

Report

Report to:	East Kilbride Area Committee
Date of Meeting:	31 January 2023
Report by:	Executive Director (Community & Enterprise Resources)

Subject:	Update on Town Centres
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ update members on the activity currently being undertaken in town centres across the East Kilbride area.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Committee is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that members note the current activity across the town centres

3. Background

- 3.1. The nature of town centres across the UK is in a transitional stage. The range of issues involved in the challenges town centres are facing are broad and complex. Factors such as the economic downturn, internet shopping, the growth of out of town shopping malls, changes in retailers' business models and consumer expectations have resulted in a decline in footfall.
- 3.2. Some of the issues are local and specific to individual towns, however, many are issues seen across the country influenced by wider economic patterns, consumer behaviour and corporate decisions. Supporting town centres remains a Council priority and officers continue to work in partnership with groups and organisations in each town to achieve our common goals.
- 3.3. The role town centres have in our communities is significant and therefore their role cannot be overstated. Town centres support and contribute to people across our communities whether this is to access essential services, visiting for shopping or enjoying leisure time.
- 3.4. Around 70% of businesses and jobs in the economy are located in town centres and they are the principal location for leisure and hospitality. They retain a vital social importance as a meeting, events and performance space.
- 3.5. Across the 10 towns defined in the South Lanarkshire Local Development Plan (LDP) there is active and ongoing engagement with the most appropriate groups in the town. These range from town to town and include Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), Development Trusts, Community Councils and private property owners.

- 3.6. Town Centre strategies and action plans have been prepared and approved for Hamilton, Cambuslang, Larkhall and Blantyre with work now underway in Rutherglen. Similar plans are being progressed by the communities in Lanark and Carluke along with the master planning work by the owners of East Kilbride.
- 3.7. These strategies and action plans are closely aligned with the Government approach to town centres captured in the New Future for Scotland's Town Centres report and action plan.
- 3.8. Officers in Economic Development are working with all key stakeholders across our towns and have commissioned 2 key pieces of work to set the direction of the Council's work around town centres going forward. These will inform and align with existing and emerging funding opportunities around town centres.
- ◆ Town Centre Visioning – this will set out how the Council delivers on the strategic aims and objectives at a local level. As noted above, while all towns have similar challenges, the solutions are not always the same. This work will set out how the Council, communities and partners should deliver meaningful and sustainable change within our town centres through a series of projects and action plans.
 - ◆ Transition to Net Zero – town centres are major contributors to pollution and although a number of early wins have been achieved, the ways to deliver long term meaningful and sustainable reductions are complex and not always palatable to business or customers. This work will set out a practical approach to working towards net zero across our towns.

4. Town Centre Activity

4.1. East Kilbride

The centre has gone through a challenging period over the last 18 – 24 months. Along with the challenges faced around COVID-19 and the changes in shopping patterns, the centre has been called in by the bank, who funded the previous purchase and has subsequently been put into administration.

- 4.2. With each change of ownership a new team of asset managers has taken responsibility for the centre and given the scale and complexity of the asset, it has taken some time for them to familiarise themselves with the asset, issues and appropriate strategy.
- 4.3. Throughout these challenging times, officers have kept regular contact with both the Asset Management Team and the Local Management Team. At all times, these discussions have been positive and the commitment by the asset managers to the future of the town centre is without doubt.
- 4.4. The centre was put into administration on 16 November 2022. Meetings have taken place between the administrator, the asset managers and senior officers of the Council to update on the process and how they intend to proceed. The administrator has been keen to emphasise that the centre will continue to trade and they are committed to working with all parties to secure a positive future for East Kilbride.

- 4.5. The Team is at the early stages of its familiarisation process but has retained many of the consultants who have been working on the master planning for the last 18 months. This has kept a level of consistency and officers believe this is a sensible approach which will lead to a future strategy being in place in the shortest timescale possible.
- 4.6. At the time of drafting this report, officers have not met with the Team since the Christmas break, however, there is a commitment to meet on an approximately 4-weekly basis to drive forward the master planning work. While officers do not yet have a completion date for this work, we understand it is likely to take in the order of 6 months to complete. The Team has been clear that there will be adequate time built into the process to allow appropriate consultation on proposals with both elected members and the wider community.
- 4.7. While the administration process is not the route anyone would have chosen for the centre, it is hoped that it will bring a period of renewed focus on the future of the centre and allow a clear and deliverable future for the town centre to be put in place.
- 4.8. **Strathaven**
The Strathaven Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) has completed its 5 years of funding from Historic Environment Scotland. The last elements of the final projects are being completed and the final financial claims being signed off. This project has been challenging for all involved but the commitment of the community group working closely with officers has led to many positive outcomes.
- 4.9. The town was also successful in securing funding from the town centre capital fund for the development of the Thomson Suite in the Town Mill and provision of a tourist information point in the town centre. It was also part of the first phase of towns involved in the development of the Inside Out app along with Stonehouse. The app gives communities a free online platform to promote their town centres and community activity.
- 4.10. As can be seen from above, there is significant and ongoing activity across the town centres in the East Kilbride area and officers in Enterprise and Sustainable Development would be keen to explore further opportunities with groups across our communities.

5. Employee Implications

- 5.1. There are no employee implications from the information set out in this report

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1. There are no financial implications from the information set out in this report. All projects and spend referred to will be subject to separate approvals as appropriate

7. Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications

- 7.1. Climate change and working to net zero is at the heart of all the work on town centres as we seek to deliver sustainable town centres which support liveable neighbourhoods.

8. Other Implications

- 8.1. All town centres face a challenging set of circumstances. It is essential the Council plays a full and active role in the future of our town centres. Not doing so will result in continued decline and greater demands on limited resources.

9. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

- 9.1. Our town centres have to be available for all across our communities. We continue to work and consult with a broad range of groups across our communities and as noted above the work involved in improving our town centres will be subject to wide consultation.

David Booth

Executive Director (Community and Enterprise Resources)

17 January 2023

Link(s) to Council Values/Priorities/Outcomes

- ◆ Ambitious, self-aware and improving
- ◆ Fair, open and sustainable
- ◆ We will work towards a sustainable future in sustainable places
- ◆ We will work to recover, progress and improve
- ◆ Good quality, suitable and sustainable places to live
- ◆ Thriving business, fair jobs and vibrant town centres

Previous References

None

List of Background Papers

None

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:- Iain Ross, Project Manager, Enterprise and Sustainable Development

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