

Folkestone Town Centre Working Group

Held at:	Zoom Meeting
Date	Tuesday, 25 August 2020
Present	Councillors Danny Brook (Chairman), Laura Davison, Tim Prater, Douglas Wade and David Wimble
Apologies for Absence	Councillor David Monk
Officers Present:	Ewan Green (Director of Place), Mrs Jess Harman (Community Safety Specialist), Sue Lewis (Committee Services Officer), Llywelyn Lloyd (Chief Planning Officer) and Lorraine Smith (Economic Development Officer)
Others Present:	None

23. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Brook declared a voluntary announcement as he is one of the ward councillors for the town centre. He remained in the meeting for discussions.

24. **Previous minutes & actions**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 February 2020 were agreed with no further actions required.

25. **Update on Reopening High Streets Safely RHSS**

Members noted the items that have now been delivered, the continuous monitoring items and the future interventions paying particular attention to the following:

- Eat Out to Help Out scheme – this has been a fantastic way of getting businesses up and running again following closures during the pandemic and it is hoped that it may be extended or introduced again during winter months.
- Busk Stops – officers want to maximise on the music town first anniversary and encourage musicians to come along and play at designated areas (busk stops).

- Engaging and consulting businesses – a business leaflet has now been produced which, once circulated will be a way of engaging and providing information to help those businesses that need additional support.
- Business Data – data on movement throughout the town will be taken, giving an overview of the route of footfall over the next six months.

26. **Folkestone Place Plan**

The proposed Place Plan will combine the collective roles of the Council, public/private stakeholders and local community to successfully deliver a joint ambition - a plan that everyone can get behind. There is already some great work being done and this will be a chance to add to that work but will be collected in one singular place.

Work initiated since 2019, together with key themes is covered in the attached slides. It is clear that there are changes happening in respect of the retail market and councils need to adjust to these changes by encouraging new investment and developments in the town centre, highlighting the opportunities that are offered.

Officers understand that particular attention needs to be paid to transport links and transport movement, including footfall. Paying particular attention to connectivity across the town centre and towards the harbour area, including how the train station and bus station can be used to help bring it all together. Identifying challenges and setting an action plan will help.

Progress is good and future works will only enhance and feed into other council objectives.

The council will need somebody to co-ordinate the work so a tender process will take place once a brief has been prepared, this will include workshops with stakeholders. A budget has already been identified for the work.

Updates will be brought regularly to the working group.

27. **Former Debenhams Store**

Members were updated on the possible future for the former Debenhams store. Informing that a number of options were being considered, but they are exiting proposals that will be carefully thought through.

Particular attention will be paid to how the building might be used as a multi-function space, again officers will look at each option as they come forward.

Members asked that consideration be taken into parking issues, the possible move of the bus station, inter connectivity to the town centre and that feasibility studies continue to be taken to help recognise and understand what the residents would like and need.

Although no timetable for works has been set officers are aware that issues relating the Covid 19 pandemic will need to be considered when any works do start.

28. F&H High Street Fund Update (Folkestone)

Members paid particular attention to the following:

- Funding had paused from the end of March 2020 due to Covid 19 pandemic but new applications were still coming in. The next decision panel will sit in September and members will be updated at the next meeting of the working group.
- 2 empty high street properties were now occupied following discussions and support from the council.

Council led interventions:

- It was noted that a market improvement programme will be reported to Cabinet in September
- Replacement litter bins have now been ordered.
- The We Made That study will feed into the place plan in due course.
- Heritage Signage will celebrate historic quarter of the town council and officers are working on this with KCC.
- Heritage Lighting – upgrading of lighting will take place.
- Live and Work project – private sector partner engagement with a campaign to promote Folkestone as a destination to visit, move to or work in.

Members asked that officers are mindful of affordable housing options and rough sleepers and the pressures on services. Government funding now available will help with wider support for rough sleepers, as this is an area that has significantly increased during these difficult times.

This particular issue can be a stand-alone item on a future meeting of the working group.

Further updates will be provided at future meetings.

29. Any Other Business

No further items were discussed.

A copy of the presentation for all items listed on the agenda is attached to these minutes for information.