

AYLESBURY TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

1 Purpose

- 1.1 To give the committee by way of a presentation, an overview of the work of the Aylesbury Town Centre Partnership since March 2018, and to highlight key elements for delivery for the next twelve months.

2 Recommendations

- | | |
|-----|---|
| 2.1 | Members note from the presentation the work of the Partnership and plans for the next twelve months |
|-----|---|

3 Supporting information

- 3.1 The Aylesbury Town Centre Partnership (ATCP) is a thriving organisation which supports the town centre business community and helps improve and promote the town to encourage more footfall and investment.
- 3.2 The work of the ATCP is funded via a number of sources – AVDC, membership of the Partnership, lettings income from public space and events and contributions in kind. The total working budget of the Partnership is £237,300 which is offset by £45,900 income (from business contributions, commercial lettings and sponsorship). AVDC pays the remaining balance.
- 3.3 The Partnership's annual business plan has five key headings:
- i Partnership and Communications
 - ii A clean and attractive town
 - iii A safe place
 - iv Marketing and promoting the town
 - v Support for independent businesses
- 3.4 The Partnership business plan is closely aligned to (but not replaced by) the former Aylesbury Town Centre Plan together with projects identified by the Garden Town Project programme both which partly dictate the work and projects within the business plan.
- 3.5 The town centre team comprises of two full time staff and two part time staff and are all employed by AVDC. The Partnership is currently Chaired by the Managing Director of Mix 96. Cllr Julie Ward and Cllr Barbara Russel are the AVDC member representatives on the Partnership.
- 3.6 The Town Centre & Regeneration Manager will present a summary of the Partnership achievements over the last sixteen months or so and highlight key elements for delivery for the next year.

4 Business Plan

4.1 i Partnership and Communications

- 4.2 The Partnership interacts with a wide range of local groups and organisations. The size and breadth of the membership continues to change. During any financial year, some businesses who are members may close and there are others who feel they can no longer afford to be a member. This is increasingly becoming a concern particularly as some key players in the town centre such as Friars Square Shopping Centre have more recently withdrawn their membership. This means not only the loss of the financial contribution to the work of the town centre team but the loss of their voice on the Partnership.

We are reviewing the structure in the next twelve months. Membership currently stands at over 90 and most towns of our size have membership around 20/30 so it is still an effective body. All town centre businesses/stakeholders are encouraged to join the Partnership and many have done so including residential and commercial estate agents, the Aylesbury Old Town Residents' Society, local Churches and transport providers.

- 4.3 Members can chose from three levels of membership (£3,000, £300 and £30).
- 4.4 One of the most valued benefits of being a member of the Partnership is the regular flow of communication the Town Centre & Regeneration Manager provides on town centre and national issues, including weekly and regular updates, quarterly meetings as well as business support.
- 4.5 In 2019, all members of the Partnership have continued to benefit from targeted updates about theatre shows, events and activity in the town. This is so that they can plan and maximise their opportunity to attract pre and post theatre diners and also get involved in the town centre events or planning work rotas according to any influx that they can expect.
- 4.6 All members are welcome to attend the quarterly Partnership meeting where time is set aside at the start of the meeting for networking and for members to ask questions/raise issues. Time is also allocated for any member to provide a business update, promote their offer or seek advice from others. This is a very popular session and has yielded positive outcomes with increased collaboration. The meetings are well attended.
- 4.7 One of the aims of the Partnership is to facilitate (and sometimes broker) discussions with different council services eg planning, licensing, waste disposal, parking, transport and other organisations eg letting agents.

ii A clean and attractive town

- 4.8 As the use of town centres change and socialising becomes a more important requirement, the cleanliness and attractiveness of the town has become an increasingly significant part of the business plan. Improvements to these aspects require ownership by everyone so work is very much a partnership and on-going effort with the Town Centre & Regeneration Manager liaising closely with others to coordinated a range of improvements including:
 - identifying and arranging the removal of rubbish from grot spots
 - removal of posters, illegal notices
 - encouraging outside street trading
 - managing and regulating buskers and charity collectors
 - working with AVDC on Christmas lights look and location
 - coordinating ice/snow clearance
- 4.9 During 2019 the upper High Street was plagued with a rat problem. It was partly down to visitors feeding the pigeons and a burrow under an old tree pit. Remedial action was taken with rodent specialists and Bucks Transport to fill the access points. A campaign was then launched across the town to educate people not to feed the pigeons as not only does it become a food source for rats but also increases the pigeon population and their droppings carry an array of diseases.

- 4.10 The area around Bear Brook was very over run and underutilised. A campaign by the Town Centre & Regeneration manager began and involved RSPB, the Environmental Health Agency, BBOT, Waitrose, Community Safety and the ecology team. The area was blitzed to clear out rubbish, curtail growth, erect bird boxes and bird feeders and install interpretation boards at both the brook and the canal basin. Legal action has recently been taken to evict homeless under the ramp and we are working with the Landscape and Community Safety teams to put in place measures that will prevent the area being used by homelessness people in the future.

iii A safe place

- 4.11 Until 2018 AVDC had invested in winning the national Purple Flag award . This was originally promoted as an asset to the town centre, however the reality is that it takes up considerable officer time, is expensive and nationally the scheme has not reached the awareness level that we were promised and so has delivered few benefits. As a result we have withdrawn from the scheme but continue the good work in delivering a vibrant and safe night time economy. Campaigns conducted in 2019 to support the night time economy involved a Summer Socialising campaign to create awareness about the beautiful outside spaces in the town centre and a Winter Warmers campaign to raise awareness about snug and cosy retreats in the town.
- 4.12 The Town Centre & Regeneration Manager works very closely with the police to identify and manage any crime issues.
- 4.13 The Town Centre & Regeneration Manager is also a Board member and Treasurer of Aylesbury Business Against Crime scheme. This scheme manages crime reduction in the shops through a radio system and exclusion album of key offenders. It plays a vital role in supporting the work of the police and reducing crime in the town.
- 4.14 The Town Centre & Regeneration Manager (TC&RM) plays a key role in enforcing the pedestrianisation scheme and has sorted out large pots in the Market Square roadway near the bollards to restrict access to rogue drivers.
- 4.15 Since the last update, Market Square and Kingsbury parking enforcement has now been passed to NSL to manage and impose fines. This has achieved good success with a dramatic drop in illegal parking in these squares.
- 4.16 During 2019, Kingsbury witnessed a dramatic rise in anti-social behaviour. A meeting was immediately called by the TC&RM inviting all the businesses, the licensing manager, the police and community safety. As a result of the meeting, the trees have been cut back to allow for better visibility of the site, the benches removed, more robust action by the police against offenders and increasing collaboration within the businesses. The situation continues to be monitored but has significantly improved.
- 4.17 Procurement is underway to appoint a public realm architect to develop plans to improve both Market Square and Kingsbury. The public realm architect will be responsible for the stakeholder engagement to develop the concepts and take them through to detailed design and planning approval. The second stage of the procurement will be for the delivery of the schemes. The £4.5m approved by AVDC in its capital programme for the improvement works has been carried through into the capital programme for the new council. However, the Shadow Executive of the new council is being asked to support the investment.

- 4.18 Begging continues to be a problem and the TC&RM attends regular meetings with the Outreach & Community Safety teams and police to tackle this issue. A media re-education campaign has just been launched called “Real Change not Spare Change” and is targeted at town centre workers and visitors.

iv Marketing and Promoting the town

- 4.19 The marketing and promotion of Aylesbury works on a number of levels. Overall responsibility for the strategic marketing and positioning of the town is led by AVDC, but the Town Centre Team helps to deliver a dynamic marketing and promotional plan locally.
- 4.20 In excess of 400 events are held in the town centre and they are planned and coordinated through one of the Partnership sub-groups, overseen by the Town Centre team. Any town centre organisation that hosts events is invited to join the group. The group comprises of AVDC leisure, Bucks CC, Town Council, library, museum, Queens Park Arts Centre, St Marys Church, Mix 96, Bucks TV, and Waterside theatre. The programme grows year on year thanks to the efforts of many contributing partners who fund a number of the events in cash or in kind. The breadth of the events programme ranges from large scale events such as Christmas light switch on (13,000 people), Santa Sunday (12,000), Christmas gift fair (11,000) to smaller events such as street entertainment around the town. September 2018 saw the launch of the first ever Waterside Festival. A new delivery model was tested for this event by working closely with local businesses and organisations to provide a unique and diverse festival. 2019 saw the event attendance explode with over 10,000 attendees and was fully funded by sponsorship.
- 4.21 The town centre team are an active event producer at the WhizzFizzFest managing the tea party, a fancy dress competition, live music and performances on the runway. They are also responsible for business engagement in the event including sponsorship. The overall event programme provides essential credibility and support for the town’s Vision to develop its unique selling point as a town of performance and the arts.
- 4.22 In 2019, 40,000 biannual Live Guides were produced and distributed across the town and to Vale villages. This is a tourism guide providing information on transport, events, things to do, shopping and places to eat. This is currently under review to establish its effectiveness in the new paperless era that is emerging.
- 4.23 The Town Centre & Regeneration Manager attended the Bucks County Show with marketing collateral to present the changing face of the town centre and show the target demographic a different face of the town centre.
- 4.24 The national Refill scheme was launched in Aylesbury with the support of the team. The scheme was supported through the provision of free advice, marketing and social media support, production of leaflets, business engagement and a free stall on the market. Refill has now provided a platform for the integration of a greener and sustainable market.
- 4.25 A significant element of the AVDC funding contributes towards the events programme, however, we have been moving away from free events and now charge the public for events or income is raised from letting space at the events.
- 4.26 Strong relationships have been developed with local landlords and letting agents to attract the right tenant mix. The team Manager has established a

Task Force to look at emerging town trends, work on cross collaboration of potential tenants and influence landlords to consider new uses that are not just retail. There has been considerable success in this area with the Manager helping to secure a new soft play area in the town centre and attracting a roof top restaurant. Further work will be done on this in 2020 with already five new tenants looking for retail space.

- 4.27 In recognition of the work being achieved in Aylesbury the Manager has been asked to host sharing sessions with High Wycombe, Buckingham and informally Winslow. Additionally the Manager will be on the panel for the forthcoming Bucks High Street conference in Pinewood.

v Support for independent businesses

- 4.28 The importance of retaining and attracting independent town centre businesses and the continuation of the market is appreciated by all stakeholders including the multiple retailers.

Partnership members have the following support:

- The opportunity to attend events
- Quarterly network meetings
- Discounted theatre tickets
- Personal visits to traders affected by development /works outside their premises
- One stop shop advice and assistance when applying for licences, planning permission etc.
- Free advertising
- Free social media blogs

- 4.29 Events have been introduced in 2019 to show case underutilised parts of the town, this has included a Halloween window dressing competition to encourage the public to discover parts of the town that they would not normally frequent.
- 4.30 To support the business two vouchers have been produced. The businesses just provide the offer and we print and issue the booklet. This was done for both the County Show and again for January 2020. The January promotion recognises that the town centre is very quiet and aims to increase the footfall. The promotions have been very well received with over 750 printed brochures and over 1500 hits on the website.
- 4.31 There are a growing number of enquiries from families looking to open up businesses in the town that have little experience of running a physical environmental. It is anticipated that these enquiries will need more support to attract them in to the town centre and ensure that they are viable.
- 4.32 Whilst retail across the UK is shrinking this does create challenges and opportunities in the town. The Town Centre Manager works closely with the Assistant Director for Commercial Property & Regeneration to stay abreast of changes and specifically through the studying of Place Management and Place Leadership with the Institute of Place Management and workshops around changing trends.

5 Supporting information – markets

- 5.1 The management and strategic direction of the Aylesbury and Winslow markets fall within this service. The team includes a part-time Markets' Manager who is supported by an part- time administration officer and other members of the team as and when needed. The key tasks focus around attracting more traders, attracting more shoppers, managing the trader relationship, improving the customer experience and generating income from the markets to at least break even.
- 5.2 The market expenditure is £108,000 with income at £99,700 and the team continues to work hard at attracting and retaining market traders, with initiatives and collaborative working.
- 5.3 Nationally, markets are facing tough challenges and many continue to be subsidised, or are experiencing falling numbers or closure. Many esteemed markets such as the covered market at Oxford are facing difficulties and are under threat. Aylesbury in particular has its own challenges and opportunities which are identified through a business plan and are taking effect.
- 5.4 The main focus of the business plan has been on assessing the viability of the dwindling Tuesday market, continuing to build on the success of the Friday food market, improving our terms and conditions and the new objectives are now:
 - Aylesbury market is proud to be financially sustainable and is working towards becoming green. It continues to be known as a national leader in delivering innovative solutions in managing the market and enabling successful trading.
 - The market respects its' heritage whilst embracing a modern, lively and social environment.
 - Market traders are knowledgeable, helpful, offering a range of unique and traditional products.
- 5.5 In the last sixteen months the market has achieved Fur Free market status, introduced safe guarding advice for traders, held green/sustainable markets, works with promoting the NHS, and is attracting a younger audience of traders and shoppers.
- 5.6 The promotion of the markets continues to be an important part of the business plans for both markets. Love your market is celebrated and market dates promoted in publications. The town centre team has won three national awards for the work they are undertaking to improve the markets. Social media is playing an ever important role in attracting visitors and a recent market campaign attracted over 10,000 reach.
- 5.7 One of the aims of the market is to offer an opportunity for new traders to test their products in a low risk, low cost environment. This has been successful with three traders moving in to units and a further three traders looking for suitable retail units in the town centre.
- 5.8 The market traders are all being offered social media training and being encouraged to take up machine payments for customers and to have an online presence to support their business.
- 5.9 A critical time has come for the market where stock needs replacing in an environment that encourages deterioration (i.e. uneven cobbles) coupled with

a fourfold increase of the stall erection costs now it has come in house to AVDC. A SWOT analysis is being undertaken on the how these areas will impact the running of the market and will provide a recommendation on the way forward.

- 5.10 Whilst there is undoubtedly a long way to go, the work so far is paying off and the team are committed to improving the market further.

6 Key focus for the next twelve months

- 6.1 Delivery of an exciting events programme
- 6.2 Management of empty units, new tenant enquiries and innovative changes of use through the Task force
- 6.3 The development of a suite of tourism Apps including trails and historical information
- 6.4 Future of the market and the best way forward
- 6.5 Future of Aylesbury Town Centre Partnership
- 6.6 Identifying a support package for first time family run businesses.
- 6.7 Ensuring that all the services within the remit of the team are safe and legal on 1 April 2020.
- 6.8 Working with the delivery of the Garden town projects and objectives.

7 Resource implications

No increase in AVDC funding is requested.

Contact Officer
Background Documents

Diana Fawcett 01296 585880
Presentation