

20 NOVEMBER 2019

ALDERSHOT TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. This report sets out the current position and next steps in the development of the Aldershot Town Centre Strategy, focussing in particular on three elements of the evidence base. These are the work of the Civic Society in engaging with the community to develop a Town Centre Vision, the recommendations of the Rushmoor Leadership project group charged with developing ideas to attract and grow independent business uses and the Aldershot Parking Study.

1.2. The Board is asked to consider three elements of the evidence base and their implications for the Town Centre Strategy

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

2.1. The regeneration of our town centres is a Council priority. A long-term vision and masterplan for the town centre is set out in the Aldershot Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), which was published in early 2016. The SPD set out six key themes which remain appropriate and relevant, and these have been joined by a seventh theme which reflects the increased importance of digital and clean energy and the Council's commitment to climate change:

- A revitalised town centre offer
- Town centre living
- A family friendly town centre
- An improved cultural offer
- Investing in streets and spaces
- Affirming the Victorian heritage
- Developing a Digital/5G offer with links to clean energy

2.2. Since then, the Council has taken a very proactive approach to regeneration, including engaging in site assembly, securing Government and LEP funding, setting up the Rushmoor Development Partnership with Hill Investments and working with partners to bring forward key schemes including Union St East, The Galleries, Aldershot Rail Station and the Digital Games Hub.

2.3. In recognition of the disruption that the major projects were likely to cause, the production of a 'retail plan for Aldershot Town Centre' was identified as a Council priority as part of the 2018/19 Council Plan. However, the advice from expert retail consultants was that any plan the council developed needed to look beyond a 'retail plan' to a wider 'town centre strategy'. Subsequently, the Government and others have published several reports on revitalising town centres, details of which were

reported to PPAB in April 2019. This year, the Council submitted bids for funding to the Future High Streets and High Streets Heritage Action Zones schemes but, unfortunately, these were unsuccessful (although a second bidding round for each is likely next year). An expression of interest for development of a Digital/5G Aldershot was submitted to Enterprise M3 LEP and this is being worked up in more detail in preparation for a funding bid next year.

- 2.4. Since April, we have been working with the Aldershot Civic Society and the Aldershot Task Force, a group of core stakeholders, to shape a longer-term town centre strategy and enable consultation and engagement with the wider community, including residents and other stakeholders. The Civic Society have led a process of engagement known as the Community Conversation which is resulting in the drafting of a community-led 'Town Centre Vision' based around key themes, all of which impact on the town's present and hold both potential and challenges for its future.
- 2.5. In addition, we have been implementing a short-medium term plan to help sustain the health of the town centre in the meantime and maintain vibrancy as much as possible through this period of transition. As reported to the Board in April, the Transition Plan addresses the disruption likely to arise from regeneration schemes such as Union St East and the Galleries, which are expected to start on site next year, focussing on means of increasing footfall through events, activities and engagement. The Transition Plan also includes an aim of exploring how to encourage and develop independent businesses in the town centre. As part of the implementation and as an element of the longer-term strategy, one of the project teams for the staff development 2018/19 Leadership Programme was asked to look into attracting and growing independent business uses.
- 2.6. As part of assembling the evidence base to support the development of the strategy, we also commissioned a parking study for Aldershot town centre with two aims: to examine the current parking situation taking account of previous off and on street parking surveys and to look at how supply and demand is likely to change in the future, given the planned regeneration projects and increasing use of sustainable and alternative modes of transport.

3. TOWN CENTRE VISION

- 3.1. To kickstart the Community Conversation, the Aldershot Civic Society held an Emergency Town Centre Meeting in May 2019 which was attended by over 300 people and the BBC. During a series of subsequent meetings, a further 100 people have become involved and attendance at the Society's regular monthly meetings has more than doubled. This has resulted in a still evolving draft Town Centre Vision document prepared by the people of Aldershot and facilitated by the Civic Society. The Aldershot Task Force has been given an interim presentation of the document and welcomed the work so far and asked that it be taken account of in

developing the Council's Town Centre Strategy. A copy of the draft Vision is attached at **Appendix 1**.

3.2. The draft Vision recognises that Aldershot town centre is rich in unrealised potential, with a strong sense of community, Victorian built heritage and royal history, well-kept public gardens and parks, large-scale development opportunities and a diverse and growing community. The Vision sets out to shift the directions of local conversations away from Aldershot's decline to focus on its assets and potential.

3.3. Ten key themes have been identified that impact significantly on the town's present and hold both potential and challenges for the future. Ideas have already been put forward for most of the themes and these are being developed further through themed workshops. The ten themes are summarised below:

Communicating Aldershot: communications should support the physical transformation, including during transition, and should look forward to the future, not focus solely on the town's military history. Ideas include a centrally located information centre, a website and phone app and setting up a Business Improvement District (BID).

Future Development: should deliver policy compliant affordable housing and should be of contemporary high-quality design that contribute positively to existing Victorian heritage. Ideas include creating momentum within the arts community to create a Makers Yard.

Public Realm: should be welcoming, accessible, of high quality and easy to move around. Ideas include community entertainment spaces, public toilets, more trees and planting and high-quality shop fronts.

Feeling Safe: people should feel safe and a sense of belonging. Ideas include a dementia friendly town centre, good lighting and seeking alternatives to CCTV in addressing anti-social behaviour (such as more police presence).

Transport, access and movement: should be improved to promote active use of the town centre. Ideas include free short-term parking, removal of street clutter and more cycle provision.

Entertainment, events and activities: create a sense of pride and ownership as well as increasing footfall and prosperity of businesses in the town. Ideas include more regular, smaller events that leave time to use the shops and cafes, free activities for families and involving local artists.

Facilities and services in town: a range of these adds to the town's vibrancy and usefulness. Ideas include moving the library to a town centre location and a modern, interactive and family-friendly museum.

Retail, restaurants and cafes: a unique and independent retail offer and a variety of high-quality cafes. Ideas include a start-up incubator programme, traditional

retailers (butchers, bakers etc), regular themed markets, variety of food outlets including restaurants, cafes and street food, specialist bar to attract young people.

Incentives for new businesses: establish a pathway from ‘pop-up’ to permanent to allow Aldershot to ‘grow its own’. Ideas include reducing business rates, a forum for local business owners and employees and co-working spaces.

Transition period: draw up a communications strategy to bring people along on the journey of transformation. Ideas include artwork on hoardings and ‘greening’ Aldershot activities.

3.4. The Civic Society is continuing to develop the vision through themed workshops focussing on particular aspects, including one planned for 20 November to address transport, connectivity and services and one planned for January 2020 to address future development.

4. GROWING INDEPENDENT BUSINESS USES

4.1. A group of council officers participating in the Council’s Leadership Programme was asked to look at how the vibrancy of the town centre could be developed by attracting and growing independent business uses. The project had three stages: creating a knowledge baseline; evaluating potential opportunities; and developing ideas to form recommendations.

4.2. Over the course of the ten month project, the group identified many potential ideas and came up with recommendations for eleven of them. Several were themed around engagement with young people, which has previously been highlighted by the council as an area for improvement. Of the eleven projects, the group envisaged that three could contribute to the transition plan (ie. short-medium term) and that the remaining eight should be evaluated alongside other initiatives as part of the long-term Town Centre Strategy. It was very positive that the group identified leisure provision opportunities and operators who were interested in Aldershot.

Transition Plan	Town Centre Strategy
	‘Escape Room’ adventure centre Climbing Centre
Engagement with young people: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art student display on RBC hoardings • ‘Humans of Aldershot’ concept for RDP hoardings • Youth engagement project with Farnborough 6th Form College • Construction opportunities linked to Aldershot College (FCOT) 	Children’s activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soft Play - recommend no further action due to new facilities opening in town centre • Indoor Trampolining – look at possibility of including in future soft play provision but not stand-alone • Little Street – evaluate once new soft play facilities established

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Splash Area – explore provision within public open space of major regeneration schemes
Repair Café, focussing on armed forces veterans	Visual Gaming Centre – do not take forward but explore provision of space to watch and participate in E-Sports
West End Centre – continue work already underway to improve cultural offer, including loyalty scheme	Relocation of Army Career’s Office to town centre

4.3. Further information and detailed evaluations of the individual projects are set out in the project team’s report and appendices, attached as **Appendix 2**.

5. ALDERSHOT PARKING STUDY

5.1. The parking study brief was to:

- Assess the current off and on street parking situation in Aldershot town centre
- Identify changes in use and demand compared to previous studies in 2014 and 2017
- Assess future demand in the light of regeneration projects and growth trends (over the next 5 years)
- Look at good practice elsewhere and identify opportunities for Aldershot

5.2. The surveys took place on a Tuesday and a Saturday in June and covered ten car parks (8am to 8pm) and on-street parking in the town centre (hourly beats from 6am to 8pm).

5.3. The surveys found that most car parks were less busy than in 2014 and 2017, although Princes Gardens and Cross St were busier at weekends. Peak times for Princes Gardens and the High Street Multi-storey had changed slightly, moving to afternoons and evenings. On-street occupancy had increased in over half the roads surveyed, especially at weekends and there had been a significant increase in on-street short stay parking. However, the consultants report urged caution in drawing any detailed conclusions on the basis of changing traffic patterns.

5.4. In forecasting future demand and supply, the consultants looked at historic traffic trends but noted that there had been no overall change locally. However, the national traffic growth model (TEMPro) estimated growth at 6.7% for Wellington ward. No net change was assumed in demographic data (expectation of more families with young children offset by increase in elderly population). The consultants factored in emerging development proposals, including regeneration schemes and other developments forecast in the Local Plan. The TRICS database trip rates estimated additional parking demand of 592 per day. This included displacement arising from the net loss of the High St Multi-storey and Parsons Barracks car parks.

5.5. Crucially, the study concluded that there will be sufficient car park capacity in the town centre to accommodate planned growth to 2024. Many roads will exceed on-street parking capacity and the new Galleries 250 space car park is likely to be busy. However, the Wellington Centre car park has capacity and should be promoted as an alternative.

5.6. In terms of opportunities for Aldershot, the study concluded that the following had potential to improve the town centre offer for off-street parking:

- More strategic use of car parks and partnership working by Rushmoor BC, Wellington Centre and Westgate;
- Improved car park management and operations, including discounts linked to spend, reduced charge short-stay bays, ParkMark accreditation and smartphone apps;
- Technological improvements to infrastructure including Realtime information & signage, smartphone apps, ticketless payment and Automatic Plate Number Recognition (APNR), Electric Vehicle (EV) charge points;
- Further study of good practice examples including Festival Place, Basingsoke and The Lexicon, Bracknell.

5.7. With regard to on-street parking, the study identified the following opportunities:

- A strategic review of on-street parking, including consolidation of the wide variety of restrictions, reduction in number of spaces, creation of more public realm space for pedestrians and cyclists (e.g. Oslo);
- Improved on street parking management and operations including cashless payment options and Car Clubs;
- Technological improvements to infrastructure including pay by phone apps, short-range wireless (NFC) technology, EV charge points outside cafes;
- Further study of good practice examples including Tunbridge Wells

5.8. In terms of non-car use, the study identified the following opportunities:

- Improved public transport
 - New Gold Route bus services planned
 - Rail Station improvements underway
- Cycling facilities
 - Consider Cycle Hub at station (e.g. Woking and Enfield)
 - Implement 2012 Town Access Plan improvements
- Car share schemes
 - Car clubs, Mobility as a Service (MaaS), smartphone apps e.g. 'Whim' (e.g. Helsinki)

5.9. In conclusion, the study made the following recommendations for Aldershot:

- Set up a stakeholder Transport/Parking Working Group

- Visit good practice examples e.g. Bracknell
- Produce a smartphone app that provides realtime parking information, taxi and car club booking, shopping vouchers
- Look into ParkMark and Disabled Parking Accreditation
- Investigate opportunities for technological improvements to infrastructure e.g. real-time parking information
- Review operations and management including charging
- Introduce a Cycle Hub and improve infrastructure for cyclists and pedestrians (Town Access Plan)

5.10. A copy of the consultants' report is attached at **Appendix 3**.

6. NEXT STEPS

6.1. Further pieces of evidence are being commissioned and developed. The intention is to bring these together into an overall strategy which will be in draft form in March 2020 and be considered by Cabinet subsequently. Further updates will be provided to the Board as the evidence is produced and the strategy developed.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1. Once the Aldershot Town Centre Strategy has been established, any budgetary implications will be identified and a paper will be submitted at the appropriate time. Funding for a number of elements of the Transition Plan are included in the agreed budget for 19/20. Any further funding will be sought through the usual budget processes.

8. RECOMMENDATION

8.1. The Policy and Projects Advisory Board is asked to consider the three elements of evidence and provide their views on how these should inform the future development of the strategy:

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List of appendices:

1. DRAFT Town Centre Vision
2. Leadership Programme project team report
3. Aldershot Parking Study