

**REPORT TO:** OVERVIEW WORKING GROUP

**DATE:** 10 MARCH 2016

**TITLE:** REVITALISING HARLOW TOWN CENTRE

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

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

**RECOMMENDED that:**

- A** The Overview Working Group consider whether there is further added value, through research and guidance, that it can provide in addition to the existing work being carried out by the cross-party working group and Council Officers.
- B** A further report is provided to the Overview Working Group in six months' time, on progress as detailed in the report.

**BACKGROUND**

1. As with many other New Towns, Harlow Town Centre has a diverse and mixed land/property ownership, with parts in need of regeneration due to ageing buildings and public realm.
2. Regeneration of the town centre is a Council priority and is highlighted as a key goal in achieving the Council's corporate objective, "Regeneration and a thriving economy".
3. Development is reliant on private sector owners to deliver improvement schemes and although this has been positive in some areas of the town centre, in others there has been a lack of investment which creates inconsistency and a segregation of the whole town centre offer.
4. Communication and coordination has also been inconsistent over the years, leading to a perception of poor engagement and progression.

## CURRENT PROGRESS

5. In recognising that the town centre is in need of regeneration, with no current major development in the pipeline and the Council not having control of commercial assets, the Council has considered the role it can play in coordinating and working with private sector land owners, delivering improvements to the public realm, promoting the town centre as a location for investment and taking the lead in stakeholder and community engagement.
6. At the beginning of 2015, a bid to the Council's Non-housing Capital Programme was successful and in addition, the Council set aside £1m for town centre regeneration, creating a funding pot of £1.3m for the town centre.
7. The aim of the capital programme project is to deliver a number of improvements to the public realm in public sector ownership, but concentrating on Broad Walk and Market Square.
8. Specific activities that are being developed and due for delivery from the capital project include:
  - a) New and improved LED street lighting.
  - b) New street furniture and signage.
  - c) Refurbishment of 21 The Rows.
  - d) Improvements to Market Square.
  - e) Introduction of open green space and planting.
  - f) Installation of public-access Wi-Fi.
9. In addition, a cross-party working group has been established with Councillors, with the aim to provide a platform to lead, coordinate and progress the regeneration of the town centre.
10. The Working Group has developed an action plan detailing activity and communication opportunities. The plan focuses on four key objectives:
  1. Attracting investment and creating opportunities for residents and businesses.
  2. Restoring pride and improving the public realm.
  3. Giving stakeholders a say and working together.
  4. Promoting town centre opportunities to residents, businesses, community groups and visitors.
11. The action plan brings together a variety of short, medium and long term activities and actions, aimed at supporting the ongoing regeneration and revitalisation of the town centre and incorporates activities from the capital programme project. Actions include recruitment of a Town Centre Development Coordinator, the review of Harlow Market, re-invigoration of

Harlow Town Centre Partnership and improved communication and engagement, commissioning long-term viability and market analysis studies and redevelopment options.

12. Current action plan activity includes:
  - a) Developing the capital programme project.
  - b) Appointment of a Town Centre Development Coordinator.
  - c) Permanently relocating Harlow Market in Broad Walk North and a review of the market operation.
  - d) Commission of market analysis study.In addition, communication and engagement with land owners and managing agents continues and funding is being explored for potential long-term redevelopment in town centre north east.
13. As well as the Council's role in leading a revitalised town centre, other stakeholders are progressing schemes such as Addington Capital, (owners of the Harvey Centre and properties in West Square, East Gate and Broad Walk), which is progressing proposals to modernise the Harvey Centre and redevelop the first floor to include a cinema and brand-new restaurant units. It is also redeveloping the former Marks and Spencer unit, which includes the sub-division to eight units, incorporating a variety of retail uses, including a gym.
14. In addition, Essex County Council is undertaking improvements which include re-surfacing at Playhouse Square and West Square, expanding and improving the disabled car park in West Gate, installation of cycle racks and improved highway signage.

## **FUTURE PROGRESS AND ACTIVITY**

15. It is anticipated that the cross-party working group will continue to meet, monitor and develop the action plan and look to establish a vision and aspiration for the town centre to gain private sector, resident and community buy-in, to support sustained and long-term revitalisation of the town centre.
16. Work will continue to explore and provide an evidence base to pursue long-term investment and create a masterplan for redevelopment of the town centre, including its property and transport infrastructure. Such studies will provide the strategy and framework for long-term regeneration, including the resources need both in terms of public and private investment.
17. The Town Centre Development Coordinator will progress re-invigorating the Harlow Town Centre Partnership, improve stakeholder (including residents) communication and engagement, continue to progress and build on the capital programme project and explore development opportunities.

18. Other potential opportunities to be explored include the relocation of the Central Library, redevelopment options for the north and eastern areas including transport and bus service provision, and improved links with Wych Elm and the train station.
19. In order to recreate cohesion, consistency and restore civic pride, private and public sector redevelopment across the whole town centre needs to be coordinated and complementary. The Council will continue to provide the leadership role in encouraging positive and sustainable redevelopment and working with existing and new landowners as necessary to achieve this.
20. These existing and future approaches should provide the catalyst and step-change in Harlow's town centre regeneration, improving the physical and social environment, allowing the town centre to meet the current and future needs of residents, visitors and businesses.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### **Place (includes Sustainability)**

None specific.

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

### **Finance (Includes ICT)**

Whilst there are no direct financial implications arising as a result of the report outside of the existing funding made available for Town Centre Regeneration, financial considerations are likely to play a significant part in any future options that may be proposed.

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

### **Housing**

As outlined in the body of the report.

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

### **Community Wellbeing (includes Equalities and Social Inclusion)**

Contained within the report.

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

### **Governance (includes HR)**

None specific.

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.]*

None

**Glossary of terms/abbreviations used**

None