

Growth and Regeneration Scrutiny Commission 16 November 2021



Report of: John Smith, Director of Economy of Place, Growth & Regeneration

Title: City Centre & High Streets Recovery and Renewal Programme

Ward: All

Officer Presenting Report: Jason Thorne, Senior Project Manager – City Centre & High Streets

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Recommendations:

That the Commission notes this report and the progress of the City Centre & High Streets Recovery and Renewal Programme.

The significant issues in the report are:

The City Centre & High Streets Recovery and Renewal programme will deliver over £4.725m worth of investment across the city, to safeguard and create businesses and employment opportunities.

The programme will be delivered in collaboration with businesses, communities, and stakeholders, who will help inform interventions ensuring they meet needs and reconnect places with people. It will support the recovery of key sectors that have been most affected by the pandemic; these include retail, hospitality, culture and events sectors, and night-time economy.



1. Summary

The City Centre & High Streets Recovery and Renewal programme will deliver over £4.725m worth of investment across the city, to safeguard and create businesses and employment opportunities. It will support the recovery of key sectors that have been most affected by the pandemic; these include retail, hospitality, culture and events sectors, and night-time economy.

There are four citywide elements to the programme – Vacant Commercial Property Grant Scheme, Welcome Back Fund, business engagement and support, and marketing and promotion. The programme also includes geographically targeted interventions for the City Centre and nine high streets, which focus on a more inclusive culture and events offer to attract people back to high streets, and street scene and green infrastructure enhancements to improve the look and feel.

Extensive survey work has been undertaken with businesses and local communities to identify priorities for the City Centre and the nine high streets.

2. Context

- 2.1 City centres and 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. Bristol’s 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.’
- 2.2 A number of funding sources have been allocated as a result of the pandemic and have been brought together to enable the development of a programme of support. The City Centre & High Streets Recovery and Renewal programme will deliver over £4.725m worth of investment across the city, to safeguard and create businesses and employment opportunities. £2.725m of the funding is from the West of England Combined Authority’s Love our High Streets project and £2m from the Council’s COVID Capital Recovery Fund.
- 2.3 The programme objectives are:
 - To reimagine and repurpose high streets to meet local need, improve the mix and variety of offer, support economic inclusion, and facilitate access to jobs and skills development.
 - To support new enterprises, which will help create new employment opportunities.
 - Reduce vacancy rates by bringing commercial properties back into use.
 - To increase footfall by reanimating our high streets, through locally distinctive and inclusive cultural and creative events and activities, meanwhile and innovative uses, and supporting a vibrant night-time economy.
 - To support existing high street businesses to assist recovery and growth by engaging businesses across the city. Providing advice and information on a range of business support services including sustainable and green business practices, Living Wage, Bristol Eating Better and skills and training.

- To enhance the street scene and green infrastructure by improving the appearance of the areas and supporting biodiversity and climate priorities.

2.4 The programme of activity will be delivered in collaboration with businesses, communities, and stakeholders, who will help inform interventions ensuring they meet needs and reconnect places with people. It will support the recovery of key sectors that have been most affected by the pandemic; these include retail, hospitality, culture and events sectors, and night-time economy.

2.5 The programme is aligned with other funding received from the Government for Reopening High Streets Safely/Welcome Back Fund and includes the following citywide packages of support:

Vacant Commercial Property Grant Scheme – businesses/organisations will be able to apply for up to £10,000 of capital funding to bring a vacant commercial property back into use. Expressions of interest opened on 29 October, with the full application process live week commencing 8 November.

Welcome Back Fund - businesses/organisations can apply for up to £2,400 to support activity and events that will safely animate and welcome people back to high streets, boosting footfall and supporting local businesses. Eight projects have been agreed so far, with more in the pipeline. The fund is open to applications until 30 November 2021.

Business engagement and support – 1:1 visits to high street businesses to understand their needs and provide support/signposting. A weekly business newsletter on support and initiatives is produced, businesses can sign-up via www.bristol.gov.uk/businessnewsletter

Marketing and promotion – including the Where’s It To campaign, see www.wheresittobristol.com, Bristol Rules Night Safety campaign, see www.bristolnights.co.uk, @ShopLocalBris Twitter, Shop Local Bristol Facebook and @ShopLocalBris Instagram, and free access to the Maybe* platform to support the use of social media, see www.maybetech.com

2.6 The programme also includes geographically targeted interventions which focus on a more inclusive culture and events offer to attract people back to high streets, and street scene and green infrastructure enhancements to improve the look and feel.

2.7 The targeted interventions are focussed on the City Centre and nine local high streets - Brislington (Brislington Hill/Bristol Hill, Church Road (St George), East Street (Bedminster), Filton Avenue, Filwood Broadway, Shirehampton High Street, Stapleton Road, Stockwood (Hollway Road/ Stockwood Road), Two Mile Hill. These areas provide a geographic spread across the city, different types and sizes of high streets, with a mix of demographic and economic contexts. This approach was agreed in consultation with the Mayor and Cabinet Members.

- 2.8 The City Centre is strategically economically important to the city and region and has been more negatively impacted by the pandemic with a significant loss of footfall, in comparison to other local high streets, so as such has been allocated £1.3m of funding. Footfall was down 13.9% in Broadmead in October 2021 versus October 2019, in comparison footfall at St Nicholas Market was 25.9% down.
- 2.9 In terms of the other nine high streets, the funding has been allocated taking into account number of businesses (size of high street), number of vacant commercial properties (which is a key indicator of economic health of high streets) and level of deprivation:

High street	Funding allocation
Brislington (Brislington Hill/Bristol Hill)	£91,087
Church Road (St George)	£208,452
East Street (Bedminster)	£404,561
Filton Avenue	£111,279
Filwood Broadway	£144,625
Shirehampton High Street	£196,987
Stapleton Road	£345,410
Stockwood (Hollway Road/Stockwood Road)	£145,503
Two Mile Hill	£120,373
Total	£1,768,276

- 2.10 These high streets will also benefit from support from a Culture & Events Development Officer, Business Engagement Officers and other citywide elements of the programme, including the Vacant Commercial Property Grant scheme. The programme is also aligned to other funding opportunities, for example through the Community Infrastructure Levy, s106, Transport, Regeneration and Housing delivery.
- 2.11 A citywide High Streets Review, which is currently being tendered, will inform the phasing of future priority high streets and resource requirements. The intention moving forward is to develop an action plan for all high streets which require intervention.

City Centre

- 2.12 As identified above, the City Centre has been significantly impacted by the pandemic, which has led to less workers, residents and visitors and the closure of national anchor stores e.g. Debenhams and Marks and Spencer (planned for closure in January 2022).

- 2.13 We have worked and continue to work with partners including City Centre and Broadmead Business Improvement Districts, Cabot Circus and The Galleries on a range of activities to support the City Centre economy:
- Safe reopening and communication campaigns e.g. Bristol Together, Love Bristol.
 - Culture and events e.g. In Memoriam, pop-ups, Christmas lights and markets. Our current focus is on planning activities for Spring 2022 onwards.
 - Tackling empty properties, including through meanwhile uses which animate buildings.
 - Monitoring footfall, movement and spend to inform and evaluate interventions.
- 2.14 A City Centre Development & Delivery Plan (DDP) will focus on the longer-term physical regeneration of Broadmead, St James Barton Roundabout, Castle Park and the Old City. The Plan will consider changing trends (including retail, leisure, office markets), and provide a vision and plan for the next 10 years. This will be informed by Bristol’s Employment Land Study and the City Centre Retail & Leisure Study. The Retail & Leisure Study will cover a range of key assessments and recommendations including:
- Analysis of future retail and leisure trends, and how these trends have and will impact on the Bristol authority area and city centre in particular
 - A quantitative and qualitative capacity assessment for both retail and leisure needs within the city centre
 - A trading gap analysis, including an audit of the city centre (the primary retail core)
 - An assessment of the independent traders within the city centre
 - The provision of recommendations in respect of policy formulation and future development opportunities within the city centre
- 2.15 Key stakeholders will inform the DDP through the City Centre Revitalisation Group, which includes the Council, Business Improvement Districts, Cabot Circus, Business West, Bristol Hoteliers Association, Bristol@Night panel, Bristol University, University Hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS Foundation Trust, Royal Institute of British Architects and landowners/developers. Citywide engagement activity is being planned in quarter 1-3 of 2022 and the DDP will be completed by quarter 4 of 2022.

Engagement and consultation activities

- 2.16 Our engagement and consultation activity on this programme to inform action plans started internally in June 2021 (including the establishment of a City Centre & High Streets Programme Board) and externally in September 2021. Extensive survey work has been undertaken with businesses and local communities to identify priorities for the City Centre and the nine high streets. The surveys close on 8 November, a verbal update on the results will be provided at the Scrutiny Commission meeting.
- 2.17 Engagement activity in each of these areas included on-street visits and online focus groups to be as inclusive as possible. This was promoted through a range of methods - email, Council newsletters, social media and on street, with the support of Councillors, Equalities and Community Development teams. Activities have also been supported through close working with a variety of business and community organisations/groups, including Business Improvement Districts, Filwood Broadway Working Group, Black South West Network.

- 2.18 Information collected through the engagement and consultation phase will be used to develop short, medium and long- term action plans for the City Centre and the nine high streets. Once drafted these will be shared on the Council’s website and communicated back to businesses/local communities for comment and agreement. As we move into implementation the action plans will be key to engaging and identifying delivery partners.

Programme milestones

- 2.19 Key milestones for delivery include:

Vacant Property Grant Scheme expressions of interest – October 2021
Vacant Property Grant scheme fully live – week commencing 8 November 2021
City Centre and High Streets Action Plans – November drafted
Engagement on draft action plans – December 2021/January 2022
Detailed costings plans produced (where required) – January to March 2022
Delivery of short/medium term measures in action plans – January 2022 to March 2023
End of programme evaluation – April/May 2023

- 2.20 Governance and reporting milestones:

City Centre & High Streets Programme Board - monthly
Internal reporting – monthly
Cabinet Member briefings – quarterly
Funding reports - quarterly

3. Policy

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.’

Bristol’s challenges are set out in the One City Economic Recovery & Renewal Strategy (October 2020), which sets out key priorities for the City Centre as a key destination for work, leisure, tourism and investment, and to protect and enhance the viability of high streets.

4. Consultation

a) Internal

John Smith, Director of Economy of Place
Anesa Kritah, Head of Economic Development

b) External

Not applicable

5. Public Sector Equality Duties

- 5a) Before making a decision, section 149 Equality Act 2010 requires that each decision-maker considers the need to promote equality for persons with the following “protected characteristics”: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. Each decision-maker must, therefore, have due regard to the need to:
- i) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010.
 - ii) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to --
 - remove or minimise disadvantage suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic;
 - take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of people who do not share it (in relation to disabled people, this includes, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities);
 - encourage persons who share a protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.
 - iii) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to –
 - tackle prejudice; and
 - promote understanding.
- 5b) A Equalities Impact Assessment can be found at Appendix A.

Appendices:

A – Equalities Impact Assessment

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers:

None