

# Report

Report to:	<b>Community and Enterprise Committee</b>
Date of Meeting:	<b>31 March 2020</b>
Report by:	<b>Executive Director (Community and Enterprise Resources)</b>

Subject:	<b>Larkhall Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan</b>
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## 1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ inform the Committee of the work undertaken to prepare the consultative draft Larkhall Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan
- ◆ seek Committee approval to consult on the consultative draft Plan
- ◆ inform the Committee of the next steps in implementing the consultative draft Plan

## 2. Recommendation(s)

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

- (1) that the consultative draft Larkhall Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan be agreed and be subject to an 8 week period of consultation as set out in section 5 of the report; and
- (2) that following a period of consultation, the revised Larkhall Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee for approval

## 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 town centre 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.
- 3.3. Supporting our town centres remains a Council priority and officers continue to work closely with groups and organisations in each town through a partnership approach to achieve common goals. The Committee, at its meeting on 6 March 2018, gave approval to move forward with a phased programme of town centre strategies and Action Plans. The Hamilton Strategy and Action plan was approved in October 2018 and Cambuslang in November 2019, with this report the third in this sequence of these strategies. The key partner in this case is Larkhall Community Council, with a specific focus on town centre regeneration.

- 3.4. There have been considerable levels of activity in both Hamilton and Cambuslang since the adoption of their Strategies and Action Plans, with a number of key developments coming forward in Hamilton and significant funding being secured from the Town Centre Capital Fund and SPT funding for major projects. In Blantyre, work has commenced with the community to draft their strategy and officers hope to be in a position to bring a report in this regard to the June 2020 meeting of this Committee.
- 3.5. Local communities remain supportive of their town centres and have a desire to see them thrive. The way in which they use their town centres is, however, very different to that of a generation ago. It is broadly accepted that the traditional function of a retail town centre needs to change to meet the needs and expectations of modern communities. There is, therefore, a collective need to establish a new role and function for our town centres to ensure that they can continue to thrive and remain relevant in the years ahead.

#### **4. Larkhall Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan**

- 4.1. South Lanarkshire's town centres support a diverse range of economic, social and civic functions. In common with the rest of the UK, however, our town centres have felt the effects of both the economic downturn and changes in shopping patterns.
- 4.2. Despite these challenges, Larkhall Town Centre retains numerous assets that provide a solid foundation which will allow the centre to adapt to societal changes and provide a centre that people wish to visit and spend time in.
- 4.3. The future of all town centres is dependent on reacting to changing behaviours by both consumers and retailers and recognising that town centres can no longer place such heavy reliance on their retail offer. Town centres need to diversify to give users the broadest range of reasons to visit and stay in the town centre. Retail remains a fundamental part of a healthy town centre, however, residential development, leisure activity, café culture, evening economy and local services for local communities have an increasing role and importance within the town centre mix.
- 4.4. The Consultative Draft Larkhall Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan (Appendix 1) sets out a range of initiatives which the Council wishes to pursue with partners to support this outcome. The private sector has a key role in providing a shopping, service and leisure offer that will attract and meet the needs of the local community. Private sector support, coupled with strengthening links between local businesses and the community, will provide a strong base from which to drive town centre activity forward.
- 4.5. The Strategy is informed by Scottish Towns Partnership's Your Town Audit, carried out in the summer of 2018, which is a framework developed to measure and monitor the performance of Scotland's towns and town centres using a series of Key Performance Indicators. The results allow more meaningful comparison of towns based on their similarities and challenges and help practitioners develop more meaningful solutions.
- 4.6. Larkhall Community Council and Larkhall Growers have also conducted two surveys which have informed the Strategy. The Larkhall Community Survey 2019 and the Larkhall Business Survey 2019 are supporting documents available to members on request.

- 4.7. The Strategy considers the national and local policy context for the improvement of our town centres and considers the key challenges and areas of opportunity for the town centre. Recognising these challenges, while focusing on the areas of opportunity, is key to the successful delivery of the Strategy.
- 4.8. The Strategy recognises a series of objectives for which Larkhall should aim, and which are consistent with the activity being promoted by Scottish Towns' Partnership (STP) and others, namely, a collaborative approach across all sectors is the only way to bring meaningful and sustainable regeneration.
- 4.9. Finally, the Strategy presents a town centre Action Plan which captures the priorities for Larkhall and illustrates where resources and activities should be focused. The Action Plan will remain a live document with projects and priorities evolving over time.
- 4.10. The Action Plan considers the potential activity under three main themes, these are:-
- ◆ Physical Environment – maintaining an attractive town centre environment helps to attract people into the town centre and increase dwell time. The current economic conditions make delivery of large scale projects challenging, however, taking a strategic partnership approach across the town centre gives the best chance of taking forward projects in this area.
  - ◆ Accessibility and Transportation– successful town centres need their customers to be able to access and navigate the town centre easily. Potential activity here considers projects which will ease access to and around the town centre.
  - ◆ Attractive Business Environment – this considers the more intangible assets which contribute to the success of a town centre. These include events and marketing, digitalisation and commercial strategies.
- 4.11. The Strategy has been drafted by officers within Planning and Economic Development Services, in consultation with Larkhall Community Council, to capture the ongoing activity of the Council and Partners. The process has also had input from Scottish Towns Partnership, Ironside Farrar Consultants and EKOS Economic Consultants, all of whom have involvement in similar plans across the country, thereby ensuring that the development of the Action Plan is informed by best practice. The Strategy and Action Plan also follow the model approved by Committee for both Hamilton and Cambuslang.

## **5. Next Steps and Timescale**

- 5.1. Following Committee agreement of the draft strategy it is intended that the Larkhall Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan will be published and made available for consultation as described on page 19/20 of the Strategy during April-June 2020. The consultation will have four main elements as follows:-
1. Partner and Larkhall Community engagement - sharing the Plan with partners for initial feedback on the content.
  2. Stakeholder engagement to allow those with a financial, service or community role in the town to input.

3. Public engagement organised through a consultation event in order to allow the wider community to consider the proposals and offer feedback on the Strategy.
  4. The Strategy and feedback questionnaire will be available online for the duration of the consultation process.
- 5.2. Following consideration of the comments received, a finalised Strategy and Action Plan will be prepared and presented to the Community and Enterprise Resources Committee after the summer recess. This report will include the outcomes of the consultation process, proposed next steps and governance arrangements.
- 6. Employee Implications**
- 6.1. The development and implementation of the Plan will be taken forward by officers within Planning and Economic Development Services, in particular, with Larkhall Community Council.
- 7. Financial Implications**
- 7.1. Implementation of the Strategy will focus on the co-ordination of activity and events that will largely be funded through existing resources. The financial resources required to deliver the objectives of the Action Plan will be considered on a project by project basis. In addition, the Strategy provides a basis to support funding bids from a range of sources, however, it is important to note that much of the success of the Plan will relate to support and investment from the private sector and the buy in from the community by increasingly using their town centre.
- 8. Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications**
- 8.1. The strategy and action plan has been prepared having regard to the existing and emerging challenges around climate change and sustainability. It is intended to complement and comply with the Council's and wider communities' aspirations in the area.
- 9. Other Implications**
- 9.1. The risks associated with not supporting the proposal is that Larkhall Town Centre will not have a coordinated approach to its response to the many challenges it faces. The support and partnership working within Larkhall Town Centre could be lost, leading to a loss of activity in the town centre and increased calls for the Council's intervention and investment. The Council's reputation could also be damaged if it is not seen to actively support and encourage community and business initiatives and investments in Larkhall Town Centre.
- 10. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements**
- 10.1. This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy and, therefore, no Impact Assessment is required.
- 10.2. Consultations have been co-ordinated by the Economic Development Service with a range of other Council Services who have an ongoing role in delivering services and initiatives in our Town Centres. This consultation and co-operation will continue throughout the duration of the initiative.

**Michael McGlynn**  
**Executive Director (Community and Enterprise Resources)**

18 February 2020

**Link(s) to Council Values/Ambitions/Objectives**

- ◆ Improve the quality of life of everyone in South Lanarkshire
- ◆ Support the local economy by providing the right conditions for inclusive growth
- ◆ Improve health, care and wellbeing

**Previous References**

- ◆ Community and Enterprise Resources 6 March 2018 - Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan and Town Centre Audits

**List of Background Papers**

- ◆ Draft Larkhall Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan
- ◆ Your Town Audit – Larkhall – EKOS/STP
- ◆ Larkhall Community Strategy draft results 2019
- ◆ Larkhall Business Survey draft results 2019

**Contact for Further Information**

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

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