

Manchester City Council Report for Resolution

Report to: District Centres Subgroup – 21 January 2020

Subject: District Centres Subgroup - Final recommendations

Report of: Strategic Director (Growth and Development)

Summary

Since February 2017, the District Centre Subgroup has overseen a work programme to consider the most effective policy approach the council and its partners can take to promote successful district centres in Manchester. A core aspect of the work programme comprises the Institute of Place Management (IPM) Vital and Viable pilots in Chorlton, Gorton, Harpurhey, Northenden and Withington.

This report describes the process and overall findings and recommendation of the IPM pilots and the IPM report 'Vital and Viable Manchester District Centres' is attached in Appendix 1. The IPM recommendations are outlined in the report and summarised under the following three key common principles:-

- Strengthen local networks and their capacity to effect change
- Align place making interventions against 25 priority intervention factors
- Monitor and share data to make informed decisions

The Manchester Local Plan review will consider the character and individual needs of each centre and policy will be developed to support development that creates multifunctional thriving and attractive centres. Further work, however, will be needed to consider options for providing the necessary support to local communities to establish and maintain effective collaborative networks.

In addition to the IPM pilots, the Subgroup has received a report on underserved and emerging communities which considered communities served by an underperforming district centre, communities without reasonable access to a centre and the need for centres to serve emerging communities. It provided information on the current and previous uses in district centres and described the on-going centre audit evolved from the IPM district centre Vital and Viable pilots.

The Subgroup also received presentations and held discussions on:

- the role of 'Identity, Branding and Marketing' in creating successful centres;
- The role of markets; and
- Withington, a centre with a well-established local network. (The Withington community are successfully using innovative projects and events to improve the vitality of their local centre).

Finally this report also outlines the on-going work by IPM and the Council on centres as part of their roles in the Area Based Collaborative Entrepreneurship in Cities (ABCitiEs) European Partnership.

Recommendations

Members are recommended to:

- note the report and recommendations made by the Institute of Place Management (IPM) summarised in sections 6,7 and 8 of this report;
- forward this report and any further recommendations to Economy Scrutiny Committee with a recommendation that the Executive be asked to consider and where appropriate endorse the policy recommendations arising from this sub group's work;
- instruct officers to consider the IPM recommendations as part of the statutory review of the Local Plan; and
- instruct officers to develop options for providing the necessary support to local communities to establish and maintain effective collaborative networks within centres and report on this to Economy Scrutiny Committee and Executive when this report is considered.

Wards affected: All

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

None

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Since February 2017, the District Centre Subgroup has overseen a work programme 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.
- 1.3 As part of the work to develop a ‘Future High Streets Fund’ bid to Government, IPM also ran a pilot study in Withington.
- 1.4 In addition to the IPM pilots, the Subgroup has received a report on underserved and emerging communities and has heard presentations on ‘Identity, Branding and Marketing’ and the role of Markets.

2.0 Manchester Place Management Pilots

Approach to the Place Management Pilots

- 2.1 The aim of the IPM Management pilot work has been to:
 - develop a better, evidence-based understanding of the key factors the local authority and its partners can influence to create more vital and viable local centres;
 - promote the creation of active collaborative partnerships in centres that are able to bring about positive change; and
 - monitor centre performance
- 2.2 The work is underpinned by research completed in 2016 by the IPM, which studied the impact changes to retailing in the UK were having on town and city centres. The main outcome of this project was the identification of 25 priority interventions for centre management as listed in table 1 below.

Table 1: High Street UK 2020 25 ranked priority factors impacting vitality and viability

1. ACTIVITY HOURS	Ensuring the centre is open when the catchment needs it. What are the shopping hours? Is there an evening economy? Do the activity hours of the centre match the needs of the catchment?
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2. APPEARANCE	Improving the quality of the visual appearance. How clean is the centre?
3. RETAILERS	Offering the right type and quantity of retailers. What retailers are represented?
4. VISION & STRATEGY	Having a common vision and some leadership. Do stakeholders collaborate? Is the vision incorporated in local plans?
5. EXPERIENCE	Considering the quality of the experience? Measuring levels of service quality and visitor satisfaction. What is the image of the centre?
6. MANAGEMENT	Building capacity to get things done. Is there effective management – of the shopping centre(s) and town centre?
7. MERCHANDISE	Meeting the needs of the catchment. What is the range and quality of goods on offer?
8. NECESSITIES	Ensuring basic facilities are present and maintained. Is there appropriate car-parking; amenities; general facilities, like places to sit down and toilets etc.?
9. ANCHORS	The presence of an anchor which drives footfall. This could be retail (like a department store) or could be a busy transport interchange or large employer.
10. NETWORKS & PARTNERSHIPS	Presence of strong networks and effective formal or informal partnerships. Do stakeholders communicate and trust each other? Can the council facilitate action (not just lead it?)
11. DIVERSITY	A multi-functional centre. What attractions are there, apart from retail? What is the tenant mix and tenant variety?
12. WALKABILITY	The 'walkability' of the centre. Are linked trips between areas possible – or are the distances too great? Are there other obstacles that stop people walking?
13. ENTERTAINMENT & LEISURE	An entertainment and leisure offer. What is it? Is it attractive to various segments of the catchment?
14. ATTRACTIVENESS	The 'pulling power' of a centre. Can it attract people from a distance?

15. PLACE ASSURANCE	Getting the basics right. Does the centre offer a basic level of customer service, is this consistent? Or do some operators, or parts of the offer, let this down?
16. ACCESSIBLE	Each of reach. How convenient is the centre to access? Is it accessible by a number of different means, e.g. car, public transport, cycling etc.?
17. PLACE MARKETING	Communicating the offer. How does the centre market and promote itself? Do all stakeholders communicate a consistent image? How well does the centre orientate visitors and encourage flow – with signage and guides etc.
18. COMPARISON/CONVENIENCE	The amount of comparison shopping opportunities compared to convenience. Is this sustainable?
19. RECREATIONAL SPACE	The amount and quality of recreational areas and public space/open space. Are there places that are uncommodified? Where people can enjoy spending time without spending money?
20. BARRIERS TO ENTRY	Refers to obstacles that make it difficult for interested retailers to enter the centre's market. What is the location doing to make it easier for new businesses to enter?
21. CHAIN VS INDEPENDENT	Number of multiples stores and independent stores in the retail mix of a centre/High Street. Is this suitably balanced?
22. SAFETY/CRIME	A centre KPI measuring perceptions or actual crime including shoplifting. Perceptions of crime are usually higher than actual crime rates. Does the centre monitor these and how does it communicate results to stakeholders?
23. LIVEABILITY	The resident population or potential for residential in the centre. Does the centre offer the services/environment that residents need? Doctors, schools etc.
24. ADAPTABILITY	The flexibility of the space/property in a centre. Are there inflexible and outdated units that are unlikely to be re-let or re-purposed?
25. STORE DEVELOPMENT	The willingness for retailers/property owners to develop their stores. Are they willing to coordinate/cooperate in updating activities? Or do they act independently?

- 2.3 Although each centre is different and warrants 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.
- 2.4 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. Following an initial presentation of the IPM's academic research, including information regarding centre performance (in particular footfall), attendees were asked to work in groups to identify key characteristics and strengths of the centre. 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.
- 2.5 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.
- 2.6 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. Using the 25 priority interventions and the 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.

3.0 Identity, Branding and Marketing

- 3.1 In Oct 2019, the Subgroup heard a presentation from Marie Hodgson of Manchester Life (ML). ML is a partnership between the Abu Dhabi United Group and Manchester City Council and was established to respond to the need for housing and to deliver a thriving and safe neighbourhood in Ancoats and New Islington. ML is a developer and landlord making a long term

investment in the area and is investing in creating cohesive communities. It has assembled local developers and building managers to collaborate on community safety and placemaking, and funded additional community policing, street lighting and neighbourhood CCTV. ML also employs 'Manchester Life Placemakers' to build the residents' sense of community, helping residents to know their neighbours and foster a strong sense of community. The area has now become a popular residential location as well as a destination with acclaimed restaurants, bars, independent retailers and the Hope Mill Theatre.

- 3.2 The key themes from the presentation for improving and creating new district centres support the IPM findings and recommendations and include: the need for a strong well communicated vision; the strength of a Public/Private partnership; and that promotion of community cohesion (e.g. through 'Placemakers') and creating a safe and vibrant environment will help create a sense of identity and a stable longer term population.

4.0 Markets

- 4.1 The IPM research has also identified the important role of successful markets can play in supporting district centres. The IPM have incorporated the development of successful markets as a new priority intervention as a separate factor for centre success. Where there are successful markets the IPM found that centre footfall aligns closely with market opening times and days.
- 4.2 In November 2019 the Subgroup heard from Helen Power, one of the founders of Levenshulme Market, the Head of Wholesale and Retail Markets and Neighbourhood Officers on the roles of markets in revitalising centres. The Council was unable to make a pilot market in Levenshulme financially viable in 2011 but local residents, working together with the Neighbourhood team, were successful in establishing a community led market in 2013. The market's aim was to address deeper economic issues in the area. It worked with community groups, including groups from black and minority ethnic (BAME) communities, to encourage people to take up the opportunities created by the market. The Levenshulme Market Fund was established which provided grants to those who wanted to make a difference to Levenshulme high street.
- 4.3 The Neighbourhood Manager reported that it had been challenging at the beginning to develop a sustainable market in Levenshulme. He informed Members that this had involved a lot of work from Helen Power and the other market directors and a small amount of investment from the council but that the risk had been worth it due to what had been achieved.
- 4.4 The Head of Wholesale and Retail Markets explained that Manchester Markets operates as a business unit within the Council and runs the retail markets at Longsight, Gorton and Wythenshawe. Business plans are being produced to develop and cosmetically improve the markets at Longsight and Gorton. Although Wythenshawe Market faces additional challenges, plans for the next five years are being developed. The Council has commissioned a consultant to investigate the social and economic impact of the three retail

markets and the resulting report will underpin any requests for funding for the markets in the future. The experience of Levenshulme and other markets in the city has shown that developing and sustaining a successful market is not straight forward. The right offer in the right place can however, make an important contribution to a centre's vitality and viability.

5.0 Withington

- 5.1 In November 2019, the Subgroup also heard from Jennifer Smith of Love Withington Baths about the success of the community working together in Withington. Residents came together initially to resist the Council's plan to close Withington Baths. Following a petition and a march by local people, the Council agreed to keep the baths open for a further twelve months and during that time the community put a business plan together to run the baths as a charity. The Baths is now run by the charity as a community hub and swimming pool and includes co-working space. A community advisory group was also established to ensure the Withington Baths Charity Directors are acting in line with the community's wishes. The success of the baths has empowered the local community to work together with traders, land owners and the council to further improve Withington District Centre.
- 5.2 As footfall counters were already installed in Withington and to support the Withington Future High Street Fund bid, the IPM were commissioned to include Withington as a pilot centre. Following the IPM workshop, traders in Withington have created a traders association. Data from the footfall analysis has shown that many people visit the centre later in the day. This has resulted in traders adjusting their opening hours accordingly. The workshop considered what kind of place the stakeholders wanted Withington to be, while recognising the challenges such as the busy bus route of Wilmslow Road and the limited public realm.
- 5.3 The community taking an Our Manchester approach to improving their local centre has had a positive impact in the area. Innovative events have increased footfall in the centre. This has included the shutter art project, popup shops, markets and events such as "Withington By Night" and the forthcoming re-development of the former Nat West Bank. The refurbishment of Withington Library has also created a valuable community hub.
- 5.4 The challenge in Withington now is to sustain this work, keep people engaged and support the local networks that have been established. While the initial bid to the Future High Street Fund was unsuccessful, the Council was informed in December that funding to develop Withington as a High Streets Task Force Pilot was being made available. Through this, some further support will be made available to develop the proposals in the initial bid further.

6.0 IPM pilots - conclusions and recommendations

- 6.1 The place management initial pilot workshops have now all been completed 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.

6.2 IPM have reviewed all the pilots and have produced a summary and recommendations report, Vital and Viable Manchester District Centres attached as Appendix 1. The report highlights the following recommendations for the City to consider in the development of new policy support for local centres:

- Work should be undertaken to develop targeted and place specific interventions to build local collaboration.
- Work should be undertaken to increase local capacity to effect change in areas of the city where existing capacity is low.
- Efforts should be devoted to enhancing existing local collaborative networks.
- Monitoring data on centre performance should be collected and shared with partners so that evidence based actions to improve centres could be taken.

6.3 Although effective revitalisation of each district centre requires a bespoke response, the IPM have identified some common principles and guidance to inform a citywide approach. In summary these are:

Strengthen local networks and their capacity to effect change

- It is essential to build community ownership or collective responsibility for each centre.
 - Where effective networks of local stakeholders exist, they should be supported to raise their capacity to take further responsibility for centre management and marketing.
 - Where networks are less established but are beginning to emerge, MCC should capitalise on already engaged stakeholders to encourage momentum and build capacity.
 - Where networks do not yet exist MCC may need to take leadership responsibility, on the understanding that once new community led structures are in place, the authority will need to step back and take on a more nurturing position.
- New and established networks form subgroups to take responsibility for specific interventions (e.g. social media) and environmental improvements.
- MCC need to identify capacity to initiate greater stakeholder collaboration and facilitate regular meetings. The role will involve networking, leadership and good communication skills.

b) Align place making interventions against 25 factors

- District centre networks are recommended to refer to the IPM 25 Priority Interventions and the 4Rs Framework (Repositioning, Reinventing, Rebranding and Restructuring) as a mechanism for identifying priority interventions. It is important that priorities are set locally and not set from

above and that networks focus on factors they can influence at a local level.

- Each centre has individual issues but a top priority across all centres is the visual appearance including litter, graffiti and quality of storefronts and public realm. Traffic and pollution are also a concern in each centre, however, these issues are beyond the remit of local networks and require a strategic response.
- IPM recommend branding is created collectively and managed by local stakeholders utilising low cost social media.
- Future proofing centres is essential which will require many centres to reduce dependency on retail and to consider new uses to create multi-functional centres.
- Introduce more market activity or further capitalise on existing market assets as markets are particularly important drivers of diversity and vibrancy.
- Co-locate key services in central hubs in centres. Public services located together in centres have a significant impact on footfall.

c) Monitor and share data to make informed decisions

- The monitoring and analysis of footfall data has proved crucial in the pilot centres in allowing stakeholders to monitor the routine footfall patterns in each centre, and the impact of interventions to be measured.
- In addition to providing evidence on which to base decision making, the data has also provided a tangible and accessible source of information around which stakeholder groups have coalesced and utilised as a marketing/promotional tool (as exemplified by groups in Chorlton and Withington).
- Footfall provides the only source of round-the-clock insight into how these centres are being used. Therefore, data should continue to be captured and shared with local networks on a regular basis.

6.4 As a result of the Manchester pilots and other research the IPM have reviewed their 25 priority interventions which now include:

- Markets – The research has identified the central role of successful markets to Manchester's district centres and has subsequently led to development of successful markets being identified as a new key factor for centre success. IPM found that centre footfall aligns closely with market opening times and days, with less people typically using the centre when the market is closed.
- Functionality – the multi-functional nature of centres, including the key role of co – located public services, is essential as ideally they will serve a variety of purposes
- Innovation – Pop-up activity, such as that seen in Withington, led to this being included.

7.0 Underserved and emerging communities

- 7.1 The District Centres Subgroup received a report in November 2019 on underserved and emerging Communities. The report considered underserved communities in three categories:-
- communities that surround an existing district centre which is underperforming;
 - communities without reasonable access to a district or local neighbourhood centre; and
 - emerging communities without reasonable access to shops and other community facilities or to a designated district centre
- 7.2 It provided information on the latest trends in the District Centre Survey: Planning Use Classes and described the on-going centre audit evolved from the IPM district centre Vital and Viable pilots.
- 7.3 It was reported that the majority of Manchester residents live within walking distance of a centre (taken to be 1km), however residents in Higher Blackley and Charlestown on average live over 1.5km from a district centre.
- 7.4 New communities expected to emerge over the next 15 to 20 years are mainly concentrated in the extended city centre area. These areas are not currently underserved but it was recommended that the level of provision of shops and other services be kept under review as communities grow.

8.0 Centre Policy

- 8.1 The Local Plan review will consider the character and individual needs of each centre, taking into account recommendations from the pilot reports. Policy will be developed to support development that creates multifunctional thriving and attractive centres. Recommendations for planning policy to support collaborative working in centres and consideration of amendments to district centre boundaries will also be considered as part of this work.
- 8.2 As part of the Local Plan review analysis will continue to build a better understanding of each district centre and establish whether there is a need for new district centres or amendments to current boundaries. Data gathered on centres through the land use planning surveys and the footfall analysis will be shared with centre stakeholders
- 8.3 However, the need to increase local capacity and enhance local collaborative networks cannot be delivered through the planning process. It is recommended that Members instruct officers to consider options for providing the necessary support to local communities to establish and maintain effective collaborative networks.

9.0 Area Based Collaborative Entrepreneurship in Cities

- 9.1 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. Once complete an action plan to trial emerging recommendations will be produced and monitored for two years.

- 9.2 The ABCitiEs project will also fund a workshop for council staff working in the pilot centres. They will review the impact of the project and consider action plans for nurturing effective local networks and will receive training on analysing footfall data.
- 9.3 An ABCitiEs conference will be held in Manchester in 2021 for all partners, stakeholders and interested parties to share the findings of the partnership research and pilot projects to date.