

Report

Report to:	Community and Enterprise Committee
Date of Meeting:	7 December 2021
Report by:	Executive Director (Community and Enterprise Resources)

Subject:	Blantyre Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan - Consultative Draft
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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 of Blantyre 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 Blantyre Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan, and a period of consultation as described in section 5 of the report, be approved; and
- (2) that it be noted that the finalised Strategy will be brought back to the next meeting of the Committee for approval and adoption.

3. Background

- 3.1. Members may recall that this town centre strategy and action plan for Blantyre is the latest in a rolling programme of Town Centre Strategies. This completes the programme of 4 towns, Hamilton, Cambuslang, Larkhall and Blantyre, set out at the start of the programme. These strategies seek to engage with local businesses and communities throughout South Lanarkshire and create a dynamic Action Plan to tackle issues within the various towns and help repurpose them for the future. Several of our towns such as Lanark and Carluke are well advanced with community led plans and strategies and officers are consulting with communities to inform the next stage of the programme and the merit in applying the town centre strategy and action plan approach to other towns. Officers are also working towards a 5 year rolling programme of refreshing the existing Strategies and Action Plans which will begin with Hamilton in 2022.
- 3.2. Strategies and Action Plans have already been approved for Hamilton, Cambuslang and Larkhall and approval is now being requested in this report to commence consultation on the attached draft Strategy for Blantyre.
- 3.3. To produce the Strategies, audits have all been completed in consultation with Scotland's Towns Partnership and this has helped to inform the Strategies and Action Plans along with a specifically designed community engagement and

consultation process which now required to be undertaken for Blantyre as the latest town to be covered by the programme.

- 3.4. The nature of town centres across the UK is in a transitional stage. The range of issues involved in the challenge's town centres are facing are broad and complex. Factors such as the current and previous economic conditions, the COVID-19 crisis, internet shopping, the growth of out-of-town shopping malls, changes in retailer's business models and consumer expectations have resulted in a decline in town centre footfall.
- 3.5. 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.
- 3.6. Supporting our town centres remains a Council priority and we continue to work closely with the appropriate groups and organisations in each town through a partnership approach to achieve our common goals. In the case of Blantyre, the key partner is the Blantyre Business Community with a focus on town centre regeneration.
- 3.7. 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. Blantyre 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, our town centres have felt the effects of both the economic conditions and changes in shopping patterns.
- 4.2. Despite these challenges, Blantyre town centre retains numerous assets that provide a solid foundation to help develop the centre to adapt to societal changes and provide a place that people will continue to wish to visit and spend time.
- 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. In addition, the current COVID-19 crisis has accelerated the need for town centres to evolve.
- 4.4. The Consultative Draft Blantyre Town Centre Strategy and Action plan (Appendix 1) sets out a range of initiatives which the Council wish to pursue with partners to support the vitality and viability of the centre. The private sector has a key role in providing shopping services and leisure offers 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 Partnerships Your Town Audit (Appendix 2) which is a framework which has been 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 helps practitioners develop more meaningful solutions.
- 4.6. Officers have engaged with Blantyre business owners and community groups and held a series of face to face and virtual community group meetings which have informed the Strategy. The Strategy, once approved by Committee, will go for wider community consultation and any alterations will be reported as part of the report seeking final approval.
- 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 are key to the successful delivery of the Strategy.
- 4.8. The Strategy recognises a series of objectives for which Blantyre should aim for and 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 Blantyre 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 6 main headings these are:-
- ◆ Objective One: To support safe sustainable town centre growth, mixed-use development, and investment opportunities through planning and economic development initiatives in line with the "Town Centre First" policy initiative.
 - ◆ Objective Two: To ensure that town centre accessibility and movement supports all modes of transport and meets the needs of users through measures to ensure convenient and safe access by foot, cycle, car and public transport.
 - ◆ Objective Three: To ensure that the town centre has a welcoming, safe and attractive physical environment that supports the needs of both business and town centre users and provides a focus for community life and events
 - ◆ Objective Four: To improve the commercial viability of the town centre by supporting enterprise through business advice, training, events and marketing, finance, and other support measures for existing and potential new businesses.
 - ◆ Objective Five: To exploit the opportunities of digitalisation for business growth and usage of the town centre.
 - ◆ Objective Six: To create the conditions for social regeneration and improve the health and wellbeing of the community, creating a town centre that is welcoming to all and safe with a strong sense of community
- 4.11. The locally focussed objectives link to Council and wider national outcomes and are shown in the chart in section 8 of the Strategy, titled "Town Centre Action Plan". Included in this are the timescales and responsible partners

- 4.12. The Strategy has been drafted by officers within the Planning and Economic Development Service, engaging with local community groups to capture the ongoing activity of the Council and Partners. In addition, officers have sought input from Scottish Town Partnership and EKOS Economic Consultants, all of whom have wide experience of producing similar plans across the country, thereby ensuring that the development of the plan is informed by best practice.

5. Next Steps and Timescale

- 5.1. Following Committee approval, it is intended that the Blantyre Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan would be published and made available for wider consultation during January, February, and March 2022.
- 5.2. The consultation will have 2 main elements as follows:-
- ◆ Partner and Blantyre Future engagement - sharing the plan with partners and businesses for feedback on the content through regular ongoing stakeholder meetings.
 - ◆ Stakeholder engagement through a series of consultations, focussed around public meetings at the Leisure Centre, COVID-19 restrictions permitting.
- 5.3. Dependent on the current pandemic situation during the consultation period, the additional element of a virtual consultation support may be added.
- ◆ A virtual engagement process will be organised through an open electronic on-line consultation event to allow the community to consider the proposals and offer feedback on the Strategy.
- 5.4. The Strategy and feedback questionnaire will be available online for the duration of the consultation process.
- 5.5. Following consideration of the comments received, a finalised Strategy will be prepared and presented to the Community and Enterprise Resources Committee following the closure of the consultation. The planned completion date is the end April 2022 with the final document to be presented to the first available Committee of the new Council session.

6. Employee Implications

- 6.1. The development and implementation of the plan will be taken forward by officers within Planning and Economic Development Services.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1. Implementation of the Strategy will focus on the co-ordination of activity and events that will 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 recommendations in this report and the content of the Strategy and Action Plan aim to align with the Council's climate change and sustainability policies and bring forward meaningful change in the town centre in support of these aims.

9. Other Implications

- 9.1. The risks associated with not supporting the proposal is that Blantyre town centre will not have a coordinated approach to the challenges it faces. The support and partnership working within Blantyre Town Centre could be lost leading to a loss of activity in the town centre. The Council's reputation could also be damaged if it is not seen to actively support and encourage business initiatives and investments in Blantyre 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 Economic Development Services 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)

17 November 2021

Link(s) to Council Values/Ambitions/Objectives

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

Previous References

- ◆ None

List of Background Papers

- ◆ Blantyre Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan (Appendix One)
- ◆ Your Town Audit – Blantyre – EKOS / STP (Appendix Two)

Contact for Further Information

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

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