

Town Centres Business Support

Purpose

The purpose of this briefing note is to inform Overview and Scrutiny members of the current support which Wyre Council provides for businesses and town centre support and to put forward a draft scoping document for the Town Centres Task Group.

Background

One of the ambitions in the Council's Business Plan 2019-2023 is to "Support economic growth by attracting investment to Wyre and by supporting businesses to prosper". Some of the measures used include the take up of employment land, the number of businesses supported, and monitoring town centre vacancy rates.

Current support offered By Economic Development Team

The Economic Development team undertake a range of activities to help and support local businesses including supporting new and existing businesses and delivering the Wyre local growth plan. This is a document which sets out our economic objectives and aspirations for the borough.

There are a number of services that we offer free to local businesses to help them develop in the right way and support the local economy:

- Premises/land search available on request
- Referral to local business support services
- Access to local economic data
- Personal visit from a dedicated council officer by request
- Link to local business networking group Wyred Up
- Access to local knowledge and contacts
- Do we also produce a newsletter?

We also offer support to any potential businesses looking to relocate, or invest in Wyre:

- Assist in finding suitable employment land
- Referral to local business support services
- Access to local economic data
- Advice and knowledge about Hillhouse Technology Enterprise Zone (benefits could include business rates relief for five years or enhanced capital allowances).

Once contact is made (telephone, face-to-face or e-mail enquiry), an Initial Business Enquiry Form (see attached) is completed to include query details, advice given, and next steps to be taken.

Businesses can then be referred/introduced to support available from outside the Council including (but not limited to): Boost Lancashire, Growth Lancashire, Federation of Small Businesses, North & Western Lancashire Chamber of Commerce and Lancaster University.

The Council can also support businesses to write their Business Plan by offering a Business Plan template (see attached).

Existing Town Centre Support - Fleetwood

The Economic Development team continue to work closely with Fleetwood Trust. Currently assisting new start-up (Relax and Re-mind) in Fleetwood town centre, introducing to Boost Lancashire and Lancaster University Health & Innovation campus.

Fleetwood is, however, benefitting from the main support with three ongoing bids for Government Grants to both improve the environment and regenerate the town by focussing on projects that will benefit and stimulate new business in the town centre.

These include the Governments High Streets Heritage Action Zone Programme (HSHAZ), Coastal Community Funding Round 5 and the Future High Streets Fund (FHSF).

High Streets Heritage Action Zone Programme

The High Streets Heritage Action Zones Programme is a nationwide initiative designed to secure lasting improvements to our historic high streets for the communities who use them. It is funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (with a contribution from the National Lottery Heritage Fund) and is run by Historic England. The Programme goal is making the high street a more attractive, engaging and vibrant place for people to live, work

and spend time. The High Streets Heritage Action Zones Programme will do this through three complementary strands: (a) undertaking physical works to buildings, including repair, reinstating lost features, supporting the conversion of historic buildings for new uses and improvement of shared spaces, drawing on the lessons learnt in Streets for All, (b) facilitating cultural activities and events celebrating the history of the high street and its importance to local communities over the generations and, crucially, (c) giving local communities a key role in deciding what works they want to see happening on their high street and what sort of place they want it to be.

Our project proposal 'Developing Fleetwood's Heritage Quarter' has been successful in reaching the Programme Design stage, and Historic England has been working with us to develop the scheme which was submitted in January. The fund applied for was £2m to look at developing the 'heritage quarter' in Fleetwood and identify this as the main arrival point for the town. We expect to hear whether our bid has been successful very shortly. This will complement the Future High Streets Fund, which will aim to look at the re-development of the high street/town centre.

Coastal Community Funding Round 5 (CCF5)

The council was successful in securing a CCF5 grant of £772,085, which will go towards a £1.22m project called 'Joining Up the Wyre Coastline Economy'. The vision is to link the coastal economies of Cleveleys and Fleetwood by strengthening ties between key visitor attractions using digital signage and an interactive app. The project includes the refurbishment and modernisation of Fleetwood Market to create new units and pop up stalls and space for start-up businesses.

The Coastal Community Fund will be split across five key projects:

- Development of the outdoor market space at Fleetwood Market. Introducing new stalls, a new seating/entertainments area, cultural calendar, new signage and resurfacing of the ground
- Redevelopment of 220 sq. metres of currently vacant first floor flats above Fleetwood Market to develop creative/shared studio space for new start-ups
- Internal improvements to the market, including the creation of two accessible studio spaces for people with disabilities
- The development of an interactive trail that would encourage visitors to our attractions via an app that can be downloaded to a mobile device. This would promote our attractions and also encourage outdoor activities and healthy living
- The installation of new digital signage from Cleveleys to Fleetwood providing information on local events/interactive trail

Progress is going way towards this project and the studio space, Market House Studios is due for completion by end of March 2020.

Future High Streets Fund

The Future High Street Fund is a key element of the Government's plan to help high streets to evolve and adapt to changing times. They want to see thriving places created where the community feels engaged, and vibrant town centres where people live, shop, use services and spend their leisure time.

We have been successful in getting through the first stage of the application process and are now developing a full business case for funding. During Phase 2, revenue funding is allocated to support the development of high street strategies which include specific project plans and associated business cases setting out how they will regenerate these places.

The objective of the fund is to renew and reshape town centres and high streets in a way that improves experience, drives growth and ensures future sustainability.

The fund will contribute up to a maximum of **£25 million** to each successful place. However, they expect a range of project sizes to come forward, many of which are in the region of £5-£10 million per town centre.

Our bid highlighted the number of challenges that are faced by Fleetwood town centre such as: it has 15.5% unit vacancy level in Fleetwood town centre compared to UK average of 10.4%; buildings are generally of poor quality; limited usable public realm; accessibility of Fleetwood; deprivation issues, etc.

Our vision is for a more concentrated high street that meets the needs of the local community and is attractive to the wider visitor economy. Fleetwood Market will be an anchor point for the transformation.

Key areas that are being developed as part of the Phase 2 business case:-

- Connectivity
- Accessibility – traffic routing and pedestrianisation
- New and Improved Public Realm
- Retail offer
- Culture and Heritage – linked to Heritage Action Zone
- Business and skills
- Digital and Eco-innovations

The Council has been awarded a development grant of £150,000 which has mainly been used to commission a Town Centre Masterplan and to recruit consultants to help produce the full business case.

A Town Centre Partnership Board has been set up which is made up of key partners that all have an interest in the redevelopment of Fleetwood high street.

In January the Council submitted its draft business case in support of the Future High Streets Fund bid. This draft document provided an outline of projects and interventions in-line with the emerging Masterplan; the total ask is likely to be in the region of up to £25m. Feedback from Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) is anticipated which will help to inform the final business case which is to be submitted by 30 April 2020.

Monitoring Undertaken

In January 2020, retail monitoring was carried out across the main town and key settlement centres within the borough, establishing that Wyre had 96 empty shops out of 1,100 shops, that is, an average rate of 8.73% vacant units across its main town centre areas (see attached). The total number of units has increased from 1047 in July 2019, due to the inclusion of Great Eccleston and Knott End, where previously only Cleveleys, Fleetwood, Garstang, Poulton-le-Fylde and Thornton were monitored. Of the main town centres Garstang has the lowest vacancy rate, at 3.8%, whilst Fleetwood has the highest by a significant margin 15.63% compared to the next highest, Cleveleys, at 8.86%. Poulton Le Fylde and Thornton have vacancy rates of 5.92% and 5.66% respectively.

The vacancy rate overall is slightly lower than the previous year. It is also below the North West average of 11.6% and the national average of 9.8%. Looking at the 5 towns that were previously monitored there has been a reduction in vacancy rates since July 2019 for Fleetwood, Garstang, Poulton-le-Fylde & Thornton. Cleveleys was the only town centre to see an increase since last it was monitored.

Analysis is currently being undertaken in order to ascertain specific areas where there has been a significant increase/decrease in vacancy rates, and what trends or reasons for these changes can be identified.

Town Centres Task Group - Scoping Document

A draft scoping document for discussion and amendment is attached as Appendix A.

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