

Report of the Executive Manager Neighbourhoods

Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Housing, Planning and Waste Management Councillor R Upton

1. Summary

- 1.1. In November 2016 the West Bridgford Growth Board appointed three voluntary Commissioners, Kim Cassidy (Professor of Services Marketing), Mick Burrows (former Chief Executive of Nottinghamshire County Council) and Colonel Timothy Richmond OBE TD DL (Vice Lord-Lieutenant of Nottinghamshire and business entrepreneur) to support their work and with the aim of securing a degree of independence, impartiality and objectivity.
- 1.2. The Commissioners remit had a clear focus on the Central Avenue, Tudor Square and Gordon Road area with the objective of undertaking an investigation and making a number of recommendations to help maintain the success of the West Bridgford town centre. The Commissioners undertook extensive consultation with residents, town centre users and businesses and examined and contextualised feedback from these key stakeholder groups along with a range of other information sources to provide an independent research and evidenced based report to assist the West Bridgford Growth Board to prioritise and realise its growth ambitions in line with the overall growth vision for the area.
- 1.3. The Commissioners report was published in November 2017 and identified six broad themes, which together contained twenty-eight individual recommendations. Following further work with the West Bridgford Growth Board this report outlines the Borough Councils response to the West Bridgford Commissioners report and sets out a vision which will shape the future of the town centre. Key highlights include the following strategic ambitions along with a range of supporting 'areas for action'
 - Making improvements to Tudor Square to establish it as the heart of West Bridgford town centre and improve connectivity with Gordon Road
 - Exploring the feasibility of redeveloping Bridgford Road car park including an option to move it underground to help increase capacity and open up development space for commercial and residential opportunities

2. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet consider and approve the Borough Council's response to the Commissioners Report and recommendations

3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 A number of the recommendations made by the Commissioners require consideration and action by a range of partners and stakeholders. However the Council will have a lead role to play and it is important that the Council incorporates this vision and ambitions within its future strategic framework, medium term financial strategy and supporting work programmes.

4. Supporting Information

- 4.1 The Strategic Growth Board was established in December 2015 by Rushcliffe Borough Council and supported by a number of local growth broads including West Bridgford. The Strategic Growth Board recognised that with limited resources and multiple stakeholders a place-based commissioning approach was required for West Bridgford to help shape a future vision for the town and respond to and address the risks and challenges in a co-ordinated way
- 4.1. Although West Bridgford Town Centre already has an enviable reputation for business, shopping, dining, leisure etc. the aim of the West Bridgford Growth Board is to ensure the future vibrancy and viability of West Bridgford by taking a balanced and sustainable approach to growth and improving the well-being of residents, communities and business through social, physical, economic and environmental improvements.
- 4.2. To support this ambition the West Bridgford Growth Board appointed three independent Commissioners who could develop trust and confidence in their role and remit with the aim of developing an informed and evidence based debate with all interested parties. The output from this work was a final report that aimed to:
- a) clarify the communities perceptions on the current retail, food, drink and environmental offer to support existing growth
 - b) provide a view on the feasibility of delivery and assessment of support for the retail study
 - c) identify opportunities, challenges and any other information the Commissioners determine will be of value to the Growth Board
- 4.3 In addition to gathering existing data and research such as the Kerching Retail Study the Commissioners interaction particularly focused on local businesses and the wider community who either frequent, or have an interest in the focus area. They undertook an extensive consultation comprising a number of differing methods including direct contact, online survey questionnaires, focus groups, one to one interviews and postcards placed in

town centre locations. Local interest and community groups were also fully engaged as were key partners and in total over 370 online responses and 70 postcard responses received.

- 4.4 After considerable work to assimilate the data the Commissioners findings and subsequent report were shared with the West Bridgford Growth Board and following wide endorsement the report was published in November 2017.
- 4.5 The report is split into six themes of Accessibility, Balance and Blend, Local and Level, Green Space, Town Centre Coordination and Strategic Considerations each of which is supported by key findings and recommendations. Further details of the six themes, key findings and recommendations are contained in Appendix 1 of this report.

5 The Borough Council's Response

- 5.1 Since the report was published work has been undertaken to consider and develop the Council's response which is intended to form the basis of a future vision and associated work programme that can also be supported by West Bridgford Growth Board.
- 5.2 The original six themes in the Commissioners report have now been developed into two key strategic ambitions that are then supported by five 'areas for action', which are detailed below. A pictorial summary of this vision and areas for action is illustrated in Appendix 2.

Strategic Ambition - Bridgford Road Car Park

- 5.3 The Commissioners highlighted a number of times throughout the report that a development opportunity exists for the Council owned Bridgford Road car park: For example 'There was a view that Bridgford Road and Gordon Road had tremendous potential to contribute to the retail offer if developed sympathetically to the overall ambition for the town centre.'
- 5.4 In light of this, it is proposed that the Council will lead on the development of a feasibility study to explore if and how the existing car park could be increased in capacity and potentially moved underground. This would then release land that subject to a viability assessment could be sympathetically developed to create appropriate development in the form of retail, office, leisure and or residential opportunities to both enhance and compliment the existing town centre offer.
- 5.5 Subject to the outcome of further feasibility work that will take place over the next 6 – 8 months, it is expected that the Council will draw up a project proposal with timelines and opportunities for engaging and consulting with key stakeholders and the local community.

Strategic Ambition - Tudor Square

- 5.6 A key area of work for the West Bridgford Growth Board has been to explore the development of a radical and innovative vision for Tudor Square, initially involving the idea of creating a 'shared space' with appropriate improvements to landscaping (without impacting on traffic movement), by removing barriers and increasing the open space. The vision was to create a more accessible and visually appealing area where people want to stay and shop and businesses want to locate. In addition to creating Tudor Square as the heart of the Town Centre the vision also aimed to encourage footfall in the Gordon Road area of West Bridgford by increasing connectivity through the removal of some of the current public space infrastructure in the area which can act as a barrier to movement.
- 5.7 The ambition for Tudor Square also captures and builds on the Commissioners recommendation to "provide opportunities for an improved retail mix, prioritising high quality clothing/fashion units and more local independents" by facilitating new opportunities for development by key stakeholders.
- 5.8 The Commissioners report highlighted that the potential Tudor Square development was critical to the success of improving the physical environment of the town centre. Recommendations such as greening, tree planting, creating more retail space and creating a focal point for the town centre can all be explored and supported during any development to Tudor Square.
- 5.9 To progress the work of the West Bridgford Growth Board on Tudor Square, Rushcliffe Borough Council commissioned VIA to undertake a detailed assessment of the Growth Board's preferred option which sought to translate the vision into an operationally deliverable plan which included the following key elements (see Appendix 3 for more details):
- Removal of pedestrian guardrails from most of the space;
 - Narrowing of the carriageway and associated zebra crossings on Albert Road and Davies Road;
 - Road surface replacement with block paving;
 - Option to replace puffin crossing at Gordon Road with a zebra crossing;
 - Addition of zebra crossing at the central crossing point on Davies Road; and
 - Opportunity to remodel the private parking to frontages of Russell House and Landmark House in consultation with relevant property owners.
- 5.10 The preferred option would create improved pedestrian movement, increased utilisation of space and create a heart of the town centre. A VISSIM model was created by VIA's subcontractor Aecom using logical and industry standard methods of traffic modelling. The model assessed the preferred option and the preferred option with four further scenarios. To analyse and investigate the schemes impact on the study area, three methods were adopted to assess the impact – Bus Time Journeys, Queue Lengths and Network performance summary analysis.

- 5.11 Currently the modelling work has highlighted some issues on vehicle traffic flow in the area however further work is planned with the highways authority who are a key partner on the Growth Board to develop a way forward for the delivery of this strategic ambition.
- 5.12 Together the strategic ambitions for both Tudor Square and Bridgford Road car park represent significant opportunities to respond to the Commissioners recommendations through reshaping West Bridgford Town Centre and supporting the delivery of both the Council's priorities and the West Bridgford Growth Board aims. It is expected that further reports will be provided on both strategic ambitions at appropriate intervals and decision points.

Action Area – Brand Identity

- 5.13 The Commissioners report identified the opportunity to create a sense of place and identity within West Bridgford Town centre through the creation of 'The West Bridgford Way' brand (WBW). Following their recommendation to produce a physical map of the town centre the West Bridgford Growth Board commissioned an illustrator to design a map highlighting shops and key landmarks. The map will be digitally downloadable but print versions will also be available and placed on displays boards throughout the town centre. The map also has potential to create advertising and sponsorship opportunities as well. Importantly there is also the opportunity within the map to identify other areas of West Bridgford such as Melton Road shopping which provide valuable local facilities and links to the main town centre.
- 5.14 To develop the brand concept further the Strategic Growth board has allocated resources to develop marketing material with the creation of a recognisable logo which (subject to further consultation) will be followed by a suite of marketing material including: shop stickers, posters, lamppost banners, email footers, letterheads. Most of the elements will be digitally available for shops & businesses to download which in addition to supporting the place brand will add to their digital activity. A key element of the marketing material is that it is adaptable as West Bridgford could then act as a pilot for other Growth Board areas in the borough.
- 5.15 Once the WBW marketing material has been created the Council will work with key partners to assist local businesses in implementing the material on the high street and online to ensure a strong take up and to embed the sense of place and identity.

Action Area - Digitalisation

- 5.16 The importance of retail businesses maintaining both a digital presence to support their physical presence has been widely recognised. Therefore to support local business that wish to progress their digitalisation journey the Strategic Growth Board commissioned the #WDYT campaign to work in all of the Growth Board areas including West Bridgford.

- 5.17 This is a national campaign that provides support to businesses in setting up or enhancing their existing social media accounts, and using them effectively to drive footfall to their shops. The West Bridgford launch event took place on 20 April and since its launch 44 businesses have registered with the campaign across the five Growth Board areas, nine of which are in West Bridgford with further publicity planned.

Action Area - Retail Mix

- 5.18 West Bridgford town centre currently hosts nine charity shops. As recommended within the report officers have explored options to restrict the number of shops in the centre, however investigations have shown that there is no planning controls which could be used to restrict the number of existing or potential charity shops from opening. In addition, registered charities are automatically entitled to relief, which the Rushcliffe Borough Council has no discretion over. The Kerching report into WB town centre suggests charity shops should be 'engaged to create a unique and compelling offering for the town. Therefore this sector remains an area for further focus including the opportunity generate better coordination in the sector by exploring a central drop off point.

Action Area – Physical Environment and Access

- 5.19 The report recommends 'to consider the potential for further tree planning and greening of the centre'. The Council shares this ambition for the entire borough and has recently pledged £50,000 to fund tree-planting schemes across Rushcliffe, which includes West Bridgford if suitable locations are identified. However as most of the roads and pavements in the centre of West Bridgford form part of the highway it would be very difficult to deliver a cost effective tree planting scheme in the town centre without major distribution to roads, footpaths and services which would require external approval from the County Council as the Highway authority. Therefore the report identifies Tudor Square as an optimum location for tree planting and greenification during any Tudor Square development/regeneration and the Council support this ambition.
- 5.20 During the consultation period the Commissioners identified that the parking arrangement in the town centre at that time did not allow any flexibility for residents who wanted to make a quick visit. The Council listened and took early action on this issue to review parking in West Bridgford town centre and introduced a more flexible parking tariff on the 3 April 2017. In particular the new charge of fifty pence for the first half hour is felt to have addressed the issue with positive feedback being received.
- 5.21 Overall the future provision and arrangements for car parking will be delivered as part of the Council's recently approved Off Street Car Parking Strategy.

Action Area - General Management

- 5.22 The report highlights some concerns raised over litter and dog mess. The Council will continue to monitor these issues as the existing street cleansing and litterbin provision will shortly be enhanced by the installation new recycling bins that is part of a borough wide initiative to help encourage further recycling, and where possible reduce single use plastic.
- 5.23 In respect of dog fouling the Council has a range of existing control measures and the vast majority of dog owners in the area are responsible. This is evidenced by the Council only receiving one report of dog mess in the town centre during 2017.

6. Risk and Uncertainties

- 6.1 The purpose of this report is to set out the Council's broad strategic ambitions and areas for action to respond to the Commissioners Report. Clearly further reports and permission will be required to develop these ambitions into actions and at the appropriate stage key risks and uncertainties will be identified and reported upon.

7. Implications

7.1 Finance

Funding with regards to feasibility work concerning Bridgford Road Car Park is expected to be met from the Strategic Growth Board budget and will go through the relevant approval process by the Strategic Growth Board. Any expenditure in relation to the various 'Strategic Ambitions' will be subject to the Council's Financial Regulations and Contract Standing Orders and as such will be reported to Cabinet or Full Council as required through either the budget setting process or ongoing financial reporting.

There are currently other funding streams in relation to various aspects within the report, as follows:

- £50,000 budget for tree planting schemes (across the whole of the Borough);
- Strategic Growth Board funding in relation to WDYT campaign – £10,500, Original Tudor Square masterplan - £20,000, shop front improvement grants - £9,500 for West Bridgford, branding - £2000 allocated for marketing material as part of the West Bridgford Way; and
- External funding – £29,000 (Notts pre development fund) for traffic flow modelling for the Tudor Square Masterplan.

7.2 Corporate Priorities

The Council's response to the Commissioners Report directly supports all three of the Council's corporate priorities which are:

- Deliver economic growth to ensure a sustainable, prosperous and thriving local economy
- Maintain and enhance our residents' quality of life
- Transform the Council to enable the delivery of efficient high quality services

For more information contact:	David Banks Executive Manager - Neighbourhoods 015 9148438 dbanks@rushcliffe.gov.uk
Background papers Available for Inspection:	West Bridgford Commissioners Report
List of appendices (if any):	Appendix 1 - West Bridgford Commissioners Report Themes, Key Findings and their Recommendations Appendix 2 - Creating a new vision for Central West Bridgford – Rushcliffe Borough Council Responses Appendix 3 – Tudor Square Vision