the Town Centre Innovation Fund.

This report is public

Recommendations

The Executive is recommended:

- (1) To receive the report and approve the proposed allocations set out in paragraph 1.4.
- (2) To approve funding for the Christmas Parking Initiative set out in paragraph 1.7.
- (3) To approve the process for developing projects and releasing resources to Town Centre projects set out in paragraphs 1.8, 1.9 & 1.10.

Executive Summary

Introduction

- 1.1 This report considers the Portas Review of High Streets and the award to CDC of funding to support 'Town Centre Innovation'.
- 1.2 This report proposes a distribution of the funding to contribute to the strengthening of the economies of the town centres and to meet the objectives of the Cherwell Economic Strategy, Town Masterplans and Cherwell Local Plan.

Proposals

Using the Town Centre Innovation Fund award

- 1.3 The two Town Masterplans are now well advanced and together with the draft Local Plan set the strategic framework for the development of the towns. It is

now appropriate to consider how best to use the funding awarded to CDC, recognising that as this is one off funding how the funding is used should have local economic impact.

Allocation

- 1.4 It is proposed to initially allocate the £100,000 awarded for 'Town Centre Innovation' by the DCLG in the following proportions:-
- 50% to Banbury - £50,000.
 - 30% to Bicester - £30,000.
 - 20% to Kidlington - £20,000.

Proposed Uses

- 1.5 The CDC Economic Development Team has engaged in discussion with local Chambers of Commerce, town traders and town partnerships as to possible projects for funding.
- 1.6 One initial priority that has been identified has been using part of the funding award to reduce the cost of parking in Banbury and Bicester in the run up to Christmas. This is an initiative that is intended to provide real support for the traders of the two towns in a very challenging economic climate.
- 1.7 It is therefore proposed to commit the following to the Christmas Parking Initiative that will operate in Banbury and Bicester (Kidlington has free car parking already):
- £40,000.

Full details of the scheme, to be administered by CDC, were approved at the November 2012 Executive.

- 1.8 The remaining amounts for the support of town centre projects are therefore:
- Banbury - £25,000.
 - Bicester - £15,000.
 - Kidlington - £20,000
- 1.9 The CDC Economic Development Team will continue to hold the fund and commit to a package of local projects in each town/village, developed with the local retail/traders groups, in agreement with the Portfolio holder Councillor Bolster.
- 1.10 It is proposed that project funding should:
- Show a broad fit with the Objectives of each Town Masterplan and the Cherwell Economic Strategy.
 - Promote the town for shopping as part of strengthening the visitor economy.

Bicester Initial Proposals

- 1.11 From local discussions the Bicester issues to tackle include:
- Promoting the Town centre to attract specialist independent retailers so that it can co-exist with Bicester Village in a mutually productive way
 - Preparation of a marketing strategy for the town
 - Widen the distribution of tourist information about the town

- Considering how to use the historic character of the town
- Events calendar needs widening and more events putting on
- Improved signage from car parks to town centre
- Improve the links between Bicester Village and the town centre
- Better promotion of local produce
- Improved promotion of the market and more specialist market days e.g. regular antique fair/flea market

1.12 Bicester project proposals for development include:

- Conduct research on what shoppers opinions are of Bicester.
- Enhanced on-line presence and you tube video of town and traders
- Consider a better spread of finger signs through the town
- Prepare cycling and walking maps
- Explore with Oxfordshire County Council installing large brown heritage signs outside of the town

Banbury Initial Proposals

1.13 From local discussions the Banbury issues to tackle include:

- Preparation of a marketing strategy for the town
- Improving the signage from the car parks to town centre
- Raising the profile of the Tourist information Centre
- Improved promotion of local produce
- Improved promotion of the market and more specialist market days e.g. regular antique fair/flea market
- Better signage from car parks, new maps and guides
- Promote the town to the surrounding villages as a place to shop

1.14 Banbury project proposals for development include:

- Improved signage - in car parks (maps highlighting tourist attractions and old town), from the coach park, St Mary's, The Cross and the Tourist Information Centre.
- Events and promotion – i) The creation of a programme of events throughout the year such as a weekend town food fair, Easter events - find eggs in windows, Victorian Xmas market, Banbury in Bloom, a 'buy local campaign' and independent retailers month. li) Promotion at rail stations, including Marylebone Station, with maps from Banbury station, so visitors can see distances to shops and attractions.
- Welcome pack for new comers (Town Guide) / Brochure promoting town.
- Development of a loyalty scheme
- Christmas promotional campaign (like Leamington) with vouchers & map

1.15 Longer term

- Development of a town centre strategy to guide the long term, to draw in other funding for identified action, including the development of a Business Improvement District (BID) to support the funding of a town centre manager
- Developing a programme of physical improvements to street lighting and street furniture.
- Developing a scheme to improve shop fronts

Kidlington Initial Proposals

1.16 From local discussions the Kidlington issues to tackle include:

- Improved signage off Oxford road
- Improved promotion of the market and more specialist market days e.g. regular antique fair/flea market
- Raising local awareness of the Tourist information centre and what it can offer
- Establishing an events calendar
- Improved promotion of local produce

- 1.17 Kidlington project proposals for development include:
- i. New signs and maps to Kidlington
 - ii. Identify unnecessary clutter and consider how that can be removed or combined onto single boards.
 - iii. Work with Oxfordshire County Council on signage policy, brown signs, black-on-white information signs, etc.
 - iv. A Masterplan for Kidlington is to be commissioned (by CDC) which will examine how the economy of Kidlington might be strengthened further.

Conclusion

- 1.18 The aim of this proposal is to commit the Town Centre Innovation funding to a package of measures that assists the economies of Bicester, Banbury and Kidlington.

Background Information

The Portas review

- 2.1 On 17 May 2011 the Prime Minister announced that he had asked Mary Portas, leading retail marketing consultant, to undertake a review of the English high street. The report was published on 13 December 2011 'The Portas review: an independent review into the future of our high streets'.
- 2.2 The Government's formal response to the recommendations made by Mary Portas in her report was published by the Department for Communities and Local Government on 30 March 2012.
- 2.3 The purpose of the Portas review was to identify what the Government, local authorities, businesses and others can do together to promote the development of new models of prosperous and diverse high streets. It forms part of the Government's work to promote economic growth. The main aims of the review were to:
- Examine the case for developing town centres that contribute to promoting economic growth, creating jobs and improving quality of life in local areas
 - Explore new business models for high streets relevant to the modern consumer
 - Recommend what action government, businesses and other organisations should take to create diverse, sustainable high streets where small businesses and independent retailers are able to thrive.
- 2.4 High streets are a very visible indicator of how well a local community and economy is thriving. They are recognised as important hubs of social

interaction and providers of employment and local commerce.

- 2.5 The recent recession has had a significant negative impact on a number of high streets throughout England. The Government has said it would like to reverse this downward trend by working with retailers, local government and others to improve the prosperity, diversity and social and economic contribution of the high street. The Portas review of how to secure the economic future of high streets forms part of that role.
- 2.6 The Review makes a series of recommendations on what can be done by government, local authorities and business, many of which are reflected in the Bicester and Banbury Masterplans and the Cherwell Local Plan.
- 2.7 The recommendations aim to:
- Get town centres running like businesses: by strengthening the management of high streets through new 'Town Teams', developing the Business Improvement District model and encouraging new markets.
 - Get the basics right to allow businesses to flourish: by looking at how the business rate system could better support small businesses and independent retailers, encouraging affordable town centre car parking and looking at further opportunities to remove red tape on the high street.
 - Level the playing field: by ensuring a strong town centre first approach in planning and encouraging large retailers to show their support for high streets.
 - Define landlords' roles and responsibilities: by looking at disincentives for landlords leaving properties vacant and empowering local authorities to step in when landlords are negligent.
 - Give communities a greater say: by greater inclusion of the high street in neighbourhood planning and encouraging innovative community uses of empty high street spaces.
- 2.8 The report was published alongside new Government commissioned research, 'Understanding High Street Performance', which shows that: although some high streets continue to thrive, a third are degenerating or failing; by 2014 less than 40% of retail spending will be on the high street; and that over the last decade out of town retail floorspace has risen by 30% while in town has shrunk by 14%.
- 2.9 Mary Portas also recommends that her suggestions are tried out in a number of high street pilots, 14 of which have been announced.
- 2.10 Cherwell has not been awarded a High Street pilot, but like a number of other Districts has been awarded £100,000 to promote 'town centre innovation'. The DCLG has not prescribed what the funding should be used for and has left this for local determination. There is no time limit on the use of the funding, but there is a need to account for these of the monies.

Cherwell District Context

- 2.11 How this funding for town centre innovation is used should be governed by local strategies for maximum impact:
- The Masterplans which are being completed for Banbury and Bicester with extensive proposals for how the two town centres might be strengthened.

- The Local Plan for Cherwell guiding development through to 2031.
 - The Economic Strategy for Cherwell
- 2.12 The evidence base for our strategies is becoming extensive with an analysis of District economic trends informing the Cherwell Economic Strategy and a study of retail trends (CBRE 2012) and a District economic assessment (Roger Tyms 2012) informing the Local Plan.
- 2.13 All these studies point to the importance of the town centres as a focus for retail, commercial and cultural activity with a need for actions that promote new development and encourage additional footfall (visitors), through new town marketing, increasing the provision of overnight accommodation and new retail development that strengthens the draw of each town centre.
- 2.14 In particular, the Local plan (2012) proposing placing an emphasis on the importance of strengthening the town centres as places to shops with commercial and cultural activities. The plan states -

'Policy SLE 2: Securing Dynamic Town Centres

B.47 We are looking to ensure that our Market Towns have a strengthened role in achieving economic growth, as a destination for visitors, and in serving their rural hinterlands.

B.48 We are determined to secure dynamic town centres as the focus for commercial, retail and cultural activity at the heart of our district. The renewal and strengthening of the town centres is critical if the towns are to expand, with the creation of new retail, commercial and other employment generation (such as leisure) that reduces the overall level of out-commuting and maintains their role as the focal points of the district economy and their historic role as the heart of the community.

B.49 We envisage town centres that are:

- *Easy and pleasant to walk around*
- *Great for shopping and going out*
- *Easy to do business in*
- *Have housing for all ages*
- *Served by efficient public transport.*

B.50 The increasing rationalisation of public assets (libraries, civic centres & public access points), is an opportunity to ensure multiple use of public sector buildings and so strengthen their role as a draw to secure additional footfall into the town centres.

B.51 The town centres of both Banbury and Bicester will grow; in Banbury, with new retail forming part of proposals for Bolton Road, Canalside and Spiceball Development Area and in Bicester towards the improved Bicester Town Railway Station and on through to an expanded Bicester Village, which will be integrated more fully into the town ('Policy Banbury 7: Strengthening Banbury Town Centre' and 'Policy Bicester 5: Strengthening Bicester Town Centre').

B.52 We will support businesses affected by the redevelopment of strategic development areas by assisting their relocation and ensuring alternative land is available locally elsewhere.

B.53 We do not support out of town office and retail development outside the two

town centres. Where edge of town retail is created we will examine whether to increase the town centre land allocations within future phases of the plan to seek to balance the impact, for example north of Bolton Road (see 'Policy Banbury 8: Land at Bolton Road') and along the Warwick Road in Banbury. All new retail will also be required to be built to high design and building standards.

B.54 We will also support the role that new restaurants and cafes have in the economy of both towns in drawing people into the town centre to attract new professionals, new small businesses and to strengthen the draw of the town at the centre of its local hinterland.

B.55 The urban centres within the district offer an important focus for shopping, commerce and the provision of leisure and other services to meet the needs of local people and visitors. The main centres in the district are the town centres of Banbury and Bicester and the village centre of Kidlington. There is also significant other shopping floorspace in the following locations:

- Bicester Village Outlet Shopping Centre*
- Banbury Cross Retail Park*
- Various other edge of centre & out-of-centre large stores including a number of major food stores*
- At various local centres within Banbury and Bicester.*

B.56 As well as serving the population of their immediate communities and more widely within Cherwell District, the retail centres serve a wider population and draw trade from towns such as Southam, Daventry, Towcester, Buckingham, Witney, Chipping Norton and Shipston-on-Stour. This gives a total catchment population of approximately 464,000 (2001 census).

B.57 Each of the main urban centres within the district is unique and today faces different challenges and opportunities. More information, and specific policies for each of the centres, is included within Section C 'Policies for Cherwell's Places': 'Policy Bicester 5: Strengthening Bicester Town Centre', 'Policy Banbury 7: Strengthening Banbury Town Centre' and 'Policy Kidlington 2: Strengthening Kidlington Village Centre'. A number of general comments can, however, be made:

- Both Banbury and Bicester town centres lie at the heart of towns which have grown significantly in recent years and, through the period of this Local Plan, will continue to do so. Assessments of the need for more shopping floorspace have shown that the towns should seek to identify significant levels of further floorspace if they are to provide the capacity to meet local needs.*
- Banbury has seen significant retail growth in the last decade with the expansion of the Castle Quay Shopping Centre and this has helped to meet its immediate shopping needs. The Council intends to take the opportunity to expand its retail role.*
- Bicester town centre has seen less growth. However, the re-development of the Bure Place car park which has begun to provide a substantial increase in shopping within the town centre (see 'Policy Bicester 6: Bure Place Town Centre Redevelopment Phase 2'). Away from the town centre, the Bicester Village Outlet Shopping Centre was opened in 1995 and extended in 2000 and 2008, and Bicester Avenue opened in 2007. Further developments in the town centre will need to ensure that the town remains accessible by all forms of transport for residents and visitors. Further growth of the Outlet Village will also ensure its role as a major national and international retail draw continues with all the employment gain this brings to the town. It must, however, be integrated into an improved town centre. Parts of both Banbury and Bicester*

town centres lie within conservation areas and any development in these areas will need to be sensitively treated.

- *Kidlington centre is considerably smaller than the two town centres, however it plays an important role in serving the local population. Additional shopping floorspace was opened in the centre in 2004 and there is capacity for further floorspace in the period up to 2031.*

B.58 The Council is committed to supporting its town centres and to maintain and enhance their vitality and viability and their associated infrastructure to create vibrant retail environment.'

Key Issues for Consideration/Reasons for Decision and Options

3.1 To consider the proposed allocation of funding.

3.2 To consider the proposed uses to which the funding might be put.

The following options have been identified. The approach in the recommendations is believed to be the best way forward

Option One To take no action and retain the funding for other purposes.

Option Two To be more prescriptive about what can be funded.

Option Three To change the proposed allocation of funding.

Consultations

Chambers of Commerce, town traders and town partnerships for Bicester, Banbury and Kidlington.

Implications

Financial: This fund is from the DCLG and involves no direct CDC funding.

Comments checked by Karen Curtin, Head of Finance and Procurement, 03000030106

Legal: The allocation of funding will need to comply with any conditions imposed by CLG.

Comments checked by Kevin Lane Head of Law and Governance, 0300 0030107

Risk Management: Although there appears to be no time limit imposed on use of the funding there is a risk of potential claw back if it is not fully committed within a reasonable time.

Comments checked by Kevin Lane, Head of Law and Governance, 0300 0030107

Wards Affected

Wards in Bicester, Banbury and Kidlington

Corporate Plan Themes

A District of Opportunity

Lead Member

**Councillor Norman Bolster
Lead Member for Estates and the Economy**

Document Information

Background Papers	
None	
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