

Folkestone Town Centre Working Group

Held at:	Council Chamber - Civic Centre Folkestone
Date	Wednesday, 30 October 2019
Present	Councillors Danny Brook (Chairman), Laura Davison, Tim Prater, Douglas Wade and David Wimble
Apologies for Absence	Councillor David Monk
Officers Present:	Katharine Harvey (Chief Economic Development Officer), John Bunnett (Corporate Director - Place and Commercial Services), Sue Lewis (Committee Services Officer) and Lorraine Smith (Economic Development Officer)
Others Present:	

1. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Danny Brook declared a voluntary announcement in that he has a business in the High Street, Folkestone and is a Ward Member for Folkestone Central.

Councillor Laura Davison declared a voluntary announcement in that she is a Ward Councillor for Folkestone Central.

2. **Introduction and Terms of Reference**

Councillor Brook explained that he felt the working group had an excellent opportunity to do something positive for the town, looking at what Folkestone needs and what can be achieved.

John Bunnett added that the town needs to respond to change in retail spending patterns. Officers will be able to update members of the working group of proposals and propositions that come forward as the working group develops.

Members paid particular attention to the following points in the Terms of References:-

Point 3 - Overview and Scrutiny states - A Councillor who is on the Working Group shall not sit on the Overview and Scrutiny committee when it is scrutinising a decision made by the executive after receiving a report of the Working Group on which the Councillor sits.

It was agreed that further information will be sought from the Monitoring Officer and a response will be provided to the working group following the meeting.

Point 9 - Confidentiality states - Those present will keep the discussions of the Working Group confidential unless the Working Group decides otherwise. The relationship between the Working Group and the media should follow the council's communications protocol at all times.

Councillor Davison asked that all discussions should be open and transparent allowing the residents of Folkestone to hear what is happening in the town. She felt this was extremely important and that if officers had confidential information then this should be flagged in advance and confidentiality be maintained for these items, but hoped this would not be necessary.

John Bunnett advised strongly that much of what was hoped to be shared with the group is likely to be commercially sensitive and therefore it would not be appropriate for this to be in the public domain, particularly whilst discussions of important schemes were taking place.

It was agreed that the Working Group would continue discussions relating to the Terms of Reference at the next meeting.

3. Public Engagement

John Bunnett informed members that Folkestone Town Centre is due to have a number of significant changes in the coming months. High Street retail spend nationally has reduced dramatically over recent years. It is clear that Folkestone needs to re-invent itself and increase its mixed use, office, leisure and residential offer; the Council needs to be proactive and help manage this transition.

Recent research shows that Folkestone is losing spend to neighbouring centres so, the Council needs to understand how best to position Folkestone's offer for the future. It is clear that there is a need to bring more people back into the town and increasing leisure and entertainment facilities in the town is one way of achieving this. Folkestone currently has a relatively high proportion of retail floorspace compared to other towns.

Members were informed that Watermelon Research, which are customer experience and insight specialists, were appointed through a procurement process to undertake market research in Folkestone Town Centre.

The research will be conducted over a four week period comprising, 60 shifts at different times and places. In addition, there will also be an on-line survey

which can be accessed through the Council's website for others to have their say.

Watermelon Research will undertake 1100 interviews with residents, businesses and visitors. This includes interviews with 100 businesses, of which, 75 are non-Folkestone based business, and 25 will be randomly selected businesses in Folkestone.

Members wanted to understand the rationale for the 75/25 split for the business survey and the statistical robustness of this. The questionnaire being used by interviewers was also requested. Officers agreed to approach Watermelon for their responses to these requests.

4. **F and H High Street Funds**

Members were informed that 11 applications across the district have been received since 1st October launch with 5 specific to Folkestone town centre, including grant requests for:

1. Lighting infrastructure for Christmas lights and support for FTC Christmas event
2. CCTV expansion throughout Folkestone
3. Building fit out to deliver Food Hall opportunity for circa. 15 stalls
4. Property extension and refit to support disabled access
5. Refurbishment of existing establishment

Members were advised that all applications will be subject to a scoring and evaluation methodology and that some applications received were for locations outside of the area identified in the launch material.

Members were given an update on Folkestone Town Centre – Council led projects, some of which are underway and some planned throughout 2019

5. **Folkestone Town Centre proposed developments**

Members discussed proposed developments and propositions being considered.

6. **Folkestone Town Centre masterplanning process**

Members noted that officers are identifying locations for investments and will use the expertise of professional support to encourage investment in the Town. The point was made that these need to be commercially viable and deliverable.