

## **SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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**WARD(S):** Central

### **PART I** **FOR COMMENT & CONSIDERATION**

#### **TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT UPDATE**

##### **1. Purpose of Report**

This report explains the town centre activities undertaken since the appointment of the town centre manager and sets out the ambition of Slough Town Centre Partnership. Also included is an update on The Curve's impact on the town centre since its opening in September 2016.

##### **2. Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action**

The Committee is requested to:

- Note the progress made to date in delivering the priority actions for town centre improvements.
- Recommend to the Cabinet to support the exploration of a Business Improvement District for Slough as the best possible solution for revitalising Slough town centre.

##### **3. The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan**

The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy (SJWS) is the document that details the priorities agreed for Slough with partner organisations. The SJWS has been developed using a comprehensive evidence base that includes the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA).

##### **3a. Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy Priorities**

The activities listed in this report address and link to the Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy (SJWS) priorities below.

Priorities:

1. Protecting vulnerable children
2. Increasing life expectancy by focusing on inequalities
3. Improving mental health and wellbeing
4. Housing

The local actions taken will help to reverse the decline of the high street. The town centre management activities are responding to the needs and requirements of our local businesses and residents. In the Issues and Options Consultation Document of a Local Plan for Slough, it states as part of A Vision for Slough in 2036, “The centre of Slough will be an attractive, vibrant hub providing high quality offices, retail, leisure, landmark buildings and cultural opportunities for our diverse communities”.

### 3b. Five Year Plan Outcomes

The actions highlighted in the report will help deliver outcome 5 of the 2017-2021 Five Year Plan - Slough will attract, retain and grow businesses and investment to provide jobs and opportunities for our residents (Outcome 5).

However it is important to understand that the town centre management activities also help deliver other outcomes such as:

- Our children and young people will have the best start in life and opportunities to give them positive lives (Outcome 1).
- Slough will be an attractive place where people choose to live, work and visit (Outcome 3).

### 4. Other Implications

#### (a) Financial

The majority of the actions outlined in this report are funded via the Economic Development team budget. There will be some financial implications of proposed actions such as: Scoping exercise and BID feasibility study, development and implementation of a town centre app, discount card, website, and provision of town centre wide Wi-Fi. Any relevant funding decisions will be presented to Cabinet when required.

#### (b) Risk Management

Risk/Threat/Opportunity	Mitigation(s)	Recommendation
Lack of funding to deliver identified actions for town centre improvements	Explore sponsorship and bid opportunities for external funding	The Council to consider allocating capital funding for town centre improvements
Inviability of a Business Improvement District for Slough	Town centre management team in collaboration with town centre stakeholders including the council to devise effective town centre improvement plans	The Council to enter into discussions with the new owner of The Queensmere and Observatory shopping centres to help change the image of the High Street

#### (c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no Human Rights Act and legal implications identified.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

It is not necessary to undertake an Equalities Impact Assessment at this stage. However should any actions require an assessment, this exercise will be carried out when necessary according to Slough Borough Council's rules and guidelines.

5. Supporting Information

- 5.1 Slough Town Centre Partnership – a thorough engagement and dialogue with retailers led to the formation of Slough Town Centre Partnership by Slough Borough Council. The Partnership is comprised of members of the public, private, voluntary and community sectors and operates as a forum. It is bringing together people that have a stake in the development of the town centre. The key themes for action are: a clean, attractive, safe and accessible town centre.

The forum has been instrumental in obtaining business views and sharing information on regeneration activities underway in Slough town. The Partnership, chaired by Marks & Spencer and Starbucks, aims to position Slough town centre as a key business location as well as a local destination for shopping and leisure. In order to implement this vision which links to the Five Year Plan Outcome 5, Priority "Creating a vibrant town centre", a number of actions focussing on improving the image and perceptions of the town have been devised.

- 5.2 Understanding the required town centre improvements – A town centre visitor satisfaction survey was undertaken in 2016 to evaluate visitors' views and perceptions of the town centre and identify their needs and requirements. The survey covered areas such as physical appearance, cleanliness, range and variety of shops, crime and safety, shopping experience and evening usage of the town centre. 65% of the respondents indicated that improvements to the general appearance would encourage them to use Slough town centre. Respondents stated that the high concentration of betting shops, cash converter outlets, takeaways, pound shops, phone repair shops was deterring them from using the town centre.

A footfall procurement activity currently underway will help to monitor and evaluate the positive impact of the regeneration projects, the impact of Slough Town Centre Partnership's actions and the performance of the town centre.

- 5.3 A joint marketing plan for Slough town centre – Slough Town Centre Partnership is devising a plan to run promotional campaigns for the town centre. To reach out to a wider audience, a town app, website, a discount card are being explored as is the provision of a town centre wide Wi-Fi. A successful events programme in collaboration with HOME Slough - the Arts Council 3-year investment programme, The Curve, Queensmere Observatory shopping centres, Slough Borough Council and Slough Aspire was delivered between April 2016 and February 2017. The High Street has demonstrated a strong potential to become a destination that can host events, markets and festivals. It is envisaged that more activities will be delivered in 2017. Retailers, community organisations and the council will need to continue collaborating and working together effectively to drive footfall and increase consumer spend.

- 5.4 The balance of shopping/commerce compared to housing in the town centre – *The Review of the Local Plan for Slough, The Issues and options consultation, 16 January-27 February 2017* document suggests the objectives of the Local Plan

are to support innovation, growth and regeneration and ensure the town centre is the focus for high density housing and major retail, leisure, office and cultural development.

- 5.5 Is the emphasis quality or quantity? Are we looking to ‘import’ shoppers, or operate as a centre for residents? – The Local Plan suggests there will be no compromise on quality. The centre of Slough will be an attractive, vibrant hub providing high quality offices, retail, leisure, landmark buildings and cultural opportunities.
- Slough town centre already operates as a district centre like many other town centres across the country. The redevelopment of The Queensmere and Observatory shopping centres will revitalise the town centre into a residential, leisure and shopping destination.
- 5.6 Impact of the Abu Dhabi investment – The impact of this investment cannot be gauged at this stage because the asset management company who acquired The Queensmere and Observatory shopping centres on behalf of Abu Dhabi Investment Authority have yet to announce their redevelopment plans. However, as stipulated in the *Issues and Options Document, 16 January – 27 February 2017*, it is believed that this major investment will transform the centres into a residential, retail and leisure destination which could attract people from further afield and restore Slough’s role as a sub regional centre.
- 5.7 How will the Council ensure that contractors follow guidelines – Slough Borough Council has the Contract Procedure Rules which provide the framework for the procuring of goods and services for the Council. All contracts are awarded in accordance with all relevant United Kingdom and European legislation including best value and European procurement legislation. The Council’s Procurement Operating Procedures provide for increased assurance and new practice guidance to Council officers who procure goods, services and works. These Procedures provide advice and guidance to service areas to promote consistent procurement standards of practice and compliance with the Council’s constitution and Public Procurement Regulations.
- 5.8 An evening and night time economy – The town centre visitor satisfaction survey found that 59% of respondents said they don't visit Slough town centre in the evening; 69% of respondents stated a safe and secure town centre would encourage them to use Slough town centre in the evening; and 94% would not recommend Slough town centre as an evening destination.

Our ambition for an evening and night time economy is for Slough town centre to offer a more diverse range of activity which could include arts & culture, leisure, food & dining, education and events. The Purple Flag programme has been identified as the possible solution to developing an evening and night time economy. Purple Flag is the international accreditation scheme and “gold standard” for town centres in the evening and at night. Places that reach the standards can fly the flag, to the benefit of their image, local perceptions and their local economies. A Kickstart Workshop, an introduction to the Purple Flag programme is planned for 2017 to start the journey in applying for the accreditation.

5.9 A Business Improvement District (BID) for the town centre – While the significant development of regeneration and infrastructure projects are progressing in the centre of Slough, it is advised that greater focus should also be given to the High Street. Consequently the development and delivery of a BID could be a possible solution to meeting the needs and requirements of residents, workers, shoppers and visitors. A BID is a recognised model for engaging with stakeholders, particularly businesses. A BID should be developed by the local business community for the benefit of the businesses, whilst benefiting the rest of the community within the area. It is established through a ballot of all those that will be required to pay a levy. This ballot follows a thorough research and consultation phase that focuses on the needs and requirements of the potential contributors within that location and, if successful, a BID levy becomes mandatory for a period of up to five years. A BID invests in its local area by delivering projects and services against an agreed business plan that is designed to provide benefits to those who pay first and foremost whilst contributing to the wider community. A BID operates as a partnership vehicle accountable to its contributors.

An expert placemaking consultancy will need to be appointed in order to carry out a scoping exercise and feasibility study. These activities will determine the viability of a BID for Slough town centre. If viable, a BID proposal will be produced followed by the development and implementation stages. Discussions have been initiated with a regeneration consultancy that has demonstrable experience in successfully managing BIDs across the country. It is envisaged the scoping exercise will be undertaken in 2017.

5.10 The Curve's impact on the town centre – Anecdotal evidence shows that the town centre has seen an increase in footfall since the opening of The Curve in September 2016 although there is no data to confirm this increment. The public events held in conjunction with HOME Slough and The Curve have also contributed to this positive change. Retailers such as Greggs in McKenzie Street have reported an increase in sales. There are plans for retailers to work with The Curve in order to design special offers with a view to promoting their brand and attract more customers.

## **6. Comments of Other Committees**

None.

## **7. Conclusion**

This report has highlighted the town centre management actions taken since the creation of Slough Town Centre Partnership and lists future plans which will help to change the image and perceptions of the area. This report also seeks the support of the committee in exploring a Business Improvement District for Slough Town Centre.

## **8. Appendices Attached**

'A' Town Centre Impact on The Curve

## **9. Background Papers**

- 1 Slough Town Centre Partnership Terms of Reference
- 2 Review of the Local Plan for Slough, Issues and Options Consultation Document, 16 January – 27 February 2017

## **Town Centre Impact on The Curve:**

Performance Indicators for The Curve are collected quarterly. Currently, these include outputs for Library, Learning and Curve Development and the data is available for four months to the end of December 2016, covering the first four months.

The headline figures for Q3 year on year comparison (2015 and 2016) are as follows:

- Recorded Library visits are up by 63% to 89,080
- Issues have increased by 15% to 50,450
- Active borrowers have increased by 30% to 11,284

The Curve launched its own website in October ([www.thecurveslough.com](http://www.thecurveslough.com)). Combined reach through Library Twitter and Facebook and The Curve Twitter and Facebook is increasing month on month, with total Facebook impressions reaching 185,700 and Twitter 148,200.

'Impressions' refers to the number of times our messages are added to someone's Twitter timeline or Facebook feed.

There have been 237 events hosted at The Curve with a total attendance of 6735. This does not include external hirers. The Curve hosted its first pantomime 'Sleeping Beauty' from 20 December to 28 December with 12 performances. Ticket sales = 1385, equivalent to 55% across the run. Busiest days were matinees on 27 Dec and 28 Dec with nearly sold-out shows.

Really positive feedback received from members of the public – anecdotally as they left the performance; through social media and direct email back to us. A partnership with Slough Children's Trust enabled over 180 young children and their families to be invited on the first evening as a special event for foster families at a fully subsidised rate. Plans are presently being discussed to programme pantomime for December 2017 and extend the run to enable school visits.

Gallery @The Curve is now regularly hosting exhibitions. In February, Alexander Sádlo, a Czech born artist who has lived in Slough for over 30 years, exhibited a retrospective of his work. A private view evening was hosted on his behalf by the Czech Ambassador to the UK, His Excellence Libor Sečka.

Both Employment and Learning report increasing engagement with the public through courses and advice sessions - the town centre location attracting many more enquirers across the services, including for 1 to 1 appointments and for job clubs. The ripple effect means that all the library venues where sessions are delivered through signposting, and in particular at The Curve, are busier. Employability workshops at The Curve are also well attended.

Creative People and Places – HOME Slough, is an Arts Council 3-year investment programme that develops arts and culture in Slough. A number of activities were provided during the autumn in the town centre, culminating in the Spark festival before Christmas that illuminated the town centre - processing through the High Street and including over 100 community participants. This is just one of a growing number of events that The Curve is hosting as part of the Creative People and Places – HOME Slough.