

BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report of: Lynda Turner, Executive Member of Place

To: Cabinet – 3 January 2017

(Author: Cassie Ruffell – Business Growth Officer)

Subject: Market Town Initiative – Grant Confirmation

Purpose: To approve indicative Town Action Plans as part of the Council's commitment to the priority of "Supporting market towns in the district to be attractive to new businesses and visitors to the area whilst meeting the needs of rural communities and businesses".

Recommendation(s):

1. That members approve the indicative Town Action Plans in appendix A to enable the spend of the allocated money of £23,017 from the Resource4Growth funds approved by Cabinet in February 2016
2. That members agree to delegate authority to the Executive Manager (Growth and Prosperity) in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Place to agree amendments to the Action Plans if requested by the relevant Market Town.

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Breckland's five market towns together contain 55% of the population of the district with a population density of 130,491 (Nomis 2011 survey). "City Population" figures show Thetford (pop 24,833) and Dereham (pop 20,651) are the main shopping centres within Breckland, followed by Attleborough, Swaffham and Watton and the local service centre villages. Thetford and Dereham attract shoppers from across the district, whilst Attleborough, Swaffham and Watton perform a more local shopping function, with a more limited range of comparison goods retailers
- 1.2 The centres compete with major shopping destinations just outside the district, including Norwich, Cambridge, Kings Lynn and Bury St Edmunds, particularly for comparison retailing. Most noticeably, Norwich has a strong influence over the Eastern part of the district.
- 1.3 A fifth of all England's market towns are based in the East of England. Market towns are a key feature of the regional landscape and of how its economy and society functions. In common with many market towns in the UK, Brecklands five market towns are experiencing a decrease in footfall. Whilst each market town has its own unique character the challenges facing them are similar:
 - Threat of large out of town shopping centres
 - Increasing use of on-line buying
 - Increasing use of Click and collect

- Closure of key services such as banks
- Decline in markets

1.4 In February 2016 Cabinet agreed to distribute the final retained funding of Resource4Growth to the support the five market towns and consultation to be undertaken with the market towns on their perceived needs and proposals. (Resource4Growth (R4G) was a Community Interest Company (CIC) set up to carry on activities which benefit the community and assist business growth. Following completion of several contracts and in the light of changes to funding regimes the CIC was closed. However funds remained that had been generated from the activities of the company.) Funding was allocated by proportion of population using the census data 2011. The requirements of spend stipulate that the money must be spent on the town centre to increase footfall and the attractiveness of the town. The table below shows the rate distribution

TOWN	POPULATION	FUNDING SHARED £
Attleborough	10,482	3,553.70
Dereham	18,609	6,308.99
Swaffham	7,258	2,460.67
Thetford	24,340	8,251.96
Watton	7,202	2,441.68
	67,891	23,017.00

- 1.5 The research and consultation with key stakeholders in each of the market towns, has shown there is an interest to find a mechanism for great joint working on the ground to support and promote Breckland's market towns in a more targeted way. Headline results from recent consultations indicate that the priorities for the town centre and the businesses in terms of their needs are:
- Marketing
 - Shop front improvements
 - Physical town image
 - Digital – website, broadband, Wi-Fi
 - Training
 - Partnerships
- 1.6 A number of respondents noted that increasing marketing to promote the town to visitors had been one way in which they were responding. Planning events was seen as a way of encouraging people into town centres. Others commented on boosting the tourism offer and making the town a more attractive and welcoming destination. As digital becomes bigger the need to support the businesses move forward is more essential to develop their growth, it is also needed to meet the needs of residents and visitors as without technology towns will not strengthen.
- 1.7 Another common occurring theme amongst the town's responses was that of making physical improvements to the town. This ranged from relatively small scale measures, such as putting up hanging baskets and flower boxes, to larger scale improvements. The aim of the activity was to increase towns appeal to visitors and also perhaps to boost morale amongst residents. Relocating markets to locations where they would be more visible to pedestrians and passing traffic was also suggested.
- 1.8 The proposed Town Action Plans for expenditure of the Resource4Growth funds are contained at Appendix A. There has been extensive consultation with the Market Towns and the plans have been developed and submitted by them.

- 1.9 Breckland became a member of the Association of Town Centre Management (ATCM). The ATCM offer a wealth of experience in supporting the renaissance of market town centres. Extensive project research has been completed to establish interventions to enhance the vibrancy, attractiveness and commercial success of Breckland's five market town centres. This has included the ATCM conducting a first impressions exercise in Thetford and Dereham town centres to provide an overview report on topics including overall appearance, gateway sites and signage, access and the range of business activity present.
- 1.10 In April 2016 we also launched a pilot scheme for businesses rates relief in Dereham as part of reviewing a larger scheme. The scheme was to support businesses with a reduction of up to 80% for the first year. The scheme looks to attract investment and limit areas of retail decline and it will be reviewed in March 2016 to assess its effectiveness.
- 1.11 Breckland Council will continue to develop its approach to Market Towns and a further report will be brought forward in the New Year.

2.0 **OPTIONS**

- 2.1 Option 1 – To approve the Town Action Plans to enable the spend of the allocated money of £23,017
- 2.2 Option 2 – To not approve the recommendations and ask for further review of particular initiatives.
- 2.3 Option 3 – Do nothing

3.0 **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 3.1 We have a clear commitment in our Corporate Plan to helping our market towns to thrive in order that they in turn provide the required support to surrounding villages and hinterlands. We recognise that Brecklands market towns need to be vibrant and busy, offering an interesting and enjoyable experience for visitors. Out of town and online shopping have drawn many people away from our town centres.

4.0 **EXPECTED BENEFITS**

- Delivery of elements of the Market Town Initiatives
- Increase in footfall and retail spend
- Reduction in vacant units
- Increase in skills and employment opportunities
- Improved community and/or cultural facilities
- Improved infrastructure, including public spaces

The above will our market towns assist businesses to survive financially by attracting visitors and local residents and converting footfall into actual customer spend. Working in partnership with retailers and other organisations in order that they can deliver their services more effectively and achieve more robust decision making for businesses operating in the town centres. We need to consider the evening and leisure economy that the towns can provide and the town's willingness to pull together and adopt a purposeful way forward to make them more sustainable and prosperous.

5.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 **Carbon Footprint / Environmental Issues**

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

5.2 **Constitution & Legal**

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

5.3 **Contracts**

5.3.1 It is the view of the author that the adoption of the recommendations of this report will have no impact upon existing contracts.

5.4 **Corporate Priorities**

5.4.1 This proposal clearly supports our corporate plan objective of developing the local economy to be vibrant with continued growth and open for business agenda.

5.5 **Crime and Disorder**

5.5.1 Reducing empty properties can have a positive contribution to improving anti-social behaviour.

5.6 **Equality and Diversity / Human Rights**

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

5.7 **Financial**

5.7.1 Dependent on allocation to the programme and member decision.

5.8 **Health & Wellbeing**

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

5.9 **Risk Management**

5.9.1 The risk that a Breckland market towns initiative is not accepted by local stakeholders will be mitigated through active engagement with key groups and individuals as part of the consultancy exercise.

5.10 **Staffing**

5.10.1 The scheme will be administered by the Inward Investment Service. Additional proposals may include a resource to manage this programme.

5.11 **Stakeholders / Consultation / Timescales**

5.11.1 A critical part of any programme will be involving key stakeholders to deliver, consult and engage with.

6.0 **WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED**

6.1 Potentially all wards

7.0 **ACRONYMS**

7.1 ATCM – Association of Town Centre Management

7.2 MTAF - Market Towns Advisory Forum

7.3 BID – Business Improvement District

7.4 NPPF - National Planning Policy Framework

7.5 GPDO - General Permitted Development Order

7.6 R4G – Resource 4 Growth

7.7 CIC – Community Interest Company

Background papers:-

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Key Decision: Yes

Exempt Decision:

This report refers to a Discretionary Service

Appendices attached to this report:

Appendix A Town Centre Action Plans - Contribution required from Resource4Growth money allocation