



Classification Open / Closed	Item No.
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Meeting:	Cabinet
Meeting date:	24 th November 2020
Title of report:	RAMSBOTTOM PLACE MANAGEMENT PLAN
Report by:	Cllr. Eamonn O'Brien (Leader) – Cabinet Member for Finance and Growth
Decision Type:	Non – Key decision
Ward(s) to which report relates	All Ramsbottom Wards

Executive Summary:

This report seeks Member approval to appoint a multi-disciplinary consultancy to prepare a public realm and place management plan for Ramsbottom. The plan will guide a series of actions/initiatives aimed at improvement and promotion of Ramsbottom town centre as a quality visitor destination, aiming to secure its role as one of the Boroughs main visitor destinations over the next 10 to 15 years.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- Members approve the use of consultants to prepare a Place Management Plan for Ramsbottom town centre.
- Note that the first phase of the Place Management Plan will be presented to Cabinet for approval for consultation purposes.

- Delegated powers be given to the Director of Economic Regeneration and Capital Growth to authorise progression to phase two of the commission, following completion of the Place Management Plan.

Key considerations

Background

- 1.1 Over recent years Ramsbottom has developed a strong reputation as a food and drink led visitor destination, supported by the East Lancashire Railway visitor attraction (a top ten North West attraction), a good range of independent retailers, expanding events programme, and a growing reputation as one of the best places to live in the region.
- 1.2 As one of the Borough's main visitor destinations the Council has over the years supported the Ramsbottom Business Group to deliver priority projects and activity to support the growing visitor economy. This included a significant programme of events including festivals (e.g. Chocolate and Head for the Hills) and specialist markets. More recently the Business Group has led the programme of events activity due to Council capacity issues.
- 1.3 The Ramsbottom Destination Strategy (2010) set out a framework of proposals and activity, aiming to ensure continued success and growth of Ramsbottom as a key visitor destination within the Borough. In support, the East Lancashire Railway have updated their Development Strategy and activity to support destinations along the route, including Ramsbottom. The Council continue to work with and support the ELR Trust to maximise benefits for the Boroughs visitor economy.
- 1.4 Whilst Ramsbottom has performed relatively well as a visitor destination the major changes now impacting the physical retail environment is likely to affect all town centres across the country. The centres that remain successful will be those that have a diverse range of visitor and leisure attractions, modern workplaces and a reconfigured and varied retail experience.
- 1.5 As a key destination and one of the most popular visitor destinations in the Borough, Ramsbottom is in a good position to continue its recent success. However, an updated approach to further improve the quality, appeal, and range of attractions in the town is required, to ensure that the offer remains attractive to visitors and Ramsbottom retains its important role in supporting the local economy.
- 1.6 If Ramsbottom, like other town centres in the Borough, can adapt appropriately, they can continue to be key economic drivers for the Borough playing an important role in the delivery of the cultural and economic aspirations set out in the emerging Bury 2030 Strategy.

Town Centre Challenges

- 2.1 Town centres across the country have been facing significant challenges that have eroded high street retailing and its role in underpinning the vitality and economic strength of town centres. These challenges have included:
 - Continued and rapid growth in the use of mobile devices and online retailing;
 - Increasing wages, rents and business rates;
 - A shift in consumer spending away from products towards experiences and lifestyle; and
 - Wider economic conditions in general.
- 2.2 Furthermore, whilst the scale of the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is yet to be fully understood, it is already clear that this has led to a significant intensification and acceleration of these challenges and that this is likely to have far-reaching consequences for the economies of all town centres.
- 2.3 Although not immune from the wider economic challenges facing high streets across the country, Ramsbottom, having developed as a visitor-led destination, has been supported by the increased emphasis in recent years on quality of experience and lifestyle. Ramsbottom does have a significant hospitality sector and the impact of the pandemic upon this sector has underlined the need for action.
- 2.4 It is now a critical time for the town centre to have a planned response to these ongoing challenges - a response that will enable it to adapt and respond to the challenges facing the visitor economy in both short term recovery, and longer term need to improve the quality of product offer, to maintain both resident and visitor spend in support of the local economy.
- 2.5 The overall aim is to provide a strategy to guide a series of town centre initiatives aimed at ensuring further place improvement and promotion of Ramsbottom to maintain its vibrancy and attractiveness.
- 2.6 A place management plan would help to play a key role in delivering this response as well as being an important tool in demonstrating that the Council has a cohesive and up-to-date strategy in place to support any bids for external funding. The plan preparation will focus principally upon public realm, townscape, and infrastructure improvements, in recognition of the need to further enhance existing assets including the built and natural environment, tourism, culture, and events activity. Opportunities for physical rationalisation and/or development together with traffic/access/parking related issues will form part of the wider approach.

The proposal

- 3.1 Whilst the scale of opportunity is different from the large regeneration and development ambitions in other centres across the Borough, the need for a co-ordinated approach for Ramsbottom is nevertheless important to sustain the longevity of the vibrancy of the centre.
- 3.2 An up to date Place Management Plan for Ramsbottom will consider the potential to:
 - Significantly improve the overall townscape and visitor environment through creation of common design guidelines for public realm improvements, enhanced pedestrian linkages, legibility, and information across the town centre;
 - Achieve an improved balance between all town centre users, vehicle/visitor/pedestrian/cyclists movement and space requirements;
 - Identify opportunities to create additional space for leisure activity, e.g. improved access to the river and green space;
 - Achieve a co-ordinated approach to parking provision, access, and traffic circulation as part of a parking strategy approach, all of which currently can act as a detractor for visitors and events;
 - Facilitate an enhanced destination management approach, including for example the markets/events/activity programme, to ensure it remains attractive and in line with changing consumer needs.
 - Review and enhance visitor facilities to ensure the offer remains attractive and relevant;
 - Review and promote additional physical complementary development opportunities where they exist e.g. the vacant former Mondi paper mill site;
 - Review the scope and opportunity to rationalise existing Council/public owned assets to create additional development opportunities to support the place management approach; and
 - Identify a phased approach to implementation via a series of short medium and longer term interventions to bring forward a programme of improvements, subject to funding availability.

- 3.3 It is proposed to appoint a multi-disciplinary consultancy to prepare a comprehensive Place Management Plan with a series of actions and initiatives to guide the continued improvement and promotion of Ramsbottom town centre over the next 10 to 15 years.
- 3.4 The consultancy would be procured in accordance with Council requirements and procurement rules. A phased approach is proposed, with phase one setting out the vision, draft place management plan and parking strategy, together with a draft series of key interventions identified with high level outline costs. It is envisaged that an initial budget of up to £50,000 would be allocated to cover the costs of this phase one work.
- 3.5 There would be extensive engagement with businesses, community and wider stakeholders in developing the draft Place Management Plan, before it was presented to Cabinet for approval for formal consultation purposes. The intention is to take the Place Management Plan back to Cabinet for formal approval thereafter.
- 3.6 Upon completion the plan will be used to inform statutory policies and proposals in the emerging Bury Local Plan. It would also be used to identify opportunities that could attract public and private funding and it is important that proposals are clearly set out in a plan that has the Council's support.
- 3.7 Phase two of the commission would comprise detailed design work and detailed costing for the proposed interventions. This element of the proposal may be further broken down into individual projects depending on opportunities, priorities or recommended delivery programme (i.e. it may not be appropriate to develop all of the design work immediately).
- 3.8 A further £50,000 is proposed to cover the cost of this phase two work. It is proposed that delegated powers be given to the Director of Economic Regeneration and Capital Growth to authorise progression of the phase two element of the commission following completion of the consultation programme.
- 3.9 The commission to prepare Phase 1 of the Place Management Plan for Ramsbottom is likely to take up to 6 months to complete on appointment.

Other alternative options considered

None

Equality Impact and considerations:

24. *Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the ‘general duty’ on public authorities is set out as follows:*

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;*
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;*
 - (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.*
25. *The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying ‘due regard’ in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.*

Assessment of Risk:

The following risks apply to the decision:

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
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Consultation:

Legal Implications:

The proposal within the report is below the EU threshold but the procurement of the service must comply with the Council’s Contract Procedure Rules.

Financial Implications:

The cost of the proposal is £100,000 and can be met from within the 2020/21 capital programme.

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Background papers:

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

Term	Meaning