

**AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET**

<b>Report Title:</b>	Town Centre Working Groups
<b>Name of Committee:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	6 June 2022
<b>Report Director:</b>	Chief Officer - Growth and Investment
<b>Portfolio:</b>	Growth and Investment
<b>Ward Relevance:</b>	All
<b>Prior Consultation:</b>	None
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Nicola Smith
<b>Public or Private:</b>	Public
<b>Report Subject to Call-In:</b>	No
<b>Report En-Bloc:</b>	No
<b>Forward Plan:</b>	No
<b>Corporate Priorities:</b>	This report relates to the following priority(ies): <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rugby is an environmentally sustainable place, where we work together to reduce and mitigate the effects of climate change. (C) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rugby has a diverse and resilient economy that benefits and enables opportunities for all residents. (E) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Residents live healthy, independent lives, with the most vulnerable protected. (HC) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rugby Borough Council is a responsible, effective and efficient organisation. (O) <a href="#">Corporate Strategy 2021-2024</a> <input type="checkbox"/> This report does not specifically relate to any Council priorities but
<b>(C) Climate</b> <b>(E) Economy</b> <b>(HC) Health and Communities</b> <b>(O) Organisation</b>	
<b>Summary:</b>	The report provides an update on work being undertaken in relation to the town centre.
<b>Financial Implications:</b>	None in relation to this report
<b>Risk Management/Health and Safety Implications:</b>	None in relation to this report

**Environmental Implications:** None in relation to this report.

**Legal Implications:** None in relation to this report

**Equality and Diversity:** None in relation to this report

**Recommendation:** The work being undertaken in relation to the Town Centre, and in particular the establishment of working groups around key themes, be noted.

**Reasons for Recommendation:** To update Cabinet Members on recent progress in relation to the Town Centre.

**Cabinet - 6 June 2022**

**Town Centre Working Groups**

**Public Report of the Chief Officer - Growth and Investment**

**Recommendation**

The work being undertaken in relation to the Town Centre, and in particular the establishment of working groups around key themes, be noted.

**1. Introduction**

1.1 At Council on 14 March 2022 the Portfolio Holder for Growth and Investment updated Councillors regarding the work being undertaken by the Growth and Investment Portfolio with regards to the Town Centre. It was recognised that the Town Centre Strategy is a longer term strategy for the town centre and therefore a number of interventions and work on supporting the town centre in the summer and autumn of 2022 needs to be undertaken along with the investigation of a medium term “meanwhile use” strategy.

**2. Action undertaken**

2.1 Following on from Council, Officers have been holding a number of meetings with key stakeholders and recommending a number of working groups on key themes and areas of concern that originated from the stakeholder engagement sessions.

Rugby First

2.2 A meeting was held on 16<sup>th</sup> March with Rugby First. This was attended by Leadership Team and the Portfolio Holder for Growth and Investment.

2.3 The meeting discussed the range of events that Rugby First were planning to hold during 2022, which included Bikefest, the Christmas Lights and Christmas Markets. Rugby First advised that they would not be holding a Food Festival as it had done prior to the pandemic.

2.4 Other matters discussed was the Energy Saving Strategy that Rugby First are rolling out along with their Eco Bag scheme.

2.5 In terms of improvement in the Town Centre Rugby First would like to see the following

- Increase in residential in the Town Centre
- Grants for converting upper floors of commercial units

- Reduction in business rates for vacant buildings
- Improvements to shop fronts
- A Town Centre website hosted by the Council
- Public Realm improvements e.g around St Andrew's Church, street furniture replacement and a review of some structures which are consider dangerous
- A business hub that business can use and get advice

### Business Breakfast

- 2.6 On 7<sup>th</sup> April a Business Breakfast was held in the Benn Hall. The event was hosted by the Growth and Investment Portfolio and supported by other key members of Leadership Team. Councillors were not able to attend on this occasion as the event was held in purdah.
- 2.7 Around 200 letters were sent out to businesses within the Town Centre. 45 people representing town centre businesses attended the Rugby Business Breakfast. The event was an opportunity for town centre businesses to raise any key town centre issues with officers and present their own ideas for economic development in the Borough.
- 2.8 The businesses who attended were from a range of sectors including retail, property, hospitality and commercial office uses. Feedback from the event itself was mostly positive. Local businesses were grateful for the opportunity to speak to officers and were encouraged that momentum on regenerating the town centre is building. Residents expressed a range of views on the format of the event, with some welcoming the opportunity to speak directly with Officers whilst others expressed a desire to see a presentation on future plans. Businesses were reassured that there would be further consultation events where future plans would be presented.
- 2.9 The top three issues raised by local businesses were parking, high vacancy rates and the role of the BID. Feedback was recorded in notes and residents submitted 'postcards' of their comments and ideas. A summary of other feedback is set out below.

#### **Configuration of town centre:**

- Train station is too far away, so need to think about wayfinding to town centre uses
- The distance from the train station to town centre is a challenge for the elderly / those who are not particularly agile
- Rugby Clock Tower area needs to re-considered. Needs more Food & Beverage and leisure to activate the area.
- ASDA is in the wrong place. Many see it as a nuisance as it encourages people to drive in and out, without using the town centre. Doesn't encourage dwell time.
- Theatre is excellent, and the location in the Independent Quarter is brilliant.
- Accessibility around the town centre is an issue – needs better permeability and wayfinding.
- Rugby Central needs regeneration

### **Rugby Bid:**

- Many businesses view it as an unnecessary additional cost. They believe the BID doesn't do enough engagement with businesses.
- Other see the work the BID do as positive i.e. cleaning and security. They don't feel that it is recognised as valuable to the town centre.
- Some had a view that the Bid should do more in terms of promoting Rugby, like Warwick Bid (so it can compete with surrounding areas).
- Some felt the BIDs don't engage and promote the independent business owners and more could be done to have them included.
- there was additionally a view on governance and better management between Council, Businesses and BID; coming together to deliver change. Greater transparency between everyone was also called for.

### **Market and eventing:**

- Market could be better. More artisanal / vintage fairs to draw visitors to the centre.
- Market is a good way to incubate new businesses – start on the market with a view to gradually progressing into a small shop unit.
- Crafts and basics should be covered (fruit and veg) but needs to move with the times.
- Many comparisons to Leamington Spa, and the gravitational pull it has in comparison.
- Market could be moved to the independent quarter – and made more of an artisanal market. With an idea that there could additionally be a food festival.
- Many were keen to see greater eventing and branding – Rugby needs a new identity
- A good concert / music hall is the gap in the offer. One that can accommodate c.1,000 seats. Potentially could compete with the assembly rooms in Leamington Spa (where residents tend to go to now). Rugby's connectivity is the perfect location to accommodate touring bands. If this was delivered, could help boost the nighttime economy and additionally.
- Bike Fest cited as a very positive event.
- Need to do more to "dress" the town centre.

### **Competing locations:**

- Elliot's field is seen as great, but doesn't do much for the town centre...
- Free bus service suggested between TC and out of town retail, via station.
- Warwick, Leamington Spa and Daventry were seen as much more pleasant experiences. Many residents go to them instead.

### **Heritage:**

- There is a wealth of heritage but not much is done to use this as part of Rugby's identity.
- Need to embrace the heritage of Rugby as a sport – surely an opportunity to establish some sort of visitor draw?
- Opportunity to establish a stronger relationship with Rugby school – could play a stronger / more coordinated role with the Council and businesses in relation to regeneration initiatives.

## **Businesses**

- A new art gallery will be opening in the Alexandra Pub. The owners want to do more for the town centre and invite local artist to come down for events.
- One business owner is a zero waste shop. She is keen to see a greater variety of different business come forward with a greater sustainability ethos. Less single use plastics in the town centre.
- Desire to enhance the retail offer – the arrival of more food and drink establishments has benefits but would be good to focus on core shopping facilities. Too many charity shops.
- Rents and rates are a problem – compounded by increasing wage costs, energy prices and general rise in costs. Anecdotal evidence of challenging discussions with landlords. Rents going up, but unwillingness to review until tenants reach the point of closing / threatening to leave. Subsidies or reductions would be a way of encouraging start ups / supporting businesses.
- Evidence of entrepreneurial individuals – e.g. establishing gin distillery.

## **Demographics:**

- The town centre doesn't cater for the elderly – need a better mix of uses
- Anticipate the new residential will bring in a new demographic and hoards of people, who will have very little to do in the town centre unless there is action / coordinated vision for greater eventing as well as a more diversity in term of the mix of uses. Food & Beverage was considered one of the uses which required more diversity, particularly the delivery of more evening-orientated restaurants.

## **Engagement:**

- Desire for ongoing engagement – genuinely shape and feed back on proposals.
- Businesses keen to see short term initiatives, and evidence of a longer-term plan

2.10 Following on from these stakeholder events five workings groups have been recommended to deal with the issues raised. These working groups are as follows

- Town centre events  
Aim: To examine the potential programme of events to be delivered within the Town Centre from June 2022 to December 2022 following the success of events programme delivered through the Welcome Back Fund.
- Town centre safety  
Aim: To examine the safety of the Town Centre and identify quick wins and short term (12-24 month), costed actions that can be implemented to enhance the safety of the Town Centre.
- Rugby markets  
Aim: To examine how the Market in Rugby should be improved and diversified.

- Public realm  
Aim: To examine the public realm of the Town Centre and identify quick wins, short term (12-24 month), costed actions that can be implemented to improve the look and feel of the Town Centre.
- Support for business  
Aim : To examine how the Council can support businesses within the Town Centre.

2.11 The working groups will be meeting throughout June and July in order to establish a range of work and outputs to deliver on the aim of each working group.

**Name of Meeting:** Cabinet  
**Date of Meeting:** 6 June 2022  
**Subject Matter:** Town Centre Working Groups  
**Originating Department:** Growth and Investment

**DO ANY BACKGROUND PAPERS APPLY**       YES       NO

**LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

<b>Doc No</b>	<b>Title of Document and Hyperlink</b>

The background papers relating to reports on planning applications and which are open to public inspection under Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972, consist of the planning applications, referred to in the reports, and all written responses to consultations made by the Local Planning Authority, in connection with those applications.

Exempt information is contained in the following documents:

<b>Doc No</b>	<b>Relevant Paragraph of Schedule 12A</b>