

## Building Stronger Town Centres for Edinburgh

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### Economic Development Committee

18 August 2009

#### 1 Purpose of report

- 1.1 To make the case for supporting Edinburgh's town centres, showing how strong partnership and positive management can help to maintain these urban areas as attractive, viable and vibrant places. This may be achieved through a Town Centre Strategy produced in association with a wide range of partners, which could identify a range of practical measures to improve Edinburgh's town centres including town centre management and establishing business improvement districts. The TCS will build on and complement the work of the existing Urban Centres Programme and guide future town centre investment linked to the emerging public realm strategy.

#### 2 Summary

- 2.1 Town centres provide a broad range of services, facilities and activities. They serve as a focus for employment, the community and public transport. Attractive, well designed, town centres boasting a diverse shopping choice, arts and cultural uses, entertainment, amenities and good transport connections are engines for sustainable economic growth. They provide a focal point for business and social interactions. Vibrant town centres are good for business and for local communities. They create jobs, attract investment and generate income. They also create a feeling of civic pride, help to define the area and attract people from near and far.

#### 3 Main report

##### Scottish Government

- 3.1 The Scottish Government supports town centres through business improvement districts, a small business bonus scheme and through planning policy. Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) 8 – Town Centres and Retailing provides the key policy guidance and advises that the Scottish Government is committed to land use policies that secure vital and viable town centres. The Scottish Government recently launched the Town Centre Regeneration Fund, a new £60m capital fund available to regenerate and grow town centres from April 2009 to March 2010. Crucially, the Government website on town centres states that 'issues of towns and town centres are at heart for local authorities to lead on with local private and public sector partners.'

##### Edinburgh's town centres

- 3.2 Places like Leith, Morningside and Stockbridge contribute to Edinburgh's sense of identity and vibrancy, and give local people a sense of pride in the place they live or

work. Each centre has distinct characteristics, history and provides a broad range of facilities and services, acting as a focus for residents, shoppers and public transport.

- 3.3 Nine town centres are identified in the Edinburgh City Local Plan. These are:
- Corstorphine
  - Gorgie/Dalry
  - Leith Central
  - Leith Walk
  - Morningside/Bruntsfield
  - Nicolson Street/Clerk Street
  - Portobello
  - Stockbridge
  - Tollcross
- 3.4 The Edinburgh City Local Plan describes the nine town centres as 'consisting mainly of traditional units, under tenement flats and fronting busy roads. They tend to be set within high density residential areas and are well served by bus services. They do however tend to suffer from a poor pedestrian environment and a lack of parking. Development opportunities are seldom available. The current downturn has resulted in increased vacancy rates. Recent work by the business coordinator for Leith and the West End has highlighted the improvements needed in terms of cleansing, access, and maintenance. Close cooperation between the business coordinator, neighbourhood partnerships and local traders has already resulted in measures identified to address these issues.
- 3.5 A submission to the first round of the Town Centre Regeneration Fund was made under the banner of "Building Stronger Town Centres for Edinburgh" and covered the town centres of Leith Central, Portobello, and Tollcross. The outcome of that bid will be known at the end of July. A further bid to the second round of the fund is currently being worked up and needs to be submitted by 21 August.
- 3.6 There are also over 60 local centres defined in the Edinburgh City and Rural West Edinburgh Local Plans. These centres vary in size, with some anchored by a supermarket and others providing only a basic level of convenience shopping for residents in the immediately surrounding area. All are considered viable and the Council and its partners will seek to enhance their vitality and vibrancy. Local centres perform different roles to town centres but the advice and guidance in any strategy is likely to be just as applicable for all.

### **Building Stronger Town Centres for Edinburgh**

- 3.7 To be viable and sustainable, town centres need to be responsive to local needs and to strike the right balance between choice and sustainability in order to be competitive and attractive. The result will look different in different places because the diversity of Edinburgh's town centres is a major strength. Although there is no obvious 'one size fits all' model it is clear that to maintain vitality and vibrancy, particularly in the current economic climate, a clear direction, management, local solutions and partnership working between the private and public sectors is paramount.
- 3.8 It is proposed that to achieve the aim of "Building Stronger Town Centres for Edinburgh" a Town Centre Strategy (TCS) will be produced. This will act as a guide for centres, set out a clear vision and direction and deliver a longer term action plan designed to achieve these goals. The TCS will cover a number of elements described in more detail in Appendix 1.
- Town Centre Partnerships
  - Safety and security

- Marketing and promotion
- Cleansing
- Accessibility
- Public realm
- Signage and street furniture
- Festivals and events
- Business assistance
- Vacant units and development opportunities
- Prioritising investment

#### **4 Financial Implications**

4.1 There are no financial implications to the Council at this stage.

#### **5 Environmental Impact**

5.1 The TCS will help to deliver a range of improvements to which will create more attractive, sustainable and pedestrian friendly centres.

#### **6 Conclusions**

6.1 The Council wished to take a lead role in helping to shape the direction, investment and future management of Edinburgh's town centres through a TCS. This can build on the success of the previous Urban Centres Programme and link closely to this work and Edinburgh's emerging public realm strategy. A coordinated approach to public realm improvements, promotion, cleansing and other issues will achieve economies of scale and drive up standards and the quality of offering in all Edinburgh's centres. The TCS will be produced in association with the Chamber of Commerce, local businesses and other key stakeholders. This will be an important first step in building stronger town centres for Edinburgh.

6.2 Longer term sustainability will be achieved through more efficient town centre management arrangements and the introduction of business improvement districts. The council will help to facilitate this process but to work best such arrangements rely on dedicated management arrangements with local businesses at the core.

#### **7 Recommendations**

7.1 It is recommended that Committee approves the production of a TCS to provide direction, guidance and practical actions for Edinburgh's town centres on the range of issues contained in this report. This will include the potential for employing town centre managers; providing additional resources to support businesses; and designating each centre as a Business Improvement District.



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Appendices	1 Town Centre Strategy Framework
Contact/tel/Email	Steve McGavin / 0131 529 6237 / <a href="mailto:steve.mcgavin@edinburgh.gov.uk">steve.mcgavin@edinburgh.gov.uk</a>
Wards affected	City Wide
Single Outcome Agreement	<p>1. We live in a Scotland that is the most attractive place for doing business in Europe.</p> <p>2. We realise our full economic potential with more and better employment opportunities for our people.</p> <p>10. We live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need.</p> <p>11. We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others.</p> <p>12. We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and protect it and enhance it for future generations.</p>

Background  
Papers

## **Appendix 1      Town centre strategy framework**

### **Partnerships and town centre management**

Partnerships are vital in developing an effective response to complex, multi faceted challenges that cannot be effectively tackled by any single organisation. Partnerships deliver real benefits; provide a platform on which to develop strategies; secure coordinated action; and respond to particular local issues. Informal partnership arrangements exist in Leith and the West End involving local traders, the business coordinator, the Chamber of Commerce and the neighbourhood partnership. Successful town centres contain a diverse range of uses, perform a variety of roles and attract a wide range of visitors and shoppers at different times of the day. The TCS will explore the benefits of town centre management and identify whether additional partnership and management arrangements are needed.

### **Safety and security**

Various factors combine to help town centres create a sense of safety and security for shoppers, businesses and visitors at all times of the day and night. These include the layout and design of streets, buildings and open spaces, the attractiveness of public spaces, lighting and the visibility of a uniformed presence on the street. There are many guides available and a number of good examples of work already underway in Edinburgh, particularly in the city centre. The TCS will also look at the scope for ambassadors and additional CCTV.

### **Marketing and promotion**

The TCS will look at how town centres can work closely with the local media to build on, promote and project the individuality and identity of centres. This might include generic marketing campaigns and awards so readers can nominate shops and restaurants which offer excellent customer service. It will also look at a more coordinated approach involving stakeholders with marketing budgets. This will be carried out in consultation with Destination Edinburgh Marketing Alliance.

### **Cleansing**

To maintain attractiveness and ensure that visits are a positive experience it is important that the centre is clean. As well as refuse collection it is important that graffiti removal and chewing gum littering is tackled. Enhancements to the cleansing regime in the West End have recently been put in place through the efforts of local traders, the business coordinator and the neighbourhood partnership. The TCS will consider what enhancements are needed to deliver the highest standards of cleanliness in Edinburgh's town centres.

### **Accessibility**

Town centres rely on their ability to attract people and encourage them to return. They need to be accessible, on foot, by public transport and by car and people need to be able to use good quality amenities. The accessibility needs of all sectors of society need to be considered. The TCS will look at the location of bus stops and shelters, parking needs and pedestrian access.

### **Public realm**

Well designed and well maintained buildings and public spaces play a key role in creating attractive and welcoming town centre environments for people of all ages. High quality public green spaces can help attract investment into town centres,

enhance community spirit, promote community health and well being and significantly increase the attractiveness of an area. The success of the recently opened St Andrew Square is a good example of this.

### **Signage and street furniture**

In Leith, recent attempts to reinforce the local identity, both historic and current, of the area through flags and signage have been well received by businesses and customers alike. The extent to which a town centre makes a strong and positive impression is vital in securing repeat visits. Businesses operate to turn customer footfall into turnover and profit. The quality of the public space; the ease to which people can move around; the design and branding of street furniture and signage are all major contributors to this. The TCS will examine how quality design advice can be delivered; opportunities for public realm improvements and the role of local signage and street furniture

### **Festivals and events**

Town centres can be enlivened by encouraging the use of streets and venues by community or performance groups. Edinburgh is already a well established location for festivals and events but these are largely confined to the city centre. The TCS will consider what events and festivals can take place in town centres as well as the role of local farmers markets such as the monthly one in Balerno. Farmers' markets provide lively, colourful additions to the town centre as well as providing a range of high quality local produce.

### **Business assistance**

There are a range of measures already available and it is important that these are well publicised and maximum usage taken by Edinburgh businesses. It may also be necessary to look at additional sources of funding. Access to a small amount of funding can sometimes tip the balance in a business surviving or in getting an idea off the ground. In Birmingham a pilot retail development programme offered a small grant to local businesses for a range of projects from new flooring, new windows or promotional materials. Funding was restricted to a maximum of £1k and all awards had to be matched by contribution from business itself. Take up of this programme has been very successful.

### **Vacant units and development opportunities**

There has been an increase in the numbers of vacant shops and other premises in town centres. The closure of Woolworths resulted in vacant premises in prominent locations in the town centres of Corstorphine, Leith Central, Leith Central and Stockbridge and Tollcross. There may be opportunities to use vacant shop windows to display local information or host local events. Innovative examples from elsewhere show how town centre partnerships are facilitating new cultural or educational uses into vacant retail premises. The TCS will look at what barriers exist to using vacant premises and potential solutions.

### **Prioritising Investment**

It is recognised that some method of prioritising investment into key locations is likely to be required. The Urban Centres Programme previously examined twenty six local centres in 2006 and more recently work has been carried out with neighbourhood partnerships to determine investment priorities. Scottish Planning Policy 8: Town centres and Retailing identifies health checks as being the appropriate monitoring tool to measure the strengths and weaknesses of a town centre and to analyse the factors which contribute to its vitality and viability. Updated guidance on town centre health checks and vitality and viability indicators are likely to be produced in the near future in

the form of a Planning advice Note. The TCS will seek to identify and appropriate prioritisation method with the neighbourhood partnerships and local traders having a key role in this.

### **Other**

There will be other issues which will be identified during consultation with key stakeholders. This might include the role of arts and culture; managing the 24 hour economy; the use of licensing powers; Council and other public agency buildings; and monitoring and evaluation of performance.