

SECTION TWO

CURRENT TOWN CENTRE ACTIVITY: GENERAL ISSUES

Some review of Partnership structures has recently taken place, particularly arising from the re-forming of the partnership in the Deepings¹. Cabinet has also supported the principle of establishing a Charitable Company Limited by Guarantee², primarily in relation to Stamford, but potentially applicable to other TCMP's as well.

The effectiveness and robustness of the partnerships in place varies. Whilst it would be unwise to make a uniform, one-size prescription for all partnerships, several years on from their inception it is timely to review their success, and to identify how they can best react to future challenges, particularly bearing in mind the identification of town centres as a key priority for this authority.

A broad overview of partnership working, identifies a number of critical success factors that should underpin activity;

- **A clear vision and set of priorities**
- **A geographic focus to activities**
- **An appropriate balance of public and private sector interests**
- **A strong working relationship with the business community**
- **A robust structure including appropriate sub-groups to oversee partnership projects**
- **Support for Partnership priorities and activities**

Vision and priorities

Vision and priorities will vary according to the issues facing each town, although one might reasonably anticipate a measure of commonality. To varying degrees the initial masterplan or action plan documents will have provided some focus to activities. This is certainly the case in relation to the Stamford Vision 2015 document, and recent work within Stamford Vision has established short / medium term priorities for the organisation. In relation to Bourne and Grantham, there is considered to be merit in reviewing and establishing the vision and priorities for each partnership, as a precursor to a review of masterplan / Action Plan documents. Recent activity in the Deepings, in re-forming the partnership with a strong private sector engagement has included the use of consultants to work with Partnership members to identify priorities. This process has shown itself to be working very well and has had the effect of binding the Partnership together with a clear set of ambitions. This is fundamental to the development of a Masterplan. The use of a similar approach in relation to both Bourne and Grantham is proposed as part of this plan.

¹ NKD; Economic portfolio holder; February 2005. Report PLA.480

² Cabinet 9th May 2005; Report DCS22

In re-forming the Deepings Partnership, the following aims and objectives were defined. It is considered that these could be equally relevant to both Bourne and Grantham (with specific additions as may be deemed appropriate). They are equally relevant to Stamford, however, the nature of the partnership there differs somewhat – see later in this report.

TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT PARTNERSHIPS

AIMS

To create an active partnership of town centre stakeholders to develop a healthy, vibrant and sustainable town centre environment that involves and benefits all its stakeholders.

OBJECTIVES

- To develop the life of the town centre, for investors as well as users
- To improve the management of the public realm, so that it is accessible to all
- To help the town centre and retailing activity to maintain a competitive edge
- To create a shared vision of the town centre's identity, function, market niche and image that meets the needs of the people it serves, now and into the future
- Organise mutually supportive, practical partnerships between business, service providers, the public sector and the community at large
- Create clear priorities for the Partnership, including medium and long term aspirations, and an effective Action Plan containing achievable year on year outcomes endorsed and funded by all the partners
- Develop projects that focus on environmental improvement, access, car parking, signing, security, inward investment, marketing, customer care and attractions
- Justify public support by listening and communicating decisions openly and objectively
- Promote confidence by publicising achievements

Geographic focus

In developing proposals for town centres there is merit in defining the principal area of activity for the Partnership to provide a proper focus. This is not to suggest that all activity should be confined to this area; in some circumstances a wider area may be appropriate. This may be particularly relevant in relation to Grantham where particular focus is required in relation to the enhancement of the town's role as a sub-regional centre.

Balance of public and private sector interests

The composition of each partnership is quite naturally different, largely because of the nature of each centre, Parish /Town Council representation (or in the case of Grantham the absence of this level of representation), the business / economic profile of the town, and the types of non-public organisations that exist. There is no one-size-fits-all prescription that can be universally applied. Crucially however, there

is a need to ensure that key town-centre stakeholders are properly engaged with partnership activities, participate in them, and contribute to the vision of the body. There is also a need to ensure that there is a strong private sector representation, and that there is an appropriate balance of public and private sector representatives.

As has been described in Section One, the membership and public / private split on each partnership varies considerably. Private sector attendance in many cases is actually quite limited in practice and can result in Partnership meetings that are quite heavily skewed in favour of elected members. In reviewing the performance of the TCMP in the Deepings, the following membership principles were established;

- Private sector chair
- 7 private sector representatives
- 2 SKDC representatives
- 2 LCC representatives
- 2 Parish / Town Council representatives
- 2 community representatives
- 1 Local highway authority representative

This composition was to some extent conditioned by the dual-parished nature of the town centre area. However, as a general principle it is considered important to strive towards a position where there is majority private sector representation. Fundamentally, that representation should involve the key stakeholders in the relevant town centre. In this connection, this plan proposes that, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio holder and TCMP chairs, the structure and composition / membership of the Grantham and Bourne partnerships be reviewed. This should also include a review of any sub-groups within each partnership, to ensure that they have appropriate remits, and are, again, suitably composed.

As Partnerships mature, it must be recognised that their organisational structures will need to respond to changing circumstances and evolving priorities (A case in point relates to Stamford Vision, who have secured considerable funding for the delivery (inter alia) of the Stamford Gateway project in Sheepmarket / Red Lion Square). The establishment of Charitable Companies Limited by Guarantee (or Community Interest Companies (CIC's)) behind established TCMP structures creates an appropriate framework to deliver projects, secure and manage funding from external organisations, invest (and carry over from one year to the next) funds, and own assets. Cabinet have supported steps to establish such a company in relation to Stamford³, and subject to the Partnerships in other towns achieving the same level of robustness, similar companies could be established in relation to each town centre.

A strong working relationship with the business community

The involvement of the town centre business community is fundamental to the success of partnerships. Whilst it is clearly desirable for key private sector stakeholders to be involved in their own right, it is also important for all business interests to have an input into partnership activity and ambitions. In these

³ Cabinet:9th May 2005; Report DCS22; Town Centre Management Partnership structures

circumstances, it is important to the success of partnerships that there is an active business organisation that can represent the views of businesses on the partnership.

In some circumstances, such as Stamford, there is an active Chamber of Trade and Commerce, and they are directly, and very positively, involved through representation upon Stamford Vision and its sub-groups. In Grantham, the TCMP has supported the establishment of the Grantham Business Club. This Club, has a membership exceeding 65, holds regular monthly meetings and is represented upon the TCMP. The Club has also established an Events Sub-Group which organises the a Christmas Fun Day in the town centre. The Business Club is a representative voice of the business and retail community on the partnership

Whilst there is Chamber of Trade / Business Group organisations within Bourne and The Deepings, these appear to be less well developed than in the other two towns. In these circumstances, it is desirable to develop and grow these organisations, or, if appropriate to seek to establish new Business Clubs that can be represented on the TCMP's. This is considered to be worthy of financial support, and it is anticipated that some SSP funding could be attracted for this purpose too.

Robust structures

This has largely been discussed in the foregoing. There is however a need to ensure that there are robust partnership structures in place to oversee and deliver identified priorities. This applies not simply at partnership level (in terms of size, membership and public/private split), but at sub-partnership level too, in terms of working groups (either standing topic groups, or task-specific groups).

Support for partnership priorities and activities

One general criticism of Town Centre Management Partnerships, by no means unique to this district, is that they are non-elected bodies with little accountability. There is consequently some negativity surrounding partnerships, especially from partner organisations comprised of democratically elected representatives. Partnerships have demonstrated that they are effective, representative organisations, and any future re-structuring of Partnerships should ensure full and appropriate constituent support.

Business Improvement Districts: Structures

Business Improvement Districts are discussed in more detail later in this report. In the event that BID's are progressed, the preferred delivery mechanism is through a company limited by guarantee. It is conceivable that TCMP or Business Club structures may be an ideal starting point for the establishment of such companies, and this will need to be explored as the BID process develops.

Monitoring town centre activity

There is a considerable amount of national and regional comparative benchmarking tools available at the present time; for example; Experian retail rankings and Experian Most Profitable Towns Survey. The ODPM also compiles comparative town centre data relating principally to employment, floorspace and rateable values.

Locally, the Welland Market Towns Group (comprising the Town Centre Managers / Co-Ordinators in the Welland area) has developed a more readily collectible (and sustainable) comparative benchmarking tool for town centres. Collection of data in relation to Stamford and Bourne is likely to commence soon, and it will be desirable to extend this data collection exercise to both Grantham and The Deepings too. Comparative benchmarking and time-series analysis will provide useful information about the rate of development of our towns, and as such data collection must be assigned a high priority.

The Evening Economy

Evening activities are an increasingly significant component of the economy of town centres. This encompasses shopping, leisure and the arts, eating, drinking, dancing and other entertainments. Town centres are the ideal focus for such activities and any masterplanning should not overlook the valuable contribution that can be made to the health of a town by a healthy evening economy.

However, whilst the evening economy injects money into the local economy, public perception generally associates the evening economy with negative images of youth culture, drunkenness and anti-social behaviour (violence, vandalism and crime) and littering problems. These perceptions may actually deter many people from visiting town centres in the evening.

A large number of agencies would appear to recognise that the evening economies of our town centres raise issues that need to be addressed. In some cases these issues are real, in others they may well be myths, and the challenge in those circumstances is to dispel perceptions. A vision for the town centre evening economy might reasonably be:-

“ To create safe and attractive town centre areas with a diverse night time economy, accessible to all, whilst protecting the quality of life for residents”

In tandem with other agencies; TCMP's, the LSP, the Crime and Disorder Partnership and the Police, there would appear to be merit in developing an Evening Economy Strategy to address the issues raised (such strategies are encouraged within Planning Policy Statement 6⁴). From this District's perspective; such a strategy would be cross-cutting, contributing directly to three identified priorities; town centres, anti-social behaviour and street-scene. BID's (Business Improvement Districts) and the new licensing regime potentially offer funding opportunities to address issues arising out of any strategy.

The role of tourism in the development and enhancement of town centres

In November 2004, consultants produced a Tourism Intervention Appraisal⁵ for the District Council. A copy of the Executive summary is attached as Appendix 2, and a full copy of the report has been deposited in the Member's Lounge. In recognition of the identification of tourism as a service for disinvestment, and the identification of town centres as a key priority, the appraisal focussed upon the role that tourism

⁴ ODPM:Planning Policy Statement 6:Planning for Town Centres.March 2005

⁵ ACK Tourism: South Kesteven Tourism Intervention Appraisal. November 2004

could play in achieving town centre regeneration and the development of Grantham as a sub-regional centre, as well as in relation to the business development secondary priority.

The report identifies a number of key priorities, most specifically in relation to Stamford and Grantham. No specific actions were proposed in relation to Bourne and The Deepings, although it is recognised that the planned regeneration of Bourne town centre is likely to make the town more attractive as a place for passing visitors to stop off.

The sections upon Grantham and Stamford which follow, identify the relevant visitor economy actions arising from this report. An Economic and Community Development Strategy is also in preparation. That Strategy sets out the specific business development actions arising from the appraisal.

ACTIONS:

- 1. That the broad aims and objectives for TCMP's, as set out within this report be act as the basis for establishing specific aims and objectives for each partnership**
- 2. That working with TCMP's a clear vision and priorities be established for each town centre area**
- 3. That for each TCMP, a clearly defined geographical area of activity be established as the principal focus of activity**
- 4. That, in consultation with the relevant portfolio holder and TCMP chairs, the partnership structure, sub-group structure , composition and representation upon each TCMP be reviewed.**
- 5. Where partnership aims, objectives and structures are demonstrably robust, steps be taken to establish appropriate company structures to support activity**
- 6. In undertaking reviews of TCMP's the support of partner organisations be secured**
- 7. That where suitable business organisations do not exist, TCMP's be encouraged, and supported to create or develop appropriate organisations.**
- 8. In conjunction with TCMP's undertake appropriate monitoring and benchmarking of town centre activity**
- 9. That in conjunction with other agencies, steps be taken to prepare an Evening Economy Strategy for the district's town centre areas.**