

## BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

**Report of:** Cllr Paul Claussen, Executive Member of Place and Rob Walker, Executive Director of Place

**To:** Cabinet, 10 July 2017

**Author:** Rob Walker, Executive Director Place

**Subject:** Market Town Initiative

**Purpose:** To seek Cabinet support for the further development of the Breckland Market Town Initiative programme.

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

- 1) That Cabinet support the further development of the Breckland Market Town Initiative programme;
- 2) That Cabinet **recommend to Council** that the Pride in Breckland programme is concluded and that the residual funding held in reserve for this Programme is reallocated to the Market Town Initiative.

### **1.0 BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 This report seeks Cabinet approval for the further development of a strategic Market Town Initiative across Breckland's market towns.
- 1.2 Breckland's five market towns make up 55% of the population of the district with a total population of 72,000 people. Thetford (population 25,000) and Dereham (population 21,000) are the main centres, followed by Attleborough, Swaffham and Watton and the local service centre villages.
- 1.3 Market towns are a key feature of the local landscape and how its economy and society functions. In common with many market towns in the UK, Breckland's five market towns are experiencing a number of challenges, including competition from major retail destinations and out-of-town shopping centres, increased online retailing, the closure of key services and decline in markets. Whilst each market town has its own unique character the challenges facing them are similar.
- 1.4 Breckland's five market towns compete with each other and major destinations outside the district, including Norwich, Cambridge, Kings Lynn and Bury St Edmunds. Most noticeably, Norwich has a strong influence over the eastern part of the district.
- 1.5 There are, however, significant opportunities that Breckland's market towns can also benefit from, including: housing growth as a catalyst for regeneration, infrastructure investment, A11 dualling, planned upgrades to the A47, Norwich-Cambridge Tech Corridor, Local Enterprise Partnership investment and the One Public Estate programme.
- 1.6 In February 2016, Cabinet resolved to allocate the final retained funding of Resource4Growth (£23,017) to the support the five market towns – through a Market Town Initiative – and consultation was undertaken with the Town Councils on proposals to increase footfall and the attractiveness of the towns.

- 1.7 The consultation with the Town Councils demonstrated that there is collective interest in finding a mechanism for greater joint working that supports and promotes Breckland's market towns in a more targeted manner. Town Action Plans were developed by each of the Towns and were the basis for the allocation of funding.
- 1.8 In January 2017, Cabinet resolved to spend £23,017 across the market towns, apportioned in line with respective population figures. The projects contained within the Town Action Plans and supported with funding included: -
- Improve signage in and around the town centre
  - Purchase Town Flags
  - Refurbish Market Place maps /
  - Revitalise town centre flower planters
  - Heritage Open Day
  - Christmas lights switch on and winter theatre & wonderland
  - Heritage Hanging Basket Post
  - Heritage Information Boards
  - Co-ordinated marketing strategy and publicity campaign for market
  - Litter bin replacement
  - Publishing of adverts/articles to promote businesses
  - Provision of pop up stall/display stands
- 1.9 Whilst unquestionably valuable, none of the above projects, either individually or collectively, will succeed in [the long-term] addressing the challenges or maximising the opportunities facing Breckland's five market towns (as highlighted briefly above).
- 1.10 It should be noted that in April 2016, Breckland Council launched a pilot scheme for business rate relief in Dereham. The scheme was to support businesses with a reduction of up to 80% for the first year. The scheme sought to attract investment and limit areas of retail decline and is being reviewed to assess its effectiveness.
- 1.11 Furthermore, it should also be noted that the current development partnerships for Attleborough and Thetford have sought to introduce a structured and strategic approach to place-based governance and leadership but to date have been largely focussed on the implications of the housing and employment growth agenda rather than holistic regeneration of the existing towns.

## **Proposals**

### ***Leadership***

- 1.12 This report proposes the further development of the Market Town Initiative beyond this initial grant-giving phase to increase the vibrancy of all our market towns and their economic, social and cultural capital.
- 1.13 It is further proposed that Breckland Council takes the strategic lead on the Market Town Initiative and subsequent work across the district's five market towns. The Council will work with the democratic representatives in each town but also with those key stakeholders that can help support change and development.
- 1.14 There are not currently widely agreed visions of what the market towns can provide, their challenges, opportunities or aspirations for the future. Breckland Council, therefore, needs to work with the Town Councils and other stakeholders to pull together an evidence base,

full and comprehensive work programmes and [most importantly] shape visions for each place, taking account of current challenges and future growth and opportunities.

- 1.15 To address long term leadership concerns in the towns and sustainability of the Market Town Initiative there is a need to upskill the Town Council's resources and support them to address current capacity and future resources to deliver an ongoing Market Town Initiative programme.

### ***Work Programme***

- 1.16 Due to the scale and breadth of the potential work programmes it would be appropriate to develop a series of work-streams under which the actions would sit. These should link to the strategic visions that are developed and allow for each town to be treated uniquely. It is anticipated that there will be three work streams over the short, medium and long term.
- 1.17 In the short term, the focus will be on the better coordination and focus for 'business as usual'. This will include, for example, a focus on the active use of resources and engagement / enforcement tools to enhance the local environment (litter, graffiti, untidy sites, ASB, etc.).
- 1.18 In the medium term, attention will be on securing inward investment in to each town, taking a strategic approach to, for example, market provision, car parking, asset management and better alignment with [amongst others] Norfolk County Council's work on highways and their own discrete review of market towns.
- 1.19 In the longer term, the Initiative should be coalesced with national government's long term economic plans, which include support for local shops and high streets, changes to business rates, parking policies, support for local leadership, business improvement districts, support for local markets and planning changes. Our relationship with the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership will be at the forefront of this work.

### ***Local Intelligence***

- 1.20 Internally, the Council needs to pull together all the information it holds, from across its services (planning, housing, economic development, environmental services, etc.), into a single evidence 'baseline' for each town. This evidence will help inform and shape the visions for the place and the subsequent work programmes for each town.
- 1.21 This evidence baseline can be widened to include information held by Norfolk County Council and other key partners at a later date. Furthermore, the baseline evidence can be used to test some of the assumptions that are currently made regarding the 'health' of our market towns and inform future investment strategies. This reinforces the need for the Council to make better use of the service intelligence it holds. Moreover, having a consistent evidence baseline will help to engage partners and can also be used to test and benchmark future success.
- 1.22 Using the evidence base, the Council could then work in towns to develop specific Work Programmes and undertake a prioritisation exercise for the actions identified within the programmes to deliver the strategic visions. These actions plans could form the basis of a series of public and wider stakeholder engagement events at a town level as appropriate.

## **2.0 OPTIONS**

- 2.1 Do nothing. The Market Town Initiative will not be developed and the funding will remain

held in reserve for the Pride in Breckland programme.

2.2 This report recommends the following options: -

- That Cabinet support the development of the Breckland Market Town Initiative programme;
- That the Pride in Breckland programme is concluded and that the residual funding held in reserve for this Programme is reallocated to the Market Town Initiative.

### 3.0 **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)**

3.1 Our high streets and town centres are facing serious challenges from out-of-town shopping centres and the growth of online and mobile retailing. Our market towns and high streets need to be vibrant places with a strong economy and offer something that neither shopping centres nor the internet can match.

### 4.0 **EXPECTED BENEFITS**

4.1 The market towns will be better placed to meet the challenges of competition from major retail destinations and out-of-town shopping centres, increased online retailing, the closure of key services and decline in markets; and maximise the opportunities presented by housing growth as a catalyst for regeneration, infrastructure investment, A11 dualling, planned upgrades to the A47, Norwich-Cambridge Tech Corridor, Local Enterprise Partnership investment and the One Public Estate programme.

### 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 with regard to carbon footprint. Environmental issues in each town are expected to form part of the work programme with redirected and focused activity on areas in need of attention.

#### 5.2 **Constitution & Legal**

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

#### 5.3 **Contracts**

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

#### 5.4 **Corporate Priorities**

5.4.1 The further development of the Market Town Initiative has value in increasing the vibrancy of our market towns and their economic, social and cultural capital and is a key objective in our Corporate Plan. The Council's financial strategy is focused on business growth and achieving financial returns from investment. The Council's economic development and strategic asset services are also focused on achieving these key outcomes. The emerging

Local Plan sets the framework for scale and location of development focussing on the market towns as key sustainable locations. Furthermore, a number of key pieces of work currently being undertaken by the Council will feed in to this work e.g. Breckland Bridge, car parking studies, the Local Plan Infrastructure Delivery Plan, etc.

## **5.5 Crime and Disorder**

5.5.1 Building on work of the Operational Partnership Team, community safety issues in each town are expected to form part of the work programme with redirected and focused activity on areas in need of attention.

## **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 £231,000 funding is held in reserve for the Pride in Breckland project. This funding has been received from Norfolk County Council over a number of years and is returned (50%) Second Homes Council Tax monies. Beyond 2017/18 no further funding will be received from Norfolk County Council.

5.7.2 This money was originally granted to support the work of the Breckland Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS). The Breckland LSP has been disbanded and the SCS is no longer active. There is no requirement to return any of the funds received to date, although there is an informal expectation that the monies will be used to fund community-based initiatives as originally intended.

5.7.3 Over recent years, a relatively small number of grants have been made to community organisations using this funding but the over-arching Pride in Breckland programme has not been active.

5.7.4 In short, the £231,000 held by the Council in reserve could be made available to fund the Market Town Initiative.

5.7.5 It is not proposed that the available funding is split either equally or proportionately (per capita) across the towns. The disaggregation of funding, would no doubt be welcomed in each of the five market towns, but would – in all likelihood – lead to non-strategic spend on small-scale peripheral projects. It is important that a district-wide approach is taken to ensure strategic goals are achieved and that monies are retained centrally for this purpose and to resource this Initiative effectively.

5.7.6 The funding allocated by Breckland Council should be seen as “seed” funding to enable the kick-start of key projects and to lever in external investment on key [infrastructure] priorities, e.g. from the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership.

## **5.8 Health & Wellbeing**

5.8.1 Health and Wellbeing issues in each town are expected to form part of the work programme with redirected and focused activity on areas in need of attention.

## **5.9 Risk Management**

5.9.1 It is the opinion of the Report Author that there are no specific implications at this stage.

Further risk assessments will be undertaken and detailed as part of the work programming process.

#### 5.10 **Safeguarding**

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

#### 5.11 **Staffing**

5.11.1 It is proposed that the establishment is not increased and that resources are redeployed within the Environment and Community Services Team to lead this project. Much of this team's work can be coordinated and promoted under the banner of the "Market Town Initiative" and resource from elsewhere in the Council and third parties will further be utilised as required.

#### 5.12 **Stakeholders / Consultation / Timescales**

5.12.1 As detailed in the body of the report with Town Councils and Norfolk County Council.

### 6.0 **WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED**

6.1 Whilst it is important that the Market Town Initiative be developed across the five market towns in Breckland it should not focus exclusively on the respective towns (Town Council administrative boundaries) to the detriment of the rural hinterlands served by each town. A proposed geography will be developed to reflect the rural hinterlands for each town and – where possible - district ward boundaries.

---

Background papers:-

---

#### **Lead Contact Officer**

Name and Post: Rob Walker  
Telephone Number: 07867 988826  
Email: Robert.walker@breckland-sholland.gov.uk

**Key Decision:**  No

**Exempt Decision:**  No

**This report refers to a  Discretionary Service**