

CABINET OVERVIEW WORKING GROUP
Tuesday, 7 February 2017 at 7.30 pm
Council Chamber, Civic Centre

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence

To receive any apologies for absence from Councillors.

2. Declarations of Interest

To receive Councillors' declarations of interest (if any) in relation to any matters on the agenda.

3. Minutes (Pages 2 - 4)

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2016.

4. Matters arising

Any matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.

5. Non Housing Asset Management Strategy

Work continues on the Council's stock condition survey, the full results are now scheduled to be received towards the end of April 2017. In the absence of the full stock condition survey results and consequent analysis, it is not possible to establish a firm direction of travel for the Asset Management Plan at this stage.

It is anticipated that Officers will report the summary findings of the stock condition survey to the Cabinet Overview Working Group in June 2017, with the Asset Management Plan Review to follow thereafter.

6. Review of Pets Corner (Pages 5 - 13)

7. Update on Town Centre (Pages 14 - 25)

8. Work Plan (Page 26)

To review the Overview Working Group's work plan for the current year.

9. Matters of Urgent Business

Such other business which, in the opinion of the Chairman, should be received as a matter of urgency by reason of special circumstances to be specified in the minutes.

**MINUTES OF THE CABINET OVERVIEW WORKING GROUP
HELD ON**

1 December 2016

7.30 - 9.14 pm

PRESENT

Overview Working Group Members

Councillor Ian Beckett (Chair)
Councillor Mark Ingall (Vice-Chair)
Councillor David Carter
Councillor Simon Carter
Councillor Michael Garnett
Councillor Stefan Mullard
Councillor Clive Souter
Councillor John Strachan
Councillor Rod Truan

Officers

Simon Freeman, Head of Finance
Donna Beechener, Revenues and Benefits Manager
John Dyson, Principal Finance Manager
Lisa Purse, Corporate and Governance Support Officer

18. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

None.

19. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

20. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2016 be agreed as a correct record subject to adding Councillor David Carter to Agenda Item 7 'apologies for absence'.

21. **MATTERS ARISING**

None.

22. **TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY REVIEW**

The Overview Working Group received a report, from Simon Freeman, Head of Finance, on the Treasury Management Strategy Review. John Dyson, Principal Finance Manager, introduced and summarised the report.

The Group discussed current financial markets, the Council's current financial position and the role of Arlingclose, the Council's financial advisors.

RESOLVED that:

- A. the Working Group noted the report and the underpinning principles that support the Council's Treasury Management Strategy.
- B. whilst the Working Group identified no specific issues, it did note the volatility and unpredictability of the current financial situation set out by Officers and Advisors and expressed that it would be willing to consider any critical additional interim reports, for diligence and overview, should there be a requirement.

23. **LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME**

The Overview Working Group received a report, from Simon Freeman, Head of Finance, on the Annual Review of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTSS). Donna Beechener, Revenues and Benefits Manager, introduced and summarised the report.

In response to questions from Councillors, Donna provided more details on the consultation methodology that had taken place on Government changes to support including the period for which a person can be absent from Great Britain and still receive Council Tax support, Work Related Activity allowance and the Severe Disability Premium.

Councillors discussed the recommendation to reduce the period for which a person can be absent from Great Britain and still receive Council Tax Support to four weeks (Bi). The discussions included possible exceptions to the rule and the implications involved in not approving the recommendation.

RESOLVED that the Overview Working Group:

- A. acknowledged the current position regarding the 2016/17 Local Council Tax Support Scheme and endorses continuing stability within the scheme for 2017/18.
- B. recommended to Cabinet that, following the results of the consultation process, the scheme is amended with effect from 1 April 2017 as follows:
 - i. reduce the period for which a person can be absent from Great Britain and still receive Council Tax Support to four weeks

- ii. remove the element of a Work Related Activity Component in the calculation of the current scheme for new Employment and Support Allowance applicants
 - iii. remove entitlement to the Severe Disability Premium where another person is paid Universal Credit (Carers Element) to look after them
- C. recommended to Cabinet that the proposal to remove the Family Premium in calculating an award of Local Council Tax Support is deferred for a further 12 months.
- D. recommended to Cabinet that the proposal to limit the number of dependent children within the calculation for Council Tax Support to a maximum of two is deferred for 12 months.

24. **WORK PLAN**

The Cabinet Overview Working Group received a report that outlined its Work Plan for the current year.

The Group discussed the practical reasons why the Economic Development Strategy Work Group had not been able to meet as often as desired.

RESOLVED that:

- a) the 2016/17 Work Plan is noted.
- b) it is unlikely that the Interim Report of the Economic Development Strategy would be considered at the January meeting of the Cabinet Overview Working Group.

25. **MATTERS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIRMAN OF THE OVERVIEW
WORKING GROUP

REPORT TO: OVERVIEW WORKING GROUP

DATE: 7 FEBRUARY 2017

TITLE: LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PETS' CORNER

PORTFOLIO HOLDER(S): COUNCILLOR EMMA TOAL, DEPUTY LEADER AND PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR YOUTH AND COMMUNITY

LEAD OFFICER(S): JANE GREER HEAD OF COMMUNITY WELLBEING (01279) 446406

CONTRIBUTING OFFICER(S): MAUREEN PEARMAN COMMUNITY, LEISURE AND CULTURAL SERVICES MANAGER (01279) 446065

JUSTIN HOPWOOD PETS' CORNER MANAGER (01279) 422790

RECOMMENDED that Overview Working Group:

- A** Notes the progress made by the Pets' Corner Working Group.
- B** Recommends to Cabinet:
 - I. That the current subsidy for Pets' Corner of £195,000 is maintained until 2018/19 and notes the Overview Working Group's opinion that funding of some scale will be required beyond 2018/19, albeit in a potentially diminishing level.
 - II. That Pets' Corner develop a number of initiatives to increase income targets in order to reduce the level of Council subsidy in the future.

REASON FOR DECISION

- A** The Pets' Corner service is funded through the Discretionary Services Fund. This fund is limited in terms of the resources the Council has available for all discretionary services. To extend the funding beyond 2018/19 is likely to create a significant financial challenge for the Council and lead to service budget reductions in other service areas.

- B** The Council needs to provide certainty over the future delivery of The Pets' Corner service and to explore all options its long term sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

1. The Overview Working Group established a Pets' Corner Working Group to assist in making recommendations to Cabinet on whether the current subsidy to Pets' Corner is required, and to what level, taking into account any additional income streams and significant alternative funding arrangements with education providers. This report provides details of the progress made by the Pets' Corner Working Group.

BACKGROUND

2. Options for outsourcing Pets' Corner have been considered in the past and in January 2012, as part of the Councils' Big Society approach to Discretionary Services, Special Cabinet agreed in principal to transfer a range of discretionary services to alternative providers.
3. As part of this approach, Pets' Corner service was put out to tender and three formal expressions of interest were received. One was not shortlisted as it did not meet the basic criteria. Two organisations were invited to submit full tender bids.
4. Organisation one (from a commercial organisation) was not selected for competitive dialogue as it would have resulted in a radical change to the service and would have offered very limited community benefit. The business case proposed by them assumed high entrance fees that would have made entry to Pets' Corner unaffordable to many Harlow residents. There would also have been a requirement for a high level of subsidy from the Council.
5. Organisation two (a local not-for-profit organisation) withdrew their submission part way through negotiations. The submission was highly dependent on the involvement of another partner to deliver a provision of alternative and vocational education courses. The partner changed their business model part way through the tender period and was no longer able to deliver what was required due to other priorities. Organisation one also identified TUPE arrangements and pension obligation as a reason for withdrawal. There would have been a requirement for subsidy from the Council.
6. In 2012, the Council successfully secured Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF) for the regeneration of Harlow Town Park. The grant enabled capital improvement works in the region of £500,000 to be carried out at Pets' Corner. The works included erecting a new events barn along with improvements to the animal accommodation to ensure that the site complies

with zoo licence requirements. Access and circulation improvements to the facility which included new entrance gates, a new reception and gift shop were also made.

7. In addition, the HLF grant enabled the construction of a new Learning Centre with a construction costs in the region of £300k. Income from the Learning Centre has enabled the Council to create additional income by hiring it out to external organisations.
8. The HLF have grant conditions that apply for 25 years (from 2012 to 2037). A key requirement of the grant is that the Council hold the freehold and control over usage of all property that the grant was provided for. Should the Council decide to dispose of, or operate the Pets' Corner facility in a different way to the current arrangement, agreement is required from the HLF and there may be a requirement for the Council to pay back a proportion of the HLF grant.
9. The grant agreement also states the facilities must be accessible to the community. This does not mean that facilities must be free, only that any entrance fees must be affordable to the local community.
10. For the reasons set out above, it has not been possible to transfer to Pets' Corner service to an alternative provider and therefore the Council has continued to provide the service. However, the Council has explored as many avenues as possible in order to increase income and therefore reduce the level of subsidy that is required to maintain the service.

EVIDENCE

11. The Pets' Corner Working Group was chaired by Councillor Maggie Hulcoop, with Councillor David Carter and Councillor John Strachan and supported by the Head of Community Wellbeing, the Leisure and Cultural Services Manager and the Pets' Corner Manager.
12. The Group has held regular meetings to examine review and discuss potential options for the Pets' Corner, including:
 - a) A tour of the Pets' Corner venue and learning Centre.
 - b) A review of Pets' Corner budgets between 2011 and 2019.
 - c) A review of fees and charges.
 - d) Analysis of statistical figures on visitor numbers, education programmes.
 - e) A review of opening times and the current staffing structure.
 - f) A review of the current income generation schemes.

- g) A review of the different approaches to attract new business.
 - h) A schedule of capital works and associated costs as well as future maintenance and repairs.
 - i) Review of existing partnership arrangements with Harlow Education Consortium, Writtle College, Harlow College and local Academies.
 - j) A review of Learning Centre hirers, exploration of potential usage, opening times, visitor numbers and gift shop figures.
 - k) A benchmarking exercise was undertaken to compare another local authority run zoo.
 - l) Impact of the contributions from the volunteers and Friends of Pets' Corner on supporting the delivery of the service.
13. The Pets' Corner Working Group have discussed and reviewed current and potential income streams. The review included an analysis on whether an entrance fee should be introduced as a potential source of revenue. To charge an admission for Pets' Corner, a barrier/turnstile system would have to be installed to control visitors entering Pets' Corner and a member of staff would be required to issue tickets, collect monies and manage the turnstiles. Estimates suggest that this would cost in the region of £60,000 to set up in the first year, with additional year on year staffing costs. In addition HLF would also need to be consulted on any new proposals and this could incur financial implications.
14. To cover the above costs a significant entrance charge would have to be set to try and accrue a profit to justify above. It is extremely likely that the required admission charge would cause a negative impact by excluding visitors who probably use the facility the most. It would also reduce visitor numbers.
15. The Pets' Corner Working Group concluded that charging an admission fee is not a feasible option and that keeping Pets' Corner free and pursuing other income streams with a view to increasing income enables the Council to have a facility accessible to all.
16. There are a number of income streams already in operation for various services provided at Pets' Corner. These include :
- a) Delivery of Land Based Studies with Writtle College.
 - b) School visits.
 - c) Group bookings.

- d) Sponsorship opportunities.
- e) Birthday parties.
- f) Shadow a keeper.
- g) Gift shop and animal feed.
- h) Voluntary donations.
- i) Venue hire.

These pricing structures are reviewed on a regular basis as part of the Councils budget setting process.

17. The Friends of Pets' Corner was established in 2011 to provide a fundraising arm for the Council. The Friends are now a fully constituted group, supported by approximately ten core individuals with twenty additional volunteers who organise fund raising opportunities such as an annual dog show as well as staffing the on-site gift shop.
18. Pets' Corner also provides a hub for many organisations such as Mencap, Rock School, Heart for Harlow, MIND, Changing Places, Youth Offending Team, St Elizabeth Residential School, Beavers, Scouts, as well as providing volunteering opportunities.
19. Community wellbeing is of fundamental importance to the Council. A number of activities and initiatives delivered at Pets' Corner have a significant impact on Harlow's children and young people. In particular educational attainment the development of skills and abilities are all very important contributors to a person's sense of wellbeing.
20. In addition to Pets' Corner the Walled Garden project provides an enhanced cultural, leisure offer as well as promoting and supporting volunteering. A range of different approaches are also delivered to specifically attract older people and families

FINDINGS

21. The Pets' Corner Working Group identified that Pets' Corner is offering a cost effective service. The number of educational partners involved show that Pets' Corner is already maximising its capacity to deliver quality educational programmes for children and young people, as well as apprenticeships and volunteering opportunities.
20. Pets' Corner is well placed within the Town Park and is a key feature attraction. Analysis of visitor numbers demonstrates that this is a popular service for Harlow residents with constant high numbers during spring,

summer and autumn with reasonable numbers during the winter period. Visitor numbers also indicate that Pets' Corner is a popular visitor attraction for non-Harlow residents bringing additional benefits to the Town Park.

21. New income streams have been introduced. Budgets and income targets are reviewed and monitored on a regular basis and efficiency savings have been implemented. Income targets have been met and have far exceeded expectations. The introduction of land based studies for students in 2014 has increased income from to £2,500 to £52,100.
22. In addition to the learner packages delivered with Writtle College, the Heritage Lottery Funded (HLF) improvements are providing additional opportunities to work with educational providers, commercial operators, hirers and community partners. The new learning centre is proving to be a popular venue and has attracted a wide audience of hirers.
23. The building is in reasonable condition given its age and investment made in more recent years by the HLF project. Ongoing capital funding will be required in the future to maintain good quality standards for example for the Zoo Licence and to retain Green Flag status for the Town Park.
24. The Friends of Pets' Corner play a significant role in assisting with additional income to enhance the service raising and raised £16,000 in 2016 from fundraising activities.
25. The role that Pets' Corner plays in maintaining and improving health and wellbeing for local residents is significant. It is for these reasons alone that the Pets' Corner Working Group feels that the Council should continue to fund Pets' Corner post 2018.

THE FUTURE

26. The Pets' Corner Working Group has recognised that to sustain and develop the service long-term, additional opportunities for increasing income must be explored.
27. In order to plan for growth and secure the future of Pets' Corner there are a number of additional opportunities that could be explored. These proposals are outlined below.

INCREASING INCOME

28. The Pets' Corner Working Group has considered a number of options for increasing income at Pets' Corner. It is anticipated that implementation of a number of initiatives will increase the income achieved significantly, for

example:

- a) Introduce responsible dog ownership packages.
- b) Continue to build relationships with partners and increase educational programme at the Walled Garden site.
- c) Build on delivering the Learning Centre as a commercial space to partners and other organisations.
- d) Increase merchandise sales through the shop.
- e) Re-launch commercial sponsorship by promoting companies to buy into the Pets' Corner brand.
- f) Shorter opening times in the winter and close Christmas Bank Holidays minimal savings on overtime.
- g) Re-siting the donation box to a more prominent position.

CONCLUSION

29. In considering the findings of the options above, experience has shown that achieving a partnership approach to discretionary services is challenging and evidence suggests that seeking an alternative operator for Pets' Corner will not be possible. The view of the Pets' Corner Working Group is that Pets' Corner is much valued by the community and increasing income in order to reduce the subsidy provided by the Council represents the best solution to secure the long term future of Pets' Corner.

IMPLICATIONS

Place (includes Sustainability)

None beyond those contained within the report

Author: **Graeme Bloomer, Head of Place**

Finance (Includes ICT)

As set out in the report, current funding to sustain the service is likely to be time limited as the Government makes major changes to the funding arrangements for local authorities nationally. It is likely that the existing funding will no longer be available to the Council by 2019/20 financial year and therefore it is essential that all work that can be undertaken to increase income to the facility and reduce the net operating costs will help significantly when considering future funding options beyond the 2019/20 financial year.

Author: **Simon Freeman, Head of Finance**

Housing

None specific.

Author: **Andrew Murray, Head of Housing**

Community Wellbeing (includes Equalities and Social Inclusion)

As set out in the report.

Author: **Jane Greer, Head of Community Wellbeing**

Governance (includes HR)

Pets' Corner is a discretionary service therefore there is no obligation on the Council to continue to provide grant money however the Council may make payment via grant money. The grant money must be made to assist in subsidising a service that is considered necessary by the Council and because the recipient does not otherwise have the resources.

Grant money must be freely given by the Council without obligation to repay and with nothing contractually required in return from Pets Corner. This is to ensure there is no breach of the EU Rules for Public Procurement.

The body of the report details why the Council believes that the service provided by Pets' Corner is necessary for the wellbeing of the community and as such can show due regard to the reasons why grant money can be provided.

The Council can ensure that there is no breach by ensuring due diligence when making the decision to award the additional grant funding. To satisfy its audit responsibility the Council can request that reports are submitted by the Pets' Corner Working Group to inform the Council how the grant money is assisting them to deliver the service.

Author: **Brian Keane, Head of Governance**

Background Papers

None.

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

None.

REPORT TO: OVERVIEW WORKING GROUP

DATE: 7 FEBRUARY 2017

TITLE: UPDATE ON HARLOW TOWN CENTRE

PORTFOLIO HOLDER: CLLR TONY DURCAN PORTFOLIO HOLDER
REGENERATION & ENTERPRISE

LEAD OFFICER(S): JANE GREER, HEAD OF COMMUNITY
WELLBEING (01279) 446406

CONTRIBUTING OFFICER(S): DAVID SELLINGS, TOWN CENTRE
DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR (01279)
446487

RECOMMENDED that:

- A** The Overview Working Group notes the contents of the report.
- B** An update report is provided to the Overview Working Group in six months' time.

BACKGROUND

1. Regeneration and a thriving economy is a priority for the Council and supporting improvements and redevelopment to the town centre is a key objective in achieving this priority.
2. A report titled Revitalising Harlow Town Centre was presented to the Overview Working Group on 10 March 2016 and detailed the current and future activity in supporting an improved town centre.
3. It was agreed at the Overview Working Group meeting in March 2016 that a further report would be provided to give an update on progress.

CONTEXT AND STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

4. Harlow has a declining town centre which suffers from an ageing infrastructure, poor physical environment and lack of inward investment. The current state and perception of the town centre is failing to attract diverse and high-quality retail and leisure outlets as well as newer and more affluent residents within the wider catchment which is, in turn, perpetuating decline.
5. Evidence suggests that Harlow has an affluent catchment population spanning an estimated shopping population of 246,800. However, the town

centre is not capitalising or benefitting from the available catchment and is losing out to neighbouring competitors.

6. According to the UK Shopping Venue Annual Rankings (2015-2016) out of the top 200 UK retail venues, Harlow saw the biggest fall of all venues following the closure of Marks & Spencer in 2015 and the lack of significant regeneration.
7. Harlow's location and connectivity to London and Cambridge (and further afield) means the town is in a unique position to attract both national and international employers and a skilled and diverse workforce. Harlow has a key role to play in achieving the economic potential of the London Stansted Cambridge Corridor and as a sub-regional centre and is a key focus for both housing and economic growth, playing a complementary role to London and Cambridge.
8. The corridor contains major public, academic and private sector assets which can deliver growth potential for the UK. Harlow's importance and role in the corridor is further evidenced by the growth of the Enterprise Zone, the decision of Public Health England to locate to the town and numerous housing development schemes being promoted in Harlow and its environs.
9. The town centre is therefore of great importance in enabling Harlow to continue to play such a role in the future success of the corridor. A healthy town centre is fundamental to Harlow's role as a growing sub regional centre of economic activity, attracting new business and higher income earners to the town.
10. A vibrant town centre provides an inward investment incentive to companies (and their employees) seeking to invest in Harlow and provides a competitive advantage to other locations they may be considering. A successful town centre can be an important factor to a company when it considers whether it will be able to retain its staff during a move. They often consider the quality of life aspect of a town to potentially persuade employees and their families to relocate.
11. There is an increasing need for the town centre to demonstrate that it is a high quality centre of opportunity. Permitted Development Rights have made conversion from office to residential accommodation very easy, and several office blocks in the town centre have already been, or will shortly be converted. The town centre is currently in a poor position to encourage high quality residential and mixed-use redevelopments. This is creating negative conditions for regeneration and discourages future investment.
12. It is therefore imperative that the Council can seize opportunities that support existing and future investment and development to lead regeneration and

revitalisation of the town centre.

THE OPPORTUNITY

13. In order for the Council to provide leadership and encourage positive and sustainable redevelopment, a clear vision and strategy is needed to focus priorities and partnership working.
14. A draft Harlow Town Centre Strategy is being developed to shape the Council's role in town centre regeneration and redevelopment. The strategy will enable positive dialogue with partners in both strengthening communication and collaboration and appropriate private sector investment.
15. To support both the development of the Town Centre Strategy and updated Local Plan, key studies have been commissioned. These will provide the evidence base in determining the future retail requirements across the district and a framework to guide future town centre regeneration and interventions based on market intelligence and future forecasts and trends.
16. Following an appraisal of the town centre, the Council's appointed consultants have investigated a number of intervention scenarios that provide regeneration opportunities. Feedback has made it clear that regeneration of the town centre cannot be achieved if solely driven by retail and leisure. Current and forecast retail market conditions are such that any redevelopment within a town centre environment should offer mixed-uses, including residential accommodation.
17. The consultants draft findings have identified nine areas of intervention or opportunity. However, a limited number of these are within the Council's ownership and therefore control. The area around Post Office Road, Post Office Road car park, has been identified as a potential redevelopment opportunity for the Council.
18. The main shopping area and general environment deteriorates towards the north end of the town centre and the area lacks significant attractions and resident population required to drive footfall and activity.
19. A high quality, mixed use redevelopment at the Post Office Road car park site would open up the town centre, rebalance the existing shift that has occurred towards the southern end and send a strong signal to both the retail/leisure and investor markets.
20. Developments such as the Enterprise Zone, Public Health England relocation and the recent announcement of the creation of a 'garden town' north of Harlow, will see significant growth in terms of residents and employees and provides an opportunity for the town centre to attract much needed

investment.

21. The information and evidence gained to date, in particular the current work being undertaken by consultants (including soft market testing), suggests that the right conditions exist for a development brief for Post Office Road car park to be produced, taken and advertised as an opportunity for developers.
22. The soft market testing and ad hoc contact received from developers and others has demonstrated that there is an opportunity for a mixed use redevelopment at the site. This view has also been expressed by the Homes and Communities Agency.
23. Discussions with potential developers have confirmed that in order to achieve successful regeneration and provide a step-change development in the town centre, there are a number of factors that need to be addressed. These include:
 - a) A clear planning framework (e.g. Local Plan / Town Centre Area Action Plan);
 - b) Site availability;
 - c) Flexible housing policy;
 - d) Public realm improvements; and
 - e) Improved connectivity to the town's station.
24. It is proposed that the £1 million town centre regeneration reserve funding should now be utilised to bring forward development at Post Office Road (and support wider regeneration of the town centre), by supporting the development and procurement process and in upgrading and replacing some of the existing poor public realm and connectivity issues.
25. Ring fencing this funding to address some of the physical improvements required creates the opportunity to utilise this as match funding which alongside developer contributions, will provide a much improved and wider public realm and will achieve better value for money.
26. There are already a number of redevelopment schemes proposed for a several areas in the town centre. However these proposals are confined to existing footprints and the assumption that there will not be any significant regeneration of the town centre. This has made the private sector investment cautious and opportunities to significantly redevelop have been under estimated.

27. The Post Office car park proposal will signal the Council's commitment and investment in the town centre and will encourage private sector investment and development.

CURRENT PROGRESS

28. In parallel to the long term regeneration of the town centre, a number of schemes and activities have been progressed and achieved throughout the past year.

PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS

29. Work has been taking place to deliver a range of public realm improvements, this has included:

- a) New totem-style pedestrian signage has been installed throughout the town centre;
- b) Updating high-ways and car parking signs improving accessibility between the north and south of the town centre;
- c) Removal of three large brick planters in Broad Walk and increasing the street furniture in the area;
- d) New lighting at the Bus Station in Terminus Street, with new lighting to be installed early 2017 in West Square and Broad Walk;
- e) The unused flagpoles at Market Square have been removed.

30. Funding from the Council's Capital Programme will deliver a range of improvements, which include:

- a) Replacing lamp columns throughout the town centre with new columns and LED lights;
- b) Installing new cycle racks;
- c) Additional lighting at Terminus Street;
- d) Installation of WiFi in Market Square and Terminus Street.

Scoping work is currently taking place with tendering and delivery taking place throughout 2017.

SURVEY

31. In August 2016 a short survey with members of the public took place, which asked four questions:
 1. Have you visited Harlow Town Centre before?
 2. What do you like about the Town Centre/What do you look for when visiting a town/shopping centre?
 3. What do you dislike about the town centre/What puts you off visiting a town/shopping centre?
 4. What would you improve in the town centre/What would encourage you to visit Harlow town centre?
32. The majority of respondents felt strongly that the retail and leisure offer of the town centre, although liked, needed to be improved. In particular the quality of the retail offer. For those who disliked the retail offer, the majority of comments centred on too many charity and discount stores such as pound shops.
33. There was a general feeling that the town centre is functional, meeting the basic needs and expectations of residents and visitors. However many remember what the town centre from some years ago and compared it accordingly.
34. The results of the survey provided an insight into the views of a wide range of users and confirmed the need for regeneration.

PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS

35. The Council has partnered with Phoenix Resource Centre, Harlow Enterprise Hub and Harlow College to create a Digital and Creative Technology Hub in the town centre. The Phoenix Digital and Creative Hub will provide a range of support and services focusing on developing the digital and creative sectors, improving entrepreneurialism amongst residents in the growing industry.
36. The Hub will provide access to a range of state of the art equipment and services, bringing diversity to the town centre offer and support in promoting the town centre as more than just a shopping destination.
37. As a pilot project, the Hub will provide an opportunity to explore and develop other projects and services that can be delivered from a town centre location, helping to redefine and revitalise the town centre environment.

38. Harlow College students have been commissioned to produce new wraps for the red plant pots in Market Square. Students have been asked to produce and develop designs that can be permanently exhibited around the large pots celebrating Harlow as well as promote the diverse skills and expertise existing within Harlow's young people. This project will form part of the Market Square improvement scheme taking place in 2017.
39. The Council has also partnered with Harlow College who have agreed for their construction students to undertake the refurbishment work of 21 The Rows, with the intention of creating a pop-up unit for a range of temporary uses (open to the commercial, public, community and voluntary sectors).
40. Following an approach from Harlow Art Trust, the Council facilitated the installation of a sculpture in Playhouse Square. Chief, by Nick Turvey has been made available to Harlow Art Trust on a 10-year loan to form part of the town's public sculpture collection.
41. Following this successful partnership, work will continue to explore opportunities for the town centre to host further sculptures on a similar loan arrangement. This will support in promoting the town centre and Harlow's art and cultural diversity.
42. Recognising the limited ownership, Officers continue to work in partnership and maintain dialogue with the various land owners across the town centre in particular the managing agents of the Harvey Centre and The Water Gardens.
43. Most recently work took place to increase activity in Market Square and between November and December 2016, the area played host to the Christmas Lights Switch On, Coca-Cola Christmas Truck Campaign and a fun fair and Christmas market.
44. The Coca-Cola Christmas Truck attracted large crowds to the north end of the town centre, offering much needed footfall from a large geographic area and the four week fun fair boosted activity in the area of the festive season. Both visitors and businesses were positive towards the events and welcomed the activity in the area.

MARKET SQUARE

45. As part of the works to replant trees within Market Square, following inspection of the decking and playground a number of defects and failures were found causing concerns over the remaining lifespan of the scheme. It should be noted that the trees and playground were only ever conceived as a temporary initiative (three – five years), prior to future development proposals

coming forward.

46. Following discussion it has been agreed to re-profile the original Town Centre Public Realm Improvements capital programme project to address the defects and deliver an improved open space scheme in Market Square.
47. Through re-profiling the budget, this will enable the following:
 - a) Removal of decking;
 - b) Removal of playground equipment and street furniture;
 - c) Removal of soil and irrigation system from planters;
 - d) Making good the paving etc;
 - e) New playground and sports equipment installed;
 - f) Planters re-installed in new layout with new olive trees;
 - g) New street furniture installed.
48. Architects have been commissioned to produce a scheme for Market Square. However, due to the integration of East Gate and Market Square it is difficult to treat them as separate spaces. The capital funding available is sufficient to deliver improvements to Market Square but not East Gate, therefore some funding from the £1 million town centre regeneration reserve will also be used to enhance the Market Square scheme to incorporate East Gate.
49. Additionally an application for match funding has been made to Table Tennis England to support in the installation of permanent table tennis tables in Market Square (as well as the Town Park, The Stow and Bush Fair).
50. The overall aim is to create flexible open space, providing both play and sport equipment encouraging members of the public from all ages, offer an environment to rest and relax as well as host a variety of events and activities including traditional and specialist markets.

FUTURE KEY ACTIVITY

51. As well as various improvements taken place and in the pipeline as highlighted in this report, a further key focus for 2017 will be engagement and communication.
52. A new town centre forum will be established, open to everyone with an

interest in improving the town centre. The aim of the forum will be to bring together partners and the community to update on town centre activities and developments but also understand the appetite to redevelop a Town Centre Partnership with the ability to deliver.

53. Harlow Town Centre suffers from a perception of under investment and full of empty shops. However, the reality is that the town centre is developing, increasing its offer and receiving investment.
54. To maintain investment and create a change in the perception of Harlow Town Centre promotion and activities will be co-ordinated, demonstrating the positive changes taking place. Events will also be planned and held in conjunction with the 70th Anniversary celebrations during 2017.

PRIVATE SECTOR DEVELOPMENTS

55. The Council is continuing to monitor and engage with private sector landowners and investors at all levels.
56. Addington Capital (owners of the Harvey Centre and adjacent land between Broad Walk and West Square) have published proposals for a major mixed use development scheme. The scheme currently in development will see the demolition of buildings between Broad Walk, East Gate and West Square to create a new residential and retail area. The scheme has the potential to encourage and provide a catalyst for further major regeneration in other areas of the town centre in private ownership
57. The Council is working with Addington Capital and their consultants to understand the proposals and explore the wider opportunities, e.g. adjacent public realm.
58. With the closure of Marks & Spencer in Broad Walk, Addington Capital purchased the vacant unit and has successfully completed a major sub-division and refurbishment of the unit, subsequently letting seven of the eight units.
59. The high quality refurbishment and reconfiguration of the unit took just over 12 months from purchase to having the first unit occupied and saw lettings to five new retailers to the town. This is an example that with the right conditions occupiers are willing to invest in the town centre.
60. Work has also progressed with their new leisure scheme, named The Terrace, with a new multiplex cinema and restaurant opened in late 2016 with further restaurant units anticipated to open throughout 2017.
61. Following the sale of Terminus House and Market House, proposals were

submitted advising the council that the existing office use would be changed to residential use.

62. Council Officers have made contact with the developers and continue to try and maintain open dialogue to understand the extent of development proposals and the impacts on the town centre environment.

CONCLUSION

63. Since the last report significant progress has been made in understanding the Council's role in supporting and delivering regeneration of the town centre.
64. Over the next three to six months the priorities for the Council will be to:
 - a) Develop a brief for development at Post Office Road car park to advertise as an opportunity to developers;
 - b) Progress and deliver capital programme project, including Market Square improvements, 21 The Rows and street lighting;
 - c) Develop a town centre strategy in conjunction with the Local Plan process, building on studies undertaken to date; and
 - d) Continue to work in partnership and with the private sector to secure sustainable town centre redevelopment.
65. The initiatives and activities highlighted in this report enable the Council to lead, encourage and influence investment and development sending a strong signal of commitment and aspiration to existing partners (landowners, businesses, residents and visitors) as well as future partners especially in terms of market investors, the retail and leisure sector and new users of the town centre.

IMPLICATIONS

Place (includes Sustainability)

A vibrant and thriving town centre is crucial to the growth and regeneration of Harlow. The development of the Town Centre Strategy will feed into the Local Plan and together with the capital programme interventions and partnership building with private sector interests will, collectively, provide a solid foundation of Council intent and certainty of purpose that Harlow and Harlow Town Centre will flourish

Author: **Graeme Bloomer, Head of Place**

Finance (Includes ICT)

The Council has already earmarked £1million to help stimulate and plan for the regeneration of the Town Centre. The proposals set out in this report will be funded by utilising the earmarked funds and will be drawn down at the appropriate time subject to the works being undertaken. Any further investment requirements in the project will be evaluated and subject to normal Cabinet approval processes as they arise.

Author: **Simon Freeman, Head of Finance**

Housing

Outlined in the body of the report.

Author: **Andrew Murray, Head of Housing**

Community Wellbeing (includes Equalities and Social Inclusion)

Included in the report.

Author: **Jane Greer, Head of Community Wellbeing**

Governance (includes HR)

It is necessary to promote, influence and engage with the private sector to ensure the redevelopment of the Town Centre is achieved that is beneficial to Harlow as a whole. The Council will need to be mindful that the dialogue does not make a developer or a partner think that the Council is entering into negotiations to contract with them or give an indication they are a preferred partner that may lead to a breach of the public procurement rules.

The project will require on-going legal advice at each stage to ensure the Council's compliance with its obligations under statute and legal practice.

Author: **Brian Keane, Head of Governance**

Background Papers

[These are papers referred to in the preparation of the report that are not attached as appendices but that are available for public or Councillor study.]

Revitalising Harlow Town Centre – Report to Overview Working Group (10 March 2016)

Venuescore 2015-16 : [UK shopping venue annual rankings from Javelin Group \(Executive Summary\)](#).

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

Cabinet Overview Working Group Work Plan 2016/17

	Meeting dates 2016/17			
Title	Thursday 20 October 2016	Thursday 1 December 2016	Thursday 12 January 2017	Thursday 9 March 2017
Economic Development Strategy	Scoping report			Interim report
Non Housing Asset Management Strategy	Scoping report		Interim report	Final report
Treasury Management Strategy Review	Scoping report	Report		
Local Council Tax Support Scheme	Scoping report	Report		
Medium Term Financial Strategy	Report			
Review of Pets Corner			Interim report	Final report
Update on Town Centre			Report	

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Agenda Item 8