

# Improving the High Street - Supporting local business

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A proposal by Cllr Witham to Cinderford Town Council - July 2017

Recently a number of businesses on our High Street have closed leaving empty units. One unit has been filled by a new business but only after a long period of vacancy.

It is my concern that if the old HSBC building remains vacant and more shops become vacant, the decline and demise of the High Street will become unstoppable. This council should take action now to improve the High Street and support local businesses.

Some opportunities are presented below but we should also consult the wider community and existing local businesses as to how they feel we can promote a vibrant, growing town.

## Proposal:

- Setup an online survey to canvas local residents views on how we can improve the High Street.
- Survey local businesses on how we can support them and encourage people to shop local.

## Financial relief

**Small Business Rate Relief.** From April 2017, small businesses that occupy property with a rateable value of £12,000 or less will pay no business rates.

Bradford Council offered businesses on the North Parade a business rates discount. This allowed businesses more financial flexibility, meaning there was enough to pay the rent and stop properties becoming vacant. The latest figures show that vacancy rates in North Parade have fallen to 7%.

Altrincham put a raft of measures in place to support businesses. This includes townwide reductions in business rates ranging from 8 to 15% in areas affected by developer disruption and high numbers of vacant units.

Trafford Council developed a Town Centres Loan Scheme which offered businesses interest-free loans of up to £10,000 (£20,000 on specific streets) when opening in previously vacant units. This has enabled 14 new independent businesses to date to open in Altrincham town centre. The terms state that 50% of the loan can be used against running costs, which includes business rates.

Altrincham Forward ran a campaign to publicise all business rates relief available at that time, making sure that businesses were aware of the process to follow to receive all available reliefs.

## Proposal:

- Write to FODDC to see if they are willing to offer any rate relief to new businesses.
- Promote information about small business rate relief to existing and potential businesses

# Pop Up Shop

Pop ups can reinvigorate spaces.

Government planning changes have already cut the red tape meaning that pop up shops can be used to fill vacant shop fronts for up to two years or until a tenant can be found.

Pop ups offer an easy, low cost way for burgeoning businesses to take their first steps and offer a great way to get new and different cuisine into local areas.

Local authorities have discretionary powers to provide relief to retailers in their local areas. The Government automatically funds 50% of the costs.

If your town's residents have great business ideas but not the funds, the Government's Start Up Loans programme offers a low interest way for new businesses to get the leg up they need.

## Proposal:

- Investigate potential properties for a pop up shop to offer 12, 1 month free lets to local start up businesses.
- Investigate potential properties for a pop up shop to offer 50, 1 week free lets for local charities and non-profit organisations to drive footfall and support local organisations.
- Promote information about the Government's Start Up Loans programme on our website and social media.

# Tourism

Making the most of your assets is essential when it comes to driving tourism.

Many overseas visitors come to Britain for its rich history and monuments. By focussing on the unique heritage of your area, it is possible to maximise new footfall.

It is not just about traditional techniques – try something really innovative.

Folkestone in Kent worked hard to bring parts of the town together through the umbrella of their "HEART" initiative – Heritage, Education, Art, Regeneration, Tourism – to revitalise the town and restore civic pride.

By rescuing the town's museum collections, thanks to Heritage Lottery Funding, that had been in storage for decades, they have been able to hold exhibitions and festivals. Inside and outside the town hall, Folkestone events have tied in other key sites in the local area such as the historic harbour and the Leas to the town centre.

This is prior to the building of a new local history museum that will tell the story of Folkestone for future generations of both residents and visitors alike.

## Proposal:

- Consider options for setting up a Museum to preserve the story of Cinderford and the history of freemining.
- Investigate Heritage Lottery Funding to "give a collection a new home and redevelop the historic building where the collection is housed to give it better public facilities"

# Parking

No one should be clobbered with a huge bill just for driving to the shops or going about their business. Excessive parking fees put people off driving to high streets and damage local retailers and businesses.

*“Certainly we are all guilty of popping to the bank and then seeing a rather inviting little shop and thinking ...I'll just pop in... before we know it we've been on the High Street for an hour and spent more than we should have - it works! Free parking, without doubt, increases spend per head and in return we have a thriving little market town full of independent retailers and a consistently high occupancy rate.”* Sarah Bassett, Chairman of the Alcester Chamber of Trade and Commerce

## Proposal:

- Write to FODDC to ask if they would offer more “Free Parking Saturdays” like Small Business Saturday to promote the use of local businesses.
- Write to Highways to ask them to consider removing the Taxi rank to provide an additional short stay parking space.

# Social Media

Many people choose not to shop local because they are unaware of what is available. Social Media is a great way to encourage people to shop local and share what is available on their doorstep.

## Proposal:

- Run an online campaign to get people to post a photo to the council's social media accounts of them shopping in Cinderford. Each month give a £10 voucher to a shopper chosen at random from those posting pictures to encourage participation. Posts should include the hashtags #shoplocal and #cinderford.

## Further reading:

- The Great British High Street Good Practice Guide - <http://thegreatbritishhighstreet.co.uk/pdf/GBHS-Good-Practice-Guide.pdf>
- GOV UK Start Up Loans - <https://www.gov.uk/apply-start-up-loan>
- Heritage Lottery Funding for Museums - <https://www.hlf.org.uk/looking-funding/what-we-fund/museums-libraries-and-archives>