

**INDEPENDENT CHAIRMAN OF OAKHAM TOWN TASK AND FINISH GROUP:  
UPDATE FOR THE GROWTH, INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESOURCES  
SCRUTINY PANEL 14 JUNE 2018**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Oakham Task and Finish Group is making good early progress in laying the foundations for future improvements and building a good understanding and joint working between its partners and the wider community. In its first two full meetings in April and May the Group has covered the items outlined below.

Meetings have been well attended by members, actions are agreed by consensus of the group, allocated and progressed in between meetings. Meetings are open to the public and agenda's, presentations, reports and minutes can be found on the meetings page of the RCC Website at:

<http://rutlandcounty.moderngov.co.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeed=358>

## **2. EXISTING EVIDENCE OF TOWN CENTRE ISSUES**

- a. Mr Dave Brown (former Director for Places) gave a presentation on existing data and information held by RCC.
- b. Mr Christopher Clark (Oakham Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group) provided a presentation on the Oakham Neighbourhood Plan Big Survey.

This gave the Group a good understanding of existing knowledge and where there was a need to learn more about the issues facing the town and people's perceptions of priorities.

## **3. RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE SUB GROUP**

The Group agreed to set-up a Research and Evidence Sub-Group to help get a greater understanding of the town, the issues and people's perceptions. Using a handbook and templates provided by the Chair, the sub-group devised surveys and a research timetable with the aim of collecting the following data:

- Town Centre Users' perceptions
- Town Centre Visitors' perceptions
- Business Confidence
- Visitors to the County perceptions
- Visitor Origins through post code collection
- Data on car park usage
- Footfall counts
- Business Audit

### Next Steps

The timetable for this research will run throughout June. Data will be collected on various days throughout the week. The data will then be analysed and used to

benchmark with other similar towns. This is a substantial piece of work and impressively it is intended to be undertaken completely by local volunteers.

A key distinction is that this approach is not one of consultation on pre-conceived issues or on a proposed scheme; rather it is a first stage in wider community engagement to help understand issues before seeking to develop solutions.

#### **4. COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS**

Following earlier agreement by the Group about the importance of communications, Mr Simon Jones (Communications Officer RCC) provided a presentation on Communications and Community Engagement. It was subsequently agreed that the Group needed a Communications and Engagement Plan and a sub-group was established with officer support from Mr Jones. The sub-group then presented an outline plan at the next meeting and it was agreed that delivery would be through a variety of mediums including a Facebook page, use of council newsletter, website page, posters and surgeries as necessary to ensure residents had ample opportunity to put forward their views.

##### Next Steps

It is vital that the Group members, their organisations and Rutland County Council staff and officers all present consistent descriptions of the Group's work as drafted as part of the plan.

Implementation of the Communications and Engagement Plan would begin with setting up the Oakham Town Task and Finish Group Facebook page and online survey version of paper surveys being produced by the Research and Evidence Sub Group.

The Group also agreed that key stakeholder groups would be invited to present their views to the next two Task and Finish Group meetings as part of the evidence gathering and engagement.

#### **5. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TOWN CENTRE AND WIDER TOWN**

The Group has further discussed the relationship between the town centre and the wider town. The Group has reached a consensus that recognises the importance of services and facilities such as the Library, community buildings, doctors' surgeries as much as shops. As such it was agreed that the Task and Finish Group would focus on the town centre as "commercial, cultural and community core" or simply as "The Hub". The impact and inter-connections of surrounding areas and the road network would be considered as part of any proposals for improving this hub.

A map created of the town centre for the Neighbourhood Plan Group (stretched to include the medical centre) was agreed as a working definition of this hub area.

#### **6. LGA CONFERENCE ON REVITALISING TOWN CENTRES**

Mr Woodley attended this LGA event and gave a brief summary to the Group. The new publication “Revitalising town centres; a handbook for council leadership”, provides a very useful guide on the process for the work in Oakham and can be downloaded from:

<https://www.local.gov.uk/revitalising-town-centres-handbook-council-leadership>

## **7. OFFICER SUPPORT AND RESOURCES**

As Task and Finish Group Chair, Mr Chris Wade would like to congratulate the Task and Finish Group members on the progress made to date and on the thoroughness of the approach being taken. He would also like to acknowledge the support of Mrs Natasha Taylor in facilitating the workings of the Group beyond normal governance duties and the invaluable assistance from Mr Simon King in developing the communications and engagement work. Similarly he welcomes the addition of the experience and strategic support of Mr Steve Ingram Strategic Director for Places that will become invaluable as the work of the Task and Finish Group progresses.

## **8. TIMETABLE AND MILESTONES**

The Group is hoping to have the survey completed and results analysed in time to report back to its August meeting. Further engagement work and planning on projects can then begin. At this time the availability of officer support to help facilitate project development is likely to become increasingly important.

A further update will be provided to the Growth, Infrastructure and Resources Scrutiny Panel in September 2018.