



Growth and Development Scrutiny Group

Wednesday, 29 January 2025

The Health of our Town and Village Centres

Report of the Director Development and Economic Growth

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. This report provides an overview of the recent retail reviews commissioned for each of our 7 larger town/village centres. It includes current challenges and opportunities and sets out recommendations, identified in the retail review, for areas the Council can focus on in the short, medium and long term.
- 1.2. The report also identifies the priorities and actions from the recently published Economic Growth Strategy that have been selected to help support and enhance the offer in our town and village centres. The action plan will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis and therefore the initial list of actions is not exhaustive, however suggested additional areas of work need to consider the role of the Council and the available resources.

2. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that the Growth and Development Scrutiny Group

- a) Review the information and data provided on the town and village centres across the Borough.
- b) Consider the identified priorities and initial actions from the Economic Growth Strategy and suggest actions to be prioritised.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1. The town and village centres across the Borough have continued to perform well despite challenges over the last few years. However, the Council knows it cannot be complacent and it is important therefore that current performance is reviewed and action to support and enhance them is considered.

4. Supporting Information

- 4.1. In 2023 the Council commissioned reviews of its 7 main town centres; Bingham, Cotgrave, East Leake, Keyworth, Radcliffe on Trent, Ruddington and West Bridgford. This work was completed by Save the High Street. The

purpose of this was to understand the current offer, challenges, opportunities and some recommendations were identified.

4.2. Key data contained in the reviews is highlighted in the following table (data from April 2023):

Centre	Footfall (average per month)	Vacant units	% of independents
Bingham	466,000	5	70%
Cotgrave	213,000	0	73%
East Leake	206,000	3	65%
Keyworth	86,000	3	70%
Radcliffe on Trent	263,000	3	73%
Ruddington	314,000	4	82%
West Bridgford	1,300,000	13	46%

- 4.3. The data shows a generally very positive picture for the town/village centres:
- Most have more independents than the regional and national averages (West Bridgford's figure is more in line with the averages)
 - Vacancy rates are low and those identified in West Bridgford, the majority did not stay vacant for long and have now been re-let.
 - Footfall is low in Keyworth, but this could be linked to the size of the town centre and the fact that it is split between 2 areas.
 - In all centres, compared to national averages, there is a higher proportion of service businesses e.g. hairdressers, estate agents, dry cleaners etc.

This data provides a useful baseline which can be reviewed in future to help to identify the impact of any actions. A summary of key insights from the 7 retail reviews can be found at appendix A.

- 4.4. The retail reviews recommended some actions that the Council could take to support the town and village centres. This includes:
- Working closely with defined stakeholder groups e.g. landlords to proactively influence the future of town centres.
 - Providing targeted business support programmes for high street businesses.
 - Carrying out feasibility studies for possible future uses of long-term empty units.
 - Establishing a formal trader's group where these don't already exist.
 - High street incubator/pop up space to support start-up businesses where space exists.
- 4.5. These recommendations and the data from the retail reviews has fed into the Economic Growth Strategy. The recommendations will become part of the action plan supporting the strategy and will be developed over time. As Councillors will be aware some of the above activity is already in place in some town centres e.g. East Leake Traders Group and Ruddington Village Centre Partnership. These already established groups provide some best practice that can be learned from and shared with other areas of the Borough.

4.6. The Council have produced an Economic Growth Strategy which was adopted by Cabinet in October 2024. The Strategy has 3 priorities:

- Place and Experience: what it is like to live, work and visit Rushcliffe including our town centres and high streets, housing growth and our culture and heritage.
- Investment and Infrastructure: attracting new businesses to the Borough and securing the right transport and other infrastructure to support growth.
- Business Support, Growth and Skills: providing the right support to our existing businesses and understanding our current and future skills needs

4.7. As can be seen town centres and high streets is clearly referenced in the first priority of place and experience. However, it also links to the other priorities including transport and accessibility as well as business support, growth and skills. Town centres are about more than economic growth they are a fundamental part of what makes a great place to live. It is important therefore that we consider the future of our town centres and what we can do, working with our partners, to support and enhance them.

4.8. Specific actions identified within the Economic Growth Strategy to support town and village centres includes:

- Deliver appropriate recommendations contained within the 7 district centre retail reviews (as identified at paragraph 4.4)
- Landlord/agents forums
- Retail groups/forums - including bringing together different areas to share best practice etc.
- Review of empty space and opportunity to work with landlords to promote available space

- Public realm improvements on Central Avenue in West Bridgford working towards the opportunity for pedestrianisation
- Creation of vision documents for each of our 7 largest town and village centres, starting with West Bridgford because of the significant plans for the area over the coming years including: new pedestrian and cycle bridge and the relocation of County Council away from County Hall and new and future housing growth in the area.

4.9. Other linked actions which are relevant to town and village centres are included under a number of the ambitions. However, ones linked to tourism are particularly relevant:

- Create a Rushcliffe Destination Management Plan/Tourism Strategy to inform local activity and priorities
- More promotion of the tourism offer in Rushcliffe, working with partners e.g. City and County Councils as required.
- Tourism brochure/s
- Roundtable discussions with sports clubs and ongoing dialogue
- Meeting/workshop/networking with visitor economy businesses

- Review of 'West Bridgford Way' and exploring opportunities for its future
- Review of markets in the Borough, exploring opportunities to bring greater benefit to our town and village centres and development of a strategy

4.10. There are many actions to be delivered and due to resources available these will need to be prioritised; it is a 5 year strategy and so not everything will or can be delivered immediately. Over the next 12 months it is intended that the Economic Growth Team focus on the following areas to support our town and village centres:

- Masterplan/vision document for West Bridgford
- Progressing the pedestrianisation of West Bridgford following public realm work completed using UK Shared Prosperity Funding.
- Establishment of town centre groups including learning from best practice from groups already established in the Borough
- Establishment of landlord forums
- Meeting/workshop/networking with visitor economy businesses to include those in the hospitality sector, including considering more that can be done on accessibility and training to support this.
- Tourism brochure/s to promote the offer in our town and village centres and the opportunity to better promote heritage assets across the Borough.

4.11. As this list demonstrates there is a lot of engagement planned with businesses which feels like an important first step to listen and understand where the Borough Council can have an impact and add value.

4.12. In addition the team will spend some time researching best practice from other areas including:

- Discussions with other boroughs and districts across Nottinghamshire
- Association of Town Centre Management
- Institute of Place Management
- Case studies from the High Street Taskforce
- Stronger Towns Funding and the process and governance that surrounds that

At the time of writing the Council is waiting to hear how much, if any, UKSPF it will receive in 2025/26. Government have confirmed that East Midlands County Combined Authority will receive £25,170,819 (£7,872,911 capital and £17,297,908 revenue). EMCCA have indicated that Borough Councils will receive an allocation of this and have suggested councils work on the basis of receiving 60% of the allocation received in 2023/24. For Rushcliffe that would be £980,400 (with 4% allowed for management and admin costs). If received this could help with delivering some of these actions, it would also impact on the capacity of the team which may slow delivery on some actions so aligning allocations with planned activity will be important. Confirmation is expected following the EMCCA Board meeting on 10 February.

5. Risks and Uncertainties

- 5.1. There is a risk that some of the actions identified cannot be delivered. However, the intention is that the action plan is developed over time and this could mean changing and updating actions as work progresses.
- 5.2. There is a risk that plans that are developed are not deliverable due to a lack of public sector or private funding. It is important however that these plans are in place so that funding can be applied for should the opportunity arise. These plans enable the Council to highlight the ambitions of Rushcliffe and the opportunity the area presents.

6. Implications

6.1. Financial Implications

- 6.1.1. The Economic Growth Strategy identifies actions and ambitions to support and enhance town and village centres over the next 5 years. These actions could have potentially significant financial implications for the budget and should be considered within the context of the Council's priorities and medium-term budget resources.
- 6.1.2. Additional capital funding of £500k has been earmarked from efficiencies identified in the Q1 revenue report to support pedestrianisation of West Bridgford identified at paragraph 4.10. The use of this is predicated on attracting further external funding as pedestrianisation and ongoing highways maintenance costs would be the responsibility of the Highways Authority.
- 6.1.3. Further budget requirements will need to be resourced potentially from future efficiencies and incorporated into the 5-year Medium Term Financial Strategy. Many of the actions are expected to be funded from existing resources (e.g. existing staffing costs).

6.2. Legal Implications

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

6.3. Equalities Implications

There are no direct equalities implications associated with this report. As actions from the retail reviews and Economic Growth Strategy are progressed equality impact assessments will be carried out as required.

6.4. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Implications

There are no crime and disorder implications associated with this report.

6.5. Biodiversity Net Gain Implications

There are no biodiversity net gain implications associated with this report.

7. Link to Corporate Priorities

The Environment	
Quality of Life	The offer in town and village centres is an integral part of quality of life in the Borough. Giving residents access to the amenities and services they need as well as providing space for communities to come together.
Efficient Services	
Sustainable Growth	As the Borough is growing with new homes planned across the Borough it is important we support our town and village centres to respond to the opportunity and also challenge that this presents.

8. Recommendations

It is RECOMMENDED that the Growth and Development Scrutiny Group

- a) Review the information and data provided on the town and village centres across the Borough.
- b) Consider the identified priorities and initial actions from the Economic Growth Strategy and propose any additional areas of work.

For more information contact:	Catherine Evans Head of Economic Growth and Property 0115 9148552 cevans@rushcliffe.gov.uk
Background papers available for Inspection:	None
List of appendices:	Appendix A – overview of key findings from retail reviews.