

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

05 November 2019

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 LOCAL CENTRES AND PARADES SHOPFRONT GRANT SCHEME UPDATE

This report provides an update on the Local Centres and Parades scheme, which was launched in September 2019, and seeks approval to extend the support provided by Action with Communities in Rural Kent to cover this new scheme.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 In September 2019, Report ERG 19/20 set out further information on the emerging Local Centres and Parades Shopfront Grant Scheme and sought permission to launch the initiative before the end of December 2019 using Business Rates Retention Pilot Scheme Funding.

1.1.2 Due to growing interest in this initiative, it was decided to launch the initiative ahead of time, with independent retailers and food outlets being notified of the scheme at the end of September 2019.

1.1.3 Given the level of interest, it is suggested that the hands-on support provided by Action with Communities in Rural Kent for the Town and District Centres Scheme is retained for the Local Centres and Parades Scheme.

1.2 Local Centres and Parades – Progress to Date

1.2.1 In total, 62 independent retailers and food outlets located within priority areas across the Borough were contacted by letter on 20 September 2019 to announce the launch of the programme. As of mid-October, there has been a solid level of interest in the scheme, with 20 businesses (around 32%) contacting the Borough Council asking for more information about the scheme.

1.2.2 There has been a good geographical spread of interest, with responses coming from most of the priority areas apart from Burham, Wouldham, and Eccles (which only have a small handful of shops in total) and Hildenborough.

Location	Number of Requests for Further Information
Twisden Road, East Malling	4
East Malling High Street	3
Oxley Shaw, Leybourne	2
Tonbridge (other)	2
York Parade, Tonbridge	2
Martin Hardie Way, Tonbridge	2
Greenacres, Aylesford	2
Woodlands, Ditton	1
Wateringbury	1
Plaxtol	1

Table 1: Geographical Spread of Interest

1.2.3 As is evident from Table 1, there has been a large amount of interest from businesses in East Malling, both on Twisden Road and the High Street (where nearly all the eligible businesses have made contact). In addition, there is a clear correlation between those businesses that have engaged with this scheme and those businesses that got involved with previous initiatives the Borough Council has delivered within these areas (such as the retail centres projects during 2015-2017).

1.3 Hands-On Support

1.3.1 The Town and District Shopfront Grant Scheme, which is scheduled to close on 31 December 2019), has seen 19 businesses offered grant support, four of which were given hands-on support by an advisor from Action with Communities in Rural Kent. Whilst helping businesses with the application forms has been the main role for the advisor, it has also enabled a broader conversation on a wide range of topics – such as building awareness of other funding streams and support, advice on shop layouts and product placement – that have been beneficial.

1.3.2 Given the level of interest and the wider benefits accrued from the advice service, it is proposed that this service is continued for the Local Centres and Parades Shopfront Grant Scheme. The cost of this will be under £1,000 and will be met through existing economic development 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 These initiatives will be funded through the Business Rates Retention Pilot Scheme. A Local Centres Improvement Scheme would be funded through likely underspend in other projects.

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 contents of this report **BE NOTED**.

1.8.2 That the continued use of hands-on advice and support from Action with Communities in Rural Kent for the Local Centres and Parades Scheme **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.

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