



Barnstaple Place Partnership board

Friday 17th January 2025 09.30am – 11.00am

Guildhall, Barnstaple

1. Welcome and introductions

Apologies – Rob Ward, Andy Wills, Cllr Andrea Davis

2. Improving the look and feel of the town centre:

Vacant Units working group: the working group is now established and will start the audit work this month.

HH shared the base map (attached) showing the current vacancy rate – further properties were lost in Jan, with the rate rising to 15% which is slightly above national average.

The map visually shows that there are currently some areas where there is a high concentration of vacant units and that the key retail area is shrinking. Areas such as lower High Street, and Boutport Streets and are areas that we should consider targeting with appropriate interventions.

The board discussed the various areas and identified some key premises that they felt should be prioritised;

14 High Street (corner of Church Lane) – long term vacant unit and in a state of disrepair and unlikely to be let in current condition.

113 Boutport Street - belongs to Bridge Trust who are considering the options short term lease or long term block project – plans are underway.

Some of the properties, particularly those that have been long term vacant, are listed which can add to the issues around viability especially as there have been changes to the heritage grant systems but could and should be promoted as an opportunity.

Units which are vacant but well maintained e.g. 4 The Square and 80 High Street have much less impact so supporting investment in fascias / dressing windows could be a positive intervention.

Actions:

The working group will look update the map, identify priorities, appropriate interventions and create a database with landlord and premise details so we can start to engage with owners to understand why the premises are remaining vacant.

Report to be brought back to next meeting.



High Street Rental Auctions

HH talked through the new powers that came into force on 2 December allowing Local Authorities to hold rental auctions to let qualifying high-street premises that have been unoccupied for the whole of the preceding year or for at least 366 days in the preceding two years. NDC had considered being an early adopter of the new power but felt that there was no real benefit of doing so at the moment and that the working group would essentially be following a similar process to engage with landlords and link them with potential tenants.

The board discussed issues around identifying / creating new tenants which included:

- Lack of flexibility in the property market has stunted entrepreneurial activity, less appetite to start new businesses due to high risk.
- Meanwhile space has great potential with a waiting list of people /companies interested but has been hard to deliver for a number of reasons including political. JRJ suggested that we perhaps have to look at those the project is presented – move it away from a council led project. Main reasons are around lack of understanding and owners not being local so have no appreciation for the social impact

Public Art update

AM gave an update on the CDF funded public art project. 11 artists had been shortlisted to submit proposals which need to be in by Feb 10th is deadline. A scoring system is in place based on quality and some cost to ensure the right work can be commissioned.

25% of the final score will be down to a public vote element and depending on the scores there could be one piece or several commissioned. The aim is to commission them in March and have them installed within a year.

Part 2 of the project will be delivering some community led art in Forches and Gorwell. The team are working with ND homes to create a work to celebrate housing – from alms houses, post war and modern day. There is £50k for each area, the process is finding the right people to work on these projects, the local community should choose.

LY suggested that working with the local ward councillors would be a constructive ways to reach those communities. AM said that it was also a good opportunity for ND home to promote what they do.

Street Scene Working Group

JF updated the group on the first meeting of the Street Scene Working Group which is made up of those operatives who work in the town centre on a daily basis and are the eyes and ears. The initial meeting had been about meeting each other, understanding each other's roles and how can we collaborative relationships.

The next week will focus on what powers we have within the teams and a joined up approach to tackling problems to avoid cross over and identify areas that are being missed.



3. Improving the functionality of the town

Wayfinding update:

- Fingerposts are ready to be installed, waiting on DCC contractors
- Plinths - planning applications are being pulled together – BTC are submitted the applications on the projects behalf.
- Trails – aim is to have at least 3 trails live for the summer

MP hope to see the positive impacts over the summer

4. Improving the town centre offer

Evaluation of Christmas events programme

MP reported that Christmas was a great success, with a really good buzz around the town centre.

The Cultural Development Fund had funded the stage in the Pannier Market and worked with Green Lanes to have a full schedule of activity in the 3 weeks leading up to Christmas. Approximately 3k people attended the events with a good mix of demographic and 200 school children attended the school performances.

The Barnstaple Christmas guide included 97 events and activities, which demonstrated the level of activity in the town and was delivered to 6k homes with more available in various locations in the town centre. 12k leaflets were distributed in total. There were some complaints that it was delivered late (some were delivered on 20 Dec) which will be reviewed. Communication methods will also be reviewed and Barnstaple.co.uk promoted as the place to find out about all events.

The team are now evaluating the overall impact of the different events as it is important that we determine which activities can be sustained once CDF finishes (only 15months left) for example the market events can take place without the staging .

AH commented that only 8% of Age Concern clients (75- 86 year olds) use the town centres with one of the key barriers being transport, requiring support when in town especially in the winter when it gets dark early.

By working together when planning events we could look to overcome some of these issues.

JC commented that community transport is an issue for a broad range of community not just the elderly, and needs to be addressed – SJ suggested taking this to the devon board as a piece of work. LF stated that NDVS should be part of this conversation.



Footfall / trader data

HH stated that NDC now had access to some Visitor Insight data that works using mobile phone data to measure footfall – this can also provide 8 years of previous data so we can interrogate this. You can use this across the district and filter areas by geofencing up to 20 areas at a time.

Initial analysis of the data shows that footfall was up last year for both the town centre as a whole and for the Pannier Market – the challenge is to turn this into spend.

6. Open forum event / communication

In TOR it was identified to publish meeting notes and to hold an annual event. It was agreed that this should be done but to avoid May as that is busy with events.

7. Community Networks / Projects and Programme updates – key updates or issues that need escalating:

Jess – everything is ticking over – can we report on Tuly street accessibility group - needs a crossing MP take the cars out SJ will have a PID for this item to the next meeting

The Strand – working group to be established to look at issues such as lighting, traffic enforcement, use of space etc.

Oliver Buildings - SJMCS reported that there is ongoing background work being undertaken with Historic England who have confirmed a grant towards undertaking a feasibility study. The brief for the feasibility study will focus on an optimal viable use appraisal, a conservation deficit appraisal and financial deliverability.

Discussions are ongoing the owners regarding their position and NDC are encouraging them to do some further remedial works.

Slow but positive progress is being made.

8. DoNM

- 7 March 2025