

**Manchester City Council
Report for Resolution**

Report to: District Centres Subgroup – 31 October 2019

Subject: Vital and Viable Neighbourhoods / Place Management Update including Chorlton and Gorton District Centre Reports

Report of: Strategic Director (Growth and Development)

Summary

This report provides the Subgroup with an update on progress with the District Centre Pilot projects that are being progressed by the Institute of Place Management (IPM) at Manchester Metropolitan University, with the support of the Council. The Place Management Pilots are a key aspect of the work programme overseen by the District Centres subgroup, and are considering new opportunities to engage local stakeholders and enhance the quality of Manchester neighbourhoods.

The report summarises the outcome of the Chorlton and Gorton Place Management Pilots (which have reached final report stage) and recommends next steps to conclude the project.

Recommendations

To note the report and to provide any comments on the work to date.

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Wards affected: All

Background documents (available for public inspection):

None

1.0 Background

1.1 Previous reports to this subgroup have set out the work programme the council has endorsed, which aims to consider the most effective policy approach the council and its partners can take to promote successful district centres in Manchester. The work programme has been developed alongside the Institute of Place Management (based at Manchester Metropolitan University), a body with particular interest in the study and promotion of place management techniques.

1.2 A core aspect of the work programme comprises Place Management Pilots in four of Manchester's centres (Chorlton, Gorton, Harpurhey and Northenden). These are exercises that bring together a centre's stakeholders, bring to their attention key evidence relating to activity and character of the centre and focus on medium and controllable interventions that could be most beneficial for the centre's performance. There are aspects of this process that are clearly aligned with the Our Manchester approach. The council has a key role to play, but the degree to which an ongoing programme of activity can be agreed and delivered is a function of the level of commitment from other stakeholders. This report provides an update on the development of the Place Management Pilot with particular reference to the work in Chorlton and Gorton District Centres.

2.0 Manchester Place Management Pilots – Update

Approach to the Place Management Pilots

2.1 Although each centre is different and has warranted a different management approach, there has been a common overall format to the Place Management Pilots, reflecting the IPM's experience in other locations. The Place Management Pilots comprise an initial assessment by the IPM, a stakeholder workshop and a final report of recommendations. The initial assessment considered footfall data, collected through counters installed in each of the centres, and an audit undertaken through a site visit.

2.2 For the workshops, it was considered important that an appropriate range of stakeholders were invited. Consideration was given to representatives of local businesses (in particular, local traders and land owners), active community groups, service providers and residents. Lists of invitees were prepared through engagement with the council's Neighbourhood Teams and local members. Each workshop took place over the course of two hours. It comprised an initial presentation of the IPM's academic research into place management of centres. The two key pieces of research were the High Street 2020 project (focused on understanding the issues that can determine a centre's success) and Bringing Big Data to Small Users, which sought to bring information regarding centre performance (in particular footfall) to local people so that they were able to make informed decisions on collective place management. This section provided background for workshop attendees, and began generating thought and discussion over the centre's performance.

2.3 Next, attendees were asked to work in groups to identify key characteristics and strengths of the centre, which would then be fed back to the wider group. This gave a good sense of the overall range of perceptions of the centre, including the key

strengths and opportunities that could provide a basis for action to improve centre performance.

2.4 The final section of each workshop urged attendees to consider their role in effecting the changes identified. There is a tendency to assume a lack of control across stakeholders, but the IPM research suggests that, particularly where stakeholders can work effectively as a collective group, considerable influence can be exercised at the local level. For example, footfall data may reveal that the centre has visitors at times when most premises are closed. Whilst single traders may feel unable to effectively influence trading hours, acting as a group the traders are the only stakeholders able to address this issue.

2.5 Following each workshop, the IPM prepared a report for the centre. This summarised the assessment undertaken by the IPM and the outcomes of the workshop. It also included a set of recommendations for further action. Based on a conceptual framework developed through the High Street 2020 project, these were organised around the ideas of:

- Repositioning – realigning a centre’s function based on an understanding of its market position;
- Reinventing – focusing on changing perceptions and image for a centre;
- Rebranding – using measures around branding and public relations to engage more effectively with a centre’s catchment; and,
- Restructuring – seeking to change the physical and governance characteristics of a centre.

2.6 Workshops have now been held in Northenden, Harpurhey, Gorton and Chorlton. In addition to the initial pilot centres, a workshop has also been held in Withington to assist with the Future High Street Fund bid. How the IPM/Our Manchester Approach was used in relation to Withington District Centre will be reported in November 2019. The reports for Chorlton and Gorton District Centres are attached as an appendices 1 and 2 respectively to this report.

3.0 Chorlton Place Management Pilot

Place Management Pilot Workshop

3.1 The workshop for the Chorlton Place Management Pilot was held on the evening of 28 February 2019 at Chorlton Library. The workshop was attended by 15 people, including:

- Local Councillors
- Council officers including from the Neighbourhood Team and City Policy
- Business Owners
- Residents

3.2 Stakeholders at the workshop identified that the centre has a vibrant arts, culture, and events scene, in addition to a diverse range of independent retailers, cafes, and restaurants, which contributes to a sense of place distinctiveness.

Participants also believed there to be good accessibility to Chorlton due to regular trams and buses in operation. However, in terms of areas to improve upon, stakeholders commonly identified that there are some challenges around traffic and congestion within the centre, causing issues with walkability. They also considered there to be a lack of attractive public realm for the community to socialise or work together, as well as some appearance issues within the precinct shopping centre. Moreover, participants suggested there needs to be further stakeholder collaboration in local plans and strategies, since currently various groups seem to operate somewhat independently. Finally, high rents were mentioned as a potential barrier to entry for both businesses and residents.

Theme	Overview of findings and recommendations
Repositioning	<p>Findings – The centre functions well in terms of meeting basic needs of the community, as well as providing a strong leisure offer which also appeals to a wider catchment. Activity hours were identified as a key strength in Chorlton with a significant number of commercial establishments open in both the early morning and the evening. Consequently, the district centre is a place where people can dwell. Although Chorlton has grown over recent years to become a popular residential and leisure destination, connectivity within the wider district centre is an issue. It is suggested that Chorlton now comprises four distinct clusters of activity, namely Chorlton Centre, Beech Road, Barlow Moor Road and Manchester Road.</p> <p>Quick wins – Once stakeholder capacity is in place, efforts should be made to share knowledge and generate ideas in order to enact interventions to improve the District Centre. One such activity is communicating a clear message about Chorlton’s offer</p>
Reinventing	<p>Findings – Chorlton is a highly liveable place, providing access to a wide range of services, including health, library, education, and nearby greenspace. The footfall counter on Wilbraham Road is unlikely to be picking up true footfall for all four areas of the centre. It is anticipated that visitor numbers are actually much higher, but are dispersed across the wider centre. Notable deficiencies identified concerning the levels of graffiti and litter.</p> <p>Quick wins – concentrate on the basics to improve the appearance of the centre. Longer term, focus on improving connectivity and legibility of the centre through basic placemaking interventions to improve navigability and route making.</p>
Rebranding	<p>Findings – Overall Chorlton possesses a strong and positive image, driving its popularity as a residential and leisure destination. There is scope, however, to consolidate this strength by clearly identifying and communicating the centre offer to both existing and new audiences. No one single agency is taking</p>

	<p>responsibility for the generation of a cohesive brand identity for the centre</p> <p>Quick win – The marketing and promotion of Chorlton provides an opportunity to encourage more local collaboration e.g. the traders and wider stakeholders might establish a sub-group challenged with developing the Chorlton offer and brand. It is advised that any attempt to brand Chorlton is done locally, and builds on existing strengths, to create authentic messages about the place.</p>
Restructuring	<p>Findings – A key strength of Chorlton is accessibility, with regular tram and bus services. Chorlton currently has a low vacancy rate. Whilst a cause for celebration, this also presents a barrier to entrants, restricting opportunities to diversify or complement existing services.</p> <p>Quick win – Consolidate existing interested local stakeholders by establishing a district-centre stakeholder group, initiated by the neighbourhood team who will play an active role in the group going forwards. From this, form sub-groups to take responsibilities for specific interventions. The longer-term view would be to consolidate this group to create a joined-up and collective approach to centre management. Understanding and sharing the analysis of footfall data may offer an opportunity to engage a wider group of stakeholders by developing a mutual understanding of centre function and performance.</p>

3.3 The draft report for Chorlton has been completed and is attached at appendix 1. The document was circulated to ward members in August who have raised some concerns about delivering the recommendations IPM have proposed in the Chorlton V&V Report. These include capacity and resources within the Neighbourhood team to take recommendations forward; the geographical area to be included in plans going forward; and the role of elected Members. These concerns are noted and will be considered in the IPM final progress report.

4.0 Gorton Place Management Pilot

Place Management Pilot Workshops

4.1 Two Place Management Pilot workshops were held in Gorton on 14 March 2018 and 5 June 2019 in Gorton Library. The first workshop was attended by 10 key stakeholders and the follow up workshop had 17 attendees including:

- Local Councillors
- Council officers including from the Neighbourhood Team, City Policy and Markets
- Business Representatives
- Residents

4.2 The draft report for Gorton has recently been completed and is attached at appendix 2. The document has been circulated to ward members and any comments received will be reported at the meeting.

4.3 Stakeholders at the workshop identified there is a diverse local catchment area and a local community group organise events in the centre that successfully bring the community together. Gorton Centre is dominated by a large supermarket and its carpark but also provides a vibrant market and an independent retail offer. However, the centre has problems with appearance and lacks a central hub, a distinctive identity and places to dwell. Although public transport access to the centre is good, it is not well connected to nearby railway stations or attractions and is dissected by Hyde Road with few crossing points.

Theme	Overview of findings and recommendations
Repositioning	<p>Findings – Gorton provides essentials well but there is little to create a sense of experience for the catchment area or to attract visitors particularly outside normal business hours. The exception is events such as Christmas Lights switch on and local carnival organised by a local community group and which have been successful in increasing footfall. A wider group of stakeholders could collaborate with the local group to put on more events all year round. This would be an opportunity to involve the wider diverse community. Access to footfall data can assist in planning and tracking success of such events. Centre should also be better linked to local attractions such as Gorton Monastery. Neighbourhood team are already working on ‘get to know you’ type workshops within the local community.</p> <p>Quick wins – Sharing of footfall data and analysis so that more informed and collaborative decisions can be made in Gorton</p>
Reinventing	<p>Findings – Gorton is meeting immediate needs for convenience retail, essential services and nearby green space. However, overall appearance is an area for improvement. Aesthetic improvements required followed by further public realm work to move to a more pedestrian focussed centre. Supermarket clients need to have reason to dwell and to visit other traders. Using vacant units and public space next to the market along with extending market opening hours could create opportunities for new enterprises. It is also suggested that with some improvements the market could be a focal point for the centre.</p> <p>Quick wins – Low cost improvements to appearance eg hanging baskets and flower beds perhaps through ‘in bloom’ style event.</p>
Rebranding	<p>Findings – The local community are very proud of Gorton but feel there is a lack of identity. This could be rectified by marketing and signage to its existing assets such as the Gorton Monastery. Signage would reinforce their links to the centre. As part of</p>

	<p>aesthetic improvements local artists could work with the community to create public art celebrating these local assets.</p> <p>Quick win – Establish network of stakeholders to manage branding/marketing to create identity for Gorton linking the centre to Gorton Monastery.</p>
Restructuring	<p>Findings – Comprehensive physical restructuring would be expensive and challenging however redeveloping the market and immediate surrounding area as the central hub could be a positive course of action. Vacancy in retail units is not a concern but exploring opportunities to fill vacant units particularly on Wellington St/Cross Lane would be advised. The new integrated community hub will be a very positive addition to the centre. Improving walkability within and to the centre including links across Hyde Road would make the centre more attractive. Currently a long standing active group relies on volunteers to put on events/carnivals and their knowledge and expertise could form basis of a strategic approach to regular events.</p> <p>Quick win – establish a community/stakeholder group initiated by the neighbourhood team which can enact change, with a priority given to appearance initially.</p>

5.0 Next Steps

5.1 The place management initial pilot workshops have now all been carried out and have illustrated the diversity of Manchester's centres and the roles they play for their local communities and beyond. Following publication of each report, the Scrutiny and Overview District Centre Subgroup has been given the opportunity to review the recommendations and consider whether any short term actions should be implemented.

5.2 The Council along with IPM are partners in the Area Based Collaborative Entrepreneurship in Cities (ABCitiEs) European partnership. As part of this project IPM and the Council have committed to completing a further six pilot projects in centres with footfall counters across the city. These are Withington (work complete), Fallowfield, Rusholme, Levenshulme and Cheetham Hill District Centres and Victoria Avenue Local Centre.

5.3 IPM and officers will review the results from all pilot centres and report back on the key issues and possible responses both for delivery and revised policy. Recommendations for planning policy to support collaborative working in centres will feed into the statutory Local Plan review. A consultation will be held on the issues and options to be addressed in the Local Plan at the end of the year.