

Notes of the Regeneration and Neighbourhoods OSC
Task Group – 12 Point Plan
Thursday 7th August 2014

Present: Cllrs Surve, Hollings, C. Rigby and Roberts

Also Present: Andrew Bond – Head of Property & Development, Cllr Bateson – Executive Member for Regeneration, John Addison – Principal Scrutiny Officer & Sonya Palmer – Scrutiny Officer

Apologies: Cllr Whalley

The Chair, Cllr Surve welcomed everyone to the 1st 12 Point Plan task group.

Andrew Bond, Head of Property and Development provided Members with an overview as to why the 12 Point Plan had been developed. It was advised that the main reasons were:

1. The general shift in retailing patterns - Peoples shopping habits have changed
2. The Mall Re-development – Strengthened the core of the town centre but the surrounding areas have suffered and there are a number of vacant units
3. Change in the economy – Effected the night time economy as well as the day time economy

Members were told that the ambition is to revitalise the town centre, the basis of which will be the delivery of a 12 Point Plan. The plan includes activity to stimulate new creative business, develop a vibrant annual cultural events programme and schemes to kick start the night time economy. The town centre will provide new opportunities to develop skill and industry and in turn, reduce empty shops and increase footfall.

Members were provided with a copy of the 12 Point Plan prior to the meeting and Andrew Bond subsequently provided Members with an update on the 12 Point Plan.

1. Empty Properties
 - Business rate exemption scheme introduced with 10 businesses set to benefit
 - £75k commitment if all empty properties are occupied
 - Council shops let at concessionary rates
 - New Market St Investment (Oddies have received an £80k investment from the Council to upgrade the premises)
 - Assistance to industry grants

Members were informed that the business exemption scheme which provides a 100% relief on business rates is operating in certain areas, including Blakey Moor, Town Hall Street and North Gate. It was also advised that off licences, Pawn Brokers, Loan Shops, and Take Away shops would be excluded from the scheme. Andrew Bond confirmed that the scheme was quite successful so far and businesses have benefitted from the support available.

Members were also informed that there is a lot of creativity in Blackburn with Darwen and the Council are trying to draw the businesses into the town centre. It was advised that demand is high because of the modest or low business rates and all vacant Council owned shops have been let. The Executive Member explained that there are still vacant premises but they are private owned and the landlords are not offering the business rate exemption scheme.

2. Arte et Labore – Stimulating new creative businesses

- Pop up shopping 'Blackburn is Open' office
- St Johns Centre hosting arts events
- Bootstrap providing business support
- Bentleys upper floors – Potential studio space
- Creative HIVE launched

It was advised that the arts and creative industry have benefited from concessionary rents. It is hoped that the support would make the businesses more sustainable and help them to establish, develop and grow.

3. Fab Lab

- Bentleys venue for Fab Lab – networked 3D design and fabrication facility
- Essential remedial/safety works completed
- Procurement of Fab Lab 'infrastructure' works underway

Members were told that the Fab Lab would target students, education establishments, companies and entrepreneurs within Blackburn and Lancashire.

4. Cultural Events Programme

- Blackburn BEAT 23rd August 2014
- Blackburn Heritage Festival 13th/14th September 2014
- Christmas programme

The Executive Member advised the group that the proposal was to establish an annual cultural events programme from January 2014 comprising of 4 major town centre events each year, a series of monthly one-off events/attractions in public areas, themed markets and art events.

5. Kick start the night time economy

- Live music in town centre venues (FNL)
- Support for town centre licensees
- First Thursday
- Blakeys open Fri/Sat

It was advised that support is in place to encourage groups to perform at town centre venues and support was also available for licensees to hire equipment and PA kits if needed. It was also advised that the FNL event has been reduced to a monthly event due to the lack of footfall.

6. Enforcement and Anti-social behaviour

- Littering enforcement
- Alcohol control
- HMO Enforcement
- Shisha enforcement
- Fair trade enforcement

7. Maximising use of Town Centre Assets – Extending opening hours at:

- Blackburn Library
- Blackburn Museum
- Blakeys

It was questioned whether the Council were measuring how effective the opening of Blackburn Library is on Sundays. Members were told that the Library is very popular on Sundays and it is bringing people to that side of town. Members were advised to speak with Martin Eden, Director of Culture, Leisure, Sport & Young People for further updates.

8. Easier access and free parking

- Free after 3pm Mon-Fri off Street Parking
- Review of town centre movement strategy – consultation completed

Members held a discussion regarding parking charges and whether the free parking that the Council offer had had an effect on The Mall. The Executive Member confirmed that the Mall had not seen a drop in usage of their car park on Saturdays but had noticed a small drop from 3pm on weekdays.

The Executive Member confirmed that the Council would be reviewing the Council car parking systems to determine what the next steps should be.

9. Cleaner and Greener

- Bedding and planting town centre areas
- Maintenance budget review – Street furniture and public realm areas

Members agreed that people want to see a clean welcoming town centre.

10. Loving our heritage

- Cotton Exchange and Magistrates Court – Listed building enforcement
- Town Heritage Initiative bid for Northgate/Blakey Moor
- Blue Plaques

Comments were made by Members regarding the number of derelict areas around the town centre, in particular, the old Cinema and the Cotton Exchange and that the Council have been in discussions with the owners for over 2 years. The Executive Member advised the group that discussion had been taking place about the future of buildings and that it is likely that the Council would have to buy the Cotton Exchange if they wanted make use of the building/area.

11. Business Improvement District (BID) - Successful BID vote, Main themes:

- Promote Blackburn Town Centre
- Safer, more secure environment
- Cleaner and more attractive
- Attract and support businesses

12. Marketing the place

- Develop place promotion strategy
- Use successful Blackburn 'diaspora'
- Market our uniqueness

Members held a discussion on the marketing of the borough and of the 12 Point Plan. Members felt that Blackburn, as the largest section of the borough, needs to be successful and the success and history of the town needs to be promoted to sell the town. Members felt that the power of social media and other such resources should be utilised to their full potential.

Members also held a discussion on other Councils who could be used as an example of success. Andrew Bond confirmed to Members that Margate Council have taken advice from Wayne Hemmingway and helped to develop a small economy for arts and crafts businesses. It was also advised that Cannock Chase District Council have done something very similar to the 12 point plan.