

### Menu and brief explanation of market town centre initiatives

#### **Business rates relief**

See Appendix 2 (previous report to Strategy Board).

#### **Support for locally devised community events and arts**

Description: Community events and arts can be invaluable in raising the profile of a market town; enhancing loyalty amongst local people and thereby footfall; improving the visitor 'offer' and visitor spend in the town, contributing to wider community cohesion and promoting local produce, arts, services, etc. Local authority support for community events is also a practical way of demonstrating support for town councils and other representatives groups with an interest in the success of market towns.

Support for community art is not necessarily the same as support for community events. For example, 'Art in the window' piloted in the town of Glossop close to Manchester enables local artists to display paintings, ceramics, glass and sculpture in the windows of local shops, supporting both shopkeepers and artists.

Examples: Many councils including South Norfolk DC, Pendle BC and East Devon DC support locally organised community events. The LGA has produced a guide for councils and community groups to help with the organisation of such events.<sup>2</sup> High Peak DC supports 'Art in the Window' in Glossop. Calderdale DC in Yorkshire has supported community art through grants and community asset transfer, particularly in the town of Hebden Bridge.

Cost: Local discretion. South Norfolk gives £20,000 pa to each of its 4 market towns. A similar 'fair' allocation in Breckland might be £20,000 for each of Thetford and Dereham, and £10,000 each for Attleborough, Swafham and Watton.

#### **A phased introduction of Wifi and Better Broadband to market towns.**

#### **Retail Skills Training for market town retailers**

Description & examples: Barnsley MBC, South Norfolk DC and others recognise that local retailers need to develop a 'bricks and clicks' approach to retail if they are to sustain their business. However, many lack the skills necessary to optimise the use of social media, online marketing and sales, and crowd sourcing. This has an impact upon the success and longevity of businesses on the high street and can lead to void property, reduced footfall and the reoccupation of retail units by charity shops, etc. These authorities have offered training for retailers on key issues of interest to them and that will promote the overall success of the town centres.

Cost: £5,000 should provide a reasonable programme of training for retailers in all five market towns over a year.

#### **Street scene enhancements**

---

<sup>2</sup> 'Community events: A councillor handbook', LGA, June 2012.

Street scene enhancements are essentially small-scale improvements to the look/ feel of town centre shopping streets. They might include: re-paving, pedestrianisation, new/ replaced street furniture, new/ replaced street signage, enhancements aimed at disabled people and screening of different sorts for eyesore buildings and sites. Most authorities have programmes of street scene enhancements. Their cost is entirely dependent upon their scope.

## **Digital**

Description: Local authorities can support local stakeholders to use digital technology from several perspectives. There is the physical public realm aspect of digital (way-finding signage, traffic controls, information displays, public Wi-Fi etc), the marketing and communications aspects that include websites and social media, and finally the customer-driven aspect of digital that is centred round the use of mobile devices in making social connections at the various points-of-interaction in the town centre journey and ultimately at the all-important point-of-sale. However, digital strategies ultimately “apply digital technologies to create and keep customers”.

Examples: One of the most successful town centre digital strategies has been developed by Dartford BC. Locally, Norwich City Council and South Norfolk DC are leading the way.

Cost: The cost of developing a town centre digital strategy should be no more than £25,000. The cost of implementation is entirely dependent upon its scope and timeframe. Support for implementation may be available from the LEP, County Council and elsewhere.

## **Town Teams/ Town Centre Partnerships**

Description: A Town Centre Partnership (or Town Team) brings together the different organisations and agendas that are relevant for the town centre’s success and leads the development of an agreed town centre strategy. It may negotiate agreements to deliver baseline and additional services and facilitates synergies and coordination between existing organisations working for the town centre. More than anything else, it develops business-led partnerships that work in the interests of the whole community, rather than just one group (eg not just business interests).

Successful Town Centre Partnerships have a strong relationship with their local council and generally manage this through a single point of contact. In Breckland this might be an officer working within the economic development team. Some employ (or have a governance relationship with) a Town Centre Manager.

Examples: Town centre partnerships exist across the country. Examples include: South Norfolk, Stafford, Weston-super-Mare, Sale, Huddersfield and Trafford.

Cost: Although the establishment of Town Centre Partnerships/ Town Teams need not cost anything, initial seedcorn funding of (say) £5,000 for all five might be useful to encourage training, engagement and awareness-raising.

## **Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)**

Description: Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) are business led partnerships, which are created through a ballot process to deliver additional services to local businesses. BIDs are funded through a BID levy, which is a small percentage of a businesses’ rateable value. The majority of BIDs charge 1% of rateable value, however there are some that have opted for higher levies, particularly in smaller locations with lower rateable values. The average size of a BID is 300-400 hereditaments, with some of the smallest having fewer than 50 hereditaments and the largest at

over 1,000. Annual income is typically £200,000 - £600,000 but can be as little as £50,000 per annum and over £2 million.

Once a ballot is successful the BID levy is mandatory for all eligible businesses. BIDs can choose to exempt certain businesses from paying the levy (and therefore from voting in the BID ballot). Many BIDs exempt the smallest businesses; and some exempt certain business sectors.

BIDs are often successful at attracting funding in addition to the BID levy. They are particularly attractive to public sector grant making bodies due to the private sector match-funding available through the BID levy. Local authorities, property owners, and businesses outside the BID area can all provide additional income for BIDs through voluntary agreements.

Examples: There are over 200 in the UK. In Norfolk, there are BIDs in Norwich, Kings Lynn and Great Yarmouth. There may be others.

Cost: A BID involves a lot of work - including evidence-basing, business planning, intensive consultation and balloting. The approximate set-up cost is £50,000.

### **Town centre physical regeneration**

Description: Many local authorities undertake programmes of physical regeneration for their town centres. These tend to focus upon eyesore and derelict sites and often incorporate infrastructure and street scene enhancements. However, the best are developed alongside their strategic plan making process. In such cases, town centre masterplans are adopted as supplementary planning documents (SPDs). In this way, the planning process can proactively support regeneration.

Examples: Although there are many examples of successful town centre regeneration programmes, the best example of an approach known to the author that effectively integrates planning and implementation is the Kidderminster 'ReWyre' programme.<sup>3</sup>

Cost: Masterplanning is difficult to cost. This is because it depends on scale, how it is tackled (in stages; all at once) and the degree of consultation and need for local ownership. If it was to be undertaken for Thetford and Dereham, £30,000 should be set aside pending a more accurate estimate (likely to be considerably more).

### **Buy local projects**

Description: Buy local campaigns are fairly common. However, a very effective tool is known as 'Totally Locally'. Totally locally is a social enterprise and shop local movement, supporting independent retailers with free branding and marketing campaigns for their towns. Local teams are enabled to use the campaign to promote the value of shopping, celebrate their high street, create community events and ultimately lift their local economy. It supports each town to promote buying locally and how to work together to lift the town. Through Totally Locally, many towns have seen a dramatic reduction in empty shops and discovered a communal way to work together.

Totally locally is essentially a community-led town centre management and regeneration kit. Although it costs nothing, it must be backed by local shops and businesses if it to be successful. Totally locally organisers ask for their expenses to be paid and for a voluntary donation to their organisation.

Examples: Totally Locally started in Yorkshire and operates in Scarborough, it has also spread across the country to areas such as Leek, Buxton, Portsmouth, Tavistock and Penrith.

---

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.rewyre.org/>

Cost: It is anticipated that the cost of this scheme would require an estimated start up budget of circa £7,500.

### **Heritage and conservation schemes**

Description: The 'look-feel' of a town centre is important to the attraction of visitors and to the maximisation of footfall. Local authorities can enhance the visual appeal of town centre streets not just through enhancements to street scenes (see above), but also through heritage and conservation works. Money is available from the Heritage Lottery Fund, for example, to help to regenerate deprived towns and cities by improving their built historic environment. Grants range from £100,000 to £2million.<sup>4</sup>

Local planning authorities can produce Design Guides as supplementary planning documents (SPDs) or as supporting documents that must be 'material considerations' when considering planning applications. These can include detailed guidance for retail units in conservation or heritage parts of market town centres. For example, they might include guidance on: the minimisation of signage and clutter, the re-use of existing features, window design & arrangement, materials & colours, facias & lettering, projecting & hanging signs, illuminated signs, doorways & access, shop subdivision, stallrisers, security shutters & grilles, canopies & awnings, and wiring & other features.

Examples: Many local authorities have applied successfully to the Heritage Lottery Fund for support from the Township Heritage programme. Examples known to the author include: High Peak DC (Buxton & Glossop), Conwy County Borough Council (Colwyn Bay) and Norwich CC (including Norwich Lanes).

Many local planning authorities produce design guides for their town centres. These include: High Peak DC (Buxton & Glossop), Staffordshire Moorlands DC (Leek), Nottingham CC.

Cost: Although the Heritage Lottery Fund is a grant regime, 'partnership funding' of 5 – 10% of the total scheme is expected from the local authority and its partners. It will also be necessary to invest time in evidence-basing, consultation, engagement and bid-writing.

There is a consultancy cost associated with the development of urban design guides – although a large number already exist on the internet.

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.hlf.org.uk/looking-funding/our-grant-programmes/townscape-heritage>

## APPENDIX 2

### BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

**Report of:** Julie Kennealy - Executive Director

**To:** 29 June 2015 – Informal Strategy Board

**Author:** Lindy Warmer/Cassie Mant

**Subject:** Business Rates Relief Discussion Document

**Purpose:** To discuss with Members the Council's options for business rate support to our market town centre retail premises within the district, with a view to introducing an enhanced discretionary retail rate relief scheme that would attract potential entrepreneurs and limit areas of retail decline. It is anticipated that this scheme will positively assist with the reduction in the number of empty retail units in targeted areas of decline in our town centres.

#### 2) **Recommendation(s):**

Members consider Option 1 at a formal cabinet/council meeting. The introduction of a discretionary business rate relief scheme for retail businesses whose property sits within determined areas of the five market town centres. This scheme will offer up to a maximum of 80% discount for eligible businesses via formal application to the Council. The discount to be offered for up to 12 months initially for new start businesses that meet all eligible criteria and that the scheme as a whole is reviewable on an annual basis.

#### 2.0 **BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 has been amended by the Localism Act 2011 to give Council's the power to give discretionary discount on business rates. The discount may be awarded to any property or businesses of the Council's choosing. This can be on any building type, size, location, function, in support of a regeneration policy etc. The discount can apply to an individual account or a group of accounts for a similar business type or facing a similar issue.
- 1.2 Within the five market towns in Breckland, we have a total of 32 charity shops and it is the perception of existing and new businesses that these shops are at a greater advantage due to the reduction they receive in business rates. In actual fact small businesses receive considerable rate relief depending on their rateable value but focussing on retail in order to put shops on an equal footing research has been undertaken as to how a discretionary rate relief scheme for retail premises may operate within our town centres.
- 1.3 The research undertaken to provide this discussion document uses a successful scheme in Wokingham as a model and the research has also highlighted the complexity of business rate relief and an important role for the council in ensuring those businesses that can claim discounts are aware of them and do so.

- 1.4 The report and figures use Dereham by way of an example. Largely Dereham has the most affected retail area that could secure support under a local discount scheme and as such provides a good basis for illustration.
- 1.5 For the Dereham example, empty premises and charity shop locations have been identified to establish dedicated zones within which business rate relief could support increased growth. The detail of the zoning options will be presented to members at the meeting for discussion. The zones have been selected based upon a number of key variables for supporting thriving high streets including: period of time that property remains empty, high rent levels, lower footfall areas and locations which are not directly central but within a short distance of the town centre.
- 1.6 Financial implications of the introduction of such a scheme will largely be dependent upon the budget Members wish to set. By way of comparison we understand the annual budget for the Wokingham scheme was £55k. As the financial illustrations show the largest proportion of the cost of the scheme falls to central government, less so to BDC and the smallest impact is on NCC. This is because the parties involved receive 50% 40% and 10% respectively of the amount of business rate collected (after any local discount is applied). As such the financial burden of any such scheme is shared across all parties. The final cost is dependent on which option Members wish to implement, across how many towns and which “zones” the relief is applied to. Illustrations of current relief available and Option 1 and alternative Option 2 is detailed in the attached spreadsheet which shows all financial options and outcomes based on the current situation of empty properties in Dereham.
- 1.7 Currently the Breckland business rates income is in a growth position compared to the baseline set by central government. This means that a levy of 50% is paid on all growth achieved by Breckland and this levy is paid into the Norfolk business rates pool. Therefore the actual cost to Breckland of any locally agreed scheme is reduced by the saving on the levy payment (as detailed in the attached figures). The table below shows that the council is well above the baseline figure set so there is little risk that the proposed scheme will not push the council into a non growth position.

**2014-15 Retained Business Rates**

	<b>Gov't Set Baseline</b>	<b>Actual Performance</b>	<b>Additional Retained NNDR</b>
NNDR Income (40% Share)	11,279,988	12,476,722	
NNDR Tariff	(7,753,727)	(7,753,727)	
Breckland Retained NNDR Income	3,526,261	4,722,995	1,196,734
Levy Paid to the Norfolk Pool			(598,367)
<b>Breckland Final Additional NNDR Income</b>			<b>598,367</b>

**2.0 OPTIONS**

- 2.1 Option 1 - All businesses identified within the two dedicated zones in the town centre can apply for up to 80% reduction to business rates for the first 12 months via formal application and panel process. Details of the scheme are shown within the attached spreadsheet.

2.2 Option 2 – All businesses identified within the two dedicated zones in the town centres receive reduced business rates of 80% over 12 month basis to be reviewed annually, dependant on the location and zone within which they are sited. Details of the scheme are shown on the attached spreadsheet.

2.3 Option 3 – Do nothing; continue to offer the current schemes of retail relief, small business relief and the Government empty premises relief. Details of the scheme are shown on the attached spreadsheet.

### 3.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

3.2 We have a clear corporate commitment to supporting our market towns to thrive in order that they in turn provide the required support to surrounding villages and hinterlands. We recognise that in the current changing “shopping” environment in order to succeed Breckland’s market towns need to be vibrant and busy drawing people in to visit a multitude of different offerings making a shopping trip an interesting and enjoyable experience. Out of town shopping and internet have drawn many people away from town centres thus businesses find it extremely hard to make ends meet and fail; as a result we are finding that shops remain empty for significant periods. High rents, location of the premises, competition, business rates, and poor footfall all add to this scenario and unfortunately the upshot is the natural presence of more charity shops opening taking advantage of low business rates applicable to that sector as retail units become empty.

3.3 We recognise that we must be able to respond flexibly to the needs of retail businesses within the five market towns, enabling each to support strong and sustainable local communities with growing business sectors. In order to achieve this and to bring new retail entrepreneurs to a level playing field with charity shops Members views are sought on the introduction of a discretionary retail rate relief scheme.

### 4.0 EXPECTED BENEFITS

4.2 The market towns should expect further growth with new businesses joining the local communities, empty shops will become a more attractive offer to new start entrepreneurs, town centres will become more vibrant and interesting, and the local economy will see uplift in terms of new business bringing jobs and the perception of charity shops having an advantage will be suppressed. Breckland Council will be responding to a need within the community which for all intents and purposes will be at a budget set by Members but with the added value to the businesses that investment made by the Council is increased by proportionate contributions from both government and NCC. As a result of the way in which the business rates levy operates.

### 5.0 IMPLICATIONS –

#### 5.1 Carbon Footprint / Environmental Issues

5.1.2 It is the opinion of the Report Author that there are no implications.

#### 5.2 Constitution & Legal

5.2.2 Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 has been amended by the Localism Act 2011 to give Council's the power to give discretionary discount on business rates. At this stage we believe the decision making process rests with full council.

### 5.3 **Contracts**

5.3.2 It is in the opinion of the Report Author that there are no implications.

### 5.4 **Corporate Priorities**

5.4.2 [This proposal clearly supports our corporate plan objectives and open for business agenda.](#)

### 5.5 **Crime and Disorder**

5.5.2 [Reducing empty shops can have a positive contribution to improving anti-social behaviour.](#)

### 5.6 **Equality and Diversity / Human Rights**

5.6.2 It is the opinion of the Report Author that there are no implications.

### 5.7 **Financial**

5.7.3 Details of all options suggested above are shown within the attached spreadsheet for Members' discussion. This spreadsheet indicates that if the current empty properties in Dereham were full we would see an income in business rates to the value of £24,873.09p per annum. With the suggested Option 1 discount with all shops receiving the full 80% retail reduction discount this would reduce to £4,974.62 per annum. This results in a difference of £19,898.47.

5.7.4 Whilst the Council is currently in a growth position for NNDR income a levy is paid to Government of 50% of all growth above the Government baseline. The proposed relief above would reduce the annual NNDR income by £19,898.47 resulting in reducing the levy payable by £9,949.24 meaning the overall impact on Breckland of the illustrative Dereham scheme would be £9,949.23 per year under option 1.

5.7.5 This levy is normally paid into the Norfolk County Council "Norfolk Pool" for use on economic development projects in the area. Introducing the scheme would result in this levy reducing by the £9,949.24 per annum.

### 5.8 **Health & Wellbeing**

5.8.2 It is the opinion of the Report Author that there are no implications.

### 5.9 **Risk Management**

5.9.2 The scheme will need to have clear rules and processes to remove potential for abuse and will need to be reviewed annually based on affordability for the Council.

## 5.10 **Staffing**

5.10.1 The scheme will be administered by the Economic Development Service and Anglian Revenues Partnership, it is anticipated the administrative requirements of the scheme can be met within the existing ARP resources and proposed new Economic Development Structure.

## 5.11 **Stakeholders / Consultation / Timescales**

To be agreed following Members discussion and decision on the way forward.

## 5.12 **Other**

5.12.1 ...

## 6.0 **WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED**

6.2 Potentially all if applied to the five market towns.

## 7.0 **ACRONYMS**

7.2 It is in the opinion of the Report Author that there are no acronyms.

---

Background papers:- [See The Committee Report Guide](#)

---

### **Lead Contact Officer**

Lindy Warmer  
Business Growth Manager  
01362 656235  
Lindy.warmer@breckland.gov.uk

**Key Decision:** TBC

**Exempt Decision:** NO

**This report refers to a Discretionary Service**

**Appendices attached to this report:**

Appendix A