

Report

Report to:	Community and Enterprise Committee
Date of Meeting:	24 November 2020
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:-

- 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 approved, and
- (2) that the arrangements for an 8 week period of consultation, as outlined in section 5 of the report, be approved

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, 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.
- 3.2. This is the third in a series of Town centre strategies to be completed, after Hamilton and Cambuslang, and will be followed by Blantyre, which is underway and will be finalised in spring 2021.
- 3.3. 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.
- 3.4. 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 Larkhall the key partners are Larkhall Community Council and Larkhall Community Growers with a focus on town centre regeneration.

- 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, our town centres have been impacted by 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 to help develop the centre to adapt to societal changes and to provide a place that people will continue 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 Larkhall Town Centre Strategy and Action plan (appendix 1) sets out a range of initiatives which the Council seeks 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 Partnerships Your Town Audit 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. Larkhall Community Council have also conducted a business survey and Larkhall Community Growers a wider community survey which have informed the Strategy.
- 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 deliver of the Strategy.
- 4.8. The Strategy recognises a series of objectives for which Larkhall should aim, and are consistent with the 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 six 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, wheeled 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 focused 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 & Economic Development Service, working 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 involvement in 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 Larkhall Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan would be published and made available for consultation during December 2020, January and February 2021. The consultation will have three main elements as follows:

1. Partner and Larkhall Future engagement - sharing the plan with partners for initial feedback on the content.

2. Stakeholder engagement by virtual communication. This will be a virtual engagement process organised through an electronic on-line consultation event in order to allow the community to consider the proposals and offer feedback on the strategy. Included in this will be a short film clip highlighting the background to the document and its uses, supported by pre-advertised webinar information and question and answer sessions for interested parties to book onto. This will all be supported by a wider e-mail drop to local organisations and businesses to raise interest.
3. The Strategy and feedback questionnaire will be available online for the duration of the consultation process.
4. Following consideration of the comments received, a finalised Strategy will be prepared and presented to the Community and Enterprise Committee following the closure of the consultation. The planned completion date is March 2021.

- 5.2. The current COVID 19 crisis has placed additional challenges on how best to consult with a wide audience and the consultation works will be dependent on how the COVID 19 crisis evolves. As such the timescales laid down for this project may require to be altered.

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 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. There are no implications for climate change, sustainability or the environment in terms of the information contained in this report.

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 the 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. The Council's reputation could also be damaged if it is not seen to actively support and encourage business initiatives and investments in Larkhall Town Centre.
- 9.2. There are no issues in terms of sustainability arising from the recommendations made in this report.

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)

16 November 2020

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

- Larkhall Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan (Appendix One)
- Your Town Audit – Larkhall – EKOS / STP (Appendix Two)
- Larkhall Community Survey 2019 (Appendix Three)
- Larkhall Business Survey 2019 (Appendix Four)

Contact for Further Information

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

Iain Ross, Planning and Economic Development - Montrose House, Hamilton
Ext: 4227 (Tel: 01698 454 227) E-mail: iain.ross@southlanarkshire.gov.uk