

Manchester City Council Report for Resolution

Report to: District Centre Subgroup – 19 February 2020

Subject: District Centre Subgroup - Final recommendations

Report of: Strategic Director, Growth and Development

Summary

At its meeting on 30 September 2015, the Economy Scrutiny Committee considered a report about the changing role of district centres in Manchester and the potential policy and strategy measures which could be adopted to shape the future of the city's district centres. Members agreed that they wanted to see more detailed work undertaken and a more strategic approach developed to the future management of district centres. They recommended that the Council produce an overarching strategy for district centres and agreed to establish a subgroup to contribute to and review this work. The District Centre Subgroup (the Subgroup) commenced its work in March 2016.

The group 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.

This report summarises the overall programme of work undertaken by the Subgroup. The Subgroup commenced its work with an initial focus on understanding the trends that were affecting district centres. A core aspect of the work programme involved joint work with the Institute of Place Management (IPM). The Institute recommended that footfall counters be introduced at a number of centres across the city to understand usage across the day and week and enabled centres to be benchmarked with one another and with other centres nationally. Vital and Viable pilots in Chorlton, Gorton, Harpurhey, Northenden and Withington were also undertaken comprising analysis of the performance of each of the centres in detail and holding workshops with representatives from businesses and local communities. The IPM report 'Vital and Viable Manchester District Centres' that pulls together the findings and recommendations from the five pilots was discussed at the Subgroup's meeting in January 2020. 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 Subgroup has also:

- Held discussions with local traders to hear about their direct experiences in district centres;
- Heard from a representative from Transport for Greater Manchester who discussed the role of transport linkages into district centres;
- Held a discussion to understand the importance of digital infrastructure to support services and businesses in the centres;
- Considered the role of marketing and branding to establish placemaking with specific reference to Ancoats and New Islington;
- Examined the role of markets;
- Received a report on underserved and emerging communities; and
- Considered, in the light of the climate emergency, what role the district centres could play in addressing climate change.

The 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.

The work programme described in section 2 of this report has led the Subgroup to bring forward a number of key recommendations set out in section 3 of the report. The recommendations can be broadly split into the following categories:

- The overarching recommendations that have emerged from the IPM work on the case study district centres;
- Actions to be considered by the Council in terms of existing approaches within district centres and where the Council can work with the traders and other partner organisations to facilitate changes in the district centres; and
- Consideration of future policy both in terms of local policy (e.g. through the emerging Local Plan) or on a wider scale in influencing Government policy.

Recommendations

Members are recommended to:

- Note the report and recommendations made by the Institute of Place Management (IPM) summarised in paragraphs 3.3 to 3.5 of this report; and
- Forward this report and the Subgroup's recommendations set out in Section 3 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.

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Wards affected: All

Background documents (available for public inspection): None

1.0 Background

- 1.1 At its meeting on 30 September 2015, the Economy Scrutiny Committee considered a report about the changing role of district centres in Manchester and the potential policy and strategy measures which could be adopted to shape the future of the city's district centres. Members agreed that they wanted to see more detailed work and a strategic approach on district centres. They recommended that the Council produce an overarching strategy for district centres and agreed to establish a subgroup to contribute to and review this work. The District Centre Subgroup commenced its work in March 2016. The group 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 Section 2 provides a summary of the key aspects of work undertaken by the Subgroup. The initial work programme of the Subgroup considered the scope of investigation for the group. This involved discussions with IPM to establish the nature of the challenges facing district centres and considering what matters would need to be addressed in any future policy approach. The Subgroup focussed on two specific matters in its early meetings – one around transport linkages into district centres; and secondly, understanding the importance of digital infrastructure to support services and businesses in the centres. Following the initial scoping work discussions were held with a number of traders from across a range of centres (Moston Lane, Didsbury, Chorlton, Fallowfield and Rusholme) plus a representative from the Makers Market. This allowed for members of the Subgroup to hear directly about the experiences of traders and the issues they faced.
- 1.3 The chair of the Subgroup drew together some interim findings in February 2017. The findings were split into three main matters covering general observations; gaps identified in current policy and practice and where progress might be made to cover the gaps; and identifying where potential improvements to the management of district centres could be considered.
- 1.4 A core aspect of the work programme that followed on from the initial discussions comprised the installation of a ten footfall counters to enable usage to be measured and monitored and the establishment of Place Management Pilots in four of Manchester's centres (Chorlton, Gorton, Harpurhey and Northenden). These were exercises that brought together a centre's stakeholders; brought to their attention key evidence relating to activity and character of the centre; and focused 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. As part of the work to develop a 'Future High Streets Fund' bid to Government, IPM also ran a pilot study in Withington.

- 1.5 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. The Subgroup also received presentations on 'Identity, Branding and Marketing' and the role of Markets. In the light of the climate emergency declared in July 2019, the Subgroup also considered a report on the role that district centres could play in addressing climate change.
- 1.6 Section 3 sets out the Subgroup's recommendations for consideration by the Economy Scrutiny Committee and Executive where appropriate. The Subgroup has also made recommendations for consideration by the wider stakeholder group of local traders and other organisations working within the district centres.

2.0 Summary of Work Programme

Initial Programme of Work

- 2.1 The Subgroup commenced its work with an initial focus on understanding the trends that were affecting district centres. This involved presentations and discussion with colleagues from IPM to establish the key lines of investigation that the Subgroup would consider. Existing evidence on the nature and current state of district centres was drawn upon with contributions from Subgroup members and visiting councillors, IPM and Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM). The discussion with Transport for Greater Manchester focussed on the importance of good public transport, cycling and walking links into and within district centres. The Greater Manchester Transport Strategy 2040 was considered and it was recognised that the strategy had a key theme of connective neighbourhoods. District centres were key places for providing local services and goods hence requiring a good level of accessibility by public transport, walking and cycling. Digital infrastructure was also considered by the Subgroup at the request of the Economy Scrutiny Committee. It was recognised that digital infrastructure was necessary to support services and businesses in district centres. The Subgroup considered the future potential delivery of digital services noting the discussions the Council was holding with a number of fibre broadband providers.

Traders Discussion

- 2.2 The Subgroup held a specific session where traders were invited from a number of the district centres to provide a view of current conditions and challenges. In advance of the meeting, the traders were asked to consider the following questions:
- Location and types of businesses you represent.
 - Why you based your business in its current location/ what do you see as the main benefits of that location for your business or another business like yours?
 - What are the main drawbacks of that location for your business?

- If you were relocating your business to another district centre, what would be the key attributes of the area that you would be looking for and why?
- Name one thing you think the Council does well which supports businesses in your area.
- Name one thing you think the Council has the opportunity to improve to support businesses in your area.

The traders covered a wide range of issues in the subsequent discussion at the Subgroup meeting. Key points that emerged focused on the importance of transport infrastructure linking into each centre; the need for marketing of district centres; and the role that markets either played or could play. It was recognised that there was a need to develop a coordinated strategy that identified measures within the control of the Council. Furthermore, the Subgroup agreed to identify where actions were best undertaken by traders within the centres or other organisations and where the Council could play a supporting role.

Interim Report of the Subgroup

2.3 Interim findings were presented by the chair of the Subgroup in February 2017, reflecting on the evidence and discussions held throughout 2016. The findings were grouped around three main themes:

- General observations about the character and role of district centres noting that they served as 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.*”
- Identified the lines of work that needed to be undertaken to develop greater resilience in existing district centres; and identify the potential need for “new or significantly developed” centres in the east and north of the city.
- Applying Our Manchester principles to enable capacity to be built up amongst local traders and other organisations, recognising that there were varying levels of existing resilience in each district centre.

The Subgroup subsequently paused its work and reconvened in January 2018 where work began in earnest with the place pilots.

Manchester Place Management Pilots

2.4 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.

- 2.5 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 (see Appendix 1).
- 2.6 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.
- 2.7 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.
- 2.8 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 and where a change in opening hours could be beneficial to individual traders and to the performance of the centre as a whole. 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.
- 2.9 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.

Identity, Branding and Marketing

- 2.10 To understand issues around branding and marketing, the Subgroup received a presentation from 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 create 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. To maximise on the opportunity created by significant capital investment & large scale regeneration of a neighbourhood, ML 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 very popular residential location as well as a destination with acclaimed restaurants, bars, independent retailers and the Hope Mill Theatre.
- 2.11 Most district centres in the city aren't starting from scratch, and have limited opportunities for large-scale investment. However, 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.

Markets

- 2.12 The Subgroup considered the role of markets focusing on two aspects. Firstly, work undertaken to establish a market in Levenshulme was discussed noting the role of the local community 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. It was noted that it had been challenging at the beginning to develop a sustainable market in Levenshulme.
- 2.13 The Subgroup also considered the work of the Council's Manchester Markets operation (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 experience of Levenshulme and other markets in the city has shown that developing and sustaining a successful market is not straight forward. The IPM research notes in section 3 the role of markets suggesting that the right offer in the right place can however, make an important contribution to a centre's vitality and viability.

Underserved and emerging communities

- 2.14 The Subgroup considered the matter of underserved and emerging communities which covered three main 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.
- 2.15 The Subgroup discussed the latest trends in the District Centre Survey: Planning Use Classes and how this could link into the on-going centre audit evolved from the IPM district centre Vital and Viable pilots. The Subgroup noted that the majority of Manchester residents live within walking distance of a centre (taken to be 1km). It was noted that residents in Higher Blackley and Charlestown on average live over 1.5km from a district centre. This ties in with the earlier point raised in the interim findings (paragraph 2.3) that there is a particular issue to address in terms of identifying the potential need for “new or significantly developed” centres in the north of the city. 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.

Area Based Collaborative Entrepreneurship in Cities

- 2.16 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 completed an action plan to trial emerging recommendations will be produced and monitored for two years.
- 2.17 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.
- 2.18 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. The Subgroup identified that officers should work with IPM to identify opportunities to develop some additional training that could be offered to colleagues within the Council to assist in understanding matters such as footfall data.

Climate Change and District Centres

2.19 In response to the Climate Emergency declared by the Council in July 2019, the Subgroup considered a report that set out how district centres might contribute to zero carbon targets for Manchester. The main areas covered were as follows:

- The key issues to consider in how district centres link to the climate change agenda;
- Future opportunities for climate change adaptation and mitigation in district centres;
- What can the new Local Plan bring forward in terms of new policies; and
- How can the revised Climate Change Action Plan for the Council influence policy approaches in district centres.

2.20 It is clear that the new Local Plan will have an important part to play in setting out land use policies that further develop the approach to climate change already established in the current Core Strategy. Further analysis will be required to assess the role of district centres in contributing to the zero carbon targets by 2038 to inform the development of policies in the new Local Plan. The evidence base already developed by the Tyndall Centre will be invaluable in this work; alongside the analysis recommended by the IPM in their work. Alongside this will be the continuing work for the Climate Change Action Plan driven by the climate emergency declaration. The Overview and Scrutiny Climate Change Sub-group will scrutinise forthcoming work by the Council on climate change. There will be an opportunity therefore to consider how any future climate change related work on district centres, including work undertaken for the new Local Plan can be considered by the Climate Change Sub-group for comment and debate

3.0 Subgroup Recommendations

3.1 The sub group's work has sought to better understand the importance of District Centres to the city as a whole. The work has underlined both the important economic role which District Centres play and also the importance that they have in peoples' sense of belonging to a particular place.

3.2 The work programme described in section 2 has led the Subgroup to bring forward a number of key recommendations. The recommendations can be broadly split into the following categories:

- The overarching recommendations that have emerged from the IPM work on the case study district centres;
- Actions to be considered by the Council in terms of existing approaches within district centres and where the Council can work with the traders and other partner organisations to facilitate changes in the district centres;
- Consideration of future policy both in terms of local policy (e.g. through the emerging Local Plan) or on a wider scale in influencing Government policy.

IPM Recommendations

3.3 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.

3.4 IPM has reviewed all the pilots and have produced a summary and recommendations report, Vital and Viable Manchester District Centres which was considered at the Subgroup's meeting in January 2020. 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.**

3.5 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: -

a) 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 should investigate options to identify capacity to initiate greater stakeholder collaboration and facilitate regular meetings. The role will involve networking, leadership and good communication skills. It would also potentially facilitate some greater understanding of district centre management.

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.
- Improving the resilience of 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 (whilst noting the issues discussed at the markets session at paragraphs 2.12 and 2.13).
- 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.

3.6 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.

Council actions and working with traders/ other organisations

3.7 The pilot work in the five district centres has highlighted the value of acquiring good local data with a particular focus on footfall data. There are currently 10 district centres that have footfall data monitoring. This can be combined with the Council’s own monitoring work on assessing all 17 district centres in terms of physical uses as noted in paragraph 2.14. A key consideration is the potential to increase the number of footfall counters to cover other district centres. This requires additional resource and will require further consideration by the Council and potentially other partner organisations as to how this may be facilitated.

The Subgroup therefore recommends the further dissemination of key information of data including footfall and changes in uses is circulated to relevant stakeholders within each of the district centres. This will help traders and other organisations in the district centres to better understand potential changing patterns within their respective centres.

3.8 Discussions with traders and work undertaken for the five pilot district centres noted that a key aspect is to “get the basics right”. This revolves around looking to address matters such as street cleaning; graffiti on buildings; and pavement and highways maintenance. Any changes to the delivery of public realm services would have to be considered in terms of how this was funded. It could present opportunities to demonstrate good examples of public and private sector services working together better.

The Subgroup recommends that relevant Council services consider where there are opportunities to improve current practices with respect to the maintenance of the public realm within district centres,

recognising that any proposed changes to the delivery of public realm services would have to be considered in terms of how this was funded. It could present opportunities to demonstrate good examples of public and private sector services working together better.

- 3.9 The IPM work identifies the need to strengthen local networks and their capacity to effect change. The pilots have shown the value of bringing in support via IPM working alongside the Council through its neighbourhood and planning policy teams to build capacity within the centres. This has helped both in terms of defining and monitoring issues in each centre; and identifying/delivering tangible actions to address some of the issues faced in each centre. At the heart of this is how resources, both within the Council and from the traders/other stakeholders in each centre can be identified to assist in developing greater resilience in each district centre.

The Subgroup recommends that the Economy Scrutiny Committee and Executive instruct officers to develop options for providing the necessary support to local communities to establish and maintain effective collaborative networks within district centres.

Future Policy

- 3.10 The Subgroup has discussed the role of future policy in helping to support existing district centres and, where appropriate, identify potential new district centres. A key area of work is the review of the Council's Local Plan which has just commenced a consultation on issues. The 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. 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.

The Subgroup recommend that the review of the Local Plan builds on the work and evidence base gathered as a result of the Subgroup's work.

- 3.11 The Subgroup also considered that opportunities should be taken to influence national policy with respect to district centres. The recently established Future High Streets Fund and the High Streets Task Force provide the Council with a specific link into national funding and policy development, particularly as the task force work is being led by IPM on behalf of the government. The High Streets Task Force has commenced work on a number of pilot projects and Withington is amongst the initial tranche of places that will receive further assistance in terms of training, expert insight, data and analytics, mentoring, and workshops.

The Subgroup therefore recommends that the Economy Scrutiny Committee and Executive instruct officers to identify opportunities to influence national policy initiatives including the current link to the High Street Task Force.