

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to the Executive for Decision 4 March 2013

Portfolio:	Policy, Strategy and Finance
Subject:	Maintaining the Vibrancy of Fareham Town Centre: Update
Report of:	Director of Planning and Environment
Strategy/Policy:	Local Development Framework
Corporate Objective:	Maintain and extend prosperity

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is threefold. First of all it updates Members on the progress made in achieving the short term Action Plan aimed at maintaining the vibrancy of Fareham Town Centre. Secondly it proposes some further actions which have emerged since the Action Plan was agreed by the Executive in September 2012. Thirdly it seeks agreement to the Action Plan continuing to evolve to enable it to respond to emerging challenges.

Executive summary:

On 3 September 2012, the Executive considered a report on maintaining the vibrancy of the Fareham Town Centre in the light of the current and future challenges it faces and it approved a short term Action Plan. This comprised a total of 14 actions which responded to the issues identified by local businesses and Town Centre visitors. They included actions relating to parking in the Town Centre, improving information about the total Town Centre offer, improving signage, developing a strategic vision for the Town Centre, giving it a greater sense of identity and ensuring that the issues identified were addressed in any long term proposals for the Town Centre.

Since September, a number of actions have been implemented and a number of others are in progress and are due to be implemented by the spring of 2013. In addition a number of other actions have been identified which will help to enhance the environment and encourage visitors to stay longer.

As parking was at the forefront of the issues raised, this was the first area to be tackled. With effect from 1 November 2012 the £25 penalty charge from the three pay on foot car parks was removed and replaced with an hourly tariff allowing visitors to stay as long as they like. In addition a new car parking strategy was agreed by the Executive in December 2012 which comes into effect from 1 April 2013. This simplifies parking policy by introducing the concept of inner and outer car parks instead of short stay and long stay.

Significantly two car parks, Malthouse Lane and Trinity Street, which were previously short stay will now be designated as outer car parks. This means that they will be cheaper than previously, and free on Sundays, which will help customers and traders in the independent shops in West Street. There will be no overall increase in car parking charges in any car park.

Design work is now underway on a dedicated Town centre website which will act as a shop window to the Town Centre and bring together in one place information about all of the attractions it has to offer. It is planned for this to go live in May 2013. A new strapline is being developed as a marketing tool to accompany the launch of the website. This will aim to encapsulate what Fareham town Centre has to offer in a few words.

Work on the provision of new location signs is well underway. This will be in two phases. The first phase will be the replacement of existing black fingerposts to ensure that they direct people to all of the attractions within the Town Centre area. The second phase will be carried out in partnership with Hampshire County Council as part of a Hampshire Wayfinding Project. This will involve the installation of new freestanding “totem” signs at various points within the Town Centre. These will provide a location map showing all of the different shopping zones, key services, destinations and places of interest within the Town Centre and help to improve its connectivity.

Other actions such as minor improvements to shop facades, providing artwork in the windows of empty shops and developing initiatives to encourage new businesses are still underway.

In addition to the actions already approved, it is also proposed to install some new permanent structures and additional seating and cycle racks within the Town Centre. A number of different options and locations for permanent structures have been considered and initially it is recommended that a series of tensile canopies is installed in the Portland Street courtyard between TK Maxx and Portland Chambers. These would be multi functional and could be used by market stalls, concessions, community groups and special events. It is proposed to pilot this approach during Easter week to test its viability and only to proceed with a permanent solution if this pilot is successful. Further permanent structures at different locations could also be considered in future in order to enhance the environment and add to the distinctiveness of the Town Centre. Additional seating and cycle racks will enhance the attractiveness of the Town Centre to visitors and help to increase “dwell time”.

It is proposed that the Action Plan remains an evolving document and that continuing dialogue be held with Town Centre businesses with a view to continually updating it to respond to emerging challenges. Longer term actions are proposed in the Town Centre chapter of the Development Sites and Policies Plan, the pre-submission draft of which will be considered by the Executive later in the spring of 2013. Once adopted it is anticipated that a Town Centre Masterplan will also follow on from this process.

Recommendation

- (a) That the Executive note the progress so far in implementing the Town Centre Action Plan approved in September 2012;
- (b) That the updated Action Plan, set out in Appendix A to this report be approved;
- (c) That a final decision on the type of permanent structure to be installed in the Henry Cort pedestrian area as described in this report, be delegated to the Executive Leader;
- (d) That the Action Plan remains an evolving document to be updated as appropriate and that further reports be made to the Executive as appropriate when there is the need for a formal decision.

Reason:

To help maintain the current vibrancy of the Town Centre and allow it to continue to flourish despite the challenges it faces over the next few years.

Cost of proposals:

The cost of the individual proposals is noted within the report and can be met from the High Street Innovation Fund together with match funding provided by the Council.

The cost of the provision of new “totem” signs as part of the Hampshire Wayfinding Strategy will be funded mostly by Hampshire County Council from the Local Sustainable Transport Fund. However, there may be a requirement for the Borough Council to meet some of the cost of this from the above budget in order to meet any specific requirements it may have.

Appendix A: Updated Town Centre Action Plan - March 2013

Background papers: Report to the Executive - 3 September 2012

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Executive Briefing Paper

Date: 4 March 2013

Subject: Maintaining the Vibrancy of Fareham Town Centre: Update

Briefing by: Director of Planning and Environment

Portfolio: Policy, Strategy and Finance

INTRODUCTION

1. On 3 September 2012, the Executive considered a report on the continuing vibrancy of Fareham Town Centre. This followed an analysis of national and local data, observation of the Town Centre at different times and on different days of the week, dialogue with a cross section of local businesses and a summary of the views of local residents derived from recent surveys. The report identified a number of strengths and weaknesses.
2. Its strengths, which combined give Fareham a “sense of place” lacking in out of town centres are:
 - It has a good range of shops with a variety of leisure, eating and drinking opportunities;
 - Its markets and other events are popular and draw people into the Town Centre;
 - It has a number of other assets including an attractive environment, some historic buildings and an attractive, albeit difficult to access, waterfront, which all contribute to the total Town Centre offer;
 - Visitors can combine shopping trips with other activities including eating and drinking, leisure activities and visits to the Civic Offices, library and health facilities;
 - It is relatively easy to access with reasonably good public transport links, particularly from Gosport since the introduction of the BRT, and sufficient conveniently located parking;
 - Vacancy rates are low compared with UK and the South East averages;
 - Footfall rates have been remarkably consistent over the past few years;
 - Recent customer surveys show that people are satisfied with the range of shops and leisure facilities and feel that it has improved in recent years;
 - It is seen as a safe, secure and clean environment.

3. A number of significant weaknesses were however also identified as follows:
 - There is a lack of a unified strategic vision for the Town Centre;
 - Whilst the total Town Centre offer has a number of distinct areas and a range of different facilities, the connectivity between these is not good. This makes it difficult to identify the Town Centre's unique selling point ;
 - The combined assets of the Town Centre are not well communicated;
 - The public and business perception is that parking in Fareham is expensive;
 - The development at Whiteley, due to open on 23 May 2013, could potentially lead to a number of major retailers moving there from the Town Centre due to the attraction of cheaper rents, thus threatening its viability;
 - The benefits of free parking and the presence of major retailers at Whiteley could mean that customers change their shopping habits away from the Town Centre;
 - Its geographical situation, midway between two major cities, means that realistically, it will continue to principally be reliant on its immediate catchment area.

4. Following a Business Breakfast held in July 2012 attended by representatives from 50 Town Centre businesses an Action Plan was drawn up to address these weaknesses and this was agreed by the Executive as part of the report. This report updates Members on the progress being made in achieving the Action Plan and an updated Plan is attached at Appendix A. The report also proposes some further actions and seeks approval on the way forward.

ACTION PLAN – PROGRESS SO FAR

5. **Business Breakfasts:** Action 2 in the plan was to host regular Business Breakfasts. A second one was held on 29 January 2013 to update local businesses on progress on the Action Plan and to seek views on new proposals. The feedback from this has helped to inform this report. It is intended to continue to host Business Breakfasts at regular intervals to enable a continuing dialogue.

6. **Parking Policy.** Parking policy was at the forefront of many of the issues raised so the actions relating to this have been deal with first.

7. Action 3 in the Plan was to remove the £25 penalty charge after 5 hours from the three pay on foot car parks. This has been implemented and took effect from 1 November 2012. The charge has been replaced with an hourly tariff which enables visitors to stay as long as they like.

8. Action 4 was to consider the simplification of parking policy. As a result, a new Town Centre Parking Strategy was approved by the Executive on 3 December 2012 and will take effect from 1 April 2013. This replaces the concept of short and long stay car parks, which the public found confusing, with inner and outer car parks. The charge for inner car parks will be £1 per hour, the same as the present charge for short stay, with the exception of the Market Quay car park which will continue to be charged at £1.50 per hour. This reflects their proximity to the primary shopping area. The 5 hour limit in the present short stay pay and display car parks will also be removed which will bring them into line with the pay on foot car parks.

9. The charge in the outer car parks will be 70p an hour, up to a maximum of £3.50. However, significantly, two current short stay car parks, Malthouse Lane and Trinity Street will become outer car parks, making them cheaper from Monday to Saturday and free on Sundays. This will be of great benefit to traders in West Street and their customers and will also help visitors who do not mind a slightly longer walk into the primary shopping area.
10. In line with Action 5 in the Plan, these changes will be publicised as 1 April approaches to ensure that people are aware of all of the parking options open to them.
11. **Developing a Town Centre Website:** The Action Plan proposed the development of a dedicated Town Centre website. This will be distinct from the Borough Council's website with a different look and feel and it will bring together in one place all of the attractions the Town Centre has to offer. It will have a home page, a Town centre map and pages dedicated to shopping, eating and drinking, accommodation, leisure, places of interest, parking and community facilities.
12. The domain name farehamtowncentre.co.uk has been purchased for the site and design work is currently underway. Once this design work is complete towards the end of March, the site will be built and tested with a view to it going live by the end of May 2013.
13. The total cost of the website design work is £8,000, which is lower than originally estimated.
14. **Developing a Town centre strapline:** To accompany the launch of the website some thought has been given to the development of a short punchy strapline which encapsulates what the Town Centre has to offer in as few words as possible and which could be used as a future marketing tool.
15. From a large number of suggestions a shortlist of three was drawn up and initially floated at the Business Breakfast held on 29 January. These were:
 - Fareham – The market town with more
 - Discover Fareham – something for everyone
 - Fareham Town Centre – History and heart
16. Comments were invited from local businesses at the Business Breakfast and further comments were invited informally through the local media. As a result of all of the comments received, the recommended strapline is Fareham – the market town with more.
17. **Signage in the Town Centre:** Action 7 was to improve signage and information boards in the Town Centre. This will be carried out in two phases.

18. The first phase will be the rationalisation of the existing black fingerpost signs. At present there are 82 fingerposts on 28 signs at different locations throughout the Town Centre. An audit of these has been carried out and it is proposed to change them to provide better information on existing destinations and to point to destinations that are not currently covered. As an example signs pointing to High Street will be amended to read “High Street shops and restaurants” as traders in the High Street are concerned that people do not realise that there is a variety of shops in this location. Further comments were invited at the Business Breakfast on other locations which should be signposted and reworded and these comments will be taken on board before the work is finalised.
19. The total cost of this work is estimated to be £12,500 and will be implemented by the end of May 2013.
20. The second phase will involve the installation of freestanding “totem” signs at Fareham Station, the entrances to major car parks and at other strategic locations within the Town Centre. These signs will provide a “you are here” type location map including all of the different shopping zones and other attractions and places of interest in the Town Centre. They will replace the existing signage including the two shop directory signs in West Street. This work is being carried out in partnership with Hampshire County Council as part of the Hampshire Wayfinding Project. Planning work is still in progress and the total cost is still being assessed. It is being funded from the Local Sustainable Transport Fund, although it is possible that the Borough Council may have to make a contribution to the cost if it requires additional characteristics to the signs to make them more specific to Fareham. The signs will incorporate QR codes which will enable people to access the Town Centre website using their smartphone. The installation work will be undertaken in the summer of 2013.
21. **Improving shop facades:** Action 8 was to provide artwork in the windows of empty shops similar to that provided in the former Somerfield (now Sports Direct) store. Action 9 was to discuss with landlords a possible match funded programme of minor repair and redecoration work to shop facades. Both of these actions require negotiation with shop owners and landlords and are still being progressed.
22. **Visual improvements to the Monday market:** Action 10 was to fund the provision of new equipment for the Monday market to give it a greater sense of visual identity. The varying shapes and sizes of market stalls and the way in which they fit into the existing street scene mean that very careful consideration will need to be given to this and it will be further pursued in consultation with market traders.
23. **Encouraging new business:** Exploratory discussions have been held with Hampshire Chamber of Commerce and enterprise agencies about how the Council could best help to facilitate new business start ups. Two favoured approaches have emerged;
 - A business skills training programme tuned to the particular needs of new retailers. This could include business planning, sourcing finance, available grants, registering companies, finding suitable premises;

- A mentoring scheme utilising advice from people with recent experience of starting up new businesses.

24. These approaches are being further explored with a view to implementing a programme from late May 2013 onwards.

FURTHER ACTIONS BEING PROPOSED

25. Since the Action Plan was approved a number of further possible actions or variations to existing actions have emerged and these are summarised in the following paragraphs.

26. **Permanent multi functional structures:** Considerable thought has been given to the installation of new permanent structures which will enhance the environment of the Town Centre, make it more distinctive and fit in with its market town ambience.

27. The first option which is being proposed has the advantage of being visually attractive, relatively low cost and reasonably easy to implement. This is the provision of a row of linked tensile canopies in the Portland Street courtyard which is bounded by TK Maxx and Portland Chambers. Currently, this is a wasted asset and unused with the exception of a flower seller at the front. The provision of a new structure would help to bring it to life. It is envisaged that such a structure would be multi functional, with use by market traders at both the Monday and specialist markets, by community groups and other events. The use would be managed by the Town Centre Manager. These canopies would be in conjunction with additional seating, cycle parking and signage to help create a new public space. The estimated cost of providing three 5m x 5m canopies in this location including supply, installation and lighting is £20,000.

28. Before proceeding with any work, it is proposed to install, on a pilot basis, a single canopy near the entrance to the courtyard for one week, including the Easter weekend, from 28 March. This will enable the visual impact to be assessed and the appetite for and potential usage of this type of structure to be tested. A local supplier has agreed to install the canopy on a no commitment basis.

29. It is recommended that, following this pilot, delegated authority be given to the Executive Leader to decide on the exact detail of the proposed installation.

30. An alternative option which was also under consideration for this location is the erection of a permanent kiosk of an attractive high quality design which could be leased to a trader. This would be a more expensive solution as depending on its size and design it could cost anything between £20,000 and £50,000, although this initial outlay would be offset by an annual rental income. As this option requires further investigation in terms of the cost, income and the likely demand from traders, it is not being recommended at present.

31. A number of other options have also been explored including the provision of an “architectural” solution of metal (cast iron) canopies at different locations in the Henry Cort pedestrian area.

32. For the moment such options are not being pursued on the grounds of cost or difficulty in implementing in the short term.
33. In the longer term, it is proposed that the feasibility and cost of further permanent structures at different locations should be explored and a report brought to the Executive later in the year. Such structures could involve a second podium or bandstand, further canopies at selected locations including the southern frontage of Market Quay and the west end of the pedestrian area or kiosks in similar locations. They could also include a covered structure adjacent to the podium to provide more covered space for watching events and performances.
34. **Additional seating:** It has become apparent that there is a lack of sufficient seating within the Henry Cort pedestrian area. The provision of additional seating would help to increase dwell time within the Town Centre and be of particular benefit to older people and people with young children. There are difficulties in finding suitable locations for more seating, particularly due to the location of stalls at the Monday market. However three locations are proposed. One is within the Portland Street courtyard to complement the proposed new structure. The second is in the Town Well area just to the south of the podium. The third is in front of Portland Chambers around the Tipping Scales water feature. This has not been in operation since 2005 as a result of health and safety concerns. Due to the high cost of re-instating it as a water feature and the revenue cost of continuing maintenance this will now remain as a sculpture only with no circulation of water. The estimated cost of additional seating in these locations is £20,000. The work will be carried out by May 2013.
35. **Additional cycle racks:** Local traders, visitors and Hampshire Constabulary have all highlighted the need for additional cycle racks within the Town Centre. This will help encourage people to visit the Town Centre by bicycle and discourage them from leaving bicycles chained to railings or leaned against shop windows. Three locations are proposed. One is in Harper Way, adjacent to the Westbury Manor Garden. A second is at the eastern end of West Street outside Cafe Tusk. The third is within the Portland Street courtyard. The total cost of the provision of 50 cycle racks in these locations is estimated to be £8,000. The work will be carried out by May 2013, subject to the necessary approvals by the highway authority.
36. **Advertising boards in multi storey car parks:** At the moment, there is a large amount of blank space on the walls at the entrances to the multi storey car parks. Some of this space could be utilised to provide advertising space for local independent traders at low cost. It is proposed that the best means of achieving this be further pursued in consultation with traders.

MOVING FORWARD

37. It is not intended that the Town Centre Action Plan is set in stone. It will need to evolve in order to react to events as they occur and to respond to any changes in the future health of the Town Centre. It is therefore proposed that it be reviewed regularly, to ensure that it is kept up to date and to ensure the regular input of local business through events such as Business Breakfast. Further reports will be brought to the Executive when specific decisions are required.

38. The Action Plan comprises mainly short term actions. Longer term proposals are contained within the Development Sites and Policies Plan, which is currently moving towards pre-submission stage. This includes a Town Centre chapter which sets out a long term vision and strategy, objectives and policies and includes site allocations for new mixed use development opportunity areas. These areas are subject to developing masterplans to ensure that the Town Centre is developed and strengthened holistically and in a robust way to ensure its success in the long term. It is anticipated that, following consideration of the pre-submission draft by the Executive, this will be submitted to the Secretary of State in late Spring. An Examination in Public will be held in the autumn and the Plan should be formally adopted by the Council in the early part of 2014. A Masterplan which “re-imagines” the central area of the Town Centre, encompassing the Civic Area, Fareham Shopping Centre and the Market Quay car park will also follow on from this process. However the long term vision, proposing new development opportunities and improving the quality of public spaces to increase its appeal, will encompass the whole of the Town Centre area.

RISK ASSESSMENT

39. There are no specific risks associated with the recommendations. Indeed, there is the potential risk that not proceeding with the proposals could potentially lead to a decline in the future vibrancy of the Town Centre in view of the challenges it faces.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

40. The cost of the specific recommendations made in this report, together with the cost of previously approved actions can be met from the High Street Innovation Fund of £100,000 which was awarded to the Council in 2012/13. This funding was neither ring fenced nor time limited. The Executive also agreed in July 2012 to match fund this with a further £100,000.

CONSULTATIONS

41. The original Action Plan was informed by individual meetings with a cross section of Town Centre businesses, the views of local residents obtained from a number of different surveys and views expressed at a Business Breakfast held in July 2012. Further actions have been informed by a second Business Breakfast held on 29 January 2013.

CONCLUSION

42. Fareham Town Centre still remains relatively vibrant, despite the continuing challenging economic conditions. Some of the measures in the Action Plan agreed by the Executive in September 2012 have already been implemented and will have a beneficial impact on the local economy. Other actions will be complete by May 2013. This report has proposed some further short term actions and also proposes that the Action Plan remains a living document, continually updated to enable it to respond to events. In the longer term, a Town Centre Masterplan will be developed with a view to “re-imagining” the central area of the Town Centre to ensure a robust and successful future.

Reference Papers:

Report to the Executive – 3 September 2012

**MAINTAINING THE VIBRANCY OF FAREHAM TOWN CENTRE
ACTION PLAN - UPDATED MARCH 2013**

ACTION	BY WHEN	BY WHOM	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
1: Host regular Business Breakfasts to seek views on new initiatives and act as a sounding board for Town Centre Action Plan proposals	Ongoing – second meeting held in January 2013	Fareham Borough Council in partnership with key Town Centre interests	Largely staff time from organisations involved
2: Articulate a strategic vision for the Town Centre and, stemming from this, consider the development of a USP for Fareham along the line of historic market town with a modern edge	Strategic Vision outlined in Town Centre chapter of draft Development Sites and Policies Plan in October 2012. USP strapline to be agreed in March 2013	Fareham Borough Council in partnership with key Town Centre interests	Largely staff time from within existing resources
3: Remove £25 penalty after 5 hours from pay on foot car parks and replace with hourly tariff	Implemented in November 2012	Fareham Borough Council	Initial set up costs to change machines met from parking revenue income. Otherwise, likely to be revenue neutral
4: As part of current Parking Strategy Review, consider changes to the tariff structure and redesignation of car parks to simplify parking policy	Parking Strategy approved by Executive in December 2012. Changes to be implemented in April 2013	Fareham Borough Council	Financial implications taken into account in Executive report and to be met from parking revenue income.
5: Give greater publicity to current range of parking options and costs	To be included as part of updating of current FBC website and updated as changes introduced.	Fareham Borough Council	Largely staff time from within existing resources.
6: Develop a dedicated Town Centre website to bring together all information concerning the Town Centre offer	May 2013	Fareham Borough Council in partnership with key Town Centre interests	Depending on style of website, set up costs could be up to £8k in 2012/13 which can be funded from High Street Innovation Fund. Ongoing revenue costs of £5k per annum.
7: Improve Town Centre publicity and promotion through Town Centre leaflet and improved signage and information boards	May 2013	Fareham Borough Council	Installing new fingerpost signs, estimated at £12k in 2013/14. To be funded from High Street Innovation Fund. New totem signs to be funded

ACTION	BY WHEN	BY WHOM	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
			by HCC Wayfinding Project.
8: Explore with landlords the potential for smartening up empty shop frontages	May 2013	Fareham Borough Council (in partnership with Town Centre landlords)	Some revenue costs for installing murals/artwork in shopfronts, possibly £15k. Potential to be jointly met by landlord/FBC through High Street Innovation Fund/matched funding.
9. Explore the feasibility of developing a programme in consultation with landlords to enable minor repair/redecoration works to occupied shop frontages	May 2013	Fareham Borough Council (in partnership with Town Centre landlords)	Will depend on criteria for level of work funded and match funding from landlords. Council contribution could be £20k but may need to be higher.
10: Consider the purchase of equipment to give a more consistent appearance and a greater sense of identity to the Monday market	Consultation with market traders from April 2013	Fareham Borough Council	One off revenue costs for equipment purchase, possibly in the region of £30k. To be funded by High Street Innovation Fund/matched funding.
11: Propose policies as part of forthcoming Local Development Framework (LDF) documents, which facilitate and enable more cafe and restaurant use within the Henry Cort pedestrian area	Included as part of draft Development Sites and Policies Plan agreed in October 2012. Pre submission draft to be considered by Executive in Spring 2013	Fareham Borough Council	Largely staff time from within existing resources
12. Develop a programme, in consultation with Hampshire Chamber of Commerce, to encourage new business through mentoring or business skills training	May 2013	Fareham Borough Council	Council contribution will depend on the nature of the programme, but could be in the region of £10k.
13. Develop a portfolio of indicators to measure the health of the Town Centre which can inform future initiatives and investment	April 2013	Fareham Borough Council	Largely staff time from within existing resources
14. Ensure issues raised in report are taken into account in forthcoming LDF documents	Issues included in Town Centre chapter of draft DSP Plan agreed in October 2012. Pre submission draft to be considered by	Fareham Borough Council	Largely staff time from within existing resources

ACTION	BY WHEN	BY WHOM	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
	Executive in spring 2013		
15. Provide new permanent multi functional structures at selected locations within the Town Centres	Phased approach with first phase in Portland Street courtyard to be implemented in May 2013	Fareham Borough Council	Estimated cost of first phase is £20k. Cost of future phases dependent on size and design of structures. To be met from High Street Innovation Fund/matched funding.
16. Provide new seating in the pedestrian area	May 2013	Fareham Borough Council	£20k to be met from High Street Innovation Fund/matched funding.
17. Provide new cycle racks in the pedestrian area	May 2013	Fareham Borough Council	£8k to be met from High Street Innovation Fund/matched funding.
18. Provide advertising space in multi storey car park lobbies for independent traders	May 2013	Fareham Borough Council	Initial revenue outlay estimated to be less than £4k to be met from High Street Innovation Fund/matched funding.