

Folkestone Town Centre Working Group

Held at:	Boulogne Room - Civic Centre Folkestone
Date	Friday, 21 February 2020
Present	Councillors Danny Brook (Chairman), Laura Davison, Tim Prater and David Wimble
Apologies for Absence	Councillor David Monk and Councillor Douglas Wade
Officers Present:	Mrs Jess Harman (Community Projects Manager), Sharon Hayles, John Bunnett (Development Director), Llywelyn Lloyd (Chief Planning Officer) and Lorraine Smith (Economic Development Officer)

18. **Declarations of interest**

The Working Group Members indicated that they wished to make the same declarations of interest as at the previous meeting, as shown below:

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

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

19. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 February were submitted, approved and signed by the Chairman.

20. **Working Group External Speaker review**

Officers gave a presentation, and added the following points:

- The Watermelon research was not solely Economic Development related but provided commercial trend, dialogue and feedback on leisure; community; retail; residents and more.

- The Council had taken into account what residents and visitors were saying in order to respond to needs but was mindful of not producing unrealistic targets.
- Housing was not to be picked up under Economic Development, but other group meetings are held to look at housing.
- From a community point of view, it needed to be clear regarding the impact on Folkestone and protecting the environment. A beacon of well-being and sustainability.

21. **FHDC response discussion**

The Chairman reiterated the purpose of the Group which was to come together, digest, advise and report back. He added that FHDC were making decisions for the entire community.

A discussion took place, and the following points were made:

- The national trend information for retail was that big high street shops were moving to out of town areas.
- There was demand for evening entertainment, however, analysis has shown the District was under-provisioned for leisure activities.

Officers presented research by two different sources, Deloitte – ‘2020 Retail High Street Trends’ and smallbusiness.co.uk – ‘What will the future high street look like’ providing insight, highlighting sustainability and reinvention of the high street with more activities in; food and beverage; tech; green; beauty; well-being; flexible work spaces; circular retail among others.

The following process was recommended for publication of the output of the recently conducted independent Market Research

- Develop response document to key findings
 - Consider national high street trends
 - Setting appropriate expectations of commercially viable schemes
- Report to cabinet with key findings and response document
- Publish key findings and FHDC response document

The Working Group Members suggested the communication should acknowledge how high streets are changing and that national brands are not actively returning to the High Street. Further discussion was had on other town centre initiatives underway and how these could help improve the town centre. Members also recognised that the market research data for the ideal town centre showed good principles.

Officers provided an update on the current town centre initiatives as part of the regeneration activity, including an update on the current position regarding the ex-Debenhams site.

- Store closed 19 January 2020.

- Administrators appointed, 24 January 2020 and were looking to market by end of February.
- Officers were actively working on proposals to animate the window space while empty.
- The marketing of the Debenhams building would commence by the end of Feb.

Actions:

- **LS to circulate a link for some 'meanwhile use' examples to the working group members.**
- **That further work on the propositions regarding Debenhams be brought back the Working Group for consideration.**

22. **Any other business and next steps**

Officers presented a proposition for a pop-up presence in the town centre.

The Group asked for a financial feasibility study and to explore the ongoing sustainability.

Actions:

LS to feedback figures to the group via email on the options. It was agreed the group will respond via email whether they are happy with it.