



CHESTERFIELD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

*Overview and Performance Scrutiny
Forum*

Scrutiny Project Group

report on the

Town Centre

Date agreed by O&PSF:

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1.0 Introduction and review aims

- 1.1 This report aims to examine how the Town Centre can be enhanced to make it an area that is more reflective of modern-day trends, habits and preferences.
- 1.2 Forty years ago the majority of local people shopped in the town centre, at the shops and the market, and made the occasional visit to Sheffield when looking for a day out and some bigger stores. People reminisce about those days and regularly voice comments like “Chesterfield isn’t what it used to be!” They’re right - it isn’t, nor is anywhere. The world has changed and will continue to evolve. Retail and leisure habits bear no relation to those of years ago.
- 1.3 The first web site went on-line in 1991 and the rate at which technology has since influenced our lives has expanded exponentially. Meadowhall opened a few months earlier and started to immediately make a huge impact on the way we shop. Going shopping used to be something done out of necessity; since Meadowhall and other out-of-town shopping arenas arrived it’s become a leisure activity.

1.4 In 2016 The Guardian explained how there had been a huge shift in consumer behaviour, called the “experience economy”, from buying things to doing things. Later last year a senior Ikea executive

“The older generation are looking for new experiences because they have already bought enough stuff. The young can’t afford houses to fill so don’t waste time looking for lamps and rugs. They want more old-fashioned, communal experiences from their town centres: skating, bowling, literary and food festivals...”

warned that the appetite of western consumers to own ever more goods and chattels was probably waning. “In the west”, he warned, “we have probably hit peak stuff.”¹ Now retailers ranging from fashion to food chains are making similar observations, because official data shows that households are spending less on clothes and food but

more on holidays, cars, entertainment and eating out. Spending on gadgets that keep people connected to the internet is also on the rise.

1.5 “We increasingly see a trend for consumers to spend more on experiences rather than on products,” said Kevin Jenkins, the UK and Ireland managing director of payment card group Visa Europe.²

“...the most successful towns are now those like Cheltenham, which had the fastest growth in house prices last year. It has four major festivals, junior rugby and football clubs and endless coffee shops where self-employed residents set up their offices for the day. Blackburn has street fairs, art installations and a lantern parade. Dulverton on Exmoor has starlight festivals and fireworks as well as a thriving library and the only chain store is a Co-op. Success is all about creating a close community again, as well as fast broadband for the new stay-at-home workers...”

1.6 One experience that seems to have fallen out of fashion is the shopping trip. Once a very British pastime, family shopping trips are being replaced by online shopping and trips to retail parks, and face-to-face shopping is increasingly just as a result of the collection of “click and

¹ Steve Howard, Chief Sustainability Officer at IKEA, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/jan/18/weve-hit-peak-home-furnishings-says-ikea-boss-consumerism>

² Kevin Jenkins, UK and Ireland managing director of Visa Europe, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/may/06/the-way-we-shop-now-the-revolution-in-british-spending-habits>

collect” items ordered online. On-line shopping continues to grow by several percentage points each year and is here to stay.

- 1.7 It's not possible to turn the clock back to before Meadowhall and before the internet was developed sufficiently to allow shopping from your armchair. Of course many people have not and will not adopt shopping via technology but they may have to travel further and further to get the shopping experience that they prefer. Town centres will continue to host retail but, in future, the mix will need to evolve to include more food, entertainment, culture, living accommodation and experiential opportunities if Chesterfield is to secure a vibrant future.

“...towns do need transport links but they should be used to entice [people] in from the villages. Market squares need people. Councils should change more of their retail space into residential use, helping to ease housing problems by providing flats and homes on the high street and in redesigned former shopping centres.

The elderly should be encouraged to downsize to accommodation in town centres along with the young. Both groups want what a bustling market town should offer: cafés, parks, hairdressers, markets selling local produce and leisure activities at reasonable prices in proximity to their homes...”

- 1.8 There are several major new initiatives, close to Chesterfield Town Centre, that are either currently underway or due to start imminently. There is a need to ensure that those projects progress taking into account the impact they may have on the town centre. It's vital that the town centre changes to meet present day needs; it's also crucial that the on-going developments are managed in a way that recognises that they must complement rather than negatively impact on the town centre. Project managers have been asked to provide assurance and those thoughts are documented in Section 4.

“...there has been a lot of talk about building new towns for the future in recent years, but we should reinvigorate the old towns first.”

“More fun and fewer shops can save our towns” by Alice Thompson, 12 January, 2018, The Times

2.0 Reasons for the review and link to Council priorities

2.1 Several large developments are planned for Chesterfield which will provide a boost to the economy and visitor numbers and enhance our retail, leisure and cultural offering. These developments will bring a mixture of improvements including:

- better access and transport arrangements within the town centre and to the town from other locations;
- new hotel accommodation in the town centre and nearby;
- more office and retail units;
- a new major leisure resort, visitor attraction and university campus within easy reach of the town centre;
- new restaurants and bars;
- more houses and apartments close to the town centre;
- modernised parking spaces in the town centre.

2.2 The common aim in all these developments is to drive regeneration and economic growth in Chesterfield. This scrutiny project seeks to ensure that there is a joined up approach by the Council when it considers, supports and enables these developments and plans to be carried out.

2.3 Chesterfield is historically a market town and this is used as its unique selling point on entrances to the town and visitor information. However, due to the shift to online sales and increase in out of town shopping areas, footfall into the town centre has dropped.



2.4 Using data gathered from residents, visitors and businesses; the group seeks to identify the areas where improvements are needed and suggest changes that will broaden and enhance the town centre mix with a new emphasis on finding ways to increase the length of stay and encourage activities from mid-afternoon to evening.

- 2.5 This project aims to support the Council Plan priority “to make Chesterfield a thriving borough.” To achieve this, the project’s aim is to ensure that all developments that may have linkage to the town centre consider their impact, eliminate unwanted surprises and have a joined up approach to support the vision for the town centre.
- 2.6 Within this priority, the project will focus on the objectives “to develop our great town centre” and “to make sure that local people benefit from growth in Chesterfield Borough.” The town centre is the focal point for the area and the project will seek to ensure it broadens its offer, appeal, and its connectivity.

3.0 Research undertaken through focus groups

- 3.1 It became clear early on in project group discussions that the key to unlocking the potential of Chesterfield and understanding what needed to change, it was vital we spoke with the public and businesses to get their views. Two focus groups representing the public and business community met separately and the following points summarised their thoughts on the areas where improvement was needed and suggestions for making those improvements. Please see Appendix 3 full notes from the focus groups.
- 3.2 It is worth noting that both groups felt that Chesterfield was in a good position and, as shown below, most areas of concern require relatively small improvements or a re-imagined vision to enhance the town centre offering and make Chesterfield more attractive to residents, businesses and visitors:

Key areas for consideration and/or development:

3.3 Town Centre Experience

- Signage showing how to get from one area of the town to another needs improving as does car parking (including provision of well-lit overnight parking) and ease of navigating public transport;
- Street scene – Chesterfield contains some historic and beautiful buildings and they need to be looked after better and more noticeable. Enhanced cleanliness throughout the town could make it more attractive, particularly the route from the train station;
- Though the town centre feels generally safe, the ASB issues particularly around New Square made visiting the town centre not an enjoyable experience particularly at night; there was also a need to resolve the “rough sleeping” problem;
- Experiential spend now exceeds retail – this needs to be taken into account. Increase the leisure offer in the town centre so that people need to come into the town for it;
- The role of volunteer resource could be maximised e.g. town centre ambassadors, guides, museum support to enhance the visitor experience;
- Wifi access is becoming standard, online walking apps, card payment options for traders, needs to be a priority;
- Purple Flag status enhances the evening economy; current perception is that the town is very quiet after 3/4pm;
- Encourage food providers to offer a financial incentive to holders of CBC leisure tickets (e.g. film/play ticket);
- In order to encourage greater numbers to visit the town centre, public transport must improve to ensure inward and outward journeys are viable. Real time travel information on electronic signs;
- Need to recognise the shifting focus of retail – now from lower Knivesmithgate to Ravenside; vital we improve the ease of access within the entire area to encourage Ravenside shoppers to come up into the town centre and vice versa.



- Look at softening town centre parking costs to increase footfall. Late afternoon/early evening visits would greatly increase if charges after 3pm could be removed or reduced.

3.4 **Re-branding and public perception**

- Current perception was that the town needed to rediscover its identity and there has been a loss of focus on what's in Chesterfield. "Historic Market Town" does it still apply? Realism is needed and the current description raises expectation;
- The business representatives felt that the Council needed to be more adventurous in order to transform the town centre, they felt the Council was holding back to avoid taking a financial hit.
- Public consultation required when considering changes to the offer e.g. market re-configuration;
- Need to recognise and accept the reality of the modern day Market Place – online retail and out of town shopping will continue to impact and the current situation with the lack of stalls creates a centre for ASB;
- Emphasis on creating new initiatives – pop-up shops, restaurants and art galleries in vacant shops, new events e.g. film festival, literature festival, folk festival, food festival, beer festival using New Square;
- The growth of independent, niche traders will prove attractive and should be actively encouraged;
- Vital to broaden footfall in currently quiet periods, 3-7pm. Incentives for parking off peak, not just for CBC residents and increasing the amount of residential accommodation in the town centre;
- Examine possibilities of working towards Purple Flag status with the intention of the town being better prepared for Peak Resort visitors who are likely to arrive in the currently quiet period;
- Work with partner companies (e.g. outside the Chesterfield Borough to draw people in) to make sure information and leaflets about Chesterfield are displayed in the right places;
- Great opportunity to market Chesterfield to reflect its position with regard to the Peak District. The town's proximity should be

used promotionally to encourage overnight stays.

3.5 Focal point

- The need for an adaptable space in town centre for large events. New Square is one of the most attractive parts of the town and would be ideal for an outdoor event space or eating area.
- Simple low key water feature would provide a much needed attraction that could be the focal point for seating and experiential spend.
- Static display space required in the town in order to enhance visitor experience.
- Identify an area of the town as a “quarter” e.g. cultural quarter where the Museum, Theatre and Parish Church are.



Water feature in Rotherham

3.6 Developments in progress

- Northern Gateway – will revitalise a quiet area of the town. New public realm work will lead people past the old co-op building into a town that needs to complement the vibrant new area. Concerns from businesses that the impact won't be as great after the project was downsized.
- Peak Resort gives the town an opportunity to showcase itself to foreign visitors. We need to be ready.
- Waterside – perception of focus groups was that it has potential to add to the town's offering but was also a possible threat to existing businesses and businesses looking to invest in the central area. Must offer something different to the town centre and this needs to be made clear.
- Consideration needs to be given to the threat of other "in-the-pipeline" developments such as "The Glass Yard" which will aim to offer a food and drink mix on Whittington Moor, all under one

roof with parking provided.³

3.7 Market

- Attraction to visitors to the town and to prospective businesses who prefer to be near the market.
- The market is used as a key selling point for Chesterfield but either the market needs to improve or the key selling point needs to be reconsidered.
- Frequency and offer – give consideration to reviewing the number of market days and types of goods on offer.
- New Square currently has few regular traders, focus group attendees suggested merging these with the main market and freeing up New Square for other leisure use.
- A decision many years ago to create fixed market stalls now creates a problem when, on quiet market days, few are in use and the empty stalls create a negative perception.
- The recent review highlighted a need for reconfiguration and the focus groups felt there was also a need to examine the viability of using stalls that could be cleared away to reveal our wonderful historic square that would provide many new leisure opportunities.



4.0 New major development projects and their impacts

4.1 HS2

It is anticipated that the arrival of HS2 will bring many economic benefits to Chesterfield and the Council is already looking to maximise the opportunities on offer by recruiting a Project Manager to work specifically on the HS2 project.

³ "The Glass Yard" by Blue Deer Ltd, <https://www.bluedeerltd.com/single-post/2017/05/24/An-exciting-new-development-for-Chesterfield>



Master planning work has been undertaken for the train station and improvements have been incorporated into a station masterplan which will make the access between the station and the town centre easier and more welcoming to visitors.

Following the consultation on the revised route proposals published in November 2016, the Council’s response highlighted how HS2 will be “transformational for the borough”⁴ and in particular how new highways infrastructure will create clearer routes to the centre of Chesterfield and improvements made to the train station as a result of HS2 will improve accessibility through all forms of transport.

The Town Centre Masterplan also identifies the area surrounding the station as having the potential to be developed and the Local Plan highlights the important role the station plays in linking the town centre with developments at Waterside, Chesterfield College and Northern Gateway.

A separate Scrutiny Project Group has been set up to ensure that the Council has a joined-up approach to maximise the opportunities that HS2 will bring to the borough.

4.2 Northern Gateway

The Northern Gateway scheme plans to regenerate 4 areas which form part of the vision for the scheme, these are Elder Way and Knifsmithgate, Holywell Cross, Newbold Road and the Station Approach. As with HS2, the Council has already shown

⁴ “Response of Chesterfield Borough Council to High Speed Rail revised line of route consultation”, Cabinet, 7 March 2017
<https://chesterfieldintranet.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MID=4835#AI7876>

commitment to delivering the scheme by recruiting a Project Manager to lead on the delivery of the Northern Gateway.



A vision document was produced by Whittam Cox Architects which provides strategic objectives to ensure there is alignment with other plans and developments in the town centre. The Gateway is viewed as a means to bridge the gap between key connections, in particular linking the arrival of HS2 and Waterside with the town centre. “The Holywell Cross Car Park currently creates a void in the townscape; this vision will seek to reimagine this area and connected spaces around the site.”⁵

The Project Manager provided the project group with and insight into the progress on the initial stage of the scheme. The group heard how consideration had been given to the positioning of the



Enterprise Centre to create a better alignment with the new multi-storey car park and public realm works on Elder Way, achieving a clear flow of footfall into the town centre. The addition of new restaurants and an increased pedestrianised area on Elder Way would also encourage greater dwell time.

The conversion of the former Co-op department store into a Premier Inn will increase the number of visitors staying in the town centre and using the retail and leisure offer. In addition, there will be an increased use of the multi-storey car park and

⁵ “Northern Gateway Vision” by Whittam Cox Architects, <https://www.chesterfield.gov.uk/media/482317/northern-gateway-vision.pdf>

uplift in retail expenditure providing a boost to the economy of the town centre.

4.3 Peak Resort



The delivery of Peak Resort will bring a major resort and visitor attraction to our borough offering integrated health, sport, education and leisure activities. Included in the first phase of the project are varying types of accommodation from a sports hostel to a five-star hotel, university campus providing courses to local and international students, medical and clinical spa facilities and 300 acres of park and woodland incorporating wildlife and activity trails.

The developer is in regular dialogue with the Council and has already identified Chesterfield as a destination for visitors seeking evening entertainment or a day off from their activities in the Peak District. However, due to the amount of activities and leisure offer available within the complex, the town will need to work hard in order to draw visitors into the town centre and encourage the resort to offer regular trips for visitors to come into the town centre.

The Council is already looking at what developments are taking place on the north side of the town to make sure they do not detract from the appeal of the town centre. A cycle route is also being explored to link the resort with the town centre whilst the resort will provide its own shuttle buses to bring visitors into the town.

The expected visitor to Peak Resort will most likely be international and we will need to consider what this customer will be looking for in our town centre. There will need to be ample restaurants and a vibrant night life to encourage visitors to not just visit once, but want to come back another night. For those wishing to spend a day recovering from their activities in the Peak District, the town centre needs to provide a full day's worth of activities, whether it be through increasing the opening hours of the museum, creating a diverse events calendar, visiting speciality shops and market, exploring the Queen's Park or a combination of all of these.

4.4 **Waterside**

Waterside is a £320million scheme to create a new vibrant, sustainable community in the heart of Chesterfield. The first phase of the development, the Basin Square, is already underway following the award of £2.7million funding from Sheffield City Region Infrastructure Fund. This phase will see the delivery of:

- 310 private rented sector apartments – 1/2 bed apartments with ground floor retail space, circa 1500sqm
- Multi-storey car park – 442 spaces
- Office buildings – 2,500sqm of B1 and 525sqm of shops and drinking establishments
- 84-bed hotel, plus ground floor restaurants, cafés and drinking establishments.

The second phase of the development will form a residential scheme comprising of 150 new homes.

The scheme is being delivered by a public-private partnership of which the Council is a member and the developer is working closely with the Council's Economic Growth team.

Consideration has been given to the impact of Waterside on the town centre and the scheme has been designed to offer a

different style of living that will complement the town centre rather detract from it. The new residential and visitor accommodation will bring an influx of people to live in the town centre that will increase the footfall to enable both Waterside and the town centre to thrive. Apartments will be above commercial developments and provide serviced accommodation geared towards people working in Chesterfield or nearby. The apartments and new hotel will be directly opposite the train station and provide a vibrant welcome to visitors arriving by train.

The close proximity of the development to the town centre will enable a flow of footfall between the two locations. Improvements to the highways infrastructure and additional public transport will also ensure that the town centre benefits from the additional people now living and working at Waterside.

4.5 **Other developments and opportunities**

In addition to these large developments, there are also a significant number of smaller scale developments which have the potential to have both positive and negative impacts on the town centre. Recent planning permissions have been granted for *The Glass Yard*, a mixed use leisure development on Sheffield Road, and for the redevelopment of the former NEDDC council offices into extra care accommodation for older people.

The Glass Yard is not the first development by Blue Deer Ltd in Chesterfield, 131 Chatsworth Road forms part of the Blue Deer portfolio along with The Hanger, also on Chatsworth Road. This recurring investment puts Chesterfield in a strong position to encourage further investors and increase the economic development of the town centre. Whilst *The Glass Yard* will enhance the leisure offer in the area surrounding Sheffield Road,

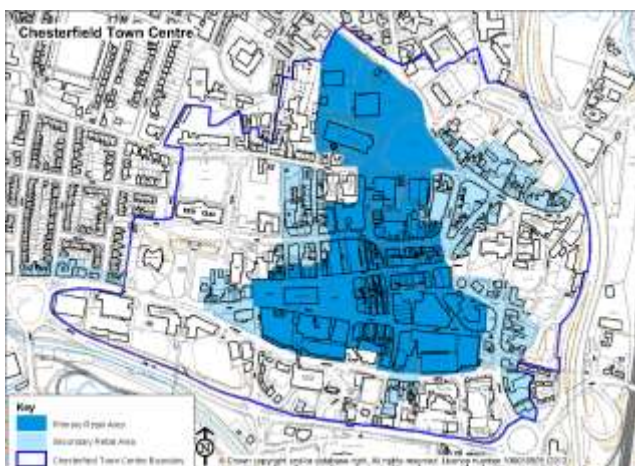


it could have a negative impact on the town centre by drawing people away; these concerns need to be addressed by ensuring delivery of the developments in the town centre.



The building of new accommodation for older people on Saltergate will provide much needed residential space in the town centre and increase the number of people living in easy reach of the town centre shops and leisure offer. Revised Northern Gateway implementation still provides sufficient space to develop our educational offering along with potential halls of residence provision which would attract a wider range of people who would be looking for different retail and leisure experiences. Greater student numbers not only provide a positive financial input into the town but also add that much needed buzz that provides the ambience that visitors would enjoy.

Within the Local Plan: Core Strategy 2011-2031, the Council sets out proposals for the development and use of land.



“A key aim of the Core Strategy is to promote the vitality and viability of the borough’s town, district and local centres.”⁶

Chesterfield Town Centre
Boundary inside the blue line

To ensure each development is contributing positively towards a thriving town centre, the strategy includes what considerations will

⁶ Chesterfield Borough Council Local Plan: Core Strategy 2011 - 2031
<https://www.chesterfield.gov.uk/media/148999/adopted-local-plan-core-strategy.pdf>

be taken into account when planning and approving developments including:

- ensuring tourism development enhances the offer of existing centres;
- controlling uses to ensure vibrancy, inclusiveness and economic activity;
- prioritising town centre locations when additional retail development is needed;
- restricting use of out of centre locations to retail that requires large premises, e.g. showrooms, – conditions applied to define permissible changes of use.

5.0 Introduction to recommendations

5.1 Taking into consideration feedback from the public and local businesses, and existing plans and developments, the project group considered the list of points which came from the focus groups and categorised them into a series of themes which reflected the recurring issues. The group put together a series of recommendations that demonstrate the areas where change is most needed and provide proposals for how this could be achieved.

5.2 The project group recommends that the proposals are viewed as a statement of visionary intent rather than a list that must be tackled in any particular order. Change was considered vital but when and in what sequence is not part of this group's remit.

5.4 There will be areas examined where initiatives are already in the early stages of development or progress is dependent on linked developments or something as basic as finding the funding is a stumbling block.

5.5 How to achieve the change is for others to determine – first there has to be the will to make the transition.

6.0 Recommendations

The Project Group recommends:

- 6.1 Signage, cleanliness, general appeal (which includes the challenges currently being faced where rough sleepers are deterring locals and visitors alike) and connectivity between areas needs to be improved as does the transport infrastructure in order that visitors gain an immediate positive first impression to enable them to speak positively about Chesterfield and encourage others to visit.
- 6.2 To consider re-branding with a new more generic tag-line for the town with the intention of bringing a clear focus to potential foreign and wider-UK visitors.
- 6.3 That measures, such as Purple Flag status, are considered to bring more life to the town during the currently quiet periods – 3pm onward.
- 6.4 A review (frequency, location, size, type) of the market is required to provide an offering that meets the changing wishes of the modern-day customer.
- 6.5 That ways to open up the town for a major event and cultural space are explored to broaden the appeal with a wider offering of activities focusing on areas as diverse as film, art, literature, food, jazz, busking and cheese, to name just a few, with a particular focus on enhancing the evening activities with night markets and live entertainment.

7.0 Review approach

- 7.1 The review began with a meeting between the Lead Member and the Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer to discuss initial ideas for the review and consider project group membership and consultees. Following this, the Lead Member and officer met with the Cabinet Member for Town Centres and Visitor Economy and

the Economic Growth Manager to consult on the ideas for the review and gather some initial information.

7.2 The project group started to meet in June to agree the scope and decide on the approach that would be taken which included:

- a) Meeting with Dominic Stevens at Destination Chesterfield;
- b) Holding two focus groups, one with local businesses, one with members of the public, to gather opinions and views on a series of questions;
- c) Reviewing all the major developments taking place in Chesterfield;
- d) Project group meetings to review findings;
- e) Meetings and discussions with Cabinet Members and officers including:
 - Councillor Steve Brunt, cabinet member for town centres and visitor economy;
 - Councillor Tricia Gilby, leader;
 - Neil Johnson, assistant director – economic growth;
 - Martin Key, assistant director – health and wellbeing;
 - Patrick Middleton, Northern Gateway project manager;
 - Officers from the planning team
 - Officers from the economic growth team
 - Officers from the policy team

8.0 Review findings and analysis

8.1 In order to be fully informed of all the developments impacting on the town centre, the Lead member and Support officer met with the Assistant director – economic growth and Cabinet member for town centres and visitor economy who were able to provide an overview of the developments and the various stages that they were at. They also provided information on the masterplan for the town centre and HS2. The Assistant director and Project manager for Northern Gateway also attended meetings of the project group to provide further information on specific developments.

8.2 Further information on the planning process in relation to considerations on the impact to the town centre was sought along with information on the relationship with the developers of the Waterside and Peak Resort developments.

8.3 **Recommendation 1 - Signage, cleanliness, general appeal (which includes the challenges currently being faced where rough sleepers are deterring locals and visitors alike) and connectivity between areas needs to be improved as does the transport infrastructure in order that visitors gain an immediate positive first impression to enable them to speak positively about Chesterfield and encourage others to visit.**

During the initial project group meetings the group began to draw a long list of potential areas for further investigation. It was right at the beginning of the project that concerns with signage, cleanliness and general attractiveness to visitors began to emerge. The group considered what impression a visitor to the town would have on arriving at the railway station or coach station. Ideas arose including signposting a clearer route to different areas of the town, for example Queen's Park, and improving access between Ravenside Retail Park and the town centre to encourage two way footfall.

As discussions progressed, it was agreed that a consultation with members of the public was needed to understand the views of users, and potentially non-users, of the town centre.

The focus group was positive about the potential for Chesterfield but felt that there was a general neglect for the town centre, in particular its historic buildings, and that areas of the town were disconnected from each other. This was echoed in the Chesterfield Champions focus group who commented that New



Square was one of the most attractive parts of the town however it was also the most run down part.

The level of homeless people in Chesterfield was a concern stressed by both groups. The project group were encouraged by Cabinet's decision in October 2017 to introduce new Public Space Protection Orders giving greater control over on street drinking and other anti-social behaviour which would have a positive impact on the appeal and cleanliness of the town centre and increase the likelihood of a homeless person engaging with support services. However, the project group note that to ensure the PSPOs are being enforced, extra resourcing was required and the restructure within environmental protection and anti-social behaviour enforcement needs to be prioritised.

The project group discussed the standard of cleanliness of the town centre and felt that a simple solution of improving the quality of street cleaning and maintenance in the town centre would help lift the town's appearance and welcome. The areas of most concern were around the market squares where cobbles are often loose and rubbish is left from market days or from overnight, and also the route up Corporation Street from the station which often looked neglected and deterring to visitors arriving by train.

The HS2 and Northern Gateway developments provide reassuring plans for improving the transport infrastructure between the railway station and the town centre. The concerns the focus group had with the approach from the railway station will be addressed by future plans to improve the pedestrian bridge over the A61 and the busy road crossings at St Mary's



Gate/Holywell Street. Conversations are already taking place with Derbyshire County Council to provide better vehicular access to the station by creating a new link road which will reduce the number of cars in the town centre.

In addition, the Northern Gateway will positively enhance one area of the town, with the Saltergate Multi-Storey Car Park, Innovation Centre, new Premier Inn and public realm works expected to be completed within the next 1-2 years. The public realm work's link into the existing pedestrian routes in the town centre and we need to make sure they are also brought up to the same standard.

When discussing accessibility with the focus groups, one of the improvements suggested was new signage for navigating the transport system. Though the project group discussed the benefits of having a central hub for transport, the group recognises that this does not form part of current plans for the town centre and at this stage would not propose the option due to the transport infrastructure and costs involved. However, by improving signage around the town centre, visitors could be given a more accessible welcome to Chesterfield.

An example of the signage at Retford, shown above, provides the location of car parks, transport links and also speciality shops, another suggestion from the focus group as many people were unaware of the location of shops in areas not on the main shopping streets, i.e. the Yards, the Shambles. The use of real time



information boards for buses could be considered to provide a better quality of service and improve satisfaction by informing passengers of accurate bus arrival times. It also reduces the reliance and costs involved with paper bus timetables which need to be reproduced following any change.

The key consideration that is needed when considering this recommendation is the initial impression visitors to the town have. Destination Chesterfield offered a Chesterfield Ambassador scheme a few years ago which targeted everyone with a public role in the town, including taxi drivers and volunteers, and provided a short training session enabling them to be a positive guide to visitors to Chesterfield. In our collaborative work with Destination Chesterfield, we could revisit and revitalise this scheme to ensure visitors have a warm welcome to Chesterfield.

8.4 Recommendation 2 - To consider re-branding with a new more generic tag-line for the town with the intention of bringing a clear focus to potential foreign and wider-UK visitors.

There is a great opportunity to market the town in a new and positive light. Already there has been talk of re-naming the railway station to ensure a clear connection with our history and ensure visitors have a positive perception before they even arrive. The new Peak Resort development will bring a whole new market into play and, here again, if we can promote the historic and countryside connection in advance we're on the right track to winning new business. It may be worth considering a new strap-line that similarly resonates.

Both focus groups felt that the "Historic Market Town" tagline did not paint an accurate picture to visitors to the town for two reasons: the diminishing market and the neglect of "historic" buildings. Though the project group agree that a new tagline for the town needs to be created, we feel it still needs to recognise the "historic" and "market" elements but also provide a more aspirational name that echoes the



£1 billion regeneration currently taking place in the borough.

When considering the re-marketing of the town, we should consider who our future visitor will be. Peak Resort is likely to attract more international visitors who will be looking for vibrant nightlife and quality restaurants but also a piece of Chesterfield culture and unique shopping experience. Likewise, HS2 will bring new visitors but the more likely customer will be individuals or families looking to make their home in Chesterfield so we need to market a thriving town centre.

Finally, we also need to recognise that Chesterfield is a town of education, hosting the University of Derby, Chesterfield College, Newcastle University at Barrow Hill Roundhouse and soon to be welcoming the University of Colorado at Peak Resort. We need to consider what attracts students to live and study in Chesterfield, or to visit for the day from their placement at Peak Resort. It is estimated that the new University of Derby campus will “be used by over 1,400 students in the centre’s first five years.”⁷ According to *Experian*, an average estimated individual student spend is over £11,000⁸ each year. Attracting new students and education



establishments would provide a vital boost to the town centre economy and comparisons need to be made with other university towns to understand what students are looking for in terms of retail and experiential offer.

Work has begun to develop a Visitor Economy Strategy and the re-branding of the town centre should form part of the priorities for the strategy. Destination Chesterfield has had

⁷ “£3.48million D2N2 funding helps create Chesterfield skills centre”, <http://www.d2n2growthhub.co.uk/news/971/3-48million-d2n2-funding-helps-create-chesterfield-skills-centre>

⁸ “How much are students worth to local economies?” <http://www.experian.co.uk/blogs/latest-thinking/students-local-economies/>

success in marketing the town as “a place that is ‘on the up’, looking forward, looking outwards with boundless ambition, energy, movement and aspiration.” In order to create a new brand for Chesterfield, we need to be careful to take into account the positive steps Destination Chesterfield has made and involve them in the development of the Visitor Economy Strategy.

8.5 Recommendation 3 - That measures, such as Purple Flag status, are considered to bring more life to the town during the currently quiet periods – 3pm onward.

Currently the town centre experiences a low point from 3pm onwards. It is anticipated that the majority of visitors from Peak Resort will be arriving in the town centre from late afternoon and we need to be prepared to ensure that there is a buzz about the town when they arrive. The visitors need to be made to feel welcome and at ease, aware of what is on offer and how to find it and, most importantly, want to come back again. There needs to be an atmosphere in the town centre that encourages people to stay past 3pm and into the evening, but to achieve this change is needed.



“The Purple Flag standard, launched in 2012, is an accreditation process similar to the Green Flag award for parks

and the Blue Flag for beaches. It allows members of the public to quickly identify town & city centres that offer an entertaining, diverse, safe and enjoyable night out.”⁹

Working to the standard will contribute to delivering all the recommendations in this report, from raising the profile and improving public image to lowering crime and anti-social behaviour. The five core standards of Purple Flag accreditation are:

⁹ “Purple Flag Status: How it fits place management police” <https://www.atcm.org/purple-flag>

- **The Policy Envelope:** An after-hours policy that shows a clear strategy based on sound research, integrated public policy and a successful multi-sector partnership.
- **Wellbeing:** Successful destinations are all safe and welcoming with all sectors playing their part in delivering high standards of customer care.
- **Movement:** Getting home safely after an evening out is crucial, as is the ability to move around the centre on foot with ease.
- **Appeal:** Successful destinations offer a vibrant choice of leisure and entertainment for a diversity of ages, groups, lifestyles and cultures.
- **Place:** Successful areas are alive during the day, as well as in the evening. They contain a blend of overlapping activities that encourage people to mingle and enjoy the place. They reinforce the character and identity of the area as well as flair and imagination in urban design for the night.¹⁰

Purple Flag also encourages businesses and organisations to work together to create a strategy for the transition period and night time economy. In Chesterfield, there is already a significant level of the ground work already in place such as the Destination Chesterfield board and Chesterfield Champions, street pastors and the new PSPO.

There are costs associated with the accreditation with the initial application fee estimated at £2,500 + VAT followed by renewal fees estimated at £1000 + VAT each year. However, the Purple Flag accreditation does not need to be Council led but it can be Council enabled.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Mansfield town centre has been awarded the Purple Flag standard which was achieved through the work of a Business Improvement District (BID). There is interest in setting up a BID as this was proposed by the Chesterfield Champions in their focus group and the Council's Plan also commits to carrying out a feasibility study of developing a BID. It must be noted however that the Council also owns a lot of commercial property in the town centre therefore if a BID was proposed, the Council would be required to pay the levy, along with the other businesses, that would enable the BID.

8.6 Recommendation 4 - A review (frequency, location, size, type) of the market is required to provide an offering that meets the changing wishes of the modern-day customer.

In today's evolving retail habits, the market has made Chesterfield unique, being one of the largest open air markets in England and attracting traders and customers for over 800 years. Chesterfield's market days are listed on the entrances to the town and people are attracted from outside the local area to shop on the market. The project group felt that, though there had been a decline in the number of stalls and users of the market, it should still be maintained as a valued asset that was iconic of the town. However, consideration should be given to renewing its offer, layout and focus.

Over the past three years, Chesterfield has recorded a significant decline in occupancy on the general market days, with the Flea Market still faring well. In 2015, the Council commissioned a consultant to undertake a feasibility study and provide options with estimated costs for a design and upgrade of the Market Place. However, within the General Fund Capital Strategy and Programme, approved by Council in February, 2016, it was decided that there would be no surplus resources available to fund the scheme but the Council remained committed to the reconfiguration project and would defer a decision to allow time for finances to be put in place.

Scrutiny Members have always been keen to see improvements to the Outdoor Market as a priority for improving the town centre for local people and the reconfiguration regular appears on the work programme as members continue to offer new options. Of course reconfiguration is not the answer on its own. The products on offer have to be what people need on a daily basis and want on an infrequent basis.

The successful markets around the UK and Europe tend to specialise more in order to meet the niche demand. A greater local and regional food offering would prove attractive as would introducing markets that offered (probably on no more frequently than a monthly basis) new products such as arts and crafts, fashion, farmer's markets, street food, evening events and many more. This format has already shown its success through the introduction of Artisan Markets.

In addition, the provision for wifi connectivity in the town centre needs to be explored. A wifi hotspot in the market would enable market traders to accept card payments, encourage visitors into the market and increase their dwell time, and assist visitors to navigate the town centre more easily.

The image below is a statement displayed at Altrincham Market, billed as one of Greater Manchester's most exciting foodie destinations¹¹ and winner of the 'Best Market' Award by Observer Food Monthly in 2015. This demonstrates that there is still a place for markets to thrive today's town centres but they need to find their own niche and speciality that turns them into a destination.

¹¹ Altrincham Market House: Our guide to one of Greater Manchester's most exciting foodie destinations, <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/whats-on/food-drink-news/altrincham-market-guide-food-drink-10809197>



It's vital that the council recognises the need to change in-line with modern shopping habits in order to ensure our much loved market area flourishes in this ever-changing commercial environment.

- 8.7 **Recommendation 5 – That ways to open up the town for a major event and cultural space are explored to broaden the appeal with a wider offering of activities focusing on areas as diverse as film, art, literature, food, jazz, busking and cheese, to name just a few, with a particular focus on enhancing the evening activities with night markets and live entertainment.**

Chesterfield has the potential to become a cultural hub for attracting audiences to events and festivals. It's convenient position on the door step to the Peak District and Sheffield, and a stone's through from the M1 gives us a large catchment area for attracting visitors. A recent study by the Arts Council found that culture enriches society, improves health and wellbeing and benefits the economy. According to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) data, 6 areas within Chesterfield fall within the top 10% most deprived areas in England and a further 14 areas fall within the top 20% most deprived, both figures had increased since 2010.¹²

The Arts Council's review provides statistics that demonstrate the value an increased arts and culture offering can contribute:

¹² "English indices of deprivation 2015" <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015>

Participation in arts contributes to community cohesion, reduces social exclusion and isolation, and/or makes communities feel safer and stronger.

Those who had attended a cultural place or event in the previous 12 months were almost 60% more likely to report good health compared to those who had not, and theatre-goers were almost 25% more likely to report good health.

For every £1 of salary paid by the arts and culture industry, an additional £2.01 is generated in the wider economy.

In 2011, 10 million in visits to the UK involved engagement with the arts and culture, representing 32% of all visits to the UK and 42% of all inbound tourism-related expenditure.

key ways that arts and culture can boost local economies: attracting visitors, creating jobs and developing skills, attracting and retaining businesses, revitalising places, and developing talent.

The focus groups also identified the need for more events, festivals, themed markets and exhibition spaces as a key draw for new visitors to the town and also to bridge the gap between evening and night time economy.

Though there is currently no cultural space for exhibitions or town centre festivals and events, there are many locations and opportunities that can be considered as future event spaces. New Square was suggested during the focus groups and discussed in project group meetings. Due to the decline of the market, the project group proposes that all stalls be moved onto the main market square which will not only free up New Square for a flexible event space but also concentrate the number of stalls on the main market improving its appearance.

The project group is aware of the current financial position of the council and considered this when forming the recommendations. One concern discussed by the project group and raised in the focus groups was the opening times and offer in the museum. Following on from the success of the Council's commercial catering team, the offer of in the museum could be increased to

include a café and meeting place to create a more sustainable space and increase footfall and dwell time. This would bring more income into the museum and enable it to be open more frequently.



Beach in Lincoln last year

The event calendar needs to be increased with more regular and more diverse events such as film festivals, food markets and live music events. These events also do not need to be Council led; as in previous years there have been events held in the town organised by private businesses, for example the Food and Drink Fair held in Queen's Park last year, we just need to make sure the Council is creating the right environment and enabling these new events to take place and be successful.

Finally, taking inspiration from another local authority, Rotherham are currently in the process of re-developing their town centre and what they are looking to achieve resonates with our vision for Chesterfield:

The following list summarises the ongoing strategy for the Town Centre, which can influence management of the Town Centre and delivery of projects and proposals:

- *Confidence in the Town Centre environment: Address anything including social incivilities that damage confidence in people's experience. Focus on the family experience and young people*
- *The arrival-to-departure experience: As far as is practically possible create the conditions for a safe and attractive end to end experience within the Town Centre. How you arrive and leave linked to the attractions used.*
- *Convenience of use - reducing barriers: Make it as easy as possible for people to use and enjoy their Town Centre*

- *More to do and see in a quality setting: This is at the heart of the implementation masterplan.*
- *The 'WOW - that really makes a difference' moment: Rotherham needs this at the present time. The town needs a big project to transform people's perceptions.*
- *More people and more life: With more people comes more footfall and more spend.*
- *Capture latent spending power: Many Rotherham Residents do have money to spend and would spend in the town if there was more of what they wanted.*
- *A better place attracts spend: Invest in the place and its distinctive and focused offer and the economy will improve.¹³*

9.0 Review conclusions

- 9.1 Chesterfield has been a market town for over 800 years, in order to succeed for another 800 years we need to evolve with the times and find new ways to deliver the town centre experience that continues to attract residents and visitors. However, success must be based on much more than retail and the changes in shopping habits need to be recognised.
- 9.2 The project group accepts that the proposals in the report may not be the complete solution however, following this in-depth review, they are what we believe will help to ensure Chesterfield continues to make an impact in attracting developers, visitors and residents. The town centre will continue to evolve and these proposals are a starting point to move in the direction that is being carved by HS2, Waterside and Peak Resort.
- 9.3 The recommendations above are offered as improvements that would complement each other and can be progressed independently. All would enhance the Town Centre mix but many are likely to be introduced as part of broader change.

¹³ "Rotherham Town Centre Masterplan" <https://www.wyg.com/rotherham-town-centre>

- 9.4 For the town to become busier and more vibrant it needs increased footfall; that will come about by improving the retail, cultural, entertainment and evening offering but also by encouraging the growth of town centre living.
- 9.5 The proposed Saltergate conversion of the old NEDDC offices into apartments for the over-50s is a hugely positive initiative that will guarantee daily revenue comes into the central area. The University of Derby has shown real commitment to increasing their local educational offering but there is huge potential to grow the education sector further and, in turn, the town centre economy. Lincoln, a city with a population very similar to Chesterfield, has flourished since the Queen opened its new campus in 1996. Since then £270m has been invested in the facilities which hosts 13,000 students (with a large percentage living in the city during term time) who have all helped to create a lively buzz in the city that has seen visitor numbers grow accordingly.
- 9.6 Rotherham's new town centre plans are visionary and match closely the type of changes proposed in this document. Retail will continue to be encouraged and will feature prominently in the town centre but it's vital that the changes in people's free time habits are recognised. Almost every major retail chain has been hit hard by the increase in on-line shopping and many are struggling to maintain their town centre presence. It's important that we look to broaden our retail mix by strongly encouraging an increase in independent and innovative traders who will add to the town's appeal.
- 9.7 Young and old will continue to shop but they are looking more to enjoy experiences with their hard earned



cash ranging from eating out to festival entertainment to bringing the family to enjoy a ride on the Chesterfield Wheel. Let's make sure we work tirelessly to give them what they want!

10.0 Considerations

- 10.1 A preliminary equality impact assessment (EIA) has been carried out to understand any positive or negative impacts of implementing the recommendations. No negative impacts were identified and it is expected that the review will have a positive impact due to the broadened offer of cultural events and improved accessibility and safety of the town centre. More details can be found in the EIA attached at Appendix 4.
- 10.2 During the review the project group considered the financial impacts that will need addressing if the recommendations are accepted. The project group decided to propose recommendations that demonstrated the change that was needed however, though suggestions are included, due to the current financial position of the Council and limits on resources, there is no specific demand on when and how the changes should be realised.
- 10.3 Though some of the recommendations may require a level of investment from the Council, the project group stresses that all the changes do not need to be delivered and funded by the Council and we should be encouraging partners to work collaboratively to achieve a shared vision. Private companies have already shown an interest in hosting events in Chesterfield, the Artisan Market for example, and towns nearby have achieved the Purple Flag standard through the work of Business Improvement Districts.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Data from “Are you being served?” survey of residents

<https://www.chesterfield.gov.uk/media/547239/are-you-being-served-full-report-2017.pdf>

Appendix 2 – Notes from public and Chesterfield Champions focus groups.

Appendix 3 – *The Value of Arts and Culture to People and Society*, Arts Council England

Appendix 4 – Preliminary Equalities Impact Assessment

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