

Overview and Scrutiny District Centres Subgroup

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 11 September 2018

Present: Councillor Shilton Godwin (Chair) – in the Chair

Councillors: Connolly, J Hughes and Kirkpatrick

Apologies: Councillor Madeleine Monaghan and H Priest

Also present: Councillor Richards, Executive Member for Housing and Regeneration

ESC/OSG/18/5. Minutes

Decision

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2018.

ESC/OSG/18/6. Introduction to the Work on District Centres and Overview of Footfall Data

Dr Steve Millington, Institute of Place Management, Manchester Metropolitan University delivered a presentation that provided an overview of the extensive work undertaken to analyse and understand the social, economic and technological changes to retail.

Dr Millington described the economic significance of retail as an employer in the UK; the factors that had influenced changes in the retail sector, including the rationale for the proliferation of retail parks and its relationship to car ownership and the increase in online purchasing. He described the decisions taken by retailers, such as closing smaller local stores and opting to operate one larger store and the impact this had on district centres and smaller towns. He also discussed the notion of clone towns that did not accommodate independent traders and how this undermined local identity and distinctions. He further highlighted that previously preferred models of retail such as multiple retail occupancy had seen 26,000 such stores close nationally.

Dr Millington also challenged the assumption that the high street was dead by arguing that the 'high street' had experienced changes over many years, was not a static entity, and provided local examples of this.

Dr Millington highlighted that Manchester had a growing population, including more older people, and consideration needed to be given as to what district centres would need to look like in thirty years time to meet the needs of local people. He suggested that it might be necessary to repurpose district centres commenting that whilst there were fewer shops there were not fewer buildings. He commented that historically retail had dominated town centre planning and national planning policy would need to be reviewed to respond to demographic changes.

Dr Millington described the academic research undertaken that had started with a review of all of the published research in this subject area. He said that the review had resulted in 25 priority interventions being identified that had then informed collaboration and workshops with local communities and a range of partners to identify local priorities and develop local solutions.

Dr Millington described that using sophisticated counting devices, operating 24/7 to collect foot fall data, had been installed in a number of locations across the city, including in areas where data had not previously been available. He said that this data was useful as it helped provide evidence that then informed local decisions.

The Executive Member for Housing and Regeneration commented that this data was useful as it could be used as one tool to measure the success of events and be used to challenge assumptions and influence planning. She further commented that this data could be used long term as a measure to assess the success of Council Policies.

The group then discussed the analysis of footfall in Harpurhey. The Members commented that Harpurhey had a very good and varied offer that included shopping; youth provision, sixth form education; health; leisure and the market. The Strategic Director, (Development) said that he welcomed the reported success of the Harpurhey area and commented that the district centre had been deliberately managed in this way. He said the Council had sought to encourage and influence public sector partners to replicate this model in other areas of the city, and the data provided represented a powerful and persuasive argument to support this approach to design. Members commented that the success and lessons of Harpurhey should be taken into consideration when delivering the Northern Gateway scheme and the Gorton Hub.

Dr Millington said the Harpurhey market was a very important stimulus for footfall and this was true nationally. He said that workshops in Harpurhey had resulted in suggestions to extend the market that would further encourage independent traders and increase the offer. He said that these discussions had also raised the possibility of other local traders opening longer as they would benefit from an increased footfall. He said this was a good example of a range of stakeholders coming together, discussing local issues and producing bespoke solutions that helped strengthen a sense of identity. A Member commented that this was in keeping by the Our Manchester approach to supporting local communities.

Members commented that empty shops contributed to negative perceptions of an area and that relatively simple and cheap solutions could have a positive impact, such as painting shop fronts that had improved other areas of the city. Dr Millington commented that empty shops was a national problem and was compounded by the challenge in identifying the owners of premises. The Planning and Infrastructure Manager acknowledged the comments from the Member regarding painting shop fronts, stating that this was an 'easy win' and could stimulate further activities in the area. He said that the work in Gorton provided an opportunity to build community capacity and establish links between the different groups in the area to influence change.

Decision

To note the presentation.

ESC/OSG/18/7. Pilot Project - Update and Policy Approaches

The Subgroup considered the report of the Strategic Director, (Development) that provided Members with an update on progress with the four District Centre Pilot projects that were being progressed by the Institute of Place Management (IPM) at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), with the support of the Council. The Place Management Pilots were a key aspect of the work programme overseen by the District Centres Subgroup, and were considering new opportunities to engage local stakeholders and enhance the quality of Manchester neighbourhoods.

The report summarised the outcomes of the Northenden Place Management Pilot which had reached final report stage, provided an update for Gorton and Harpurhey, which are at pre-report stage and set out the proposed next steps for the Chorlton pilot.

The Chair welcomed the report stating that they would inform recommendations that arose from the Subgroups enquiry. She enquired when the reports for Gorton, Harpurhey and Chorlton would be available for members of the group. The Planning and Infrastructure Manager said that the Gorton and Harpurhey reports would be available for the December meeting and the Chorlton report would be available next year.

Decision

To note the report.

ESC/OSG/18/8. Terms of Reference and Work Programme

The Subgroup reviewed the Terms of Reference and work programme. The Chair referenced the discussion on the previous agenda item and recommended that the reports on the outcomes of the Gorton and Harpurhey Place Management Pilots be included for discussion at the December meeting. The Subgroup supported this recommendation. The Chair asked that the Scrutiny Support Unit liaise with herself and partners to agree a suitable date and time in December for the next meeting.

Decisions

1. To agree the work programme subject to the above amendment.
2. To request that the Scrutiny Support Unit, in consultation with the Chair arrange a date and time for the next meeting of the Subgroup.