

Report

Report to:	Community and Enterprise Resources Committee
Date of Meeting:	4 May 2021
Report by:	Executive Director (Community and Enterprise Resources)

Subject:	Larkhall Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ update the Committee of the outcomes of the Larkhall Town Centre Consultation and request approval of the Town Centre Strategy

2. Recommendation(s)

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

- (1) that the outcome of the consultation process be noted;
- (2) that the amendments to the Larkhall Town Centre Strategy, as detailed in section 5 of the report, and the Strategy be approved; and
- (3) that the Executive Director (Community and Enterprise Resources) be authorised to proceed with implementation of the finalised Strategy in partnership with Larkhall Community Council and key stakeholders identified.

3. Background

3.1. In line with town centres across the country, Larkhall Town Centre has been affected by changes in economic conditions, demographics and the progressive rise of the internet. In response to these national changes the Scottish Government commissioned the National Review of Town Centres in 2013 which set out key recommendations for re-energising Scotland's town centres. The actions and recommendations from this review fell into 6 key themes namely:

- ◆ Town Centre Living
- ◆ Vibrant Local Economies
- ◆ Enterprising Communities
- ◆ Accessible Public Services
- ◆ Digital Towns
- ◆ Pro-active Planning

3.2. At the centre of these recommendations is the "Town Centre First" policy combined with the 20minute neighbourhood model, a concept in which people can meet all their daily needs within a 20-minute walk from their home, incorporating solutions to a range of issues such as the climate emergency, health inequality, and helping arrest the decline of local town centres. These policies recognise that the health of Scotland's town centres must be put at the heart of the decision-making process. Due to the current COVID-19 crisis this has become even more important as a support to help revitalise town centres.

- 3.3. Members may recall the report presented to the Committee on 6 March 2018 seeking approval to progress the Hamilton Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan and 4 June 2019 for the Cambuslang Strategy noted that officers would progress further audits, strategies and action plans for Blantyre and Larkhall. The Audits have all been completed in consultation with Scotland's Towns Partnership and this has assisted in informing the Strategies and Action Plans along with a specifically designed online community engagement and consultation process now completed for Larkhall and ongoing for Blantyre. The Hamilton Strategy and Action plan was approved by Committee on 30 October 2018 and the Cambuslang Strategy was approved 12 November 2019. It is anticipated that the Blantyre Plan will be reported to Committee later this year.
- 3.4. At the Community and Enterprise Resource Committee on the 24 November 2020, it was agreed that the draft Strategy for Larkhall would be subject to a consultation process over an 8-week period including feedback from partners and stakeholders and a public consultation. Due to COVID-19 support requirements, the planned commencement was delayed and started early February 2021. Planning discussions were held with relevant groups both internally and externally, the format discussed, and examples tested. This resulted in an online virtual consultation web based public consultation from 19 to 31 March 2021. The consultation was 'live' for completion online during this time period. The consultation was advertised widely through the Council's channels, third sector organisations and through community and business email links in order to attract a wide cross section of the public to complete the questionnaire. The consultation generated 109 submissions and comments from 625 visits when it closed on 31 March 2021. The schedule in the 24 November 2020 Committee report was adhered to with a final meeting with stakeholders to discuss the responses on the 8 April 2021 and the resulting completed strategy for approval is attached.
- 3.5. This report seeks approval for the Larkhall Strategy and Action Plan (Appendix 1) which Planning and Economic Development Services have prepared, in consultation with Larkhall Community Council, local business and third sector organisations, setting out a range of initiatives in order to meet the challenges facing the town centre. The action plan considers potential activity shaped at revitalising the town centre in six distinct areas of concern as per the priorities discussed during the business and third sector consultation namely:
- ◆ Business support
 - ◆ Parking review
 - ◆ Streetscape review
 - ◆ Town centre maintenance, signage review
 - ◆ An organised voice
 - ◆ Safe events (where and when possible)

4. Consultation Feedback

- 4.1. The consultation attracted 109 responses when closed on 31 March 2021. A summary of the consultation results is attached in background papers (Appendix 2). General points of interest are:-
- ◆ the town centre is well supported with a high number of local users walking to use the town centre
 - ◆ there is a wish to have a pedestrian town square for public use and events
 - ◆ there is a perception of a need for a reduction in crime / greater safety
 - ◆ greening of the high street and redesign the streetscape was a high priority

- ◆ redesign street parking to provide short term pick up, collection and loading space
- ◆ there is a perception of a lack of activities in the town centre for younger people
- ◆ there is a wish to have a series of community town centre programme of events

4.2. The community considered the greatest challenges to the town centre prospering are as follows:-

- ◆ disabled access
- ◆ lack of business support and representation
- ◆ digital access in town centre
- ◆ the perceived customer profile
- ◆ vehicle accessibility

4.3. Specific highlights from the responses are as follows:-

- ◆ 92% of responders use the town centre at least once per week
- ◆ 71% of the responders are between 25 and 54
- ◆ 53% feel that it would be a good to create a pedestrian town centre area for events
- ◆ 44% Would like to see a reduction in crime and greater safety
- ◆ 48% Walk to the town centre to use it
- ◆ 39% would like to see greening of the high street
- ◆ 33% feel short term drop off and pick-up parking in the town centre is a challenge
- ◆ 32% feel that the streetscape/public realm is poor

Full breakdown of responses are included in the summary attached in Appendix 2.

4.4. The consultation response indicates that Larkhall has some of the characteristics of a 20-minute neighbourhood:-

- ◆ a diverse retail offer and variety business meets communities' requirements
- ◆ high number of people walking to the town centre.
- ◆ proximity of the shops and services to housing adjacent to the town centre.

The agreed actions will seek to support this wider national strategy and concept of a 20-minute neighbourhood. In this regard, it is worth noting that the business occupancy level in Larkhall has remained at over 90% for the town centre prior to and during the pandemic. It is considered that this reflects well on the mutually supportive actions by both the local community who use the town and the quality of the solid base of businesses to allow the town centre to support its community.

5. Strategy Amendments

5.1. Following the completion of the consultation, officers met with Larkhall Community Council and Larkhall Growers on the 8 April 2021, remotely through Teams to consider the consultation feedback. In this regard it was noted that the outcomes from the consultation broadly supported the priorities and actions set out in the Strategy. The following alteration has been made:-

- ◆ a technical change to the map on page 3 removing the doctor's surgery. It has relocated to a new site close to the leisure centre, out-with the local plan town centre area

6. Next Steps and Timescales

- 6.1. On agreement of the finalised Strategy, projects will be developed and/or completed within the timescales contained in the Action Plan (Appendix 1). During the consultation process undertaken with the Larkhall Community Council it was agreed to work with key members of Larkhall Community Council and Larkhall Growers. It is proposed to continue to use this established relationship to work alongside officers to deliver the action plan. Membership of the support group will be kept under review to ensure all sectors of the community are appropriately represented.

7. Employee Implications

- 7.1. The implementation of the Action Plan will be taken forward by officers within Planning and Economic Development Services. The Strategy is a holistic range of measures aimed at revitalising a variety of aspects within the town centre. With this in mind, the success of the strategy is dependent on partnership working with SLC, the private sector, the community and the third sector.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1. Implementation of the Action Plan will focus on the coordination of activity and events that will be funded through existing resources. There are aspects of the Action Plan however which do not have funding in place both within the Council and across partners. The Strategy provides a basis to support funding bids which support change and development in the town centre. Much of the success of the Action Plan will be dependent on the support and ownership of the private sector, the community and third sector.

- 8.2. In parallel to the work on the Strategy and Action Plan, the Larkhall Growers were successful in securing funding £69,972 through the Council's Town Centre Capital Fund:-

- ◆ to provide install planters and banners along the main street to make it more inviting
- ◆ the installation of a digital information board on King Street outdoor space to inform residents of town centre events
- ◆ a Feasibility Study to look at using King Street as such a community space. This could be used for markets, entertainment
- ◆ contribute to the replacement of the old heating system in the Lighthouse to allow the community hub to be used for 12 months a year

This award will allow these support works to be completed and are consistent with the strategy.

9. Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications

- 9.1. The projects and initiatives identified in this report will be delivered using a range of sustainable techniques and models, having regard to best practice and current industry guidance. It is also noted that many of the projects will result in the redevelopment of vacant buildings and land.

10. Other Implications

- 10.1. There is a risk that if the Council does not maintain its support for town centre regeneration activities the physical environment will deteriorate, businesses will find trading conditions become harder with the potential closure of some businesses and subsequent job losses.

10.2. Failure to maintain this kind of activity will result in a failure to meet a range of Council objectives and policies including those detailed below and the Council's reputation and credibility may also suffer.

11. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

11.1. 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.

Michael McGlynn

Executive Director (Community and Enterprise Resources)

9 April 2021

Links to Council Objective/Values

- ◆ Improve the quality of the physical environment.
- ◆ Support the local economy by promoting the right conditions for growth, improving skills and employability.
- ◆ Partnership working, community leadership and engagement.

Previous References

- ◆ Larkhall Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan Committee Report (November 2020)

List of background papers –

- ◆ Larkhall Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan (Appendix 1 attached)
- ◆ Larkhall Town Centre Consultation – Abbreviated results (Appendix 2 attached)

Contact for Further Information

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

Mel Millar, Economic Development, Regeneration Services

Ext: 01698 454759

E-mail: mel.millar@southlanarkshire.gov.uk