

Report to Cabinet

Subject: Arnold Town Centre

Date: 19 March 2019

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Wards Affected

Ernehale, with the potential to impact on the wider Borough

Purpose

To provide Cabinet with an update on the work being done with Arnold Town Centre in order to bid for government funding. Officers are seeking approval to progress onto the next steps with the preparation of an Action Plan for the town centre and to set up a town centre delivery group to drive action plan.

Key Decision

This is not a key decision.

Recommendation(s)

THAT Cabinet:

- 1) Approves the principle of submitting an expression of interest to the Government's Future High Street Fund to facilitate improvements to Arnold Town Centre;**
- 2) Approves the preparation of a draft Action Plan for Arnold Town Centre to be prepared; and**
- 3) Approves the principle of establishing an Arnold Town Centre Delivery Group.**

1 Background

Future High Street Fund

- 1.1 In December 2018, the government announced the opportunity to bid for part of a £675m funding pot, as part of a wider programme of works under “Our Plan for the High Street”. The funding is a two staged process which includes:
 - Phase 1 – Expression of Interest to be submitted by 22nd March 2019
 - Phase 2 – In summer 2019, shortlisted places will then be asked to prepared detailed business cases and project plans for specific projects
- 1.2 The objective of the Fund is to renew and reshape town centres and high streets in a way that improves experience, drives growth and ensures future sustainability. In the first phase of the funding process, the specific challenges faced by the town centre/high street need to be defined, to set out the overarching strategic ambition for what the high street or town centre should become and what needs to be done to make this possible.
- 1.3 The funding prospectus states that any identified need for investment should fall under the following themes:
 - Investment in physical infrastructure;
 - Acquisition and assembly of land including to support new housing, workspaces and public realm;
 - Improvements to transport access, traffic flow and circulation in the area;
 - Supporting change of use including (where appropriate) housing delivery and densification; and
 - Supporting adaptation of the high street in response to changing technology
- 1.4 Furthermore, the expectation in the prospectus makes it clear “that a scattergun approach of light touch interventions is not the solution for town centres facing large structural issues. Instead effective strategic thinking and master planning is needed, with local areas able to work across public and private sector organisations including local businesses, driven by strong local leadership”. In light of this there is the opportunity to bid for funding, including capital money and revenue support, to assist Local Council’s to deliver the step change required.

Arnold Town Centre

- 1.5 Officers are proposing to put forward Arnold town centre for the funding, due to its size and role within the Borough, but also the challenges facing the centre in the future. This is also been identified as a key priority within the Gedling Plan.
- 1.6 An Officer Working Group has been set up and targeted consultation has been undertaken with some key stakeholders, such as the County Council (and Via who maintain their landholdings) to start to identify the key issues that could be included within the funding bid:
- Role of Arnold – why do people visit and how can this be increased? There are a number of locations where events and activities could take place to encourage more visitors into the town centre such as Eagle Square, the King George V Park and Church hall.
 - Although there are a number of significant draws to the town centre (Asda, Wilkos, Leisure Centre, Bonington Theatre, GP surgery), more could be made of combined trips between them and the rest of the town centre. This would help to re-address the over reliance on shops in the centre as the main draw and would bring visitors in for other reasons than to shop.
 - Town Centre is hidden away from main route into Nottingham and shops turn their backs to the main local road network, creating a first impression of service yards or backs of buildings, which is unappealing and creates further knock on impacts (e.g. alleyways from the car parks, service yards are easily accessible)
 - Centre itself is fairly pedestrian friendly, but is long linear centre and lacks a co-ordinated approach to street furniture and public realm and lacks a strong identity.
- 1.7 The funding process means that a clear vision for how these challenges will be addressed will be required. Officers have identified a number of options for further consideration:
- Creating an identity and branding for the town centre.
 - Creating a programme of events/attractions to bring more visitors into the town centre.
 - Ensure the town centre is accessible for all – either through travelling into the centre (car, bus, cycling or walking), throughout the centre (pedestrian crossing where there are needed, drop curbs for wheelchairs and pushchairs) and in/out of the shops.
 - Reduce the reliance on retail uses and encourage other town centre uses in (leisure, cultural, residential, offices and services)
 - The role of the market as a key asset to the town centre and bringing in more visitors.

- The role of the vacant/underused buildings in adding to the vibrancy to the town centre (such as Bonington House, Working Men's Club).

2 Proposal

- 2.1 Officers are seeking Cabinet approval on the principle of submitting an expression of interest to the Government's Future High Street Fund to facilitate improvements for around £5m to include the key issues identified above. Approves If successful, a further Cabinet report will be required outlining the nature of the funding, any associated restrictions and financial implications before the funding is acceptable.
- 2.2 Notwithstanding the funding opportunity, it has become apparent that there are a number of key strands of work for Arnold Town Centre which should be considered through a co-ordinated approach. Officers are seeking approval to commence the detailed work required to draft an Action Plan for Arnold Town Centre, which will pull together the key challenges facing Arnold and how these can be addressed. A subsequent Cabinet report will be required to agree the delivery of actions in the plan, the initial priority work programme and how progress is reported back before wider public consultation is undertaken.
- 2.3 The success of Arnold Town Centre Action Plan will also be reliant upon the involvement and support from partners, stakeholders, local business and Councillors, as there is only so much the Borough Council can do. Officers are seeking approval to the principle of establishing a Delivery Group, made up of local businesses, landlords, community representatives, infrastructure providers (including County Council/via) and other interested parties. Officers are therefore seeking approval on the principle of setting this group up to allow Officers to explore how this can assist with the delivery of the action plan.

3 Alternative Options

- 3.1 It is clear that town centres across the country are struggling and in need of intervention from stakeholders and interested parties. Officers are therefore considering all the options including bidding for funding where appropriate, and to establish a framework to guide further actions/interventions. To not do so, would be reducing the likelihood of a strong and attractive town centre offer for local people.
- 3.2 Members could decide not to support the principle of the funding bid and the work stream as detailed above. However, this will then limit the potential for Officers to act in increasing the vitality and vibrancy of Arnold town centre.

4 Financial Implications

- 4.1 At this stage, Officers are not committing the Council to any specific match funding, as this will be covered by a subsequent Cabinet report (if the bid to the Future High Street Fund is successful).
- 4.2 The financial implications of the preparation of the Arnold Town Centre Action Plan and Delivery group will be covered by existing revenue budgets.

5 Appendices

- 5.1 None.

6 Background Papers

- 6.1 Arnold Town Centre Review – SWOT Analysis.

7 Reasons for Recommendations

- 7.1 To ensure that Arnold Town Centre remain vibrant and continues to serves as a hub for local people in the future.
- 7.2 To set out that this is not just a role for the public sector and requires the support from a wide range of stakeholders.
- 7.3 To be able to act swiftly and apply for funding from the “Future High Street Fund”.