

12 October 2018

Town centre revitalisation

Purpose of report

For discussion.

Summary

With the continuing restructuring of high street businesses councils are expected to play an increasingly significant leadership role in ensuring the future vitality of town centres. The LGA therefore intends to continue its offer of support to member councils on developing their leadership role and influencing central government and other partners to support local initiatives and interventions.

In July this year, Jake Berry MP, the high streets Minister, announced the appointment of an expert panel to diagnose issues that currently affect the health of our high streets and advise on the best practical measures to help them thrive now and in the future. Cllr Graham Galpin, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Property, is one of the 8 members of the panel and he has agreed to update the Board the work of the panel, take feedback from Board members, and share his view of local government's role.

Many councils are increasingly making commercial investments in their town centres and do so with advice from commercial and retail property experts. Alan Harris, Partner at Montagu Evans has been invited to share his expertise on how local government can maximise its influence and control of important town centre assets.

Recommendation

That the Board considers the views of invited experts and steers the future work of the LGA as appropriate.

Action

As directed by the Board

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Background

1. The performance of town centres and high streets was a priority area of work for the EEHT Board last year, and given the continued significant decline in the fortunes of many major retailers and longer-term trends in shopping habits (see appendix highlighting key trends), it is intended that LGA will continue to support councils on this agenda this year.
2. Recent LGA activity to date has included:
 - 2.1. A seminar in November 2017 to identify key common issues where councils would welcome good practice advice and what format that advice should take.
 - 2.2. Publication in May 2018 of a [good practice handbook](#) for council leadership and a more detailed and extensive [online resource](#) for senior practitioners and councillors who would like more information on revitalising their town centres.
 - 2.3. A LGA national conference in May 2018 “What next for our town centres?” including a key note speech from Jake Berry MP, the Minister for high streets.
 - 2.4. Participation in the Future High Street Forum, a Ministerial forum reconvened by Jake Berry MP.
 - 2.5. [LGA submission](#) of written evidence to the Housing, Communities and Local Government (HCLG) Committee inquiry looking at the future of England’s high streets and town centres in 2030 – June 2018.
 - 2.6. Seeking alignment and establishing relationships with key partner organisations, including Grimsey Review team, the Association of Town and City Management (ATCM) and Revo, the community of retail property owners.
3. It is clear from national and local news and from the levels of engagement with LGA activities that town centres and the high street continue to be of high level concern to councils. It has also risen up the Government’s agenda with the creation of a new Ministerial expert panel that will diagnose issues that currently affect the health of our high streets and advise on the best practical measures to help them thrive now and in the future. Cllr Graham Galpin will talk about the work of the expert panel.
4. In recognition of the changing nature of retail and why people visit town centres, councils have been responding in a variety of ways – such as through the development of town centre strategies, the creation of town teams, place-branding and promotion of cultural activities to major regeneration. Many councils have gone further and sought to either take more direct control of commercial assets with a view to regenerating and repurposing their town centres, or exercise more influence and control through their existing assets. Clearly such an approach carries with it financial risk and therefore councils will work with property and development experts to develop their options to minimise risks and lever in maximum benefits. Alan Harris will provide an expert view about the options that are at councils’ disposal.

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LGA future work

5. It is intended that the LGA will continue working with the Government through the Future High Streets Forum and support the work of the expert panel as appropriate and as directed by the Board. More broadly, the LGA will continue to make the case for sustainable long-term funding for local government so that councils can properly resource discretionary areas of work such as local growth and helping their town centres, as well as influencing the future of business rates. Officers will also continue to update LGA online good practice resources, for example with new case study material. In addition, officers are developing further opportunities for member councils to learn from each other and industry experts, including:

- 5.1. Focused 'masterclasses' for lead members and officers on developing and taking forward their town centre strategies; and

- 5.2. An event aimed at those councils who are looking to influence or take more direct control of commercial town centre assets.

Biographies

Councillor Graham Galpin from Ashford council

6. Graham Galpin has been a councillor in Ashford since 2011 and a Cabinet member since 2013. He is currently Portfolio Holder for Corporate Property and has had responsibility for the town centre's economic vitality for almost all of that time.

Alan Harris, Montagu Evans

7. Alan is a partner in the Development Consultancy part of the business. He has spent the last 15 years advising on over a billion pounds' worth of retail led development projects and works closely with councils seeking to deliver their vision for their town or city centre.

Implication for Wales

8. There are no implications for Wales as local growth is a devolved matter. However, it is worth noting that the Welsh Assembly have made available a £28 million Vibrant and Viable Places Town Centre Loans Fund designed to help support town centre regeneration in Wales. The fund is to be used to reduce the number of empty, underused sites and premises in town centres and help their redevelopment as shops, homes and leisure facilities. It works on a recyclable loan basis which means that once the money is repaid, it is used again to fund new loans. Local authorities may re-invest the funding in other projects a number of times as long as those projects meet the aims and objectives of the Town Centre Loans Fund. The funding may be recycled over a 15 year period and the Welsh Government will require it returned in full after 15 years.

Financial implications

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9. There are currently no financial implications.