

Cheltenham Development Task Force

Business Plan 2013-15

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Executive Summary: This is the second business plan for the Cheltenham Development Task Force (CDTF). Its purpose is to set the direction for the period 2013-2015 whilst also identifying clear deliverable targets over the period. It builds upon the first phase of work developed under the CDTF and attempts to outline how strategic disposals can assist in the delivery of key outputs. In the current complex and rapidly moving economic climate it will be necessary to revisit and update the plan as circumstances unfold.

Recommendation: The document was considered as a discussion draft in October 2012 as the basis for action in the period 2013 – 2015 and, following feedback from Task Force board members it is now ready for adoption

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1.0 Background & Evolution

1.1 The Cheltenham Development Task Force came into existence on 4th January 2010 following full Council endorsement of a cross party member steering group on 14th December 2009. Its purpose was to move the former Civic Pride project forward to the delivery stage.

1.2 Multi agency funding body support included the appointment of Graham Garbutt as voluntary independent chair and Jeremy Williamson as MD and an agreement to appoint a carefully selected group of individuals to the Task Force board with a wide breadth of skills to assist in the delivery of the proposals.

2.0 Context

2.1 The approach adopted by the Task Force in many ways reflect the words of landscape architect Thomas Mawson who in 1912 said

“City planning is not the attempt to pull down your city and rebuild it at ruinous expense. It is merely deciding what you would like to have done when you get the chance, so that when the chance does come, little by little you may make the city plan conform to your ideals”

The Task Force has pursued a mantra of *opportunities and challenges*, and creating an environment that encourages delivery. Considerable strides have been made in delivering the initial targets, whilst also maintaining cognisance of other schemes and ensuring that our contribution adds to the whole eg Art Gallery & Museum extension and potential of St. Mary’s churchyard; Pittville Gates and linkages to pedestrian wayfinding proposals. Key amongst these initial targets have been:-

- The development of a consensus within the town over the overall direction of schemes and equally specific sites
- The conclusion of the Midwinter deal which will deliver 172 housing units (40% affordable) and also financial resources for other ambitions.
- The identification of a preferred bidder and subsequent exchange of contracts on North Place & Portland Street
- Securing of planning consent for the Brewery phase 2
- Proactively working with GCC, including a Ministerial visit to secure Local Sustainable Transport Fund monies. This collaborative bid will enable the implementation of the Gloucestershire Highways traffic modelling prepared for the town
- Progress on public realm works at Imperial Gardens West and the Promenade East.
- Engaging the market over the Albion Street, Winchcombe Street, Gloucester Place and Fairview Road block

2.2 In addition contributions have been made to other activities such as

- The Borough Council’s office accommodation strategy pursuing the principles of efficiency, cost saving and opportunity to improve customer service, and critically release the existing site for uses that generate more economic activity for the town.
- Working with the Diocese of St.Mary’s over longer term ambitions for that site in tandem with proposals for Minster status

- Maintaining an active liaison with the owners of Coronation Square

2.3 Against this activity have been the on-going impacts of the recession. However the nature of market response and fact that some schemes eg Regent Arcade are now on site, having previously stalled, suggests that Cheltenham is demonstrating its resilience within the wider area and may well prove to be the barometer for economic development within the County.

2.4 The positive step by Cheltenham Borough Council to set up the Task Force at such a challenging time is a testament to the foresight of Councillors, and the ever growing interest in the town and its opportunities, clearly demonstrates that Cheltenham continues to be open for business and that CBC and its partners are committed to the local economy and employment. This has resulted in significant interest from the developer/investor world.

2.5 However on the downside are the challenges posed by a range of issues including

- The on-going lack of demand for office space within the town and hence the challenge posed by vacant office blocks
- The as yet unquantifiable impacts of the National Planning Policy Framework
- The need to identify additional employment land
- Unrealistic values, relative to market trends, held by some property investment funds which hold back the delivery of key sites
- The acute need for more social housing; and the growing challenges arising from central government direction and funding eg social housing grant.
- The significance of climate change with its implications for economic development, particularly the need to move to a low carbon economy

3.0 Vision

3.1 The vision for the delivery vehicle was articulated as:-

To support the towns economic strength and sustainable development by revitalising key streets and spaces to the highest attainable quality for the benefit of the whole community.

The outcomes so far set out in section 2.0 accords with that wider ambition, however as with many programmes the next phase will be characterised by a mixture of greater detail and more challenging outputs, relating to defined public realm works and complex sites such as Royal Well.

However as previously noted and reflected in our adopted strategy of Opportunities & challenges, a town is a place that never stops evolving, and as such we must continue to grasp opportunities as they arise and attempt to create or influence outputs from other agencies for the benefit of the town.

4.0 Remit

4.1 The remit of the Task Force has not changed:-

- Boosting the internal capacity of the founder partner organisations through closer collaborative working, clearly demonstrated in the progress of the traffic modelling proposals
- Improving co-ordination and integration, linking with other relevant programmes. This has of course changed with the development of the Local Enterprise Partnership but with 3 members engaged with that forum, the Task force is well placed to maintain helpful links. Additionally the HCA continue to meet regularly with CBC and receive full updates on Task Force activity.
- Facilitating and supporting development projects, as demonstrated by North Place (a CBC owned site) and Brewery (NFU Mutual owned)
- Providing a focus for promoting a positive image of Cheltenham as a thriving town centre to live, work, shop and relax. The positive response from developers/investors and the public to schemes suggest that a balance is being achieved.

In essence it aims to help the integration of national, regional and sub-regional policy across the key areas of regeneration, development and planning within the Borough, to ensure that schemes are approached flexibly and creatively in line with international best practice, so it is critical that the Task Force does not operate in a vacuum

5.0 Core Principles

The core principles previously identified remain. The key has been to generate benefits for the whole community and regeneration of less prosperous areas, by utilising sites as a means to wider ends.

Transport

- Reduce central town traffic movement by closing Boot's corner to general traffic, whilst retaining public transport vehicles; essentially challenging the current hierarchy centred upon the car and thus improving the experience through minimising vehicle/pedestrian interfaces
- Review and rationalise car parking consistent with the town's commercial and environmental needs including a clarification of signage and access to car parks
- Promote sustainable travel – walking, cycling, bus (inc Park & Ride) to provide an optimum town centre environment.

Connectivity

- Promote high quality physical linkages between both existing and new development areas with both active and passive environments
- Utilise streets for passive and active enjoyment by encouraging high quality street environments and public spaces
- Develop a strategy for areas of "negative space "ie those that detract from surrounding elements and have unrealised potential e.g. access to St Mary's churchyard

Gateways, Landscape & Biodiversity

- Enhance the sense of arrival to the town centre particularly from the North via North Place & Portland Street and the West – via Lower High Street
- Provide clear car park routeways from the edge of town and within the centre
- Seek opportunities to strengthen the existing greenscape and biodiversity through implementing established sustainable techniques e.g. SUDS

Retail, Leisure, Culture, Heritage & Tourism

- Enhance the central specialist retail offer and connectivity between established retail areas
- Seek opportunities to revitalise non-central shopping zones and connectivity as appropriate
- Promote high quality hotel provision to meet anticipated demand
- Redefine core assets such as Royal Well to provide a distinct identity
- Reuse key buildings sensitively
- Support the established festival programme by providing “street” spaces for activity and seeking other opportunities

Housing & Community

- Promote sustainable residential & community provision against identified need.
- Enhance public spaces and the public realm generally, recognising that the more space and the higher the quality, the longer that people occupy and take a sense of ownership

Economy & Employment

- Retain the existing centre employment levels and seek opportunities for further growth
- Promote employment opportunities on key sites
- Ensure that any developments maximise local employment and training opportunities

Historical Context

- Recognise the importance of the town’s history in shaping current layout and form
- Pursue high quality designs that respond positively to historic context

Other

- Encourage renovation of private property

6.0 Cross Cutting Themes

6.1 A number of cross cutting themes were identified in the original plan. These were focussed upon economic, environmental, community, and social sustainability. These remain as relevant now as previously.

6.2 Economy

The on-going global downturn and Euro zone crisis continues to pose macro threats to the UK recovery and are reflected in the cautious responses from developers. Equally it is critical that steps are taken to foster growth by the

identification of sites for employment to stimulate recovery. Efforts must continue to satisfy endogenous growth needs and maintain local employment from successful organisations; through liaison with the LEP. In addition there is believed to be a level of demand for offices which demonstrate environmental credentials, particularly for those organisations committed to the green agenda.

Notwithstanding the unprecedented changes there is general consensus that Cheltenham has a unique position in the view of developers and any sustained recovery in the County in terms of property values is anticipated to be demonstrated in Cheltenham first. There remains considerable off market interests for certain sites in Cheltenham itself and indeed the town's housing market has proven relatively robust during the recession. It is crucial that the Task Force seek economic strength and endurance from key sites, not merely projects with short life spans. Thus utilising sites as drivers for employment enables salaries to be generated and spent in the locale which through multiplier effect enhances the collective well-being.

6.2 Environmental Sustainability

6.2.1 The need to demonstrate sustainable credentials is very important. This is best achieved through the actions of the working groups reporting to and advising the Task Force and could be exemplified in a range of ways including

- Achieving appropriate code for sustainable housing standards for new build housing and BREEAM criteria for commercial developments
- Meeting the requirements of the countywide SPD to minimise waste in new development
- Re-using existing buildings in a manner that not only reflects their historical importance but also provides economic opportunities for re-use that contribute to the maintenance of their fabric for future generations
- Creating traffic options that reduce congestion and reliance on cars in the central core, creating a positive sensory experience in terms of air quality, noise reduction and visual appearance.

6.2.2 Community Sustainability

In common with all large urban areas Cheltenham has zones of deprivation and whilst many are outside the inner core it must be recognised that development has potential to bring significant opportunity through employment creation and also by providing affordable housing. Additionally it is important that activities within the core area underpin wider strategies linked to the community such as health and education improvement..

6.2.3 Environmental Sustainability

Effective environmental stewardship (covering transport, land use, water conservation, energy efficiency, biodiversity and waste minimisation) to become a key element for consideration is a fundamental factor in maintaining Cheltenham's character. The green endowment should be advanced by opportunities for green linkages connecting key areas e.g. St Mary's churchyard and a greening Northwards of the Promenade particularly through and beyond Boot's Corner where the landscape becomes very harsh in terms of materials and form. Any such improvements must also recognise the need for sustainable planting as this will be a key element of any economic appraisal particularly where there is a greater quantum to maintain.

6.2.4 Social Sustainability

The town must be perceived as safe, healthy and attractive so engagement with the local community in its many and complex layers is key. The Communications group will continue to play a key role in ensuring the appropriate strategy to achieve a broad consensus for aspirations and proposals.

7.0 Specific Projects, Targets & Activities

7.1 The analysis identifies both headline outputs and specific actions.

No	Targets/Actions	Timescale	Responsible body	Funding	Source
1	North Place & Portland Street 300 jobs; 143 housing units (57 affordable); public square; bus node; town centre food store; improved "green link" North to South				
1a	Secure planning	Feb '13	Developer -AB		
1b	Conclude financial transaction and start on site	April '13	CBC	Net receipt	AB
1c	Upgrade Town Centre East (Grosvenor Terrace) car park and road signage to car parks	January '13	CBC plus GCC	£350k	CBC (Maintenance budget)
1d	Conclude Warwick Place transaction	Jan '13	CBC	Part of wider deal.	CBC
1e	Conclude 1 St. Margaret's transaction	Autumn '12	CBC	Net receipt	Owner
1f	Attempt to resolve Bromford land issue and connectivity between food store and Warwick Place	January 2013	CBC	tbd	CBC/AB
1g	Improve connections between Boots Corner and North Place	Spring 2014	CBC	tbd	CBC
2	Traffic network change Improve network efficiency; achieve modal shift; contribute to resolution of AQMA issues; create more pleasant town centre environment potentially including a centre public square; help sustain role of town centre as a key retail destination. Part of wider Cheltenham Transport Plan package				
2a (i)	Walking Pedestrian Wayfinding scheme design implementation	Spring '13 Summer13	CBC with GCC	£31k c£250k	CBC (high St innovation fund) & LSTF CBC

					LSTF
No	Targets/Actions	Timescale	Responsible body	Funding	Source
2a (ii)	Deliver Boots Corner public realm enhancements	Spring '14	CBC	£2m (estimate)– utilise funds from 1b	CBC
2b	Cycling Cycle route signing Cycle parking Bike-it school project	Spring 2013	GCC	£33k £tbc	LSTF LSTF
2c	Public Transport New cross town bus route Bus stop upgrades Introduce smartcard technology	Spring 2013	GCC	£tbc	LSTF
2d (i)	Car / highway Junction efficiency trial – St Margaret's Road – lessons learnt	Jan' 13	GCC	£35k	GCC NFU
2d (ii)	Publicise detailed proposals based upon refined junction designs	New year '13	GCC	£5k	LSTF
2d (iii)	Car park electronic signage	Spring 2015	CBC	£300k	CBC – CP reserve
2d (iv)	Electric vehicle re-charging Establish car club Promote car sharing	Spring 2014	GCC	£tbc	LSTF
2e	Statutory Traffic Regulation Orders	Spring '13	GCC	Staff time	LSTF
2f	Implement changes to network	Autumn '13	GCC	£tbc	LSTF
2g	Monitor and where necessary amend changes	Winter '13	GCC	£tbc	LSTF
2h	Undertake improvements beyond LSTF eg traffic light removal potentially linked to other schemes eg North Place	Spring 2014	GCC	Link to existing funds eg safety schemes, S106, maintenance	
2i	Travel Information Travel planning website Bus map preparation		GCC	£tbc	LSTF
2j	Travel Planning Modal shift activities – phase 1	Autumn	GCC	£360k	LSTF

	personalised and workplace.	2013			
No	Targets/Actions	Timescale	Responsible body	Funding	Source
	Royal Well Additional economic driver for town centre creating new jobs and prosperity; opportunity for CBC relocation to address part of the void office block challenge; enhance the role of the Promenade				
3a	Secure Council support for revised development brief	Jan 2013	CBC	Staff time	CBC
3b	Prepare information pack eg flood risk, archaeological assessment	Spring'13	CBC	£5k	CBC
3c	Identify alternative site for CBC	On-going	CBC	Cost to be determined-Utilise funds from 1b as basis	CBC
3d	Maintain market interest for existing Municipal Office building	On-going	CBC	Staff time	CBC
3e	Secure cabinet approval for disposal strategy	Spring '13	CBC	Staff time	CBC
3f	Identify preferred bidder or partner	Summer '13	CBC	£30k	CBC
3g	Develop agreed scheme	Jan 2014	CBC	Staff time	CBC
3h	CBC relocation		CBC	£tbc	CBC
3i	Scheme implementation		Partner	£tbc	Partner
	Public Realm works Maintain and enhance the town centre environment for residents and visitors alike; contribute to improving retail destination attractiveness				
4a	Upgrade to pedestrianised part of Promenade	Spring '13	CBC	£100k	CBC – CP reserve
4b	West Promenade – phase 3	Spring '13	GCC	£tbc + £100k	GCC CBC - CP reserve
4c	War memorial-public realm improvement works to Long Garden area		CBC	£400k	CBC
4d	West Promenade – phase 4	Subject to budget	GCC	£tbc	GCC

4e	High Street/Bath Road safety scheme	Spring '13	GCC	£tbc	GCC
4f	Queens Hotel – Promenade safety Scheme + other improvements	Autumn '12	GCC	Tbc C£60k	GCC + others
No	Targets/Actions	Timescale	Responsible body	Funding	Source
4g	Boots Corner and Imperial Circus – see 2a(ii)	Spring 2014	CBC		
4g	St. Mary's churchyard	Summer '13	CBC	£50k	CBC - CP reserve
4h	Upgrade of High Street from Bennington to Henrietta Street	Spring 2014	GCC/CBC	£tbc	NFU
4i	Boots corner to North Place	2014 - 2015	GCC/CBC	£250	CBC
4j	Additional planting etc as necessary	2015 - 2016	CBC	£200k budget	unfunded
4k	Neptune Fountain works		CBC	£400k	CBC
5	Brewery and Lower High Street Seek to utilise delivery of Brewery phase 2 as an opportunity to revitalise High Street West, creating jobs and connectivity				
5a	To work with NFU Mutual on delivery of scheme	January 2013 onwards	CBC + GCC for stopping up order	£tbc	NFU
5b	Public Realm – linked to 4g above plus consideration of High Street, Lower High Street and Ambrose Street junction – linked to 2f,2g,2h above		CBC with GCC for road junction changes	£tbc	unfunded
5c	Lower High Street economic/character study linked to 5b above		CBC	C£30k	unfunded
6	Albion Street block Aim to bring forward a comprehensive development for this whole block focussed on much needed housing.				
6a	Work with interested parties over scheme development	Jan 2013 onwards	TF/CBC	Staff time	CBC
6b	Aim to secure a deliverable planning consent		CBC	Staff time	CBC

7	Coronation Square Seek a partner with shared ambition to revitalise this entire block through a mixed use scheme				
7a	To work with interested parties to help revitalise site	Jan 2013 onwards	CBC	Staff time	CBC
No	Targets/Actions	Timescale	Responsible body	Funding	Source
8	St. Mary's Aim to improve setting and operation of churchyard. Seek to develop an overlooking scheme (eco office exemplar and housing that will provide surveillance at all times and contribute to wider uplift – public realm – see 4g				
8a	Attempt to develop plan for site to rear of children's library - with GCC and others. Link to 4g above		CBC/GCC and liaison with diocese	Staff time	CBC / GCC

9	Future Ambitions				
9a	Tewkesbury Road To seek to maintain impetus to improve this key gateway from the M5 motorway. Linked to Junction 10 potential upgrade; Joint Core Strategy and potential NW extension		CBC/GCC	Staff time	
9b	Encouraging community schemes This could include promotion of Lower High Street (see 5c) or equally subsidiary streets off High Street eg Grosvenor Street, Winchcombe Street, Pittville Street		CBC	Staff time plus any env. grants	
9c	Quadrangle To seek improvement of this landmark site given its prominence on the Promenade		CBC	Staff time	
9d	Civic Pride Through delivery of key actions encourage private owners to progress complementary schemes eg reinstatement of railings along Southern Promenade (link to 4d)		CBC through liaison with key groups eg Civic Society; Friends of Imperial Square etc	Staff time plus any env. grants	

8.0 Future Investment Plan

8.1 Unlike other town development and regeneration schemes the Task Force work has never been predicated upon major central government agency intervention or funding, rather a partnership approach which allows assets and modest planned expenditure to be harnessed in a collaborative manner. The Initial 3 year programme was supported as follows:

Cheltenham Borough Council £173k over 3 years

Gloucestershire County Council £150k over 3 years focused on road network.

Homes & Communities Agency £80k over 3 years.

South West Regional Development Agency £80k over 3 years.

8.2 These funds have met staff costs, road network modelling and costs associated with specific site preparation and analysis eg North Place archaeology c£35k which have encouraged improved bids from developers.

8.3 The use of capital sums generated for disposal is clearly a decision for Councillors however it is anticipated that receipts from land disposals will not only provide capital funding for key elements of public realm as set out in the targets in section 7.0 but also on-going revenue support to bring forward sites such as Royal Well, subject to Council approval for the expenditure.

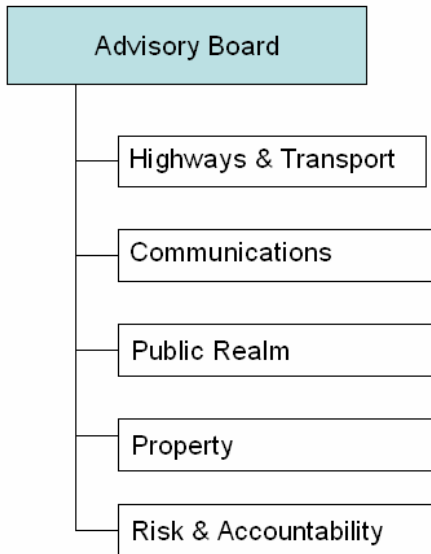
It is critical that the Task Force targets align with CBC and GCC capital strategies, especially the Local Sustainable Transport Fund, so for example, funds realised from North Place are ring-fenced to support the next major target in Royal Well.

8.4 The sequencing of capital expenditure is dependent upon the timing of capital receipts from disposals, however as has been shown with the Promenade upgrades to date effective management of GCC capital programme (specifically highways expenditure) has been undertaken in a manner that supports the wider objectives. This will also be true of targeted LSTF funding.

9.0 Delivery Mechanisms/governance

9.1 Clearly the partnership basis upon which the Task Force was established has changed with the demise of the SW Regional Development Agency and the non-direct role assumed by the Homes & Communities Agency.

9.2 The following sub-group structure identifies how the Task Force has delivered its outputs to date.



9.3 The Task Force has been fortunate in the calibre of individuals that it has been able to recruit. Additionally it has benefited from stability of membership, having only lost three members since inception. Members not only participate in board debate but many also take active roles within the sub-groups, helping to shape projects and strategy.

9.4 The sub-groups have also created opportunities for wider engagement and for example

- the Communications group includes the Town Centre manager and representation from the Chamber of Commerce
- the Public realm group has representation from the University (landscape school) and Civic Society
- Risk & Accountability from Endsleigh Insurance

9.5 Each sub-group, through its chair has recently considered the effectiveness of its remit and membership, so as to inform any changes that are considered necessary in an evolving scenario eg change of focus of Highways group to delivery rather than planning mode given LSTF. Currently no further sub-groups are proposed, however the fluidity of the governance arrangements allows for any new groups to be set up should the need arise.

10.0 Recommendations

10.1 To recognise progress to date and the contribution of members and partners

10.2 To adopt the Business Plan as set out recognising the need for CBC and GCC capital strategies to align with the targets set out in section 7.0 as far as is practicable.

10.3 To consider opportunities to strengthen or formalise links with the Local Enterprise Partnership and others

10.4 To revisit this plan on a regular basis