

<b>Committee:</b> Policy, Resources and Economic Development Committee	<b>Date:</b> 18 March 2020
<b>Subject:</b> Place Audits of Brentwood, Shenfield and Ingatestone	<b>Wards Affected:</b> All
<b>Report of:</b> Phil Drane, Director of Planning and Economy	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report Authors:</b> Name: Laurie Edmonds, Senior Economic Development Officer Telephone: 01277 312500 E-mail: laurie.edmonds@brentwood.gov.uk  Name: Phil Drane, Director of Planning and Economy Telephone: 01277 312610 E-mail: philip.drane@brentwood.gov.uk	<b>For Information</b>

### Summary

Place Audits of the retail centres in Brentwood, Shenfield and Ingatestone have been commissioned in partnership with the Brentwood Business Partnership and Brentwood Chamber. The audits will benchmark each location and create recommendations for future place shaping initiatives, recognising the importance of each community. High streets are fundamentally changing and places need to adapt to suit the modern consumer. However, this needs to be informed by an understanding that every place is different and has its own place at the heart of its community.

This report provides an update on the progress of the place audits. A final report is to be issued in April and brought to the next Policy, Resources and Economic Development Committee.

### Recommendation

**Members are asked to:**

**R1. Note the update contained within this report.**

### Main Report

#### **Introduction and Background**

1. The Council's new Corporate Plan "Brentwood 2025" identifies 'Growing the Economy' as one of five key priorities. This follows from the creation of the Policy, Resources and Economic Development (PRED) Committee and its resolutions to provide clear baseline information on the local economy and recommend ways to achieve economic growth.

2. To provide more detail about how the Corporate Plan objective to grow the economy will be achieved, a new Economic Development Strategy is to be prepared. This is to replace the Council's current Economic Strategy 2017-2020. The new strategy is to be informed by place shaping audits of the retail centres in Brentwood, Shenfield and Ingatestone.
3. The place audits have been commissioned in partnership with the Brentwood Business Partnership and Brentwood Chamber of Commerce (Brentwood Chamber). It is important that local businesses are engaged in the work so that buy-in is created for meaningful outcomes. Engagement with stakeholders in Brentwood, Ingatestone and Shenfield is a key part of the overall research into how these locations originally developed, how they function now, and how they might need to adapt to meet the needs of future audiences.
4. The aim of the audits is to benchmark each location and create recommendations for future place shaping initiatives, recognising the importance of these communities. High streets are fundamentally changing and places need to adapt to suit the modern consumer. However, this needs to be informed by an understanding that every place is different and has its own place at the heart of its community. This underpins the need to gain an understanding of the borough's main retail centres in order to provide recommendations for change that suit each place. For this reason, outcomes from the place audits will be critical to inform initiatives to achieve economic growth.
5. The need for a Town Centre Action Plan has been discussed at PRED Committee, most recently with the suggestion that an all member session take place to workshop the issues that could be included in such a plan (see minutes of 8 January 2020 PRED Committee, Item 303 Economic Development Update). Through the production of the place audits, engagement has taken place with Members through individual interviews and a DNA workshop on 2 March 2020. Feedback from that workshop has informed the outputs presented through the Place Audits and will inform the Council's emerging Economic Development Strategy.
6. A final report is to be issued in April and brought to the next PRED Committee.

### **Issue, Options and Analysis of Options**

7. Qualitative research has been carried out in the form of a variety of interviews that have been undertaken with local business representatives from all three locations. Researchers have spent time in all locations gathering first impressions about how the places function. This has included visits during the working day, evening stays and during a busy evening economy period. The

interviews have covered all business sectors and have a profile of independent and national business representatives. Owner/Chief Executive level interviews have been carried out either by pre-arranged telephone or face-to-face interview whilst General Manager level has been via walk-in survey (not pre-arranged) or via e-mail survey. An online audit of how Brentwood Borough is seen via the internet for residents, visitors and businesses alike has also been completed as part of the research.

8. Quantitative research on all three locations has been carried out around land use, vacancy rates, residential and employee numbers, transport data, crime and anti-social behaviour and customer profiling. Key statistics have been compared to four other locations: Chelmsford, Dorking, Epping and Woking. Dorking and Woking have similar proximities to London with major A-roads running through. Chelmsford and Epping were chosen as Essex comparators. All are commuter bases. A report collating findings is currently being prepared.
9. Savills Place attended the Brentwood Chamber business breakfast alongside the Council on Friday 14 February. Businesses were asked to think about the borough's three main high streets and what could change to create business opportunity in the future. Key overarching themes such as marketing, leisure, arts and culture, space for experiential activities, evening economy, and wayfinding were shared along with further specifics for each location. This was followed by a workshop where approximately 20 businesses carried out a quick-fire SWOT analysis on all three locations.
10. A DNA workshop was held on Monday 2 March. This signifies the end of the research phase. The aim of the session was to feedback the challenges and themes that had started to come through from the face-to-face research and test the views against those in the room. The attendees expanded on some of these observations.
11. The final report is likely to include recommendations around:
  - a. Branding – place narrative and vision.
  - b. Marketing and communication – to local audiences and wider audiences, both on and offline.
  - c. Public realm – spaces for experiences and community gatherings.
  - d. Wayfinding – signage for general pedestrian and car movement.
  - e. Repurposing empty retail – competitive socialisation/residential.
  - f. Markets – to suit existing and growing demographic.
  - g. Co-working spaces – community hubs and the creative sector.
  - h. Leisure and experiential uses – create footfall and increase dwell time.
  - i. Carbon initiatives – responding to three centres built along major roads.
  - j. Streetscene aesthetics – improving kerb appeal.

- k. Business engagement – delivery options for public/private partnerships.

### **Reasons for Recommendation**

- 12. Members are provided with an update on the Place Audit in order to measure performance and inform priorities for achieving economic growth in the borough. This is in line with the Council's Corporate Strategy priority to grow the economy.

### **Consultation**

- 13. Engagement with the Brentwood Business Partnership, Brentwood Chamber, local businesses and Members has taken place to inform outcomes and recommendations of the Place Audit.

### **References to Corporate Plan**

- 14. Growing the economy is a key priority in the Council's Corporate Plan 2020-2025: Brentwood 2025 "where everyone matters". Under this priority objectives are set to promote Brentwood as a place to set up and do business from; enable the growth of existing businesses; and encourage the creation of new enterprises and inward investment.

### **Implications**

#### **Financial Implications**

**Name/Title: Jacqueline Van Mellaerts, Director of Corporate Resources**  
**Tel/Email: 01277 312829/jacqueline.vanmellaerts@brentwood.gov.uk**

- 15. The value of the Place Audit and resource to prepare a new Economic Development Strategy has been accounted for within the economic development budget.

#### **Legal Implications**

**Name & Title: Amanda Julian, Director of Law and Governance**  
**Tel/Email: 01277 312705/amanda.julian@brentwood.gov.uk**

- 16. There are no legal implications.

#### **Economic Implications**

**Name/Title: Phil Drane, Director of Planning and Economy**  
**Tel/Email: 01277 312610/philip.drane@brentwood.gov.uk**

- 17. The economic implications are contained within this report.

**Other Implications** (where significant) – i.e. Health and Safety, Asset Management, Equality and Diversity, Risk Management, Section 17 – Crime & Disorder, Sustainability, ICT.

18. None.

### **Background Papers**

19. None

### **Appendices to this report**

None