

# Growth and Regeneration Scrutiny Commission 27<sup>th</sup> November 2023



**Report of:** Alex Hearn, Interim Director – Economy of Place

**Title:** City Centre & High Streets Recovery and Renewal

**Ward:** All

**Officer Presenting Report:** Jason Thorne – City Centre & High Streets Service Manager

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## **Recommendation:**

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 is delivering over £7m investment across the city, to safeguard and create businesses and employment opportunities.

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



## 1. Summary

This report sets out the background, progress and benefits of the City Centre & High Streets Recovery and Renewal programme. Councillors requested an update on Business Improvement Districts and transport projects, these are addressed in this paper.

## 2. Context

### City Centre & High Streets Recovery and Renewal Programme

1. A number of funding sources have been allocated since 2021 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 is delivering investment across the city in designated high streets, to safeguard and create businesses and employment opportunities, including within the retail, leisure, tourism, creative, events and hospitality sectors, across the day and night.
2. The objectives of the programme are to:
  - Reimagine and repurpose high streets to meet local need, improve the mix and variety of offer, support economic inclusion, facilitate access to jobs and skills development.
  - Support new enterprises, which will help create new employment opportunities.
  - Reduce vacancy rates by bringing commercial properties back into use.
  - 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.
  - 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.
  - Enhance the street scene and green infrastructure by improving the appearance of the areas and supporting biodiversity and climate priorities.
3. The programme includes the following citywide packages of support:
  - **Business Development and Support** – 1:1 visits to high street businesses to understand their needs and provide support/signposting. Our Business Development Officers have so far engaged with 1,049 businesses, 483 of these have been provided with support (62 with 3 hours or more) and 101 referrals have been made to other forms of support via partners and initiatives such as YTKO, Business & Intellectual Property Centre, Growth Hub, Living Wage.
  - A business information booklet has been produced to provide businesses with information on support available, [www.bristol.gov.uk/files/documents/689-business-information-booklet/file](http://www.bristol.gov.uk/files/documents/689-business-information-booklet/file)
  - A fortnightly business newsletter on support and initiatives is produced, businesses can sign-up via [www.bristol.gov.uk/businessnewsletter](http://www.bristol.gov.uk/businessnewsletter). The newsletter is sent to 2,714 recipients.

- Effective engagement ensures we can understand key issues/concerns from the business community we are supporting. The cost of living crisis is a significant concern to businesses, especially amongst the hospitality sector (pubs, bars, restaurants, cafes). Businesses are also concerned about the possible loss of business rate relief currently in place until March 2024 for retail, hospitality and leisure properties. It is hoped that ongoing support will be part of the Government's Autumn Statement.
- **Vacant Commercial Property Grant Scheme** – businesses/organisations are able to apply for up to £10,000 of capital funding to bring a vacant commercial property back into use. 477 enquiries were received about the grant and 104 applications approved between November 2021 and October 2023. Further information on the scheme, including case studies of some of those businesses/organisations funded to date, can be found at [www.bristol.gov.uk/vcpg](http://www.bristol.gov.uk/vcpg)
- Applications have been approved in a range of locations, including the City Centre, Brislington, Church Rd (St George), Crow Lane, Chandos Rd, Stapleton Rd, East St, Fishponds Rd, Gloucester Rd, Filwood Broadway, Henleaze Rd, North St, St Marks Rd, Two Mile Hill and Whiteladies Rd. Types of businesses supported include bakeries, gyms, bookshops, DIY, plant sales, hairdressers, art gallery, cooking school, clothes sales, furniture shop, arts and creative.
- Evaluation of the scheme will include number of businesses supported, jobs created/sustained and business rates income generated.
- The council acted as convenor to bring together M&S and Global Goals/Arts Space Lifespace to enable the meanwhile use of the former M&S building within Broadmead as Sparks Bristol. Sparks Bristol provides a practical and exciting way for people to engage in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (which the One City Economic Recovery & Renewal Strategy is based on) through education and creativity. Bristol Sparks opened in May 2023 and will occupy the space until at least 2025. See [www.sparksbristol.co.uk](http://www.sparksbristol.co.uk) and case study in Appendix A.
- The council will shortly be convening a Vacant Property Task Force, focused on the opportunities and barriers of bringing vacant property within the City Centre back into use. The task force will include Business Improvement Districts, The Galleries, Cabot Circus and property agent representatives amongst others.
- The City Centre & High Streets team has been part of a small group helping to shape the Government's approach to High Street Rental Auctions which will be implemented as part of the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Bill. See [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/high-street-rental-auctions/high-street-rental-auctions](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/high-street-rental-auctions/high-street-rental-auctions)
- **Marketing and Promotion** – including the Where's It To campaign promoting the independent business offer across the city's high streets, see [www.wheresittobristol.com](http://www.wheresittobristol.com), Bristol Rules Night Safety campaign, see [www.bristolnights.co.uk](http://www.bristolnights.co.uk), social media accounts - @ShopLocalBris X, Shop Local Bristol Facebook and @ShopLocalBris Instagram have 23,057 followers.
- **Markets Review** – work has recently begun to carry out a Markets Review. This will consider the role that St Nicholas Market and other markets play in supporting small businesses, animating the City Centre and high streets, and helping address exclusion issues. We plan to start engagement on the review in January 2024.

### **Priority high streets**

4. 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. These interventions are focused 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.

5. A summary of the engagement feedback and individual high street plans are available online at [www.bristol.gov.uk/business/business-support-and-advice/high-streets/city-centre-and-high-streets-recovery/improvements](http://www.bristol.gov.uk/business/business-support-and-advice/high-streets/city-centre-and-high-streets-recovery/improvements). Each high street is unique, with a different range of businesses serving their local communities, people fed back that they would like to see a greater mix of shops, services and community facilities. People are concerned about the appearance of their high streets, with improved litter and recycling facilities and more greenery (trees or planters) being a priority. Anti-social behaviour, poor parking provision and illegal parking were raised in a few areas. Most areas were keen to see the introduction of a street market to provide an activity to attract more footfall to support existing businesses.

### **Culture and events in priority high streets**

6. The City Centre was the initial priority as the economic and cultural hub of the city and region. In common with other city centres, it is viewed as being most negatively impacted by the pandemic due the lockdowns and changes in working practices (people working from home). The focus has been on the delivery of family friendly and inclusive culture and event activities to boost footfall by encouraging people back into the city centre. The delivery of culture and events activity in the City Centre and 9 priority high streets (within the current programme) came to an end in October.

7. The culture and events activity has been diverse, within the City Centre it has included Night Markets at St Nicholas, Better Sundays in Broadmead Markets, Little Amal in Old City and King Street, Grand Iftar on College Green, Light Festival, Windrush 75 Stories through Film in Broadmead, Summer of Film Takeover events in Broadmead and Old City. In the priority high streets activity has included markets, lantern/community parades, public art workshops and installations. Further details can be found in Appendix A and B.

8. The investment in culture and events has seen a good level of economic benefit and return. Evaluation is ongoing. Evaluation of 38 events delivered to date shows that they have generated 138,000 visits, an estimated £2.24m of spend and supported 546 paid creative/event professional jobs. Spend on the delivery of the events evaluated to date was £692,000.

### Street scene and greening in priority high streets

9. Most of the street scene and greening interventions are in the planning stage and will be delivered in Spring 2024, subject to engagement, procurement and contractor availability. Engagement on draft designs for six of the high streets is underway until 10 December, see [www.bristol.gov.uk/business/business-support-and-advice/high-streets/city-centre-and-high-streets-recovery/improvements](http://www.bristol.gov.uk/business/business-support-and-advice/high-streets/city-centre-and-high-streets-recovery/improvements)
10. A pocket park next to Stockwood Library was installed in early November 2023 (see Appendix A). Proposed works to Stockwood Square and Stockwood Road will need a longer timescale into Autumn 2024, due to the need to carry out more extensive highways maintenance works.
11. One of the priority high streets - Filwood Broadway is the focus of £14.5m investment from the Government's Levelling Up Fund and £1.72m from Bristol City Council. High Street funding has been used to support improvements to the existing children's play area, these finished in mid-November. See Appendix A.

### Footfall and commercial property vacancy rates

12. Footfall and commercial property vacancy rates are two indicators used to assess the health of high streets.
13. Footfall information for parts of the City Centre show a mixed picture in terms of recovery. St Nicholas Market and Broadmead footfall year to date (up to week 43) compared to the same period in 2022 was up 16.5% and 0.9% respectively, whereas Park Street and Victoria Street are down 11% and 28% respectively. The data for Park St has been improving as the year has progressed, but Victoria Street footfall is thought to have been negatively impacted by works to Bristol Bridge/Baldwin Street area. Available data for Bedminster for the same period (up to week 43) suggests a positive trend, up 18%. This compared to 2.7% increase for South West high streets and 3.9% increase for UK high streets.
14. The latest available commercial property vacancy rate data relating to July to September 2023 is 9.95% across all Bristol high streets. This is an increase from the April to June 2023 figure (9.02%) and is higher than the longer-term trend of around 9%. The commercial property vacancy rate for the City Centre has increased to 16.95% (from 15.01%) and is above the longer-term trend of around 15%.

### Future of the programme

15. Funding has been secured to continue the programme into 2025, with further funding currently being bid for. The details are as follows:
16. The council has successfully applied for £0.489m of funding from the **UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UK SPF)** co-ordinated by the West of England Combined Authority. This was the subject of a Cabinet decision in March 2023.

17. The allocation of £1.5m **Strategic CIL for High Streets** was agreed by Full Council on 15 February 2022 (reference GR10 Improvements to Local Centres). The approach to the allocation of the funding was agreed by Cabinet on 3 October 2023. The £1.5m of CIL funding has been added to the programme, allowing it to continue with a focus on the City Centre and support three new priority high streets.

18. The City Centre continues to be a priority area, as a driver of the city and region's economy, being a key focus for employment, retail, tourism, leisure, culture, education, transport and healthcare.

19. The three additional high streets prioritised are Ashley Road/Grosvenor Road in St Paul's, Crow Lane in Henbury and Oatlands Avenue in Whitchurch. These have been selected considering the following criteria:

- They are within areas of growth and regeneration and/or have significant housing being developed or proposed with planning permission
- Geographic spread
- The need to focus on new areas outside of the current programme
- Levels of deprivation
- The need to focus on a smaller number of priority areas given the focus of Strategic CIL.

20. These four focus areas were previously highlighted to the Growth & Regeneration Scrutiny Commission in January 2023, after consultation with the Mayor's Office, who agreed this approach.

21. Up to £0.225m (15%) of the £1.5m has been allocated to the development and delivery of plans, including the recruitment of a dedicated part-time High Street Design & Delivery Officer. This will help mitigate against delays by increasing design capacity and skills.

22. The funding will be allocated to the development and delivery of tailored high street action plans for the areas.

23. Officers have carried out site visits to the new priority high streets. Engagement work is being planned for early 2024. The programme will run until September 2025, subject to community and business engagement, detailed designs, costings and contractor availability.

24. Officers are in the process of preparing a bid for further **High Streets Recovery & Adaptions** funding of up to £0.850m from the West of England Combined Authority. The funding will be aligned to the Combined Authority's Strategic Framework and delivery of the City Centre & High Streets Recovery and Renewal programme.

25. Our emerging themes for the funding developed in partnership with Regeneration colleagues and the Night Time Economy Advisor include:

City Centre and High Streets street scene and greening  
East Street Community Hub, including Night Time Economy  
City Centre and High Streets Culture and Events, including Night Economy animation  
High Streets Going Green with a focus on greening businesses to save costs

### **Business Improvement Districts**

26. Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) are defined geographical areas where local businesses / other occupiers (including public sector bodies such as local authorities) have voted in a ballot to pay an additional levy on their business rates during the course of a fixed term (no longer than five years). The funds raised from the levy enable the BID to deliver projects and activities that must be additional to those provided by a local authority and that fulfil aims and objectives determined in a business plan, developed through a consultation process with potential levy payers prior to a ballot taking place.

27. Legislation enabling the formation of BIDs was passed under the Local Government Act 2003, and the Business Improvement Districts (England) Regulations 2004. The council has been involved in BIDs since their inception, with the development of Broadmead BID as one of the country's original ten pilots.

28. Bristol has four BIDs – Broadmead, City Centre, Redcliffe & Temple and Clifton. These BIDs generate a combined £2.3m of investment per year and represent around 1,500 business/organisations.

29. Bedminster BID came to an end on 31 October 2023 after the majority of businesses who voted, voted against the new proposal by both number and rateable value.

30. A summary of the activities focused on by the BIDs can be found in Appendix C. This includes a summary of what Bedminster BID would have focused on had it been successful at ballot.

### **Transport projects benefiting High Streets**

31. The need for better cycle parking is recognised in the draft City Centre Development & Delivery Plan (DDP), the consultation for which closed on 1 October 2023. For example, the DDP includes 'Create a new mobility hub at The Galleries as a focal point for blue badge parking, taxis, pick-ups, drop offs and e-scooter and cycle parking.' In addition, Bristol City Council sponsor a transport space within Sparks Bristol where they hold travel roadshow events and free bike repair sessions.

32. The Future Transport Zones programme is delivering 11 trial Mobility Hubs across Bristol City Council and South Gloucestershire council. They are located both along key transport corridors, and within local communities, such as at local high streets.

33. In Bristol mobility hubs are being developed in Ridingleaze, Filton Avenue; Gainsborough Square and Arnside Road, as well as at Portway Park and Ride. The Mobility Hubs will bring together transport infrastructure such as cycle stands, clearly designated parking for e-bikes and e-scooters operated by TIER, secure individual cycle lockers alongside public realm elements such as planting and seating, and wayfinding and travel information, making it easier and more enjoyable for people to travel sustainably. The Mobility Hubs are currently due to be delivered in the second quarter of 2024.

34. TIER in conjunction with the Combined Authority will be launching 20 nextbike by TIER e-cargo bikes across 10 back to base, virtual parking bays around Bristol and Bath. The specific 'nextbike by TIER' app will allow customers to rent, temporarily park and return vehicles, while loading and delivering their cargo, or transporting children for journeys priced at £1 to unlock then 5p per minute. The trial is aimed at reducing the need for car and van journeys for shorter round trips, and appeal to both local traders and the general public.

### **3. Policy**

35. The City Centre & High Streets Recovery and Renewal programme supports the delivery of the Corporate Strategy 2022-2027. The strategy states 'In line with a recommendation from our 2020 Citizens' Assembly to re-imagine the places we live so that they are people centred, we want people to live in well-designed neighbourhoods where local high streets are thriving and supporting local economic wealth, people can work and play safely, as well as have access to healthy green spaces and sports facilities. We want all people to have social and cultural experiences that reflect their own identity and life. Evolving a shared narrative and understanding of the history that has shaped Bristol will strengthen the fabric of our communities and sense of belonging, unifying the city in recovery.'

36. The strategy also states 'Our ambition is for Bristol to be a city of sustainable communities that combines housing, employment, retail, education, training and leisure functions, all linked by a strong public transport network. We know that both major infrastructure and changes in behaviour take time, but over the next five years we will make progress towards becoming a better-connected city that enables people to move around efficiently, with increased transport options that are accessible to and inclusive of all. We will deliver an improved sustainable and resilient transport network that supports Bristol's vibrant independent local centres and neighbourhoods and connects to an attractive and thriving city centre.'

37. The programme helps to deliver 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**

Director – Economy of Place, Head of Economic Development, Regeneration, Housing Delivery, Strategic Transport, City Centre & High Streets Team

#### **b)External**

N/A



## 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) An Equalities Impact Assessment can be found at Appendix D.

### Appendices:

- Appendix A – Case studies of programme activities
- Appendix B – Culture and events activities
- Appendix C – Summary of Business Improvement Districts
- Appendix D – Equalities Impact Assessment

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

### Background Papers:

None

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<sup>i</sup> In line with CIL Regulations, Strategic CIL funding can only be spent on capital infrastructure projects which support growth in its area e.g. lighting, bus stops, cycle lanes, junctions, highway