

**Open Report on behalf of Andy Gutherson,
Interim Executive Director of Place**

Report to:	Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee
Date:	09 April 2019
Subject:	Recommendations from the High Street Revitalisation Working Group

Summary:

This paper updates the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee on the recommendations made by the High Street Vitality Working Group. The recommendations identify ways that the County Council can support businesses and others in the transition that is happening to high streets.

Actions Required:

The Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee is invited to consider the recommendations being made by the High Street Vitality Working Group and;

- 1) Endorse the recommendations to the Executive Councillor for Economy and Place
- 2) Task the Head of Economic Development with sharing the outcomes of the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee with members of the High Street Vitality Working Group.

1. Background

The High Street Vitality Working Group was chaired by Councillor Barry Dobson and met on three occasions. The remit of the working group was to consider advice to the Executive Council for Economy and Place in relation to potential actions that the County Council could take in support of high street vitality.

The Working Group was clear, and this is an important point to remember throughout this report, that high streets are not dying. High Streets are changing; they are changing from places where people predominantly shop into places of leisure, living, visiting, and shopping.

The Working Group held detailed discussions about the issues relating to High Street, it considered analysis from officers about high streets in areas adjacent to Lincolnshire, and met with a panel of High Street specialists, business leaders and academics.

The Working Group endorsed the text of a letter to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government in support of changes to planning regulations which support high streets. In the letter, the Working Group recommended the government go further with some aspects of the proposed planning regulations to better support the changing role of the High Street.

The Working Group also requested that a further letter, highlighting the challenges of business rate regimes on high street businesses, should also be sent.

In addition, the Working Group produced five recommendations:

Recommendation One

"We recognise how important it is for county council and districts to work together for the vitality of our high streets. We believe that the current planning process provides structure but personal relationships are integral for good will."

The relationship between District Councils and County Councils is critical to the future viability of high streets. Working Group members therefore felt that it is essential to share their findings both amongst County Councillors and with District Councils too.

- **Each member of the Working Group volunteered to make a presentation to a District Council about the findings of the working group, and it is recommended that this approach be supported by the Executive Councillor.**

Recommendation Two

"It is essential that there is a better dialogue around delivering high street improvements; starting with discussing the direction of the Future High Streets Fund, and that this dialogue should also look to address longer term planning."

Given the Working Group's assertion that high streets are not dying, and that they will become places of leisure, living, working, as well as retail, then it is essential that high streets are accessible and that they are clean and attractive. It was noted by the working group that the government has introduced a Future High Street Fund, and that each district Council will bid for funding from this fund.

- **The Working Group recommends that each District Council in Lincolnshire is encouraged to recognise the importance of a clean, green and accessible environment in all high streets.**

Recommendation Three

"To deliver schemes that help business leaders to provide modern merchandising promotion and customer service, whilst recognising that business leaders do not have the time to attend conventional events and find a different route to do so."

The expert panel that advised the working group recognised the importance that private businesses have with regards to the vitality of the High Street. This should not be limited to a consideration about retailers, but should think about all of the businesses with an interest in the High Street most notably landowners, property owners, and housing organisations.

The advice received from the expert panel was that businesses need to recognise and be briefed upon how the high street is changing. There are several examples of best practice across the county, and these should be used to help businesses to be the best.

- **The Working Group recommends that the County Council, working with the LEP and the Business Growth Hub, should create a support program that helps businesses to understand the future, the changing patterns of consumers, and how to react accordingly. The Working Group also highlighted that these programs should be developed in partnership, and not independently of other important organisations like Chambers of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses, and Business Improvement Groups.**

Recommendation Four

"Working together makes sense. Our high streets are individual places, but by recognizing each high street's strengths Lincolnshire's sum will equal much more than its parts"

The Working Group recognised that market towns in particular must not compete with their neighbours. Retailers and investors only have so much money to use, and consumers only wish to buy a product once! Therefore, it is important that within Lincolnshire our city, larger towns, and the smaller market towns each develop economies and communities based on their individual strengths. The Working Group recognises that there are many different strengths within the towns in the county.

- **The Working Group recommends that the County Council, working with local planning authorities, especially during the revisions to local plans and champions a way in which each town in Lincolnshire can complement not compete with its neighbours.**

Recommendation five

"Make best use of young people as a resource for the future."

The Working Group recognised the importance of marketing each market town. The expert panel described the positive and modern ways in which they use social media in particular, and the working group recognised that young people have experience and confidence in using social media in a way that perhaps older generations do not. The way the working group did however recognise that older generations receive social media and act upon it much like the younger generation. Social media in particular is increasingly being used alongside reductions and concessions as a way of building up loyalty amongst shoppers to individual market towns, and the working group would encourage this to be built upon.

- **The Working Group recommends that the County Council works with towns to help them to find a way that young people (perhaps on a secondment or placement) can lead social media campaign in to encourage visitors and residents to use their market town more.**

2. Conclusion

These are the five recommendations made by the High Street vitality working group.

1. Each member of the Working Group volunteered to make a presentation to a District Council about the findings of the working group.
2. The Working Group recommends that each District Council in Lincolnshire is encouraged to recognise the importance of a clean, green and accessible environment in all high streets.
3. The Working Group recommends that the County Council, working with the LEP and the Business Growth Hub, should create a support program that helps businesses to understand the future, the changing patterns of consumers, and how to react accordingly.
4. The Working Group recommends that the County Council, working with local planning authorities, especially during the revisions to local plans and champions a way in which each town in Lincolnshire can complement not compete with its neighbours.
5. The Working Group recommends that the County Council works with towns to help them to find a way that young people (perhaps on a secondment or placement) can lead social media campaign in to encourage visitors and residents to use their market town more.

They were deliberately developed in a way that is not concerned with short-term projects, instead of being focused on actions that can lead to change and will have a long lasting impact.

It is recommended that the Executive Councillor for Economy and Place supports all five of these recommendations.

3. Consultation

a) Have Risks and Impact Analysis been carried out?

No

b) Risks and Impact Analysis

N/A

4. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

This report was written by Justin Brown, who can be contacted on 01522 550630 or Justin.Brown@lincolnshire.gov.uk.

This page is intentionally left blank