

City Centre and High Streets - Economic Recovery

Background

The Bristol Local Plan (2015) defines 47 high streets of various types and sizes – across the city centre, town, district and local centres. The policy aims to support a network of accessible centres as key focuses for development and as the principal locations for shopping and community facilities as well as local entertainment, art and cultural facilities.

In January 2020, the Council held a High Street Inquiry Day where the following vision for high streets was presented as *‘To act as hubs which include retail and a range of other employment sectors, education and training facilities, leisure and cultural uses, healthcare, homes and public transport. Providing access to jobs within local neighbourhoods, which helps reduce the need to travel and creates a better environment.’*

High streets have been impacted by the COVID pandemic, and were already changing over the last two decades, due to competition and changing patterns of consumption – most notably the growth of online shopping and use of supermarkets and out of town retail parks. The pandemic has intensified and accelerated these trends.

These challenges are set out in the One City Economic Recovery & Renewal Strategy (October 2020) and the West of England (WECA) Regional Recovery Plan, which highlights the need to work with our communities, re-imagine and re-invigorate our towns and city centres with an innovative town centre re-structuring programme, building on the increased need for ‘local liveability.’

Discussions to identify priorities have been held internally within Bristol City Council via the High Street Recovery Working Group and with external organisations including the City Centre BID, Broadmead BID, Redcliffe and Temple BID in development, Bedminster BID, Clifton BID, Bristol Food Union, Bristol Association of Restaurants, Bars and Independent Establishments (BARBIE), Federation of Small Business and Black South West Network.

Bristol’s approach

Our immediate to medium term priorities are to ensure the safe reopening of high streets and to support businesses and high streets to survive, recover and re-animate over the next few years.

Covid Capital Recovery Fund and WECA Love our High Streets programme

The Council has announced that it will use £2m of the Covid Capital Recovery Fund and £2.725m allocated to Bristol from the West of England Combined Authority’s Love our High Streets programme to support the delivery of recovery plans for the City Centre and high streets.

The City Centre and 9 of the city’s high streets have been prioritised under a programme of interventions to support recovery and renewal. This programme aims to support existing high streets business from non-essential retail, hospitality, culture and events sectors which have been severely impacted by Covid 19 restrictions and lockdown measures, but also diversify and re-animate high streets, increasing footfall and encouraging visitors into the local economy (in line with government guidance and roadmap to easing lockdown restrictions).

Within the City Centre, which is a key economic and cultural focus for the region, activity will focus on safe reopening, a diverse and inclusive co-ordinated cultural and experiential events programme, support for the hospitality sector, meanwhile/pop-up uses and greening. The focus is on ensuring the city centre is open to all residents of Bristol and visitors both day and night, with a particular emphasis on being family friendly and a range of activities throughout the year. The council is working with the City Centre and Broadmead Business Improvement Districts, Cabot Circus, The Galleries and other stakeholders to plan the activities.

The local high streets programme will include working closely with businesses, residents, community groups, the creative and events sector and other stakeholders to co-design public realm and street scene improvements which reflect the individual needs and aspirations of each area. Work will also be undertaken with the arts and events sector to develop a series of community activities and events to re-animate individual high streets. Consideration will also be given to developing interventions which facilitate localised access to skills and employability support provision in high streets, particularly those in areas of high deprivation – supporting priorities for economic inclusion and improving access to jobs.

A citywide high street grants programme will support meanwhile use/pop-ups and businesses. Meanwhile use/pop-ups will support temporary uses which enhance the existing high street offer, with a focus on the creative and hospitality sector. Support for businesses will focus on bringing vacant properties back into permanent use, with a focus on uses that diversify (e.g. workspace) and enhance the existing high street offer.

Funding allocations will be based on evidence of need including size of high street/number of businesses, number of vacant properties and level of deprivation. By using these criteria a consistent and transparent process for allocation of funds to the high streets can be applied. Engagement activities will take place with individual high street stakeholders to better understand local needs and provide opportunities for co-design.

These funds will be aligned with the £290,000 allocation from WECA’s High Street Renewal Fund and £415,785 Welcome Back programme (Reopening High Streets Safely) funding allocated to the Council. This will create one funding envelope to deliver the City Centre and High Streets recovery programme.

Indicative funding allocations (subject to engagement) – Covid Capital Recovery Fund/Love our High Streets

Activity	2021/22	2022/23
City Centre recovery	£750,000	£1,250,000
High Street – 9 priority areas	£725,000	£1,000,000
Citywide grant fund	£400,000	£600,000