
**Manchester City Council
Report for Resolution**

Report to: District Centres Subgroup – 23 February 2017

Subject: Interim output from the District Centres Subgroup

Report of: Councillor Shilton Godwin, Chair of the District Centres Subgroup

The District Centres sub-group was tasked in its initial objectives with identifying gaps in the work taking place to prepare an overarching strategy for District Centres. We have now undertaken an initial exploration of the emerging strategy.

The group has heard evidence from a range of stakeholders and others, including the Institute for Place Management, District Centre retailers from a range of District Centres, TfGM, and others, all contributions that have been enormously helpful. The sub group was tasked in its initial objectives with identifying gaps in the emerging strategy and has indeed identified some gaps.

It is therefore proposed that at this point, some interim observations are made with recommendations for action. It is further proposed that the group now pauses, and reconvenes mid-way through the next municipal year. In the meantime request the Deputy Leader, Cllr Bernard Priest, who hold portfolio responsibility in this area, to commission further development work to address these gaps.

General observations

1. Districts form an essential part of place-making and are really important in creating areas of the city that residents can be proud of, that are important for maintaining sustainable, thriving communities. Districts are an essential part of residents' identities.
2. There are many different places within the City boundary which are currently called District Centres. These currently perform quite different functions, not all of it simply meeting local needs. People travel across the city for example, to eat in Rushholme or eat in the growing night-time economies in Chorlton and Didsbury.
3. There has been a significant shift in the ways that many District Centres operate over recent years attributable to wider economic trends, such as the general reduction in high street retail as retail has moved online; shifting demography through inward migration of particular groups; the growth of a night-time economy and other factors.
4. The Council's aims for District centres as local centres, need to be more clearly defined as places where there is public space where people can meet and spend time together, and where people can meet a reasonable part of their basic day to day needs. District Centres also require transport and digital

interconnectivity. Viable retail activity is therefore a really important element of this mix, and will only flourish where there is sufficient population density to bring enough footfall to make retail viable businesses.

5. The city's population has grown rapidly over the last decade and is projected to continue to grow and homes are being built to meet the housing needs of this growing population, with the sites for these primarily in the North and the East of the city.
6. The sub-group has been advised that no specific funds have been allocated for the development of District Centres and therefore the strategy needs to be sufficiently flexible to take advantage of any funding opportunities that arise, from public or private sources.
7. Nevertheless MCC do have power and influence to change district centres over the long term through the use of planning and licensing policy, better place management, and by using its influence to encourage larger businesses or public services to locate in areas where their presence will act as anchors and attract other businesses. In addition the sub-group would like to see strong policies developed by MCC to challenge and control businesses where they have a detrimental effect on neighbourhoods and residents such as, for example, Rent to Own companies, takeaways, payday lenders, and betting shops.

To make progress, the gaps identified to be addressed are:

1. The current District Centre boundaries as defined require review, as much actual activity has moved over time.
2. It is suggested that the term District Centre should be used as an umbrella term encompassing many kinds of places, and that the different kinds of places have different needs and priorities. In due course once general policy principles are agreed will need to be individually specified.
3. There is a requirement for additional new or significantly developed District Centres in the North and the East of the city to ensure that new homes are built in places where people will be attracted to live. Potential sites for additional new or developed District Centres should therefore be identified by mapping the projected housing densities of the population in ten and fifteen years, to identify not just where the existing gaps are but also where the future gaps are.
4. Strategies for encouraging the development of District Centres in identified sites need to be considered; such as incentives to locate offices; location of health centres; etc.
5. Planning and licensing policies for the management of types of businesses suggested above should be brought forward.

Management of existing District Centres

It is clear from the comments of traders and members that even where existing District Centres are thriving, their continued successes cannot be taken for granted and they require active and positive management to remain vibrant. Many of the costs of operation identified by the independent traders who were good enough to take part in our survey and come to talk to us were costs imposed by government and not susceptible to intervention by the city council.

Nevertheless there are a whole range of interventionist strategies, including planning and licensing frameworks; supporting the city's health and well-being strategic objectives; and highways, active travel, and public transport development which may be harnessed to find opportunities to bring incremental improvements. Many of the needs identified involved facilitating access. For example ensuring appropriate bus routes, developing short stay car parking spaces and providing bike parking so that people are encouraged to use local businesses.

Equally, the changing use of District Centres impacts on local residents. For example, the increasing focus towards night-time economy brings many positive benefits for sections of the population, such as vibrant and exciting places to go and to meet, jobs, but for local residents this can also mean increased disruption, with increased litter, problems with poorly managed commercial waste disposal and inappropriate parking which is currently not always effectively managed. Again, planning and licensing policies require review to ensure that they achieve the necessary balance.

Gaps in the management of existing District Centres

1. Using the Our Manchester principles we need to enable local people to lead change, connecting each District with various MCC areas of expertise to support people in making detailed and specific local and incremental improvements when the opportunities arise
2. The Our Manchester approach can be applied as a priority to District Centres which appear to be in decline such as Moston Lane and Gorton. The potential opportunity for regeneration can be identified by mapping these areas against the forecast population in the next decade and developing individual strategies for each District in the light of this and the opportunity for attracting inward investment. The Institute for Place Management will be able to support this approach.
3. The city has a number of very distinctive areas, such as Rusholme and others, which could be promoted to visitors in the way that Greater Manchester as a whole is by Marketing Manchester. We recommend that MCC explore ways of using the skills and knowledge of Marketing Manchester and identify funding to support this. This will benefit the city economically if visitors extend their stay to visit district centres of interest to them.
4. The City Council should identify where policy has been applied and powers taken to enable more effective management of traffic and commercial activity

so that District Centres are kept safe and clean for residents, in particular, people on foot, or in wheelchairs, and should seek to find ways of applying these policies in localities where they are required.