

<p>Non-Executive Report of the:</p> <p>Housing Scrutiny Sub-committee</p> <p>10th September 2019</p>	
<p>Report of: Fiona Crehan, High Streets & Town Centres Team Manager</p>	<p>Classification: Unrestricted</p>
<p>High Streets & Town Centres – Supporting new and existing businesses</p>	

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report update for the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee on progress to date implementing the High Streets & Town Centres Strategy (2017-2022).
- 1.2 This report provides an update on the development and delivery of high street regeneration programmes, working with Council team and local stakeholders, to address weaknesses on each key local high street and in-turn improve their competitiveness and performance.
- 1.3 This report also summarises how new and existing high street businesses, including market traders, are being supported to improve their competitiveness and share in the benefits resulting from high street regeneration and local growth.

2. Recommendations:

- 2.1 The Housing sub-committee is recommended to:
 1. Note the contents of this report and the presentation.
 2. Note the invitation to visit local high streets that are the subject of regeneration programmes and meet local businesses, market traders and community groups taking part in regeneration.

3. DETAILS OF THE REPORT

Background

- 3.1 The High Streets & Town Centres (HS&TC) team was set-up in summer 2016 to be a dedicated resource, working with local stakeholders and Council teams, to improve the performance and competitiveness of local town centres.
- 3.2 A High Streets & Town Centres Strategy (2017-2022) was developed in 2017.
- 3.3 The draft strategy reviewed characteristics of key local high street, using a set of 20 Performance Indicators (PIs), which are ranked to provide a baseline measure of the performance of characteristics of each key high street.
- 3.4 The draft strategy was then shared with council teams and local stakeholders.
- 3.5 A Markets Strategy was planned by the Market Services team. However, it was agreed by senior officers, in consultation with Cabinet Member Cllr Uz-Zaman in 2018, to combine the two documents in the High Streets & Town Centres Strategy. The strategy was approved by Cabinet in October 2018.
- 3.6 A Working Group was set-up with Council officers from a range of teams to support the development and co-ordinate delivery of the high street regeneration programmes which aim to address weakness highlighted in the ranking of the PIs and improve the performance of our key local high streets.

Implementing the HS&TC Strategy through regeneration programmes

- 3.7 The following information summarises progress developing high street regeneration programmes inc: activating underused assets and vacant units, improving the public realm, supporting local businesses & market traders and working with the local community.

Roman Road East Regeneration programme (Budget £388K)

- 3.8 The regeneration programmes started in 2015 and delivered: community events led by Roman Road Trust, shopfront improvements, electric power points for market traders and new market stall canopies for traders.

Brick Lane Regeneration programme– (Budget Phase £2.69M)

- 3.9 The Brick Lane Town Centre Manager was recruited in January 2017 to manage the development and delivery of the regeneration programme.
- 3.10 A town centre partnership was set-up with local businesses and stakeholders.
- 3.11 A Public Realm Feasibility Study was completed by December 2017; with recommendations and costs for: shopfront improvements, architectural lighting, wayfinding, pedestrianizing part of Brick Lane, decluttering street furniture, traffic calming at junctions, street market security measures, accessibility improvements to pavements and replacing the Banglatown Arch.
- 3.12 The delivery of this programme was approved by cabinet in December 2017.
- 3.13 The detailed public realm design is being progress by the Council Highway Engineering team and consultants Project Centre. However this has been delayed due to the development of the Liveable Streets in '19/'20.

- 3.14 The HS&TC team is commissioning the detailed design for the Bangla Arch and progressing the renaming of Osbourne Street to Brick Lane.
- 3.15 The process of developing the redesign for the Banglatown Arch, an important part of local heritage, has been agreed with local Members and heritage and community groups to ensure the new design brings together all the communities on Brick Lane today.
- 3.16 Under the Thriving High Street programme New Homes Bonus funding of £1M is supporting delivery of some improvements and the development of plans for Watney Market, Roman Road West and Bethnal Green.

Watney Market Regeneration programme

- 3.17 The service yards off the street market in Watney Market had issues with rough sleeping, urinating and drug taking as a key weakness in the town.
- 3.18 The HS&TC team, worked with Asset Management, CCTV, Market Services, Tower Hamlets Homes, retailers and market traders, to:
 - Install CCTV cameras (monitored from CCTV Suite in Mulberry Place)
 - Install fob-activated security shutters to control access to the yards.
 - Recruited a security/ caretaker to monitor use of the security measures
 - Opening up the male toilet for market traders to use
 - Painting the service yards, numbering parking bays and installing signage
 - Resolving issues with sub-letting of lock-up units in service yard
 - A prototype design for market canopy for rig and barrows stalls.
 - Replacing token system electric metres with metres that allow market traders to pay and top-up online (September 2019)
- 3.19 Tower Hamlets Homes (THH) will consult on a Traffic Management Order (TMO) in November '19, to enable parking enforcement in the service yards.
- 3.20 The Council's underground car park by Deancross Road is used by residents in housing blocks above and has 90+ vacant parking bays.
- 3.21 A feasibility study and costs is being developed to set out improvement plans for the car park and to create new secure exit onto Commercial Road.
- 3.22 A feasibility study is being commissioned to explore options to activate 80 vacant garages off Hainton Close.
- 3.23 This will help activate underused assets and increase local footfall.

Roman Road West (Globe Town) Regeneration programme

- 3.24 Under the Thriving High Street programme feasibility studies were developed with local businesses and community groups to enable funding of £1.68M to be secured in summer 2019 to implement improvement including:
 - i. Opening-up a railway arch to create a new walking route for 15K staff & students to connect Queen Mary University (QMU) campus with Roman Road West Town Centre via Meath Gardens. Network Rail confirmed in July 2019 we can progress to an access agreement.
 - ii. Wayfinding to draw people into the town centre from Meath Gardens
 - iii. Regeneration the market square (lighting, seating, market layout etc)
 - iv. Relaunching the market with recruitment campaign for new traders
 - v. Turn up to 31 lock-ups at the base of housing blocks into workspace
 - vi. Replace solid metal shutters on shops with open grills
 - vii. Activate vacant shops units and consider change of use if appropriate

Bethnal Green Regeneration Programme

- 3.25 Along Bethnal Green Road the street market dominates the high street and cuts off sightlines from traffic on the road to shops along the street.
- 3.26 High Street businesses shared that some traders anchor their market stall to their building as they can roll into the roll when it's windy.
- 3.27 A prototype for market canopies is being tested by a trader, which include clear side panels to allow better line of sight from the road to the shops
- 3.28 Work is being developed to review the Bethnal Green market layout and create a sustainable market scale to meet customer needs.
- 3.29 A feasibility study to improve shopfront facades and make better more of the proximity to the V & A Children's museum to improve footfall.

Middlesex Street Regeneration Programme

- 3.30 A Public Realm Improvement feasibility study was jointly commissioned by Tower Hamlets Council and The City of London in 2018 and recommended improvement to the high street, including Petticoat Lane Market.
- 3.31 A feasibility study is being carried out by October 2019 to activate the toilet block on Leyden Street, which has been closed for 14 years; to create workspace and a toilet at street level for market traders and visitors.
- 3.32 A study is being carried out by October 2019 to improve the layout of the street market and make better use of the public realm.
- 3.33 Funding has been secured for £2.7M from capital delivery programme to implement improvements to the street market

Whitechapel Regeneration Programme

- 3.34 The HS&TC team are working with Market Services to identify storage and parking space for market traders to use.

Respond to challenges faced by market traders and HS&TC businesses

- 3.35 The growing number and changing profile of local residents and also new commercial space into some areas in the borough, is creating new business opportunity for high street businesses and market traders.
- 3.36 Encouraging market traders and high street businesses to adapt their menu and product offer is a challenge and requires an on-going conversation.
- 3.37 Some café/coffee shops on our high streets do not open until after 9am and so don't benefit from commuter traffic.
- 3.38 Footfall counts carried out from 8am to 4pm are shared with businesses to encourage them to consider adjusting their opening hours to capture more trade.
- 3.39 In response to a requests from businesses, a Food Hygiene Inspector role was created in Environmental Health in 2017 and to date has supporting over 90 high streets businesses to enable them to improve their operating standards and get ready for revisit to refresh their rating.
- 3.40 Introduced Just Eat Managers to local restaurants to share their market intelligence on the scale of local orders and how our local restaurants benefit.

- 3.41 This resulted in Brick Lane 8 curry houses signing up and increasing sales in 2018 and more in 2019.
- 3.42 Introducing Trip Advisor to high street businesses showed them the importance of online reviews and asking customers to post about good experiences supports their marketing.
- 3.43 The HS&TC team, working with Enterprise and other teams, support high street businesses and market traders to adapt their business and share in the benefits of local economic growth. Support has included funding:
- Supporting 8 Curry Houses to adapt and modernise their menu,
 - Visual merchandising advice to 4 businesses to improve window displays
 - Social media training for 40+ high street businesses and market traders to increase digital presence beyond only 30% on the high street.
 - A Food Hygiene Inspector to help businesses improve their rating to 4 or 5
 - Promotion participation in Best Bar None and Pub Watch groups
 - Share concerns and issues with Community Safety re ASB issues.

Responding to struggling/underutilised HS&TCs

- 3.44 The HS&TC team worked with Planning Enforcement to remove out of date For Sale/To Let signs and remove illegal shop signage in town centres.
- 3.45 The Local Plan has limited control over the concentration of coffee shops (A3) and it is not possible to control the product or prices a business charges.
- 3.46 But working with Planning & Development Control officers is helping to protect the retail footprint on the high street and implement Article 4 by commenting on planning applications to prevent the change of use from commercial to residential and ensuring change in use classes adds to and does not create too much competition.
- 3.47 The HS&TC team worked with private landlords and their agents to effectively advertise long-term vacant commercial space above shops (e.g. 68 Brick Lane), and prevent it being changed to residential, which bring in 4 times the income. (This approach resulted in 3 floors, vacant for 4+ years, activated in early 2019).
- 3.48 The HS&TC team are working with the Council's Asset Management team to activate vacant units on Roman Road and Brick Lane by introducing businesses and generate rental enquiries and bring the units back into use. Also promoting the use of Meanwhile Use Agreement to stimulate interest for a longer term let.
- 3.49 Improving shopfront and changing solid metal shutters into open grills is lifting the look of the high street and improving its appeal.
- 3.50 Working with Community Safety on anti touting enforcement under the Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) was started in 2018. The PSPO resulted in several prosecutions for aggressive touting and is helping to improve the evening experience for visitors to Brick Lane.

- 3.51 Working with Community Safety and Communications team in operation Bill Stickers to target the companies putting stickers on lamp columns and street furniture. This resulted in the prosecution of several companies.
- 3.52 Making the most of this opportunity and create better connections between where people are concentrated and local high street is opening up opportunities to improve footfall and support local businesses.

Innovative solutions to prioritising & delivery joint priorities

- 3.53 The HS&TC team are working with Council teams to develop solutions and help meet mayor and council priorities including:
- Dialogue with property owners, property management companies and the City of London Public Realm team has identified space the council and its contractors could use to store waste containers and take waste off the street.
 - Working with Workpath, Market Services, local community groups and Housing Associations the HS&TC team is piloting the recruitment and support for local ladies interested in becoming market traders. (Traders are about 90% male on street markets). This work will lead to launching a group of traders on Petticoat Lane in early autumn.
 - Working with Public Health to integrate dementia friendly design for public spaces into the high street regeneration improvements.
 - In response to businesses asking for a better pest control service that the private sector – the HS&TC team is working with Environmental Health team to carry out market research to test demand for a Commercial Pest Control delivered by the Council.

Attract external investment

- 3.54 Joint working with borough partners and local stakeholder is creating opportunities to leverage match funding for project and secure additional funding to support delivery of our high street regeneration programmes including:
- The Aldgate Partnership secured £50K funding in April 2019 from Transport for London (TfL), match funded by the Middlesex Street Regeneration programme. The funding will enable the council to purchase equipment and containers to support waste management and recycling on street markets and high streets in the Aldgate area.
 - In April 2018 The Aldgate Partnership expressed an interest in developing a Business Improvement District in Aldgate. A formal proposal has now been submitted and a separate report is going to Cabinet on 25th September 2019.
 - Supporting the Council's Place Making team with a bid to Historic England in summer 2019 to invest in Heritage at risk properties on Wentworth Streets (result due autumn 2019)

- Joint working with the City of London on a future Growth bid to the GLA focusing on Middlesex street area.
- Supporting the Regeneration team with Good Growth Bid to the GLA for Whitechapel High Street in 2019.

4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The implementation of high street regeneration programmes under the High Street & Town Centres Strategy (2017-2022) will positively impact the quality of life of residents living in Tower Hamlets, particularly people living near our key high streets.
- 4.2 The implementation of the strategy will maximise economic benefits arising from local growth and in general improve outcomes for people from protected groups by supporting our independent businesses many of which are owned by people from BAME backgrounds and by providing low cost opportunities to start businesses, assisting people from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- 4.3 An equality Impact assessment was carried out for the HS&TC Strategy cabinet report in October 2018.

5. OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 :Crime Reduction

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and Crime are particular challenges for our town centres, with aggressive begging, alcohol and drunkenness issues, drug dealing, drug use and assaults of particular concerns.

There is also a link between ASB concerns and the borough's night-time economy, particularly in the west of the borough.

Reducing ASB is one of the priorities of the strategy and a PI is being monitored as the strategy is implemented. This will involve joint working with services promoting responsible alcohol consumption and responsible management of licensed premises, supporting the implementation of the emerging CCTV Strategy and Waste Strategy and the Council's review of enforcement services.

The HS&TC team will work with the Community Safety team and Crime & ASB Operations Group to help improve reporting of crime on our key high streets and town centres.

5.2 Environmental (including Air Quality)

Public realm improvements are a key priority in the strategy and include promoting green travel including: way finding, walking routes and quiet routes between high streets, installing electric vehicle charging points and accommodating cycle storage and car hire/ share solutions.

Implementing the strategy will link with the Council's strategies including: Air

Quality, Public Health & Well-being.

6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications emanating from this report which provides an update on progress in implementing the high street and town centre strategy. Budgets for the works were approved prior to commencement of the programme and funded from s106 agreements.

7. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1 This is a report for the Committee to note. There are no immediate legal implications arising from the report.
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Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- None

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Cabinet Report
<https://democracy.towerhamlets.gov.uk/documents/s137159/6.6a%20-%20App1%20-%20High%20Streets%20Town%20Centre%20Strategy%202017-2022.pdf>

Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended)

List of “Background Papers” used in the preparation of this report

- NONE if none.

Officer contact details for documents:

Or state N/A