

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 29TH MARCH 2004

Report of the Head of Policy and Economic Regeneration

ITEM 5 TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT

“Only those centres which offer convenient, integrated retail and leisure services in safe, pleasant surroundings will be able to tap into this potential (for growth)”. *Henley Centre.*

Introduction

The need for managed town centres emerged as the impact of changing consumer behaviour became apparent. Increased mobility, prosperity and recreational time encouraged the growth of out-of-town retailing, draining the life out of traditional town centres. The contrast between out of town developments with ample parking, security, convenience and cleanliness and town centres suffering from lack of investment, neglect and apathy was apparent.

The new centres benefited from a single management - unlike a town centre they do not have a multitude of ownerships. They have control over their environment with a brief to operate as efficiently as possible. Recognition of the need for town centres to operate with the same degree of single-mindedness led to the rise of Town Centre Management (TCM).

TCM aims to create partnerships between town centre interests, harnessing resources, ideas and commitment. It aims to tackle town centre problems comprehensively, drawing together public and private interests to address commercial, social, environmental and managerial aspects of what makes a town centre successful.

TCM brings benefits in increased business, greater investment and job creation. Companies like Boots and Marks & Spencer helped pioneer TCM in order to protect their town centre interests. Benefits accrue to all who earn their living in the town centre – and the community benefits from a safer, more convenient and friendlier environment.

TCM embraces a range of activities from "bricks and mortar" schemes such as pedestrianisation and signing, "management" issues like security, cleansing and parking and "promotional" activities, from entertainment to advertising to attracting new investment. Transformation of the town centre can be through major investments or by a large number of relatively small improvements, allowing everyone to contribute to the success of the town centre. Some of the key issues to be addressed by Loughborough TCM are contained below:

Town Centre Strategy

Members will be aware that this project has been initiated, a workshop held and that a report taken to Cabinet of 25 March. There is a six month timescale to produce a Master Plan which will involve the engagement and management of consultants and wide consultation with the community. The Town Centre Manager is a member of the core team tasked with progressing this project. The success of this project is key to engaging a level of support across CBC for TCM which has not been forthcoming in the past.

Marketing

Loughborough has a much wider range of shops, services and businesses than is often appreciated and there are parts of the town centre which remain relatively undiscovered. It is crucial to use a full range of marketing activity to ensure that all of Loughborough's natural catchment, a large proportion of which goes to other centre, is fully appraised of local opportunities. A wide range of media - print, spoken and electronic must be used to relay the message. Minor enhancements to, and branding of, various elements of the town centre will also be required to emphasise the variety of the town centre offer.

Events

Events act as an attraction in their own right but can also play an important role in helping re-brand the town's image and improve people's perception of it. Loughborough benefits from an infrastructure which lends itself to the staging of special events. As well as regular events and promotions such as Christmas lights, Streets Alive and Britain in Bloom there may be a need to introduce more substantial cultural activities which reflect the diversity of the town and can act as a catalyst to further business and tourism investment. TCM is responsible for management of the November Fair, which is a considerable strain upon staff resources. The Fair has previously relied upon volunteers to fulfil certain roles and it is considered that this arrangement can no longer be relied upon.

Safety

Crime and the perception of crime is an important factor in people's perception of and use of the town centre. Continuing development of anti-crime initiatives such as Crime out of Loughborough (COOL) and Loughborough Eye engages business, the public sector and the community in ensuring that the town centre is available to all. Controls on licensing, development of CCTV, installation of infrastructure to discourage crime and management of night-time activity are amongst the measures to achieve this aim.

Access

It should be the ambition to ensure that the whole of Loughborough Town Centre is fully accessible to all members of the community. The public domain should be fully accessible and legible. TCM is responsible for management of the Shopmobility service, which is undergoing a difficult period during the Town Hall closure. All modes of transport should be fully accessible. Businesses should be encouraged not only to fully comply with Disability Discrimination legislation, but also to go beyond it to offer real services to the community.

Maintenance of Infrastructure

An important element in ensuring that the public have a good perception of the town centre is to ensure that the basic janitorial issues are addressed. This will include ensuring an appropriate cleansing regime, removal of flyposting and graffiti, maintenance and repair of street furniture. Staff engaged in this activity should further recognise their role as potential ambassadors for Loughborough. TCM staff perform duties in all these areas, plus a security role as well.

Britain in Bloom

Loughborough achieved victory in the Small Town of East Midlands in Bloom. This was due to the commitment and dedication of a small team of individuals. It is hoped to pursue victory again in 2004 but there are a number of constraints. In particular potential loss of staff from the project may compromise the ability to raise sponsorship and implement various elements of the project. This is still subject to discussion. Cutbacks by the County Council may also impact upon the project either by reduced standards or additional costs to CBC.

Business Development

To compete against larger centres and alternative methods of buying it is vital that businesses and their staff are fully equipped to meet customer needs. Technology, shopfront design, customer care, marketing and other forms of training should be offered. Business will need to work with TCM in marketing Loughborough as a destination. Collection and dissemination of business information, including footfall and turnover, will help identify the performance of the town both as a whole and of individual businesses.

Trading in the Highway

Control over outdoor activity in the town centre is difficult as it is evidently in the public domain. In order to implement a degree of control over commercial activity, CBC has introduced legislation for licensed trading, which is administered by TCM staff. This currently generates an additional £7000 of income per annum to the council. It is the ambition to introduce additional measures to apply certain controls to street cafes and to introduce changes to the Traffic Orders, but this relies upon the cooperation of the Highway Authority.

Festive Illuminations

This mainly technical contract was inherited by TCM in 2003. There have been considerable difficulties with the project due to a number of wall failures, resulting in a reduction of the number of lights last year. It is proposed to undertake investigative and (hopefully) remedial work in the new financial year. This contract also involves liaison with the ethnic community with regard to Diwali, Eid and Vaisakhi, as well as the traditional Carol Concert.

Retail Markets

Surveys show that Loughborough Market is highly appreciated by the public and is a vital element in ensuring the continuing performance of the town centre. Recognition of this role should ensure that there is continuing development of the infrastructure, range and marketing of Loughborough Markets. These may include: refurbishment of stalls to create an air of permanence for customer and trader confidence, specialist and farmer's markets to introduce a new audience, demonstrations and entertainment to enhance the atmosphere of the markets and branding for use in advertising, posters, flyers, banners and stallholder identification. TCM is responsible for management of the markets service, which has recently gone through a difficult period. The service has been subject to internal audit and it is anticipated that implementation of recommendations will lead to a considerable streamlining of procedures.

Summary

It can be seen that Loughborough TCM engages in a very wide range of activities. Over the last two years the Town Centre Manager has taken on line management of a number of activities and staff. To an extent this has led to a reduction in time available for what are generally considered core TCM activities, in particular engagement with the business community. It is the view of the Town Centre Manager that reorganisation has led to a reduction in administrative support for TCM and its associated activities. There continues to be pressure upon financial resources and opportunities to raise additional income via the private sector may be also limited by lack of staff resources.

Background Papers: None

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