

Committee: **Regeneration Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **10th February 2021**
Report Subject: **Progress Update: Town Centre Task and Finish Group**
Portfolio Holder: **Councillor D Davies, Deputy Leader & Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development**
Report Submitted by: **Amy Taylor, Team Manager Regeneration Opportunities**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
X	x	01.02.21			10.02.21			

1. Purpose of the Report

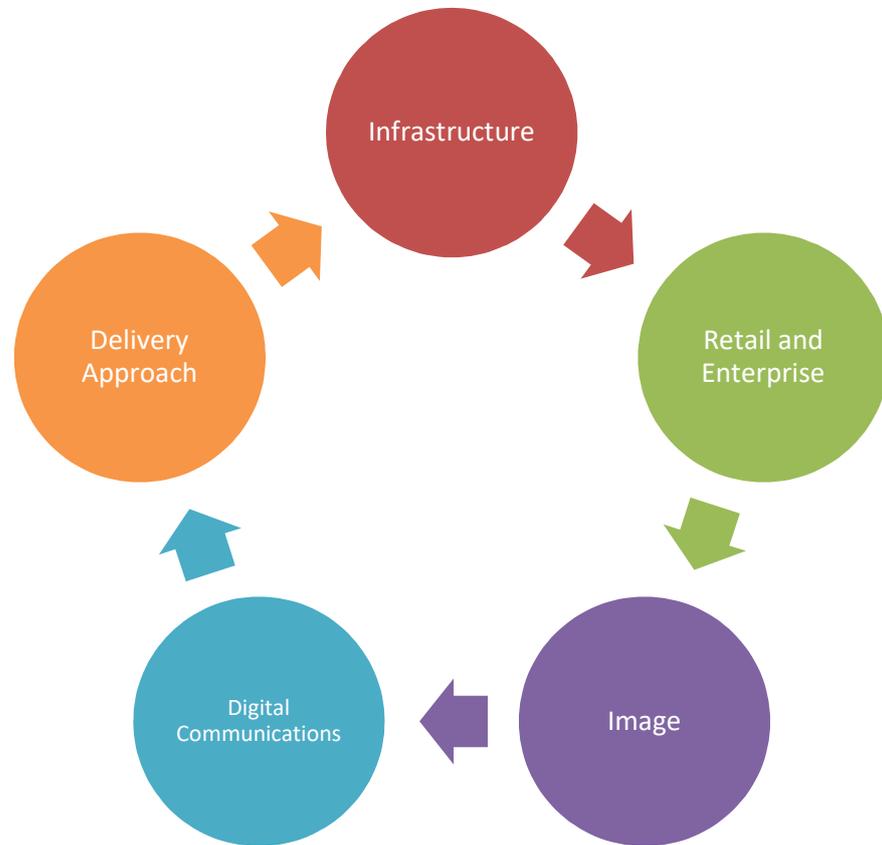
- 1.1. For members of the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee to receive a status update on the work of the Task and Finish Group.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1. In October 2020, the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee approved a report to re-establish a Town Centre Strategy Task and Finish Group.
- 2.2. Members agreed that the group membership would consist of the following Scrutiny Committee Members:
- Councillor John Hill (Chair)
 - Councillor Keri Rowson
 - Councillor Wayne Hodgins
 - Councillor Phil Edwards
 - Councillor John Morgan
 - Councillor Lee Parsons
- 2.3. The members above were selected to ensure that all town centres would have representation from a local Ward Member.
- 2.4. Two meetings have since been held since the re-establishment of the group and this report provides an update on progress.
- 2.5. The first meeting held on 26th November 2020 sought to re-establish the group and re-affirm the purpose of the task and finish group. It was agreed during the meeting that meetings would take place monthly with the frequency being reviewed regularly to ensure that suitable progress is being made.
- 2.6. Members discussed setting out a timeline for reporting the outcomes of the Task and Finish Group to the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee and it was agreed that

the Group would present regular progress updates and that work would continue until it was felt that all areas to be considered had been discussed.

- 2.7. The group discussed and agreed the key themes that would be considered as part of the future strategy for Blaenau Gwent Town Centres these included:



Infrastructure

- 2.8. In terms of town centre infrastructure members outlined the areas they wish to consider. These areas include:

- Traffic Orders / Parking Enforcement across the Towns
- Pedestrian zones and their overall impact upon town centre viability
- Parking facilities and availability
- Town Centre Gateways and Wayfinding

- 2.9. Members were particularly interested in looking at how we can make the entrances to the Town Centres more inviting and make it clearer where the towns start and finish. It was also felt that consideration should be given to looking at how we can improve signage and wayfinding to direct people to and around the towns.

Retail and Enterprise

- 2.10. Recognising current challenges resulting from COVID-19 discussions took place surrounding how we could look at ways to improve the retail and enterprise across the town centres.

- 2.11. Developing an enterprise culture within the town centre retail space would be complimentary to other projects being delivered by the Council such as Boxworks. Options for pop-up town centre space that could allow test trading and supporting businesses to use start-up retail premises.
- 2.12. With outdoor markets playing such a key role across our towns both currently and in years past we must also consider options as to how we can support them to continue operating and where possible support them to grow.
- 2.13. Along with infrastructure and physical retail premises we must also consider additional support town centre businesses may need to continue to operate. We will identify and develop training and development opportunities that will help their businesses to operate and grow in the future.

Image

- 2.14. The group discussed how we can ensure that we minimise negative perceptions of our town centres. It was agreed that we need to focus more on ensuring that we promote positive news stories as much as possible.
- 2.15. It was also acknowledged that whilst the COVID-19 pandemic had brought many challenges to our Town Centres it had also allowed our Town Centres to highlight the essential services that they can provide to our community.
- 2.16. It is important that we create a sense of place and enhance the overall town centre experience. Each of our towns have their own features so we must ensure that those features aren't lost and we talk about them when we are talking about our towns.

Digital Communications

- 2.17. As a result of COVID-19 there has been even greater shift from the physical high street to online purchases.
- 2.18. The group agreed that we need to look at how the Council can use digital communications to promote and support our town centres. We will explore how we can support businesses through the use of social and digital media.
- 2.19. It will also be important to consider how we can support the town centre businesses who want to start online trading. The Council is currently installing free public WiFi across town centres.

Delivery Approach

- 2.20. In order to deliver against any strategy that is put in place for Town Centres, it is important to develop and establish a partnership model. It was agreed that future discussion was required on the approach to establishing this model.

- 2.21. In order for further consider the delivery approach it was agreed that an invitation would be extended to Nick Landers and Councillor Malcolm Cross, Chair of the Tredegar Advisory Group.

Present Position

- 2.22. A second meeting of the task and finish group took place on 20th January 2021. On this occasion the group received a short presentation from Nick Landers on the Tredegar Advisory Group. This included details of how the advisory group was established, how it operates and how it has supported Officers and Members to collectively work on the regeneration of Tredegar.
- 2.23. Members felt that they would like to explore replicating the approach taken in Tredegar across all other Towns. Officers agreed to support members to consider these options and the establishment of the groups.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

- 3.1. To note the progress of the Task and Finish group and agree to receive further updates from the Task and Finish Group on a quarterly basis.

4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

- 4.1. The report supports the following Corporate Plan priorities:

- To protect and enhance our environment and infrastructure to benefit our communities;
- To support a fairer sustainable economy and community; and
- An ambitious and innovative council delivering the quality services we know matter to our communities.

The Town Centre strategy will consider existing infrastructure within our town centres and explore ways that this can change to support regeneration activity.

- 4.2. It also supports delivery of the Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan:

- Safe and friendly communities;
- To look after and protect the environment;
- To forge new pathways to prosperity; and
- To encourage and enable people to make healthy lifestyle choices in the places that they live, learn, work and play

The Town Centre strategy will seek to ensure that our town centres are safe and friendly communities for our residents and visitors to shop within. This will include projects to maintain and enhance the local environment, increase business occupancy and create an environment in our town centres that encourages our residents to spend time there for work, learning and leisure.

- 4.3. In supporting our statutory responsibilities towards the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act, the Town Centre Strategy will support in creating:
- A more prosperous Wales;
 - A resilient Wales; and
 - A Wales of cohesive communities

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

Cost

- 5.1. There are no direct cost implications to the Council for the areas discussed with this report. The work of the Task and Finish Group will identify projects and these will be pulled into business cases for necessary approvals as and when required.

Risk including Mitigating Actions

- 5.2. There is a risk that further spikes within the COVID-19 pandemic could further delay the work of the task and finish group. This has been mitigated by utilising virtual meeting facilities where possible and this will continue to be used throughout the work of the Task and Finish Group.
- 5.3. Site visits could increase the risk of attendees becoming infected with COVID-19. Site visits will only be arranged if they are essential to the work of the task and finish group and will be subject to COVID-19 safety measures (this will be considered at the time of the visits).

Legal

- 5.4. There are no direct legal implications associated with this report.

Human Resources

- 5.5. Regeneration will support the work of the Town Centre Task and Finish Group. The Town Centre Business Development Officer will be responsible day to day for taking forward the Town Centre strategy and working with partners to develop the partnerships and collaborations that will enable the priorities to be taken forward.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)

- 6.1. The task and finish group consists of members of the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee. Future work will include wider stakeholders including town centre forums and town centre businesses.

Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)

- 6.2. The work of the Task and Finish group alongside the agreement of a Town Centre strategy will establish a long term plan for the future of our town centres.

Preventative focus

- 6.3. Town Centres across the UK have suffered a long period of decline which has been further exacerbated by the onset of COVID-19. There are however areas of alternative approaches and business initiative which should be capitalised upon in order to reduce the potential for even further decline.

Collaboration / partnership working

- 6.4. It will be essential that delivery of the Town Centre strategy is done on a collaborative and partnership working basis. One of the key areas of focus of the Task and Finish Group is to agree and establish the delivery approach that will enable the town centre strategy to be delivered.

Integration(across service areas)

- 6.5. As described above, future work will create a wider network of stakeholders and this will include officers from across other service areas which either support or impact upon the future of our town centres.

7. Monitoring Arrangements

- 7.1. Reporting on this priority will be included within the departments business plan reporting. We will also provide regular progress updates to the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

N/A