

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: District Centres Subgroup – 19 December 2018

Subject: Vital and Viable Neighbourhoods / Place Management Pilots
- Progress Report

Report of: Strategic Director (Development)

Summary

This report provides the Subgroup with an update on progress with the District Centre Place Management Pilot projects that are being delivered 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 outcomes of the Northenden and Gorton Place Management Pilots, both of which have reached the final report stage.

Recommendations

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

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Wards affected: Gorton and Abbey Hey, Northenden.

Background documents (available for public inspection):

Vital and Viable Northenden -
Vital and Viable Gorton – August 2018

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 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 seek to agree actions 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 sets out the details of the Place Management Pilots in Northenden and Gorton. These are the centres where the first two Place Management Pilots took place, and for which a final report has been produced.

2.0 Manchester Place Management Pilots – Update

Approach to the Place Management Pilots

2.1 Whilst each centre is different and will warrant a different management approach, there has been a standard 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 workshop, 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. The workshop itself would take place over the course of two hours. It comprises an initial presentation of the IPM's academic research into place management of centres. The two key pieces of research are 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 are 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. A summary of these two projects was provided by the IPM at the last meeting of the District Centre Subgroup.

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 the workshop urges 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 suggest found that, particularly where stakeholders can work effectively as a collective, 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 the workshop, the IPM prepare a report for the centre. This summarises the assessment undertaken by the IPM and the outcomes of the workshop. It also includes a set of recommendations for further action. Based on a conceptual framework developed through the High Street 2020 project, these are 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 At the present time, the workshops have been held in Northenden, Gorton and Harpurhey. The workshop in Chorlton is expected to take place in early 2019. The reports for Northenden and Gorton have been prepared, and are available as appendices to this report. The output from these two pilots are considered in the remainder of this report.

3.0 Northenden Place Management Pilot

Place Management Pilot Workshop

3.1 The first Place Management Pilot took place in Northenden. The workshop was held on the evening of 6 March 2018 at the Britannia Hotel on Palatine Road.

3.2 The event was attended by 30 people. Attendees included:

- Council members (three members, although one was yet to be elected at the time of the workshop);
- Council officers from the Neighbourhood Team, Policy Partnerships and Research and Work and Skills;
- An officer from TfGM

- Local residents;
- Local traders;
- Representatives of the Northenden Civic Society;
- Representatives of the Northenden Neighbourhood Forum.

3.3 The discussion at the workshop highlighted a range of views about the centre, including assessments of the key issues. It was apparent that a substantial amount of activity already took place to promote the centre and activity within it. It was also clear that many local stakeholders take considerable pride in the centre.

Northenden Place Management Recommendations

3.4 Following the workshop, the IPM prepared a report that summarises its own assessment of the centre and the views expressed through the workshop. The report also includes a set of recommendations for future actions that could enhance place management in Northenden, including ‘quick wins’ and longer term measures. The recommendations can be reviewed in detail through the report (appendix A), but are summarised here.

Theme	Overview of recommendations
Repositioning	<p>Quick win – improve local understanding of the footfall data.</p> <p>Build on green space to differentiate Northenden, and look to improve evening and leisure economy to provide convenient offer for local community.</p>
Reinventing	<p>Quick win – improve signage linking the centre to nearby green space and riverside.</p> <p>Improve awareness of green resources, including Trans Pennine Trail.</p> <p>Use of planters and In Bloom events to improve appearance of Northenden.</p> <p>Organise community events to make use of the green space (the recent example of the Northenden Boat Race is evidence that there is already a significant level of activity in Northenden).</p>
Rebranding	<p>Quick win – develop branding/marketing focusing on Northenden’s location on the banks of the Mersey.</p> <p>Encourage stakeholder engagement to develop a stronger Northenden brand (using the existing Heron brand as a starting point). Online emphasis could help manage costs.</p>
Restructuring	<p>Quick win – establish community stakeholder group to oversee centre activity and governance.</p> <p>Capitalise on engaged stakeholders.</p> <p>Organise regular stakeholder meetings, and use these to share footfall data.</p>

3.5 The Northenden report was finalised in June 2018, and has therefore been available to support activity in the centre since then. It is important to note the high level of engagement that was already evident in Northenden, which was already driving action. However, following the workshop and production of the report, the following activity has taken place:

1) 'Village by the river' project.

This is a promotional project idea for the village. The phrase came out of the workshop and a project is being led by Now-Forever Heritage CIC. The approach follows the report's recommendations by involving Northenden college students to follow a design brief for artwork to promote Northenden.

2) Public art project

A local development company that attended the workshop is hoping to develop mural to animate the District Centre. There is potential for this to develop into a wider project, introducing a number of murals in the centre.

3) Events

The Makers Market and Christmas crowdfunding campaign have been successful. The Christmas event was funded through a combination of crowdfunding and contributions from local businesses (raising in total approximately £10,000).

4) Centre Branding

A previous exercise had established a Heron log for Northenden, but its use has increased following the workshop.

3.6 There remains further ambition to extend engagement, with local businesses and other local people/groups. The Place Management report and recommendations have been presented to recent meetings of the civic society and Neighbourhood Forum.

4.0 Gorton Place Management Pilot

Place Management Pilot Workshop

4.1 The workshop for the Gorton Place Management Workshop was held in Gorton Library on the evening of 14 March 2018. The workshop was attended by 10 people, including:

- Members of the council (two local members attended)
- Council officers from the Neighbourhood Team, Policy Partnerships and Research and Work and Skills;
- An officer from TfGM
- Local traders;
- Local community representatives

4.2 As with the discussions at the Northenden workshop, a range of views about Gorton were expressed during the evening. Points about which there was agreement related to the lack of a clear centre within Gorton, partly due to the significant presence of Hyde Road, and the emergence of an increasingly diverse local catchment, which could present an opportunity for services within the centre. The market was considered an important opportunity for independent traders, but its current design makes it physically closed-off. There was also recognition that events could contribute to the centre's success. In particular, the footfall data illustrated a significant increase in footfall on the day of the Christmas Lights switch-on.

4.3 Although the attendees at the workshop contributed to an engaged discussion, it was apparent that the overall level of engagement from Gorton District Centre stakeholders was lower than in Northenden.

Gorton Place Management Recommendations

4.4 Following the audit and workshop, the IPM prepared a report that summarised the process and included a range of recommendations, based on the key themes set out earlier in this report. The full report is set out in appendix B, but a summary of the recommendations is provided in the table below.

Theme	Overview of recommendations
Repositioning	<p>Quick win – improve local understanding of the footfall data.</p> <p>Create a stronger sense of experience by creating links to Gorton Monastery and by developing a more regular programme of events (considering the success of the Christmas light switch-on in 2017).</p>
Reinventing	<p>Quick win – low cost reinvention activity such as 'In Bloom' style events, focusing on hanging baskets and flowerbeds.</p> <p>Although Gorton's offer is rooted in convenience, there is scope and value to environmental improvements. This includes the In Bloom improvements suggested in the short term, but also work to 'humanise' the public realm and in particular increase dwell time and links that could help draw shoppers using the supermarket to other parts of the centre.</p> <p>Development of the Gorton hub could be an opportunity to also create a public realm hub.</p>
Rebranding	<p>Quick win – develop branding/marketing focusing on Gorton's proximity to Gorton Monastery and the speedway at Belle Vue Stadium.</p> <p>Installation of signage to direct people from the centre to the monastery (and vice versa), and introduction of public art that also emphasises these links.</p>

Restructuring	<p>Quick win – establish community stakeholder group, facilitated by the Neighbourhood Team, to oversee centre activity and develop a joined-up approach to centre improvement.</p> <p>The commitment of existing stakeholders should be supported, and used to provide the basis for wider local governance structures. Establish regular meetings for stakeholder engagement, including review of footfall data.</p>
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4.5 To enable effective Place Management to be established in Gorton, an initial challenge is to develop the local stakeholder capacity to identify and drive improvement activity. However, the prospective public investment to develop a services hub in Gorton is an important opportunity. Not only could the hub help drive footfall, its development could also be a chance to realign elements of the physical nature of Gorton, potentially improving its public realm and sense of place.

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 The two place management pilot workshops described in this report have illustrated the diversity of Manchester's centres. Whilst Northenden is clearly supported by a local community with considerable interest in its centre, there is probably a need to consider how a wider range of stakeholders can be brought in to support and shape activity in Gorton.

5.2 Local governance has been an issue for all centres, and is a point that should be considered as a wider policy challenge. Manchester has a significant number of centres – there are 17 identified in the current Local Plan but also many more alongside these. The council does not have the resources to support governance structures for all centres, and it is unlikely that there will be adequate local capacity across stakeholders to support formal governance arrangements in any but the largest centres. There is, therefore, a challenge to the council to consider how activity can be best supported at the local level.

5.3 The engagement from those who attended the workshop was a key determinant of success, as wider commitment from stakeholders is essential for effective place management. In both Northenden and Gorton, it was not easy to get interest from landowners (who are often not local), and large corporate businesses were also more difficult to engage. Extending the pull of place management exercises to cover these stakeholders is a key challenge. As the next steps are considered for the pilot centres, it may be useful to focus on securing early outcomes that can highlight the value of the approach to all stakeholders, thereby encouraging wider involvement in the process. Neighbourhood Officers have sought to use the Place Management Pilot report to support activity across the centre, which hopefully will provide a foundation for ongoing place management activity.

5.4 Whilst there are a number of distinct recommendations from the Place Management Pilots in Northenden and Gorton, a key outcome will be the development of governance and management structures that can be sustained and have the impact to deliver further place management activity within the centre. There is a clear role for the council's Neighbourhood Teams in being a catalyst for the

development of such arrangements, and providing support once established. However, without wider commitment from stakeholders, the council will rarely be able to effect significant outcomes (generally, this is only possible where there is council land interest or proposed public sector investment). Looking over a longer timeframe, the council should consider how its neighbourhood regeneration activity can support the vitality and viability of its centres. In particular, promoting further investment in residential development will increase the number of people living within centres' catchments. is one of the most positive ways of improving

5.5 As the reports for each centre are produced, there will be a range of actions proposed for each centre. Following publication of each report, it is proposed that the council will review recommendations and consider whether any short term actions should be implemented. Once the reports for all four pilots are available, it is suggested that the council reviews all recommendations and determines key general policy and practice to be considered across the city.