

REPORT TITLE: WINCHESTER DISTRICT HIGH STREETS' PRIORITY PLAN –
UP-DATE AND PROGRESS REPORT

21 JUNE 2022

REPORT OF PORTFOLIO HOLDER: Councillor Thompson, Cabinet Member for
Business and Culture

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WARD(S): ALL

PURPOSE

This report provides the Policy Committee with a final progress report on the one year tactical Winchester District High Streets' Priority Plan (HSPP) developed in response to the impact of the COVID-19 restrictions and operational measures on, in particular, the retail, leisure and hospitality sector.

The Policy Committee provided comment on the draft High Streets' Priority Plan at its meeting on 22 June and on 21 September 2021, received a revised plan and progress report on its delivery.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Policy Committee are asked to:

1. Note the progress made against the action in the one year High Streets' Priority Plan.
2. Make comments on the proposed options for a new plan to March 2024 or 2025

1 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 1.1 The Winchester District High Streets' Priority Plan is being delivered by the Economy & Community Service teams, with staff resources deployed from Economy, Tourism and Community.
- 1.2 The delivery of a number of the projects identified in the Plan has been made possible by aligning this activity to that of the funding the council received under the Government and ERDF programmes;
- a) Reopening High Street Safely (RHSS) - £110,972 from June 2020 to March 2021 then extended to July 2021;
- b) Welcome Back Fund (WBF) – £110,971 from April 2021 to March 2022.
- 1.3 The council had grant agreements for the use of these funds that set out the eligible expenditure and outcome measures. The plans for these funds were developed in consultation with Winchester BID and representatives from the market towns including ward members, town / parish councils and local trade associations and chambers of commerce. We continued to work with these representatives on the implementation of projects and will again work in collaboration with them as we formalise the activities within the second year of the High Streets' Priority Plan.
- 1.4 The WBF enabled the council to appoint a temporary part-time project officer, to co-ordinate activity, liaise with partners and support the programme management and monitoring for the period of 13 September 2021 – 3 March 2022.
- 1.5 All contracts were managed in accordance with the council's contract management framework in order to maximise the opportunities presented and grant funding provided.

2 SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

2.1 **Background**

- 2.2 The Policy Committee considered the Winchester District High Streets' Priority Plan 2021-22 at its June meeting. The Plan had been developed as a short term tactical plan to "reinvigorate our District's high streets post COVID-19, to support our businesses to reopen and innovate and to enable people to enjoy social and cultural experiences again."

3 **Progress Report**

- 3.1 The District High Streets' Priority Plan included an action plan that identified specific actions and projects that would be delivered in 2021-22. A detailed progress report on the actions included in given in Appendix 1. The following

is a summary drawing out some of the highlights from what has been achieved as completed activity between April 2021 and April 2022.

3.2 Business support

ShopAppy - e-commerce platform

Over 175 businesses engaged on the platform, offering over 3669 products and services for purchase and generating over 24,000 views

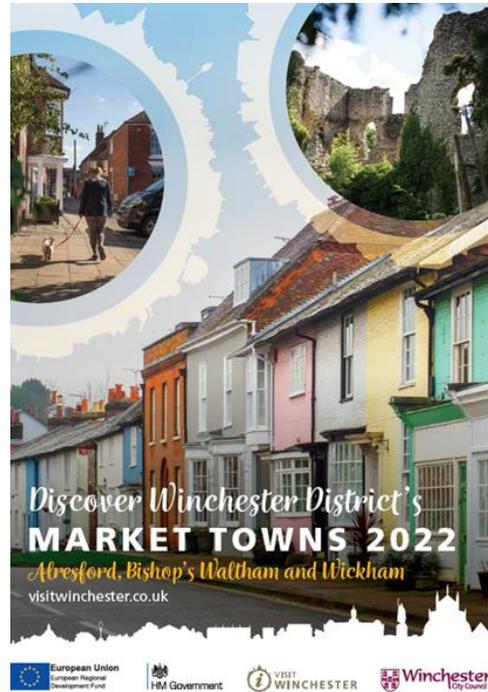
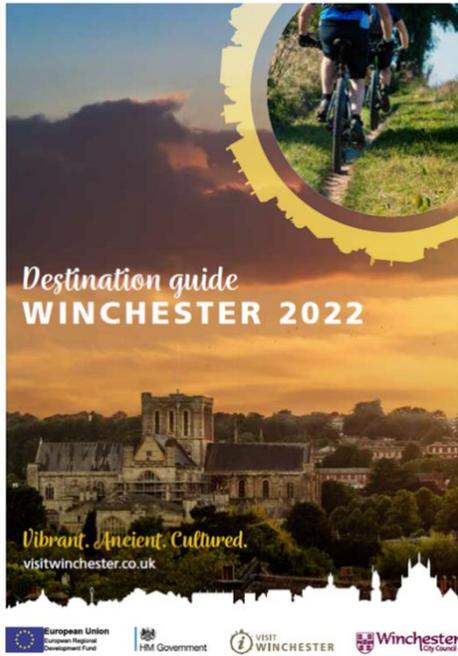


Festive wayfinding was installed on the walking route from the designated Christmas Park and Ride to create a sense of anticipation and deliver direct engagement to support footfall to high street retail business in the city.

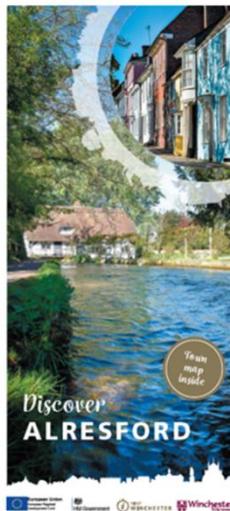


3.3 Promotion and Campaigns

A suite of promotional print to raise awareness and drive footfall has been produced. This comprises of a Welcome Back to Winchester district wide guide plus additional individual market town guides and town visitor maps.



Alresford



Bishops Waltham



Wickham



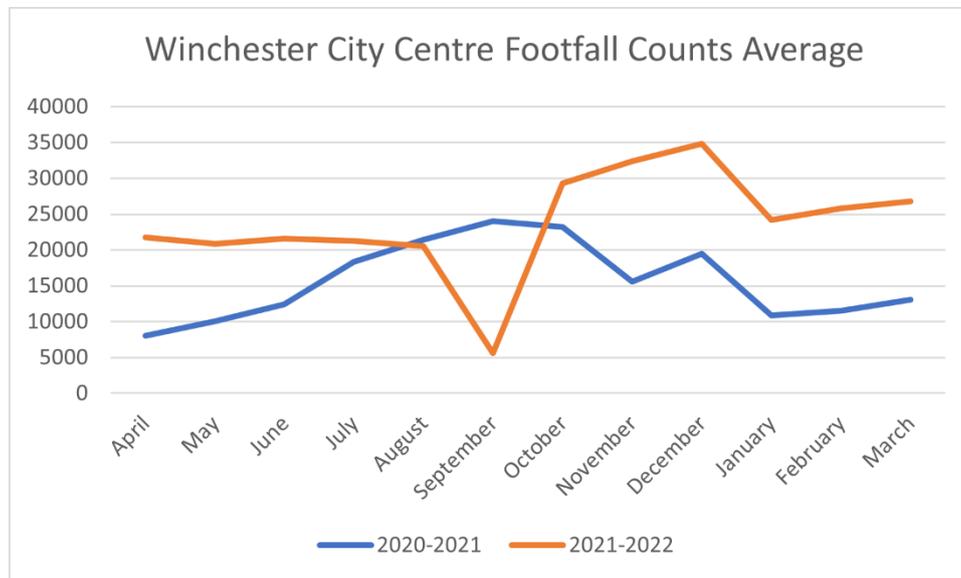
3.5 Events

Two key events were undertaken to drive footfall during typically quieter periods and to add value to the experience for visitors to the high street during popular periods; Lights in the City at the start of February and Winchester Outdoor Cinema in April.



restrictions were put in place it was 8,064; in April 2021 it was much recovered to 21,741. April 2022 it was 27,936 so very close to being back to pre-pandemic levels.

Chart 1. Average weekly footfall counts 2020-2021 compared to 2021-2022



4.4 Vacancy rates

4.5 City centre vacancy rates are provided by the Winchester Business Barometer produced by Prof. Kind. In April 2022, the city centre vacancy rate was 8.5% which is a slight fall from April 2021 figure of 9.3% and April 2020 figure of 5.4%. The typical vacancy rate pre-COVID was on average 6.9%. The national figure is 14.4% (Retail Gazette April 2022).

4.6 Business closures / openings

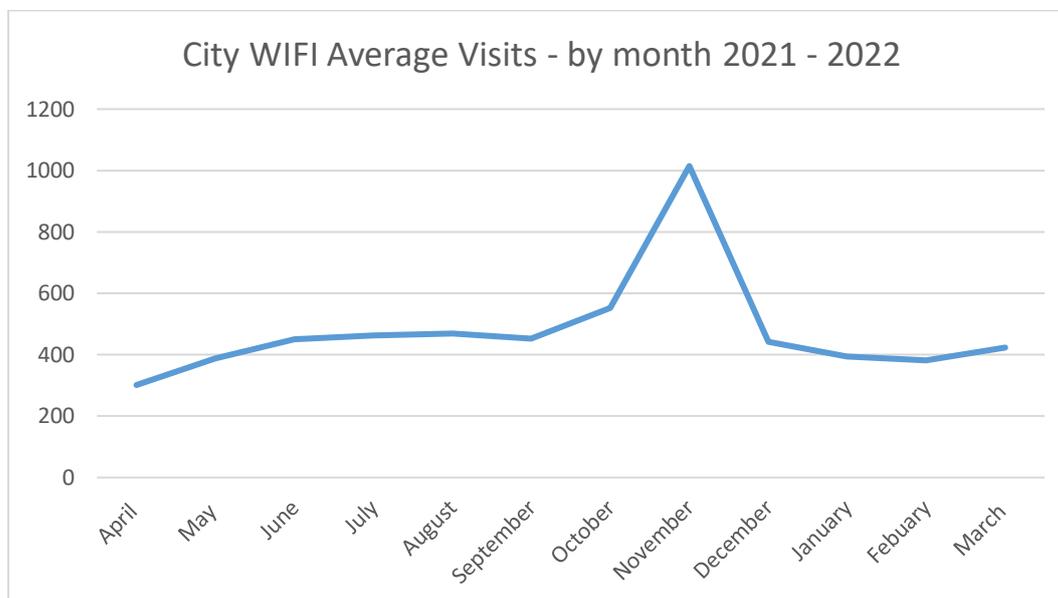
4.7 In the market towns we are aware of five business closures between April 2021 and March 2022; one in Alresford, two in Wickham and two in Bishop's Waltham. We estimate there have been five new openings. From information provided by Winchester BID, we estimate in the city centre there have been a net loss of 14 businesses. During this period, a number of businesses have changed premises. The vacancy rate is now coming down and national brands, such as Oliver Bonas and Giggling Squid as well as new independents are choosing to locate there.

4.8 City Centre WIFI use

4.9 The city WIFI launched in September 2020 so there is data available for the full year of the HSPP. From April there is a small and steady increase in total number of visits until November when there was a spike in usage from an average total visits of 453 to 1015 then back to 442 in December – as shown

in Chart 2. A possible reason for this jump is that is coincided with Christmas light switch on and Christmas digital trail.

Chart 2. City WIFI average monthly total visits



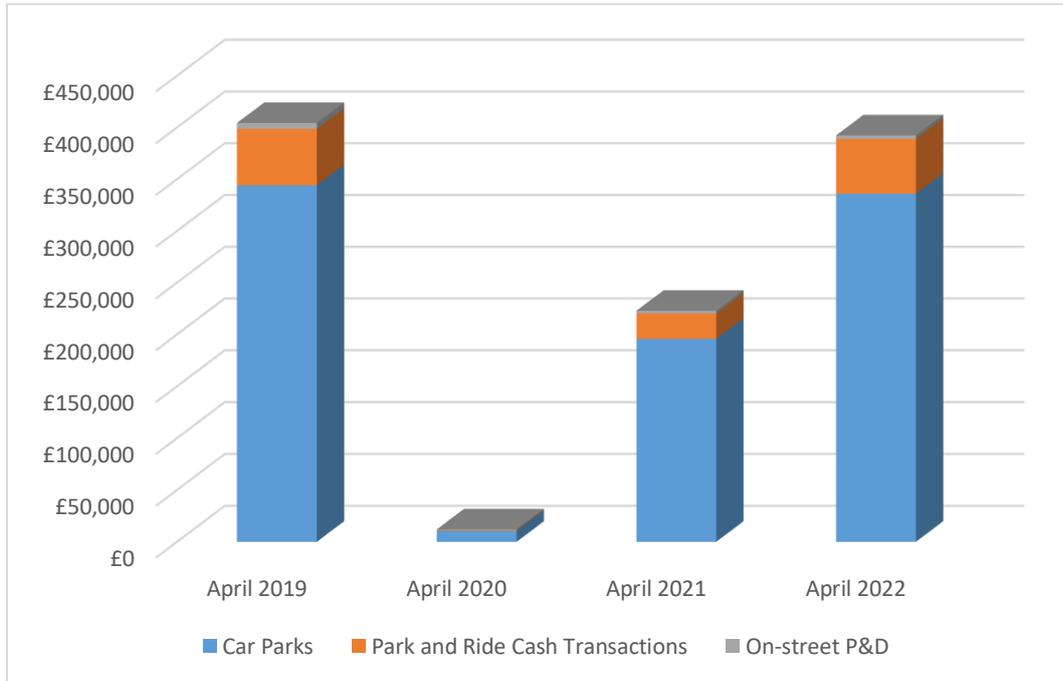
4.10 Car parking use

Table 1. District Car Park Use (income)

Location	April 2019	April 2020	April 2021	April 2022
Alresford	£6,048.50	£123.46	£3,578.87	£5,445.63
Bishops Waltham	£4,807.33	£127.34	£1,346.46	£4,007.05
City*	£413,062.50	£12,112.59	£224,985.03	£397,216.97
Wickham	£4,387.67	£33.17	£1,733.96	£3,986.80
Total	£471,862.00	£56,318.56	£275,931.32	£455,308.45

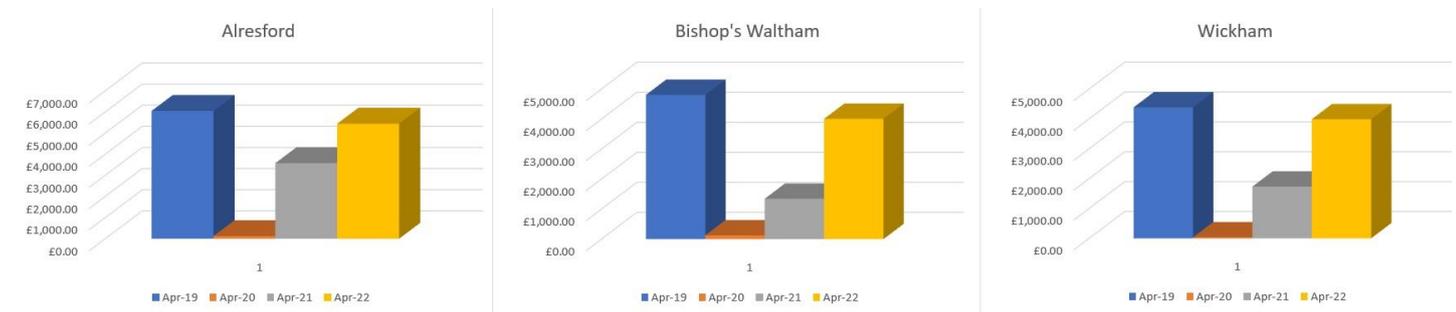
* The city car parks include all car parks in city, park and ride and pay and display on street parking, but not residents permits.

Chart 3: Winchester car park use breakdown (income)



All figures net of VAT
 VAT Rate - On-street - Zero
 VAT Rate - Park and Ride - 2.4%
 VAT Rate - Car Parks - 20%

Chart 4. Trend in car park use in market towns pre: during and post COVID-19 restrictions (income)



4.11 Conclusion

4.12 As detailed in the action plan up-date and progress table (Appendix 1) much has successfully been delivered over the past year in support of the district's high streets, their businesses and customers.

4.13 In particular and as highlighted earlier in the report, from the work on events and promotions, business support and vacant window dressing, it can be

seen from the performance measures that footfall and car park usage is returning to pre-pandemic levels. Much of the delivery was enabled by the Welcome Back Fund from Government and the EDRF. However there were aspects that should be built upon – a legacy of sorts. This includes:

- a) Activation of the high streets with events that attract a range of people.
- b) Acting on the findings from the research on festivals and the street markets.
- c) Building and strengthening the work with the market towns and Whiteley.
- d) Getting better data and evidence to understand issues and impact.

4.14 Even before the challenges brought about by the pandemic high streets and Winchester's city centre were experiencing changing consumer habits and the threat from on-line retailing. Therefore a continued focus on supporting our high streets as places to enjoy, attracting people to use them, and helping our business adapt and grow is still needed and the objectives the High Streets' Priority Plan remain valid:

- **Build on our high streets' brand** and build confidence.
- **Create better connections** between residents and their local centres.
- Strengthen the connection between organisations, businesses and events to **create a whole town experience for the benefit of all**.
- Make more of our **places as social and community hubs**.
- **Celebrate what we have** and our new successes - independent retail, festivals, events, attractions, creative and cultural venues.
- **Foster business resilience** so that our high street businesses survive, capitalise on change, grow and prosper.

4.15 The options for the creation of the next HSPP are proposed in the following section.

5 **Next Steps - Winchester District High Streets' Plan 2022-24 or 2025**

5.1 When the High Streets' Priority Plan (HSPP) was created it was envisaged that a longer term framework would be developed for a two to three year period. Since delivering the one year Plan a number of factors have changed that have implications for the way a Plan could be developed and resourced. The Policy Committee is asked to comment on the proposed next steps in order to continue to support the future of the high streets across the district.

- a) Align the period of activity with the Green Economic Development Strategy (Draft) Action Plan 2022-2024(BHPC33) and bring it into the GEDS programme of actions.

- b) The GEDS (Draft) Action Plan 2022-2024 identifies the creation of a Sustainable Tourism Strategy and a Sustainable Cultural Strategy. A range of agreed future High Street actions could be incorporated into these as many of the delivery elements are complementary; events; promotions and campaigns and business support.
- c) The Shared Prosperity Fund requires the development of an investment plan to detail the interventions and outcomes to be achieved with council's £1m grant allocation between 2022 and March 2025. Actions to support the future of the high street could be aligned to this programme and cover the three year period to March 2025. The formulation of the investment plan also requires stakeholder engagement and support; and could be used to identify both actions and the funding resources to support the district's high streets and the retail, leisure and hospitality sector under the Fund's themes of Community and place; Supporting local business; and People and skills.

6 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 6.1 The Policy Committee report in June 2021 identified options considered and rejected in relation to the High Streets Priority Plan. This is an up-date and progress report, so no additional options have been considered at this time.
- 6.2 The options that have been considered for a future High Streets Priority Plan are:

Do not create a new plan – this has been rejected. The importance of the district's high streets to residents, business, students and visitors necessitates a coherent and co-ordinated approach to their future, sustainable success.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Previous Committee Reports:-

BHP018 22 JUNE 2021 WINCHESTER DISTRICT HIGH STREETS' PRIORITY PLAN 2021/22 22

<https://democracy.winchester.gov.uk/documents/s15764/BHP018%20High%20Streets%20Priority%20Plan%20FINAL.pdf>

Other Background Documents:-

Reopening High Streets Safely Grant Action Plan, 17th July 2020, Revised 10th November 2020.

Welcome Back Fund New Activity Form, 28 May 2021

[Winchester BID Business Barometer 40th Edition January to September 2021, 19th October 2021](#)

[Winchester business barometer - Google Drive](#)

Share Prosperity Fund Prospectus:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus>

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1. Action Plan progress report