

Report subject	<b>High Streets Strategy (Update)</b>
Meeting date	23 June 2021
Status	Public
Executive summary	<p>The High Streets Strategy report presented at February Cabinet approved the development of a strategy and action plan with partners that enables the delivery interventions to support our high streets and district centres. This is progressing well.</p> <p>During the development of this work, it has become clear that there is significant work underway which deserved to be highlighted. This report highlights examples of and provides updates on some of the exciting and positive interventions, as part of our strategy work, that are making our high streets and district centres places that people will want to visit and spend time in once again.</p>
Recommendations	<p><b>It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>(a) notes the excellent examples of ongoing work detailed in this report and commends the work of officers on the positive impact these projects are making to our high streets and district centres;</b></li> <li><b>(b) supports the work of partner organisations in the projects they are driving and enabling to also deliver energy and vibrancy in our high streets and district centres;</b></li> <li><b>(c) encourages further collaboration between all those with an interest in helping our high streets and district centres bounce back from COVID19</b></li> <li><b>(d) notes that this report is an update on the activity happening on the ground at present and that a full strategy and action plan will be delivered in the future.</b></li> </ul>
Reason for recommendations	To continue supporting our high streets and district centres as part of the Big Plan and Corporate Strategy priorities.
Portfolio Holder(s):	Councillor Philip Broadhead - Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Economy and Strategic Planning and Deputy Leader of the Council,

	Councillor Nigel Brooks - Lead Member for BCP Retail Strategy and Christchurch Regeneration
Corporate Director	Adam Richens, Chief Finance Officer and Director of Finance
Report Authors	Chris Shephard, Director of Development Adrian Trevett, Head of Economic Development Liz Orme, Economic Development Officer
Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Recommendation

## Background

1. The February High Streets Strategy Cabinet paper explained that high streets and district centres are experiencing unprecedented change, and the COVID 19 pandemic has accelerated this process. This is having a major impact on businesses, and as a result, also having an impact on the experience of those visiting them.
2. However, whilst these are hugely impactful changes, there are interventions that have been and continue to be taken by the Council and its partners, to help prepare high streets and district centres for the lifting of restrictions, encourage the return of visitors and provide a positive experience. This report looks at some of the examples that are currently underway that help achieve this.
3. As already stated in the executive summary, a piece of work is underway to identify all the projects and interventions underway or planned that focus on high streets and district centres. This is already a huge list and is not in a finished enough state to share in this report. As such this report only picks out some of the highlights of the great work that is being undertaken.
4. Given the context of the last year, it is important to show this next section in two parts, the first related to COVID specific activities, the second to more general place based and economic interventions that are considered important in themselves.

### Update: COVID 19 activities

5. R<sup>3</sup> taskforce: Established in the summer of 2020, the R<sup>3</sup> Taskforce (Respond, Recover, Re-imagine) has 3 working groups. One is the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure sector working group. This has been meeting fortnightly to ensure that there is positive and regular communication between key stakeholders from the sectors and the Council about what is really happening on the ground, to ensure interventions happen in the right place and issues can be addressed. This group is working on a set of actions that will help our high streets as they emerge from COVID19. These include: Data & Insight; events; feedback to the Council on key strategic items such as planning, homelessness & begging and communications/marketing.

6. COVID 19 Signage: The Council's Tourism and Events team have ensured that signage has been rolled out across our high streets to help keep people safe during COVID19 and a dedicated hotspot reporting email has been set up.
7. COVID 19 Support and advice: Information Officers were recruited (within Economic Development) to help businesses ensure their premises are compliant with COVID19 guidelines. They have visited over 3000 businesses since the start of the pandemic. Taking this research forward into 2021, they were able to revisit and resurvey businesses by telephone to examine in detail how their trading patterns had been impacted by the pandemic, and what their plans were for the future. This data has been fed into support the Council's overall understanding of the impacts on the ground.
8. COVID 19 Security: A growing number of COVID Marshals have been funded to keep the public safe and enforce COVID19 regulations in our public spaces.
9. COVID 19 Environmental Health and Trading Standards: Officers have supported businesses and ensured that they are safe to operate within the raft of new government guidance and legislation that continues to emerge over this very changeable period.
10. COVID 19 Traffic and Transport: Officers have worked to ensure that circulation space for pedestrians in our high streets has been managed as carefully as possible, and Regulatory Services have fast tracked applications for outdoor seating where space outside allow.

## Update

11. **Community Engagement:** Several engagement pieces have been undertaken to better understand and inform the direction in which businesses, residents and visitors wish to see our high streets take. One of these was a highly publicised and digitally interactive public consultation exercise was undertaken during March 2021 by the Council's Insight Team to encourage the public to share what they were looking for in the future of their high streets and district centres. The full report "Reimagining Your High Street Consultation Report" is at **Appendix 1**, with the main themes coming through as regeneration, arts and culture, Parking, Retail, and street scene/cleanliness. 4000 people engaged with the content on the project page, 148 respondents chose to drop pins into the map creating 608 pins and comments. This was an innovative and collaborative approach and created some great ideas which we will be looking to take forward as soon as possible.
12. **Funding:** Over £150m has been paid out in either statutory or discretionary grants over the course of the last 10 months. This has been an incredible effort by staff across the Development and Finance service as some of the infrastructure and processes needed to be set up to create schemes and then administer the applications. This funding has been hugely important to businesses across the conurbation not just those in and around our high streets and district centres. At the time of writing, letters have just been released to those business support organisations who qualified for Stream 3 of the Additional Restrictions Grant. This funding will be used for some inventive and creative ideas, but also for strategic planning and research that will help inform future strategies and actions for our high streets. Two pieces of research that this funding has enabled are being commissioned by the R<sup>3</sup> Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Group. One will focus on the development of a future events strategy for the conurbation, and one will focus on what is required to encourage people to "get back into town". The remaining Stream

3 funding has focused on the Bounceback Challenge Fund, encouraging businesses to come forward with ideas that could be funded if they can demonstrate that the ideas are innovative, generate pride in place and create jobs. These applications are currently being reviewed with a view to awarding the funding as a priority, but before the end of June at the latest.

13. **Business communications:** As part of business as usual, the regular business enewsletter and the updating of the Council's business twitter page has helped businesses understand the Council's approach to re-opening, and sharing of other good news, investments and activities, which in turn boosts confidence. This is an important yet often overlooked action that requires constant, positive and thoughtful communication. Alongside this is the continued work of officers to develop relationships with key business people and investors. One such example is with the owner of the Debenhams shop in Bournemouth. By nurturing this relationship, and by doing all the Council can to support his investment into Bournemouth, the Council has helped him bring his vision for the store to reality. This has generated a significant amount of positive media coverage, locally, nationally and internationally.
14. **Economic Development Strategy:** In September, Cabinet will consider the first BCP Economic Development Strategy as part of a broader report on the how the Council is supporting businesses. This strategy will speak to the work we are already doing, with our partners to ensure high streets and district centres are vibrant and thriving places now and into the future.
15. **Cleaner, Greener, Safer;** As part of this work, and in partnership with the BIDs, a programme of deep cleaning works has been undertaken in our main town centres, along with other improvements such as bollard and lamp post painting. This has been a huge effort on behalf of all the teams and partners involved and makes a real difference to people's experience when they visit.
16. **Change for Good:** A project that is just about to start will through the BCP Homelessness Partnership, following significant multi-agency work by the Comms Action Group specifically, will enable digital, contactless giving points to be installed on shop windows and in shops, enabling people to donate money directly to Change For Good. Change For Good is facilitated by Dorset Community Foundation to help those who are rough sleeping to make a positive move off the streets. 100 per cent of the money donated will go directly to help local people in need.
17. **Rediscover Safely:** As part of the Rediscover Safely campaign, and in partnership with the Bournemouth Town Centre BID A is the roll out of attractive and informative vinyls on shop windows to welcome visitors back to the town centre. This enhances the appearance of currently vacant town centre premises in Bournemouth and has also enabled landlord engagement in conversations about the future of the high street and how to support its progression and success.
18. **Empty Shops Strategy:** Councillor Brooks has developed and presented a project which enables the Council to facilitate the bringing back into use of empty shops. This has the support of businesses, landlords and agents. Officers are working at pace to work through any risks there may be to the Council with it and are tasked with progressing a solution as quickly as possible.
19. **Technology:** Through the Council's Smart Place Programme, a proof of concept (PoC) augmented reality app has been created and is currently being tested and trialled on the Council's private 5G network in Lansdowne. "Alive!" – is an augmented reality app giving visitors and residents a unique and immersive town centre

experience; with AR sea characters as wayfinding, interactive quiz's and discount rewards linked to participation within the app redeemable in local independent and hospitality venues. This PoC project also involves installation of vivid window vinyl's on empty retail units to promote and trigger the app. Subject to funding and approvals, rollout of Alive! within the BCP area is a possibility and officers are scoping out opportunities for this.

20. **Business Improvement Districts (BIDs):** There are 3 BIDs across the conurbation, and they continue their work to support and engage with levy payers. Reports from each of the BIDs can be found at **Appendix 2**. Congratulations to Poole BID which has, on May 21<sup>st</sup>, achieved the support of its levy payers to operate for a second term. The BID will focus on delivering the commitments made in the 21/26 Business Plan, published in advance of the ballot. Three key elements Enhance, Promote and Support were identified in two independent surveys undertaken for the Poole BID and will form the basis of the next five years' operations. Officers and Cabinet have played a key role in supporting the development of the campaign, supporting the BID by voting yes and helping to promote the message to levy payers. Officers are also supporting the development of Christchurch BID which will go to ballot in September. Cabinet will be asked to support the BID in a report in the same month.
21. **National recognition:** Through the Key Cities group, BCP Council was chosen as the only case study in a report commissioned to consider the future of urban centres (**Appendix 3**). Developed by Metro Dynamics in conjunction with the Key Cities and Core Cities groups, this has had national coverage and an airing with MPs at the All Party Parliamentary Group. This profile has put Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole on the map for positive, proactive interventions on our high streets and district centres, working in partnership to get things done that make a difference.

### **Next Steps and Conclusion**

22. It is clear from the examples in the report that there is an incredible amount of positive activity going on to support our high streets and district centres.
23. These projects will continue and will evolve as the recovery takes hold and for as long as the funding lasts. Some of the interventions will be long lasting and will set the scene for the future of our high streets and district centres. The continued working with partners will be crucial for long term success.
24. The February Cabinet report outlined a potential structure for a Town Centre Strategy, which is being developed and will be brought forward for approval to a future Cabinet meeting. It will build on the operational work currently underway and the research findings described above.

### **Options Appraisal**

25. To support the recommendations and continue supporting the development of thriving, enjoyable high streets and district centres.
26. To not support the recommendations which will mean there is no positive leadership, co-ordination or investment in the high streets and district centres across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.

### **Summary of financial implications**

27. There are no financial implications in relation to this report as these interventions are funded through existing budgets or through external funding already approved,

however there will be a need for consideration of financial implications as the strategy and action plan develops.

28. Circa £150m of grant funding has been distributed by the Council to businesses since the start of COVID 19. Many of the recipients are businesses located on high streets or district centres or make up their supply chains.

### **Summary of legal implications**

29. There are no legal implications in relation to this report, however, should there be legal implications as the strategy and action plan develops, legal colleagues will be instructed accordingly.

### **Summary of human resources implications**

30. Whilst this is business as usual for teams in the Development and Destination and Culture services, some areas of the Council have had to deal with these projects as extra to their current business as usual. It is likely that these pressures will continue as long as high streets and district centres require interventions across these services. Extra funding was approved in a previous Cabinet report for an additional role in Economic Development to help drive the strategy and action plan forward.

### **Summary of sustainability impact**

31. Sustainability will be taken into consideration as part of the development of the strategy and action plan, linking with, for example, the development of the Council's Green Infrastructure Prospectus and promoting the improvements to sustainable transport delivered by the Transforming Cities Fund.

### **Summary of public health implications**

32. Developing a strategy and action plan that delivers positive interventions to attract people back to high streets and enjoying public spaces will enhance the health and wellbeing of the public. There is now a strong link between the work of the R<sup>3</sup> Taskforce and the Council's Health and Wellbeing board which will continue as this work develops.

### **Summary of equality implications**

33. Actions that have been undertaken have considered equalities implications where appropriate. As new actions are being developed, equalities implications will be thoroughly addressed where relevant. Equalities implications will also be considered in the development of the strategy, as this could lead to new actions that will help to ensure our high streets and district centres are open and accessible to everyone.

### **Summary of risk assessment**

34. At this stage when developing a strategy and action plan, there are minimal risks. There will be a risk register for any actions that are developed that require one.

### **Background papers**

None

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1**

Reimagining Your High Street Consultation Report

### **Appendix 2**

Reports from BIDs

### **Appendix 3**

Key Cities Report – Future of Urban Centres