

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

07 September 2016

Report of the Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

1 SUPPORT FOR VILLAGE STORES INITIATIVE

To provide an overview of the proposed 12-month scheme to support Village Stores in the borough. If approved, this scheme would act as a follow-on from the District and Local Centres Initiatives.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 In recent months, Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council has delivered a range of initiatives aimed at helping to ensure our traders have a positive and supportive environment within which to do business. This includes the District and Local Centres initiatives, which have seen the council work closely with local traders to carry out a variety of environmental improvements in retail areas.

1.1.2 Now that a number of these schemes have been implemented, it would seem like a natural progression to look at another vital element of the retail offer in the borough - the Village Store. Not only do these stores play a key role in the local economy but they often act as a hub for the local community. However, with changes over time in the ways that people tend to procure goods and services, these Village Stores often find it a challenge to sustain the profitability of their business.

1.2 Progress to Date with the District and Local Centres Initiatives

1.2.1 The Economic Regeneration Advisory Board has had previous updates on the progress with these initiatives. Since the last update, the following developments have taken place at the district centres:

Quarry Hill (Tonbridge) – good progress has been made by the Quarry Hill traders in partnership with the Council and Kent Highways. Having employed a Structural Engineer to draw up a design for the artwork foundation in the raised bed outside St Stephens, the TMBC Senior Engineer has engaged with contractors to get this built. The traders have been working with local artist Guy Portelli and local Primary Schools to incorporate children's designs into the

artwork and a design is being drawn up for a low maintenance planting scheme for the raised planter.

Snodland – progress has been slow as Snodland Chamber of Commerce has struggled to allocate the necessary time and resources into their wi-fi and signage project. The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration and the Economic Regeneration Officer have both been actively trying to push this project forward (see Appendix 1). The latest response from the Chamber of Commerce has been a request for an additional few weeks to get the project further advanced before any decision is made regarding the funding. As of August 2016, discussions are ongoing with the Chamber of Commerce and the Town Council, who have also expressed concern regarding the speed of progress made with this project.

West Malling – There have been delays in this project. The Parish Council have now taken the project on from the local Chamber of Commerce, yet progress has continued to be slow. In response to the letter in Appendix 2, the Parish Council have stated that they are in the process of submitting a planning application for the proposed signage and noticeboards. However, as of August 2016, no planning application has been submitted.

- 1.2.2 For both of these projects, we believe it is now appropriate to set a final deadline of the end of September and if sufficient progress has not been achieved by then, the funding would be allocated to other appropriate projects.
- 1.2.3 A number of initiatives at the local centres were completed at the time of the previous report to ERAB. However, the following initiatives have since been progressed:
- 1.2.4 **Martin Hardie Way (Tonbridge):** following on from the community clean-up, signage and resurfacing works, the manager at the Co-Op has been approached to allow a defibrillator to be located on their building and contractors have been contacted regarding installation.
- 1.2.5 **Wateringbury:** a defibrillator in the centre of Wateringbury was installed in March 2016.
- 1.2.6 **Plaxtol:** improvements to the village car park, including alterations to the entrance, have been approved and completed.

1.3 Support for Village Stores

- 1.3.1 In May 2016, officers had an exploratory meeting with Action with Communities in Rural Kent (ACRK) to find out about their work and the potential support they could offer to our Village Shops.
- 1.3.2 It is proposed that support be offered by ACRK's Kent Rural Retail Service to 20 retail businesses across Tonbridge & Malling Borough for support to maintain

custom, improve viability and introduce new services. The offer will specifically include 1-to-1 guidance and support from a specialist retail advisor on:

- business planning
- store layout
- product sourcing
- networking with other retailers
- diversification

1.3.3 A first stage will be for the specialist retail advisor to offer a diagnostic for the business (including a site visit at a time suitable for them in order to make it as convenient as possible) followed by a series of options for supporting the management of change in that retail operation – those options include telephone, email and up to two further on-site consultations.

1.3.4 It is expected that of the 20 retail businesses around 6 or 7 will take up the full range of services within the offer, with the others requiring various degrees of support.

1.3.5 The project will comprise three main costed elements:

Elements	Actions	Number of Days
Production and Promotion of Offer	- Mail out to shops - Email/Social Media with Parish Councils, Village Halls, TMBC Ward Councillors and shops.	1 day
Delivery of Support	- Diagnostic (including site visits) - Caseload with shops	11 days
Evaluation	- Production of report setting out findings, successes and areas for future action.	1 day
Total		13 days

1.3.6 ACRK has costed the initiative at £3,698.50 for a twelve month period, but will contribute 25% of the cost themselves through other funded programmes. As such, the contribution being sought from the Borough Council is **£2,773.87**. This cost can be accommodated through existing budgets.

1.4 Legal Implications

1.4.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.5.1 The programme is funded through existing budgets.

1.6 Risk Assessment

1.6.1 Not applicable.

1.7 Equality Impact Assessment

1.7.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

1.8 Recommendations

1.8.1 That the progress to date on the District and Local Retail Centres **BE NOTED**.

1.8.2 That a proposal to withdraw the funding for the current projects in Snodland and West Malling **BE APPROVED** should there be no evidence of tangible progress on either of these initiatives by the end of September 2016 at the latest.

1.8.3 That the Village Shops Initiative, as detailed in this report **BE APPROVED**.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration and the Chief Executive confirm that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

None

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