Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Date: 25 September 2017

Briefing Note: Retail Experience in the Town Centre

1. Introduction

The purpose of this briefing note is to provide Committee with an update on various key measurement points to provide a general overview of our town centres health. These information provided will assist the Committee in gaining a better understanding of the 'Retail Experience in the Town centre'.

2. Updates:

2.1 Vacant Shops Units

The council has maintained details of the vacant shop units in Northampton town centre for many years. The table below provides details of the number and % of vacant shops unit over the last 5 years from 2013 to 2017.

Year (mid-year)	Number of vacant units	Overall % of units vacant
2013	84	16.0 %
2014	83	15.8%
2015	54	13.6%
2016	52	13.3%
2017	55	14.3%

Since 2013 the total number of vacant units in the town centre has reduced despite the number of businesses relocating or closing down. Across the town centre there are a number of units which have been vacant for over two years and for a variety of reasons have been difficult to let.

The town centre has attracted many new businesses over the last 5 years and toe council 'Business Improvement Grant' funding and partnership workings with local landlords have been key factors.

Northampton town centre has faced and continues to face similar challenges to other town centres across the UK. The recent new developments in and around the town centre have assisted in attracting inward investment and maintain a relatively stable economy.

2.2 Parking Performance

The council introduced various free parking offers in 2014 to support the town centre. The offers included 2 hour free parking and Saturday free parking in the multi-storey car parks.

Year	2 Hour Parking	Saturday Parking
2014 – 15	726,369	377,984
2015 – 16	909,470	425,880
2016 – 17	1,022,958	438,727
2017 - 18	426,430 (up to 31 August)	178,513 (up to 31 August)

In 2016/17 the free 2 hour parking offer attracted more visitors into the councils multi-storey car parks, with the Grosvenor and Mayorhold attracting 766,490 (75%) of all visitors. The same car parks attracted more visitors for the free Saturday parking with 308,013 (70%) using the car parks.

The economic impact / benefit is difficult to comment upon as there is no evidence to compare.

The overall parking figures across all the council's car parks has seen an increase in numbers from 2014/15 when there were 2,005,588 visitors. In 2015/16 visitor numbers increased to 2,170,971 and in 2016/17 figures increased again to 2,282,418. The figures for 2017/18 are continuing to show visitor numbers increasing.

2.3 Footfall Performance

The footfall figures in the town centre over the last two years have increased for the first time since 2010.

Year	Abington Street	Market Square	Total
2010	11,271,153	4,670,066	15,941,219
2011	10,845,992	4,725,315	15,587,187
2012	10,236,177	4,741,195	14,977,372
2013	9,424,071	4,701,253	14,125,324
2014	9,137,256	5,339,713	14,476,969
2015	9,191,509	5,668,010	14,859,519
2016	10,258,701	5,622,474	15,881,175
2017 (up to August)	6,119,815	3,409,175	9,528,990

As a general indicator, footfall figures are used to highlight how town and city centres are performing. Every town needs to attract shoppers into their town centres to help economic growth.

2.4 The above factors (vacant shop units, parking figures and footfall) are useful in providing a broad overview of how the town centre is performing. However, there are many other aspects which impact on the vibrancy and vitality of town centres and these include environmental factors, safety, events and promotion.

2.5 Northampton town centre has seen many businesses close and move over the last 5 years, but we have always managed to attract new businesses to replace them.

3. Actions & Impacts

Positive promotion / events / partnership working / ?????

4. Other Implications