

19 SEPTEMBER 2018

REPORT NO: ED 1805

ALDERSHOT TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The regeneration of our town centres is a Council priority. With the proposed redevelopment of two major sites right in the heart of Aldershot – the Galleries, Arcade & High Street car park site, along with the Union Street East site – the town centre will undergo significant disruption throughout the period of building works.
- 1.2. The Aldershot Town Centre Strategy will propose a number of activities to assist town centre businesses and maintain vibrancy as much as possible through this period of transition, and ensure the sustained health of the town centre in the longer-term.

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 2.1. The Aldershot Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document was published in January 2016 and identifies a number of key regeneration sites in the town. The two largest sites are:
 - *The Galleries, Arcade & High Street car park* – mixed commercial use on the ground floor, with circa 550 flats, parking, and re-provision of public car park.
 - *Union Street East* – retail and other commercial on the ground floor, with circa 140 flats and limited parking provision.
- 2.2. Whilst these proposed schemes will provide a major boost to the town centre economy in the longer term, the build period - resulting in the hoarding of significant parts of the town centre – will provide a challenging time for retailers and other businesses.
- 2.3. To assist through this transitional period, the production of a ‘retail plan for Aldershot Town Centre’ was proposed, and subsequently identified as a Council priority as part of the 2018/19 Council Plan. At the end of last year, informal advice was sought from specialist retail consultant *Time Retail*, who suggested approaching a number of consultants who were not simply retail focused. Site visits and follow-up meetings with both *Cushman & Wakefield* and *CBRE* at the start of the year provided useful and consistent advice. Key themes from the discussions included:
 - Don’t rely on retail as the outlook is so uncertain
 - Retail uses should focus on ‘experience and convenience’
 - Consider town centre uses in relation to lifestyles, not simply retail

- Consolidate retail uses in the heart of the town
 - Contract the town centre and diversify uses
 - Agree Aldershot's unique selling point (USP) e.g. family friendly, young people, crafts, incubator space.
 - Try to create the conditions for incubator businesses to grow - start with meanwhile uses and see what develops.
- 2.4. There was a clear consensus that **any plan the council developed needed to look beyond a 'retail plan' to a wider 'town centre strategy'**.
- 2.5. In May 2018, the LGA published a handbook for council leadership entitled, 'Revitalising town centres'. The paper suggests that 'revitalising a town centre involves coordinating a range of activities, possibly over many years', and provides a useful self-assessment checklist of 'success factors' to help gauge current and future processes in strategy development and the delivery of town centre improvements. **The full report is attached, with Members directed to the summary checklist on page 7.**
- 2.6. The following month, 'The Grimsey Review 2' was published. This paper entitled, 'It's time to reshape our town centres', led by retail guru Bill Grimsey, provides a list of 25 recommendations to do just that. Whilst a number of them are directed at central government e.g. replacing business rates with a new tax, many are suggestions at local level. **The full report is attached, with Members directed to the summary of recommendations on pages 8 & 9.**

3. RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1. **The Project & Policy Advisory Board are asked to consider the reports identified in paragraphs 2.5 & 2.6 and provide their views on potential activities and other arrangements designed to:**
- **Help the town centre remain as healthy and vibrant as possible throughout the period of major redevelopment works on the Galleries and Union Street East sites.**
 - **Ensure the sustained health of the town centre in the longer term.**
- 3.2. Possible activities may focus around parking, access, cleanliness, anti-social behaviour, retail offer, meanwhile uses, marketing, events, markets, digital opportunities, community engagement, etc.
- 3.3. Members views will be fed into a draft strategy, with input also sought from officers, key town centre stakeholders and residents. The current proposal is that the draft strategy will be submitted to Cabinet, seeking a budget to support the recommended actions.

KAREN EDWARDS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Contact: David Phillips, Town Centre and Cultural Manager Ext: 8570