

Breckland Market Town Initiative

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Summary

This report seeks to provide the Greater Thetford Development Partnership (GTDP) Board with a background and update of the Breckland Council Market Town Initiative (MTI), with a specific focus on project developments pertaining to the Thetford area.

Recommendations

- (i) That the GTDP Board members note the content of the report

1. Introduction

- 1.1 On July 10th 2017, Breckland council members took the decision to conclude the Pride in Breckland programme and to reallocate the residual funding held in reserve for this programme to the MTI.
- 1.2 On September 13th 2017, the MTI steering group met and agreed the governance structure (appendix 1), the short, medium, and long term definitions of the project scope (appendix 2), and the project vision and objectives (appendix 3).
- 1.3 Since late October 2017 officers have visited all Town Councils and have commenced the process of collectively identifying key projects and partnerships that will fall under the umbrella of the Breckland MTI. Communication with the Town Councils continues on a regular basis.
- 1.4 At the meeting held with Thetford Town Council on October 31st it was unanimously agreed that the priority for collaborative work under the MTI should focus (in the short to medium term) on the elevation of Thetford as a site of significant heritage. Concerns around the local retail economy and general high street cleanliness were also discussed, along with more medium to longer term desires for improvement to Town Centre infrastructure, parking, and transport routes.

2. Current Situation

- 2.1 Breckland council officers have continued to work in partnership with the Town Council and key partner organisations to develop a scheme of work under the MTI banner. Overviews of the projects which have been identified, and their progress, are provided below:

3. Projects

- 3.1 **Thetford Heritage Project** - A Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) bid has been

drafted in partnership with the Town Council and key partners and is being reviewed ahead of a formal submission mid-February 2018.

The HLF were encouraging of the draft proposal and recommended a 2 bid approach over the forthcoming year; Bid 1 an 'Our Heritage' grant up to £100k for a 1 year project of high profile events and superficial infrastructure modifications. Research collected during bid 1 will form the evidence base of the application for Bid 2, a 'Heritage Grant' of up to £1m that would focus on the physical development of a central heritage hub for Thetford as the central draw.

- 3.2 **ShopAppy** – Breckland have committed to working in partnership with social enterprise 'ShopAppy' to boost the digital agility and presence of our small independent retailers over a 2 year period. The BBC One Show recently gave national coverage of the innovative initiative in Yorkshire that is looking to take on big businesses and revive the high streets across 10 of the counties market towns. ShopAppy have a very clear mission; to offer local people and visitors to towns an easy way to shop locally, and give local shops a simple solution to developing an online presence, grow their business, and increase footfall.

The offer to our traders is a mobile-friendly website designed to encourage customers to use local shops and businesses directly and more frequently and to help shops and businesses reach more potential local customers. By working in partnership with ShopAppy we will be supporting each of our local businesses to have a central online presence, enabling local people to browse and purchase products from multiple independent retail outlets and pay for it all in one simple transaction.

There is the added benefit of being able to 'click and collect' all of the shopping at a convenient time during the day or after the shops have closed from one location (e.g. a local pub) enabling people to buy locally who are at work. It will provide all of our local businesses with training on how to get the most out of the scheme, as well as an online advertising window through which they can promote and sell their products or services collectively online, with an easy click and collect service increasing footfall and spend.

- 3.3 **The Glutton** - An order has been placed for an innovative street cleansing product called 'The Glutton'. This is an urban waste vacuum cleaner, which is electric, environmentally friendly, and economical. Currently used in more than 5000 cities in 60 countries. This is a major step in making our town centres more attractive places to visit and thereby driving up footfall.
- 3.4 **Discretionary Business Rate Relief Scheme** - The scheme will offer Breckland businesses willing to relocate to an empty shop within our market towns the chance to apply for up to 80% off their business rates after all reductions given for a period of 1 year, the desire being to see less vacant properties within the market towns.
- 3.5 **Small Business Package** - The small business offer will encourage small businesses development within the district. Consultation is to be held with Small Businesses in the district through Feb 2018 seeking views on the proposal to offer a package that includes the following benefits: Small business rates promotion, a retail and compulsory training grant scheme, and access to the aforementioned 'ShopAppy' initiative.
- 3.6 **Visit Norfolk** - Work has begun with Visit Norfolk to improve the Breckland offer hosted on the website. Superficial changes have already been made making a clear distinction between what is 'Breckland' and what is 'The

Brecks'. A further piece of work is being undertaken in partnership with the Towns to nominate the highlights of each Market Town and getting each town a more comprehensive and attractive presence on the website.

4. Contribution to Board Objectives

4.1 Contributes to Objectives 2 (destination of choice), 4 (revitalise Thetford Town Centre) and 6 (encourage economic vitality)

5. Recommendations

(ii) That the GTDP Board members note the content of the report

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper please get in touch with:

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - MTI Governance

Appendix 2 - MTI Scope

Appendix 3 - MTI Vision and Objectives