

ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO AND DECISION OF CABINET ON 7 OCTOBER 2019

SUBJECT: Innovating our High Streets – town centre regeneration approaches.

REPORT AUTHOR: Nigel Lynn, Chief Executive

DATE: 18 September 2019

EXTN: 37600

PORTFOLIO AREA: Economy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The report provides background to a Local Government Association/District Council Network study tour, plus recent expert views on how to innovate and regenerate our town centres.

The report proposes that Cabinet are minded to support budget provision of £60k in the 2020/21 budget for Town Centre events in partnership with other organisations.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that:

1. Cabinet supports the principle of supporting our three Towns in Arun to improve their shopping experiences;
2. Cabinet requests Officers to investigate ways to develop Town Centre plans with Town Councils and other partners;
3. Cabinet requests Officers to consider a £60k budget within the 2020/21 Budget considerations; and
4. Cabinet requests Officers to investigate setting up a Business Rate fund for new start-up businesses (in a defined Town Centre area) to help reduce business costs (possibly through the West Sussex Business Rate Pool).

1. BACKGROUND:

- 1.1 Bill Grimsey is an acknowledged expert in the retail market. He previously worked for several well-known high street chains such as Budgens and Tesco, working his way up the ladder to become managing director of WBS (Wickes retailing subsidiary) Focus DIY, and CEO of Iceland (frozen food store).

- 1.2 In 2012, Bill published a book about the High Street debate – ‘Sold Out’ – and in 2013 he published his report on the state of the high street retail sector, ‘The Grimsey Review’ - identifying issues within town centres to be addressed. He wrote a second version in 2018 – The Grimsey Review 2. The District Council’s Network (DCN) and the Local Government Association (LGA) have welcomed these reports.
- 1.3 In essence, his report identifies:-
- We have a nation of ‘clone towns’
 - Footfall in the town centres is nationally down – 2.2% year on year – whilst general footfall is down – 1.7% year on year
 - 20th century retail is orientated around the car
 - 21st century retail is now orientating itself around the smartphone
 - Future towns need to be digitally connected
- 1.4 Saving our high streets requires:-
- Leadership
 - A 20-year town centre plan
 - Community hubs (not retail hubs)
 - Technology
 - Measurement of success
- 1.5 He believes that all cars will be robotic by 2030; there will be no till operations by 2024 and no High Street banks by 2025.
- 1.6 As a result of his 2013 report, Bill Grimsey worked extensively with a small Belgium/Flanders city called Roeselare which (over recent years) has had great success as a direct result of his involvement.
- 1.7 On 27 and 28 June 2019, the DCN conducted a study tour of Roeselare with District colleagues and the Bill Grimsey team (including Bill himself), which the Chief Executive attended on behalf of the Leader of the Council.
- 1.8 Roeselare created its own Town Plan in 2015, with seven ambitions:-
- To be the finest open-air shopping mall in Flanders
 - Encourage active support from traders
 - Create ‘smarter’ shopping
 - Provide a city of experiences
 - Provide a city accessible to all
 - Collaboration between stakeholders
 - A co-ordinated marketing approach

1.9 Roeselare's current statistics are:-

- 200,000 people catchment area
- 400 independent shops
- 6.5% unemployment
- 62k population
- Economic growth of 2.7%
- 8.3% empty shops
- Footfall has risen by approx. 175,000 (625k – 800k) between 2012-2017

1.10 Key findings from the study tour:-

- Leadership and collaboration most important to drive change
- Customers want experiences – events are key to success
- Customers want digital support with free Wi-Fi
- High quality cleanliness important to everybody
- Councils could encourage new business start-ups through incentives
- Master planning (long term) essential early on
- Sustainability is becoming more and more important to citizens

1.11 The Chief Executive attended a conference with Wayne Hemmingway (Hemmingway Design) in June 2019. Wayne talked about the unique role of culture and creativity in place making, especially those places that are seeking to improve social mobility, life expectancy and want to grow their local economy.

1.12 Places like Lowestoft, Hunstanton, Morecombe and Margate are making huge progress. The role of free festivals helps to generate opportunities for communities to celebrate, share, trade and reflect.

1.13 Culture and art lift the community spirit. Berlin for example has had huge success, probably because of the deliberate absence of local government involvement – they allowed things/events to happen, as a trial, and things really took off.

1.14 Regeneration comes out of great local people Wayne says. “Blackburn is open” is a festival of making things, linked to the industrial heritage of Blackburn. Similarly, Liverpool and Greenwich festivals take people to the history of water in their “To the Sea!” festivals. Lowestoft recently ran a 24-hour free festival “First Light” as the eastern most point of the UK.

1.15 Despite the vacancies, Wayne believes this is an exciting time for the High Street as it is on the verge of change. Being social in the High Street is more valuable now than money spent in the High Street. He believes we are only 20% into ‘the hurt’ but we can make positive adjustments particularly as the Millennials/Generation X will change things through their wish for sustainability and increased generosity. The smartphone has transformed our towns and free public Wi-Fi is essential.

1.16 “Town centre community events are the key to success. Make towns fun, not boring!” Wayne says.

- 1.17 The value and impact of cultural activity on the regeneration and sustainability of town centres has a growing evidence base from the work of researchers like Bill Grimsey and Wayne Hemingway. Community-focused and high impact arts events in town centres have been shown to have the potential to develop unique local identity, drive footfall and link the community. Family-focussed projects have been seen to achieve the highest impact. They can also positively weave our local creative industries – the fastest grow sector in the UK economy - into the identity of our Towns.
- 1.18 The project Arun Inspires, led by national children's charity, Artswork, is currently working in partnership with Arun District Council to develop and support new project activity locally targeted to transforming the life chances of local children and young people through arts and culture. The presence of the Programme Manager for Arun Inspires, based locally in ADC's offices, represents a useful opportunity to support increased investment in cultural regeneration for our town centres between now and 2021, without overly taxing officer resources.
- 1.19 Making use of existing grant-making frameworks used by the Wellbeing Team within the Council, a small grant-making scheme that supports local and regional cultural organisations to propose dynamic, inspiring cultural activity in our town centres would act as a vehicle for transformation. Grant-making processes could be managed within the remit of the Programme Manager with decision-making support by officers and councillors, to curate a new quality, inspiring family cultural event for Bognor Regis (Year 1) and Littlehampton (Year 2). A 1-day / weekend event is likely to include a spectacular centrepiece of art presented locally and supported by a collection of accessible and joyous family-centred activities that would encourage out-of-town visitors, drive footfall, raise local aspiration and dovetail into support for the night time economy.
- 1.20 The proposals have the enthusiastic support of the BID in Bognor, who can also offer project management support for any event and will feed into the regeneration ambitions for both town centres of the Economic Development Team.
- 1.21 Arun District Council continue to jointly fund the Littlehampton Town Centre Manager (with Littlehampton Town Council) and historically supported the Bognor Regis Town Centre Manager (through Section 106 monies).
- 1.22 Arun District Council has been very successful in attracting external funds to two of our town centres (Littlehampton £2.45m, Bognor Regis £1.69m plus money from West Sussex County Council and Town Councils) which highlights working together in a collaborative way.

2. PROPOSAL(S):

- 2.1 Within the findings from the DCN Study Tour, there are a few issues that could be addressed by Arun District Council in the short term to enable town centre growth and sustainability. For example:
 - 2.1.1 Prepare, plan and agree a town centre plan with Arundel Town Council, Bognor Regis Town Council and Littlehampton Town Council.
 - 2.1.2 To support the principle of £60k in the 2021 budget toward events in the three town centres (£25k – Bognor Regis, £25k - Littlehampton and £10k - Arundel) and request financial support from the respective Town Councils to support new events in the towns in order to support retailers. In Bognor Regis, support could also be requested from the Business Improvement District.

2.1.3 To investigate setting up a Business Rate fund for new start-up businesses (in a defined town centre) area to help reduce business costs.		
3. OPTIONS:		
3.1 To accept the proposals.		
3.2 To reject the proposals.		
3.3 To identify alternate or additional proposals.		
4. CONSULTATION:		
Has consultation been undertaken with:	YES	NO
Relevant Town/Parish Council (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton Town Councils)	√	
Relevant District Ward Councillors		√
Other groups/persons (District Council's Network)	√	
5. ARE THERE ANY IMPLICATIONS IN RELATION TO THE FOLLOWING COUNCIL POLICIES: (Explain in more detail at 6 below)	YES	NO
Financial	√	
Legal		√
Human Rights/Equality Impact Assessment		√
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime & Disorder Act		√
Sustainability	√	
Asset Management/Property/Land	√	
Technology	√	
Other (please explain)		
6. IMPLICATIONS:		
6.1 If Bill Grimsey is correct, austerity and financial difficulty for town centres is likely to continue as the digital age drives retail business to possible destruction.		
6.2 Roeselare have taken on board a number of ideas which have turned their fortunes positively. Should Cabinet support the recommendations, new town centre plans will help to establish a blue print for success.		
7. REASON FOR THE DECISION:		
To provide a practical and financial framework to enable town centre regeneration in Arundel, Bognor Regis and Littlehampton.		
8. EFFECTIVE DATE OF THE DECISION: 16 October 2019		

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Bill Grimsey website - <http://www.vanishinghighstreet.com>

The Grimsey Review 2 - [Grimsey Review 2](#)

DCN press release - [DCN press release - more powers and flexibilities needed](#)