

HAMBLETON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report To: Cabinet
7 June 2016

Subject: VIBRANT MARKET TOWNS

All Ward(s)
Portfolio Holder for Economic Development & Finance: Councillor P R Wilkinson

1.0 PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND:

1.1 One of the key themes in the Council's Economic Development Strategy is "Vibrant Market Towns". This report considers how to take forward this theme.

2.0 THE ISSUES:

2.1 The District has nine centres of population which, for the purposes of this initiative, have been categorised as:-

- Easingwold
- Thirsk / Sowerby
- Bedale / Aiskew
- Northallerton / Romanby
- Stokesley / Great Ayton

2.2 All these communities have a central business area which provides services not only for its immediate local population, but which also serve a large catchment area. As such they act as local capitals for large rural hinterlands.

2.3 The linkage between cultural, social and community initiatives and the economy is vital in these towns in that local clubs, societies and events create greater footfall in the town centres which in turn helps support the economy.

2.4 Whilst each market town has its own unique character the challenges facing them are similar:-

- The threat of large out of town shopping centres
- Increasing use of on-line buying
- Click and collect increases
- Closure of key services such as banks
- Decline of Markets

2.5 Some of the key indicators of how well a town is doing are the number of empty shops, unemployment levels and high rents.

2.6 Analysis across the District shows all the towns are doing quite well now by comparison with other areas of the country. The challenge, however, is how to improve on this and how to sustain vibrancy and prosperity into the future.

2.7 The headline results from a recent retail survey indicate that the priorities for town centre businesses in terms of their needs are:-

- Training

- Marketing
- Shop front improvements
- Improved security

3.0 THE PROPOSALS

- 3.1 The schedules attached at Annex A in the form of draft action plans are informed by desk research and by suggestions put forward by other local community organisations. It is proposed that these be used as a starting point for engaging and consulting with each local business community. They could then be developed locally into firm action plans.
- 3.2 Ensuring vibrancy is something the council can take a leadership role in by facilitating and enabling the local community business leaders with their local delivery. It may also be that the council directly delivers some initiatives. However, the role of businesses, the council and the voluntary and community sectors working together is vital. The overall proposal would be to directly deliver some key projects at the same time as providing support and coordination of local collective effort.
- 3.3 Northallerton is already receiving such support from the Business & Economy team and has made great strides forward with its approach to developing a “Business Improvement District” (BID) which will harness the efforts of all the businesses in the town into promoting the town itself.
- 3.4 Recently the Tour de Yorkshire and the development of a Neighbourhood Plan have been the catalyst to businesses in Great Ayton / Stokesley and Easingwold respectively, getting together for the first time; and in doing so have all requested the support of the council.
- 3.5 The Economic Development Strategy allocates funding to the Vibrant Market Town initiative, and gives the initiative a high priority. However, the existing staff team resources cannot support the development initiatives set out in the annex without compromising other projects which also have a high priority within the Strategy.
- 3.6 It is therefore suggested that up to a maximum of two full time Market Town Support Officers be appointed for a maximum of three years with the purpose of:-
- Developing local business networks
 - Encouraging businesses to work together
 - Supporting the delivery of projects and initiatives
 - Ensuring local sustainability
- 3.7 One of these positions should be a graduate intern to fit with the council’s own scheme.

4.0 LINK TO COUNCIL PRIORITIES:

- 4.1 As well as being an economic priority this report also links to community development and health.

5.0 RISK ASSESSMENT:

- 5.1 There are no significant risks associated with this report.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

- 6.1 Grade 11 is £29,031+on costs @ 27%, this is the preferred level of the new officer due to the levels at which they will work and the external people they will come into contact with.

The graduate intern would need to be Grade 7 as a minimum which is £18,557+on costs @ 27%.

6.2 It is envisaged that the graduate intern would also be a three-year position.

6.3 The total annual cost would therefore be £47,588 plus on costs of making a total of £60,440. Provision for this is already made with the current Economic Development Strategy.

7.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report.

8.0 EQUALITY/DIVERSITY ISSUES:

8.1 Equality and Diversity will feature in the action plan, the appointment and in the work delivered.

9.0 RECOMMENDATION(S):

9.1 That Cabinet approves:-

- a) The draft action plans at Annex A as a starting point for local consultation and then development;
- b) The appointment of (1) a single FTE Market Town Support Officer (three year fixed term) and (2) a graduate intern to support market town work.

DAVID GOODWIN
Executive Director

Background papers: None

Author ref: DRG / HK

Contact: David Goodwin
Executive Director
01609 767147