

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

28 March 2012

Report of the Director of Planning, Transport and Leisure and the Central Services Director

Part 1- Public

Executive Non Key Decisions

1 TONBRIDGE TOWN CENTRE – PORTAS PILOT BID

Summary

This report provides a brief update on the initiative being taken to submit a bid for Tonbridge to be one of 12 pilot towns, following a recent review into the future of high streets commissioned by the Government and undertaken by Mary Portas.

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 At the end of last year a report was submitted to Government by Mary Portas entitled, "An independent review into the future of our high streets". The report had been commissioned by Government in an effort to reignite interest and economic buoyancy in the core of town centres across the country.
- 1.1.2 The Portas review has been wide ranging and has brought forward many recommendations. The Government has indicated that it will respond to the review in the Spring.
- 1.1.3 Many of the review recommendations would require change in legislation, such as those to do with property and landlord/tenant issues. Others would appear to somewhat financially unrealistic, particularly in the current economic climate. However, some recommendations are relatively achievable and are built upon positive partnerships being formed with local businesses, community organisations and others having an interest in the success of local high streets. An example of this that features strongly in the review is the role of markets and linked events in bringing back vitality and vibrancy to many town centres.
- 1.1.4 Another strong theme of the review is the establishment of 'town teams' as a focus for positive thinking and action and as a means of improving the perception and ultimately the economic performance of high streets.

- 1.1.5 As part of this whole programme the opportunity has been given for local partnerships to bid to become a 'Portas Pilot' which, for successful bidders would award a fund of up to £100k.

1.2 Progress to date

- 1.2.1 The timescale for submitting bids has been set very shortly and submissions must be made by the end of March. The view was taken that this is something that the Council should take part in and that is a view shared by others in the town centre who have approached us seeking to form an embryonic 'town team'. Consequently there has been work put in place rapidly to put together a bid document, seek support from potential partners and produce a You Tube video that is required as part of the bid.
- 1.2.2 We have annexed a briefing document which we have been constantly updating as a basis of our approach to the bid. We hope that this will enable the Cabinet to appreciate the scope of the exercise and the main thrust that we are intending to put forward.
- 1.2.3 The fundamental message we have sought to articulate is that this is an opportunity to uplift the perception of Tonbridge Town Centre and the High Street in particular and to seek to play on the strengths of the town to engender a boost in how the place is perceived by locals and by visitors. The goal should be to increase interest, improve footfall levels and in so doing provide an opportunity for better economic performance and community participation in the town centre as a whole.
- 1.2.4 Tonbridge has a strong tradition in events and activities and also for markets. This is a theme that we have focussed on because it also chimes well with a number of the recommendations of the Portas Review. The centre point of the bid itself is a market based set of activities taking place in the High Street which can be tested as a one off event and pursued as an ongoing theme if it proves to be successful and gains support. Funding obtained if the bid was successful would be used to deliver such an initiative. This would include some improvements to the dressing of the High Street and other initiatives such as marketing links with traders to ensure economic benefit to local businesses is at the heart of the project.
- 1.2.5 We have already taken part in some media publicity to support the project and invite support. K College is helpfully assisting with the production of the video emphasising the wider involvement in the initiative we have sought to attract.
- 1.2.6 Although the bid is important in itself, we are aware that the competition will be huge across the country and there will only be 12 'winners' each being offered up to £100k in funding. The prospects of success are therefore rather unknown. However, a longer term prize arising from this exercise would be the creation of an ongoing 'Town Team' as a platform to bring a positive group of partners together to pursue improvements to the town centre. The Borough Council would be a key player in this and provide support in many respects, but the essential

attraction would be a collective sharing of a positive view for Tonbridge and taking advantage of the roles played by each of the participants. This is a model of working and organisation that might be equally appropriate for other centres within the Borough.

- 1.2.7 Clearly the Council would retain its own particular responsibilities in the town centre as would other bodies, such as the County Council, but there would be benefit in a positive sounding board. We are of course also engaged in wider matters on redevelopment, encouraging investment in transport and improvements in local leisure facilities and those will continue to be pursued.

1.3 Legal Implications

- 1.3.1 There are none directly arising from this report. If the bid were successful the Borough Council would be the Accountable Body for the purpose of managing and accounting for the funding awarded.

1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.4.1 The bid is being prepared using existing resources.

1.5 Risk Assessment

- 1.5.1 There is no significant risk arising from this report and the current work in hand. Not to pursue the current initiative would create reputational risk and, on the contrary, the leadership and support for the work to date seems to have been well received.

1.6 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.6.1 See 'Screening for equality impacts' table at end of report

1.7 Policy Considerations

- 1.7.1 The approach described in the report is aligned to the Council's key priority regarding the Sustainable regeneration of Tonbridge Town centre and economic development in communities across the Borough.

1.8 Recommendations

- 1.8.1 The Cabinet are asked to **endorse** the Portas Review Pilot bid in respect of Tonbridge and the Council's participation in the proposed 'Town Team'

Background papers:

The Portas Review December 2011

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Screening for equality impacts:		
Question	Answer	Explanation of impacts
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	The work to date is in respect of a bid for funding. The design of any particular event or project taking advantage of any funding would itself need to be subject to careful screening.
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?	No	See above
c. What steps are you taking to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		

In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above.