

Report to:	EXECUTIVE
Relevant Officer:	Alan Cavill, Director of Communications and Regeneration
Relevant Cabinet Member	Councillor Mark Smith, Cabinet Member for Business, Enterprise and Job Creation
Date of Decision/ Meeting	16 May 2022

TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

1.0 Purpose of the report:

- 1.1 To summarise the background behind the development of the updated Town Centre Strategy and to present the refreshed Town Centre Strategy and outline Action Plan for approval and further development.

2.0 Recommendations:

- 2.1 To approve the revised Town Centre Strategy and outline Action Plan at Appendix 3a and note the role of this document in guiding the future direction of strategic development in the town centre, coordinating action and in supporting the development of future funding bids and business cases relating to activity within the town centre boundary.
- 2.2 To refer the Town Centre Strategy and outline Action Plan (TCSAP) to the Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee for further consideration.
- 2.3 To confirm that the Town Centre Strategy and outline Action Plan (TCSAP) will be used as the basis of having further engagement with key partners to finalise the Action Plan including the identification of owners and timelines and to agree appropriate governance arrangements for overseeing its effective implementation
- 2.4 To agree that the Action Plan be updated annually and reported to the Executive and that the Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee be consulted each year in advance of the Executive meeting.
- 2.5 For an associated communications plan to be prepared to make it clear that the Town Centre Strategy and outline Action Plan has been prepared to build on the successes of the Growth and Prosperity Programme currently delivering major change in the Town Centre.

3.0 Reasons for recommendations:

3.1 It is essential that Blackpool has an up to date Town Centre Strategy which identifies clear priorities and actions to deliver positive change, improve business confidence and encourage quality investment to support the major Growth and Prosperity Programme currently underway, to address current Government initiatives and ensure successful economic recovery of the Town following the Covid pandemic. It is also important that the role of partners in delivering the Action Plan is identified and agreed and that residents and businesses have a clear understanding of the progress being made in the Town Centre.

3.2 Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.3 Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

4.0 Other alternative options to be considered:

4.1 The alternative option is to continue to utilise the existing Town Centre Strategy which is now significantly out of date.

5.0 Council priority:

5.1 The relevant Council priorities are both:

- "The economy: Maximising growth and opportunity across Blackpool"
- "Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience"

6.0 Background information

6.1 Blackpool's current Town Centre Strategy has been in place since March 2013. Over the course of the last nine years, there have been significant changes seen in the town centre and much of the activity outlined within the existing strategy has been delivered or superseded. Many of the actions within the action plan have been completed, and for those that remain, many of the owners of actions are either no longer with Blackpool Council or sit in roles no longer relevant to the actions outlined. Over the same nine year period, significant changes to priorities have been seen in town centres, both in relation to Blackpool specifically and across the nation, with the public choosing to engage in different ways with their local centres.

6.2 The changes locally and nationally have presented an opportunity to refresh Blackpool's Town Centre Strategy and outline Action Plan, to reflect contemporary needs and priorities, and to re-establish ownership of a refreshed action plan that will aid in guiding the activity that will take place in the town centre in the immediate future.

- 6.3 In scoping the new Town Centre Strategy and outline Action Plan, the objective was to create a new document that reflects the needs of a modern coastal town centre, providing an innovative framework to develop an exciting future direction over a 15 year period and facilitating its recovery in a post-pandemic landscape, with the COVID-19 restrictions experienced across key sectors also taken into account.
- 6.4 A number of objectives for the new Town Centre Strategy and outline Action Plan were outlined prior to undertaking tender activity to obtain support for the drafting of the new document. It was established that a document was required that:
- Outlines an innovative vision for Blackpool Town Centre in 15 years' time
 - Provides key objectives that all stakeholders can buy into and that align with the wider Council strategy framework.
 - Describes the town centre today, addresses perceptions and outlines opportunities for change
 - Identifies priorities for improvement and management of the town centre
 - Includes a rolling five-year action plan with delivery mechanisms and incorporating annual updates
 - Improves business confidence and encourages quality investment from private and public sectors
 - Acts as a basis for bidding for future funding opportunities
 - Informs future decision making and co-ordinates town centre initiatives to achieve complementary improvements
 - Assists with town centre promotion and marketing
 - Maximises opportunities to use the Town Centre's heritage assets and conservation area status to drive visits, enhancements and quality public realm
- 6.5 In order to ensure Blackpool's town centre remained fit for purpose in line with the national picture, it was also noted in initial scoping that best practice and contemporary guidance should be taken into account when drafting the refreshed Town Centre Strategy and outline Action Plan. Examples that should be regarded included:
- The Government's "Build Back Better High Streets" strategy from July 2021
 - the Local Government Association's 'Revitalising town centres – A handbook for council leadership',
 - The policies and proposals initially scoped in the Blackpool Local Plan Part 1 and 2 as well as informing the review of Part 1: The Core Strategy
 - The work of the High Streets Task Force, including specific focus on the Task Force's concerted work around Blackpool Town Centre following the town's Unlocking Your Place Potential workshop and visit, and any subsequent work. **It is important to note the specific endorsement of the Strategy by the High Streets Task Force**
- 6.6 To ensure the Strategy remained relevant to Blackpool, and maintained key links to the previous version, an outline list of areas for coverage was established prior to the tender exercise. This list included areas that had been included in the previous Strategy, but also areas that had not been at the forefront of town centre strategic thinking when the previous version was completed,

including:

- **Vision and objectives** – A headline vision and set of objectives, building on those included in the document produced in 2013, to provide a clear aim for the town centre that should be ambitious but attainable.
- **Literature Review, Data Review and Policy Context** - A thorough exploration of local, regional and national policy and documentation around town centres, including the Blackpool Local Plan Part 1: Core Strategy and Part 2: Site Allocations and Development Management Policies, as well as a review of available data sources and trends outlined in local documents such as the Visitor Economy Performance Indicators and Footfall Report, in order to identify Blackpool's current position relative to the wider national town centre picture.
- **Governance Review** – A full review of the governance picture within Blackpool's town centre, including mapping of controlling stakeholders, outlining of documentation requiring adherence and analysis of the effects of interaction between stakeholders.
- **Engagement** – Engagement activity undertaken specifically for the production of the refreshed Town Centre Strategy, as well as an overview of other engagement activity that has taken place relating to the town centre, and how this can feed into creating a framework for the future development of the area.
- **Sector Analysis** – A detailed SWOT analysis of various sectors, including: catchment, visitor profile and performance; perception; retail and service provision; leisure, entertainment, culture, heritage and business tourism; office space; housing; environmental quality and the green and blue infrastructure; access and movement; impacts on climate change.
- **COVID impact and recovery** – A section specifically looking at the impacts of COVID on Blackpool's town centre, considerations that need to be taken in future developments to account for COVID-related changes, and initial recovery plans in the post-COVID environment.
- **Priorities for Intervention** – An overarching set of priorities that comprehensively outline areas within which projects and programmes targeting town centre improvement in Blackpool should be focused, as well as a review of the priorities outlined in 2013.
- **Recommendations** – A series of recommendations, both overarching and priority-specific, that outlines ways in which stakeholders can act in order to improve footfall, retain more local shoppers, improve perceptions of the area and diversify the town centre economy.
- **Action Plan** – An annually-updated action plan outlining town centre development activity including project details, timescales and project ownership.

6.7 Whilst the Town Centre Strategy produced in 2013 was a Blackpool Council strategic document, there was inclusion of external stakeholders within the Action Plan associated, as well as reference to stakeholder interest within the Strategy itself. It was clear that the need to fully incorporate non-Council stakeholders into the refreshed Town Centre Strategy and outline Action Plan would remain, and be more prominent than in 2013. It was therefore noted that engagement outside Blackpool Council Members and officers would be essential in preparing a robust document. This need for engagement was outlined in the scoping document for the refreshed Town Centre Strategy and outline Action Plan, as well as in the tender documentation circulated when exploring options for support.

- 6.8 Tender activity to obtain consultant support in drafting the refreshed Town Centre Strategy and outline Action Plan began in the autumn of 2021, following the confirmation of funding support from the Welcome Back Fund, which was aimed at supporting activity that brought footfall back to the high street following the easing of restrictions tied to the COVID-19 pandemic. Following an open tender exercise, CBRE was selected as the consultant tasked with undertaking the drafting of the new Town Centre Strategy and outline Action Plan, as well as the associated literature review and engagement activity. CBRE's work began in late November 2021.
- 6.9 Initial practical activity, around the review of relevant literature and around stakeholder engagement, began in December 2021 and continued until March 2022. This was completed by the end of March 2022, in accordance with the timescales of the Welcome Back Fund. During April 2022, further amendments have been made as a result of engagement with Council officers and key working interests in the town centre.
- 6.10 The refreshed Town Centre Strategy and outline Action Plan has been designed to provide strategic guidance for the development of Blackpool's town centre over the next 15 years, with an action plan that outlines key activity over the next five years. The Action Plan is also designed to be reviewed annually, to reflect progress and update as necessary.

6.11 **Does the information submitted include any exempt information?** No

7.0 List of Appendices:

7.1 Appendix 3a –Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan (summarised version)

8.0 Financial considerations:

8.1 Whilst there are no direct financial considerations required in the review of this Strategy as funding was secured from the Welcome Back Fund its implementation will require funding to be sourced from existing budgets and grant funding opportunities and the TCSAP will be utilised as a basis for securing such funding.

9.0 Legal considerations:

9.1 There are none directly arising from the Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan.

10.0 Risk management considerations:

10.1 Whilst there are no key risks to outline in relation to the Town Centre Strategy and outline Action Plan, actions arising from the document will have risks associated with them and these will be project managed and risk assessed in the usual way.

11.0 Equalities considerations:

- 11.1 Whilst the Town Centre Strategy and outline Action Plan does not automatically implement any material changes to the town centre, a number of areas considered within the suggested actions outlined in the document, particularly around the public realm and provision of services and facilities, will have to take account of equalities when implemented.
- 11.2 Where an action is implemented, and this impacts on the public, guidance relating to the Public Sector Equality Duty will be followed, and Blackpool Council's Equality and Diversity Manager will be consulted where appropriate.

12.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:

- 12.1 Consideration of Blackpool's declaration of a Climate Emergency in June 2019 was outlined as a requirement for the creation of this document, both in initial scoping and in the briefing information provided to those tendering for the supporting consultant role. Sustainability and Climate Change was a topic that was included in the coverage of each stakeholder discussion that took place during the engagement phase. The greening of the town centre was also included separately as an engagement topic. The inclusion of members of the Corporate Strategy and Delivery Team, who oversee activity in relation to addressing the Climate Emergency, was also prioritised in invitations to engage.

13.0 Internal/external consultation undertaken:

- 13.1 Whilst not a formal Supplementary Planning Document, which would require statutory consultation, extensive engagement has still been undertaken in formulating the refreshed Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan. An array of individual interviews and focus group sessions were carried out by CBRE, beginning in December 2021 and continuing until March 2022, which have directly influenced the content of both the Strategy and the Action Plan. Those engaged in the process have included elected members, covering portfolio interests, and officers from Blackpool Council, who have an interest in the direction and delivery of projects within the town centre, including Growth and Prosperity, Planning, Culture and Heritage, Transportation and Highways, Tourism, Strategy, Economic Development, Green Infrastructure and Public Protection. A variety of external stakeholders from the private and third sectors, who represent business interests, as well as public interests, from across Blackpool, were also engaged. This included those from the retail sector, the architecture sector, representatives of key major developers, education providers, leisure providers, organisations representing those with protected characteristics and representatives of local governance groups including the Town Centre BID and the Blackpool Pride of Place Board.
- 13.2 In addition, CBRE were given access to recent extensive public engagement activity that had been undertaken to cover the town centre, particularly in relation to the Town Investment Plan, Town Deal and Heritage Action Zone and the Future High Streets Fund bid. Trend information around areas for prioritisation within the town centre, based on this public engagement, as well as the many open comments received relating to the town centre, were

included in the information considered and utilised in shaping the final Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan.

13.3 It is also planned for there to be further engagement with key partners in developing the detailed action plan and governance arrangements. This will include with the relevant Scrutiny Committee as outlined at recommendation 2.2.

14.0 Background papers:

14.1 None.

15.0 Key decision information:

15.1 Is this a key decision? Yes

15.2 If so, Forward Plan reference number: 9/2022

15.3 If a key decision, is the decision required in less than five days? No

15.4 If **yes**, please describe the reason for urgency:

16.0 Call-in information:

16.1 Are there any grounds for urgency, which would cause this decision to be exempt from the call-in process? No

16.2 If **yes**, please give reason:

17.0 Scrutiny Committee Chairman (where appropriate):

Date informed: 6 May 2022 Date approved:

18.0 Declarations of interest (if applicable):

18.1

19.0 Summary of Discussion:

19.1

20.0 Executive decision:

20.1

21.0 Date of Decision:

21.1

22.0 Reason(s) for decision:

22.1

23.0 Date Decision published:

23.1

24.0 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

24.1

25.0 Executive Members in attendance:

25.1

26.0 Call-in:

26.1

27.0 Notes:

27.1