

Committee: Policy, Resources and Economic Development Committee	Date: 9 September 2020
Subject: Place Audits of Brentwood, Shenfield and Ingatestone	Wards Affected: All
Report of: Phil Drane, Director of Planning and Economy	Public
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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. Updates have been provided to previous meetings of the Policy, Resources and Economic Development Committee.

The work was commissioned prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic and lockdown period delayed production of the work. This was due to the significant economic implications of the pandemic and need to consider these, and the need to re-prioritise the resources of the Council's Economic Development Team toward business community support.

The final draft Place Audit study is presented to members in Appendix A. It provides various recommendations for Brentwood, Shenfield and Ingatestone. The outputs from this work will inform objectives to be set in the forthcoming Economic Development Strategy, consistent with the Council's Corporate Strategy.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

R1. Approve that officers consider all recommendations and advise members at a future Policy, Resources and Economic Development Committee as to which they consider most viable and how to achieve them, as part of preparing a new Economic Development Strategy.

R2. Approve that officers specifically consider recommendations related to opportunities for improved marketing of Brentwood Town Centre to benefit the local economy, and report back to members at a future Policy, Resources and Economic Development Committee.

Main Report

Introduction and Background

1. The Council's Corporate Strategy, Brentwood 2025, identifies Growing our Economy as one of five key priorities. The Policy, Resources and Economic Development (PRED) Committee has resolved that a clear baseline of economic information be commissioned with recommendations on ways that the Council can help deliver growth in the local economy. To provide detail on how the Corporate Strategy objective to grow our economy will be delivered, 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.
2. In January 2020, in partnership with the Brentwood Business Partnership and Brentwood Chamber of Commerce (Brentwood Chamber), the Council commissioned Savills Place to undertake place audits of the borough's main centres: Brentwood, Shenfield and Ingatestone. Engagement with businesses and other stakeholders provided an essential part of 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.
3. The audits have benchmarked each location and recommend future place shaping initiatives, recognising the importance of these communities. At the time of the commission it was known that high streets were fundamentally changing. Places needed to adapt to suit the modern consumer. However, work was informed by the importance of understanding that every place is different and has its own place at the heart of its community. This underpinned 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.
4. Since the work was commissioned, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented social and economic challenges. Immediate challenges have included support of the economy, including local businesses. The implications moving forward remain uncertain as the world will take time to recover. The high street as we knew it, already under threat as a concept, will emerge with different needs than before the pandemic.
5. Research for the place audits took place prior to the pandemic. This included qualitative research, including a variety of interviews with local business and

stakeholders from all three locations. Researchers spent time in all locations gathering impressions about how the places function at various times. An online audit of how Brentwood Borough is seen via the internet for residents, visitors and businesses was also completed. Quantitative research included 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 other similar locations in the country. In addition, engagement with businesses has included involvement in a Brentwood Chamber business breakfast in February, and a DNA workshop with businesses and stakeholders in March 2020. Since the outset of the pandemic the work has been updated to consider wider economic implications within the context of conclusions from the study.

6. Coincidentally, recommendations regarding creating a brand for the area related to places being “open for business” have already implemented as part of the measures to support business through the pandemic. The Brentwood Open brand (along with Shenfield Open and Ingatestone Open) was successfully used across social media to publicise businesses operating during lockdown and has been expanded as part of the reopening the high streets project, working through the Brentwood Business Partnership.

Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

7. There are several recommendations made in the Place Audit for each centre (Brentwood, Shenfield and Ingatestone). These are organised by themes within an audit of the physical construct (design, connectivity, sustainability, and composition), and the social construct (perception, leadership, enlivenment, and marketing). The research and recommendations will need to be further considered, in line with recommendation one of this report.
8. Several of the Place Audit recommendations are consistent with recommendations made in the Economic Development Study (Item 427, Economic Development Study, PRED Committee, 18 March 2020). This includes the theme of better marketing Brentwood as a place to increase the number of visitors and businesses, benefiting the local economy. This could be achieved in several ways, including the online presence of the area and/or businesses, particularly relevant post pandemic. Recommendation two of this report specifically identifies this theme for further work.
9. Regarding the Economic Development Study, in March 2020 PRED Committee resolved that officers look at the recommendations and report back on whether each is viable and how they can be achieved. Since then the COVID-19 pandemic took hold and lockdown rules were introduced, resulting in the resource of the Economic Development Team being re-prioritised to local

business support. This has meant that the team has not been able to consider the implications of the Economic Development Study recommendations to report back to PRED Committee at this time. However, this will be reported to a future PRED Committee as part of work to prepare a new Economic Development Strategy, alongside the outputs from the Place Audit.

Reasons for Recommendation

10. Members are presented with the final draft version of the Place Audit 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.
11. The lessons of working with businesses through the COVID-19 pandemic, on projects such as Brentwood Open, reinforce the need to better promote places and businesses. The recommendations allow for more detailed work on what objectives can be progressed through the Council's emerging Economic Development Strategy and focus on promoting Brentwood Town Centre. This would aim to benefit businesses across the borough.

Consultation

12. 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 Strategy

13. Growing our economy is a key priority in the Council's Corporate Strategy 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

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14. The resource required to deliver Place Audit recommendations will be considered further during the budget setting process. Additional budget for economic development has been approved by the Council to deliver town and village centre schemes that provide for business support and economic growth. Projected costs of undertaking further work on marketing the town centre (recommendation 2) are within the economic development budget.

Legal Implications

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15. There are no legal implications.

Economic Implications

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16. 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.

17. The economic impacts of COVID-19 and focus on high streets has involved much cross-team working and collaboration in the Council (such as Business Rates, Licensing, Environmental Health, and Streetscene), and with partners (such as Essex County Council as highways authority). This is set to continue as the recommendations for town and villages centres are considered further.

Background Papers

- Place Audits of Brentwood, Shenfield and Ingatestone, Item 431, Policy, Resources and Economic Development Committee, 18 March 2020
- Economic Development Study, Item 427, Policy, Resources and Economic Development Committee, 18 March 2020
- Economic Development Update, Item 370, Policy, Resources and Economic Development Committee, 12 February 2020
- Economic Development Update, Item 303, Policy, Resources and Economic Development Committee, 8 January 2020

Appendices to this report

- Appendix A: Brentwood, Shenfield and Ingatestone Place Shaping Audits, Savills Place, September 2020