

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



ECONOMY, COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT AND WEALTH BUILDING POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

STRATEGIC REVIEW OF TOWN CENTRES

REPORT BY HEAD OF PLANNING, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & REGENERATION

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform and update the Panel on the proposed work by the Economic Development service associated with town centres, town centre management groups and local partnerships.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

To note the content of the report and recommendations below

1. Town centre managers will carry out a review exercise, between November 2022 and February 2023, to assess the current economic landscape of town centres.
2. Consider any potential changes to town centre management groups.
3. A further report will be brought back to this PDSP in Spring 2023.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I	Council Values	Focusing on our customers' needs; being honest, open and accountable; providing equality of opportunities; developing employees; making best use of our resources; working in partnership.
II	Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)	There are no policy and legal (equality, health, SEA or risk assessment) issues associated with this particular report.
III	Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers	None.
IV	Impact on performance and performance Indicators	Good performance against key indicators as the town centre management team works and engages on hybrid basis to provide support.
V	Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement	Outcome 3 - Our economy is diverse and dynamic, and West Lothian is an attractive place for doing business.

Outcome 4 - We live in resilient, cohesive and safe communities.

VI	Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)	This report raises no implications for existing resourcing and staffing.
VII	Consideration at PDSP	Not previously considered by this PDSP.
VIII	Other consultations	Economic Development. Representations have been made by Bathgate Community Council.

D. TERMS OF REPORT

This report sets out the work of the Town Centre Management team, within the Economic Development service, and in particular the facilitation role for the established Town Centre Management Groups.

D1 Context

Vibrant and viable town centres are essential to the economic and social well-being of our communities, individuals and families. Town and village centres provide a wide range of functions including as places to meet, eat and shop, transport hubs, places to visit, locations where services can be accessed, and centres of local employment. This is also a key message to highlight at national level within town and town centre policy.

The image and perception of our town and village centres is important to both West Lothian residents and the area's visitors. West Lothian has had a period of sustained population growth mirrored in the expansion of many towns and villages. Despite the recent pandemic and continuing economic uncertainties, population growth and increases in the size of key settlements is likely to continue into the future.

Local planning policies have been devised to co-ordinate and manage settlement growth and to safeguard and promote the appropriate development of our town and village centres across the County of West Lothian.

It should be recognised however that town and village centres will not automatically flourish as a result of population and settlement growth. The growing population and continued investment in transportation infrastructure, do however also provide opportunities for our town and village centres to attract investment, support a wide range of retail and service outlets and provide for a wider range of leisure, cultural and community activities for established and incoming residents and visitors.

D2 Town Centre Management

Within the Economic Development service, sits the Town Centre Management team. Town Centre Managers provide support to the development of thriving local town centres in the five traditional towns of Armadale, Bathgate, Broxburn and Uphall, Linlithgow and Whitburn.

West Lothian's traditional town centres have, over recent years, felt the impact of economic change and changing shopping patterns; further compounded by the unprecedented challenges of the recent pandemic and now the cost of living crisis.

These changes also offer opportunities and Economic Development works closely with Town Centre Management Groups, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), Local Trader and Business Associations, individual businesses and sole traders, all of which bring together local stakeholders with the collective aim of creating more vibrant, sustainable and prosperous communities in our traditional town centres.

D3 Town Centre Management Groups

Background

There are well-established Town Centre Management Groups operating within the four traditional towns of Bathgate, Broxburn & Uphall, Linlithgow and Whitburn. There is currently no such group operating within Armadale.

These groups help to co-ordinate or support social, cultural and economic events, and activities within the respective town, and also strive to promote the town as a good place to live, do business, shop, socialise and enjoy.

The current arrangements for Town Centre Management Groups were established prior to the introduction of the Council's Local Area Committee structure.

In light of the cost of living crisis and ongoing pressures on local government, and the West Lothian 2028 Your Council, Your Say consultation agenda, it is crucial that resource including Elected Member, Council officer and partner time is used to maximum effect and duplication of effort is avoided. The planned review will look at the operation and management in our town centres ensuring the effective working relationship with other partners and groups.

Objectives

The key objectives of Town Centre Management Groups should align with those laid out in wider economic and economic development strategies. This recognises the important role town centres play in developing a strong, inclusive and resilient local economy. This includes:

- To improve and promote traditional town centres as retail, leisure, employment and visitor locations
- To attract professional business services to traditional town centres (and to Livingston); and
- To encourage people to come to our retail centres to take advantage of other leisure opportunities provided in the area.

As well as town centre related activities, complementary local services like Business Gateway and Economic Development, here in West Lothian, have the supporting remit to assist new and growing businesses, including those within our town centres.

Role

Town centre management groups, across all traditional town centres, should look to provide a mechanism for partnership working, in particular:

Co-ordination - primary role of the group is to provide a mechanism for developing

joint local strategies and partnership-based initiatives, which the group can support in identifying deliverable projects (for the town centre).

Communication - group meetings provide a local forum for organisations to share information on relevant initiatives, projects and schemes and to share intelligence on town centre issues affecting our town centres.

Consultation – enabling partners to consult each other on plans and activities, and to guide and support wider local community consultation exercises.

Town centre management groups should operate positively and proactively, and promote a “can do culture” enabling new initiatives and solutions to be developed and implemented. Group members are committed to promoting true partnership working, and adhering to an inclusive, open and positive ethos.

In general terms, the Town centre management groups have no specified budget or decision-making powers, with delegated authority through the Head of Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration, in consultation with the Chair, and this only extending to projects which meet eligibility criteria on town centre spend.

Nonetheless, the groups are able to make recommendations to be considered, and to assist in the identification and prioritising of local projects through the Council’s town centre capital expenditure improvement fund. To provide context, the Town Centre Improvement Fund equated to a total of £125,000 in capital funds for each of the five traditional town centres over the 5 period, 2018/19 to 2022/23.

The groups have no specific powers to directly manage any projects, or to apply as a local organisation for external funding. Any project identifying alternative sources of funding would historically be developed through, and in collaboration with, other local organisations and stakeholders.

Meetings

Group meetings are generally held on a monthly basis with dates and timing agreed in advance with the relevant Town Centre Management Group. Each group has a different composition of participation, but would tend to include:

- Elected Members of West Lothian Council (from the local authority ward in which the town is geographically located)
- Representative of the relevant Community Council
- Representative of the relevant Community Development Trust
- Representative of Police Scotland
- Representative of relevant local trader/business/BID groups.
- Representatives from other stakeholders, groups and partner organisations

The groups are each chaired by a local elected member agreed by the Council Administration. Council officer support to the group is available through the relevant Town Centre Manager within Economic Development.

D4.

Key Statistics

Town Centre Occupancy:

West Lothian’s traditional town centres continue to act as community focal points and ‘hubs’ for local employment opportunities, services and amenities. Each of the five town centres is subject to a quarterly occupancy and vacancy survey, carried

out by Town Centre managers, as one measure of its relative vitality and viability. Town Centre managers strive to work with local landlords, property agents, local businesses, investors and individuals, alongside our partners to facilitate and address vacant property units and land, to encourage and support bringing them back into active economic or other use, and business occupation.

Table 1 below shows the average town centre occupancy rates across West Lothian as a whole for the 5 years period, 2017-18 until 2021-22. This indicates that occupancy levels continue to remain favourable compared to national averages.

Table 1: Town Centre Occupancy

Year	West Lothian Average Occupancy
Apr 2021 – March 22	91.9%
Apr 2020 – March 21	91.4%
Apr 2019- March 20	91.9%
Apr 2018- March 19	90.8%
Apr 2017 – March 18	90.5%

Shopfront Improvement:

Shop front improvement grants are available for various businesses across all town centres, towns and villages within West Lothian. These can help cover the costs of external improvements such as painting or new signage. The scheme has been designed to help businesses update and enhance the exterior of their premises. It is envisaged that through increased participation from businesses taking part, that there will be a positive visual impact on the area.

This is a grant-based scheme with individual grants available of up to £750. Funding will be allocated on a first come first served basis subject to individual applications meeting the guidelines which apply to any award of grant. The level of funding available to support the initiative is determined at town level through an agreed allocation via the relevant Town Centre Improvement Fund.

Table 2 below outlines the number of shopfront improvement grants awarded to local businesses within each specified traditional town centre.

Table 2: Shopfront Improvement

<u>Town Centre</u>	<u>Nos. Grants</u>	<u>£ Value of Grant Award</u>	<u>£ Value of Claim Works</u>	<u>Note</u>
Armadale	27	16,037	29,685	Started in Autumn 2012
Bathgate	9	6,949	12,302	Started in September 2020. EB BID Premises Scheme operated in town centre BID area since 2009.
Broxburn & Uphall	(a)17 (b)1 (c)1	12,315 367 1,100	31,600 636 3,576	Started in 2018. BUTA commenced scheme administration in April 2018: offering (a) shopfront grant, (b) shop safe/security grant; and (c) shop shutter replacement funding.
Linlithgow	39	20,510	25,638	Started in Autumn 2012.
Whitburn	43	25,836	38,797	Started in Autumn 2012

D5 Next Steps

Further to consideration of the report by the Panel, the next step will be a strategic review across West Lothian's town centres, between November 2022 to February 2023. The review will take the form of both digital/online consultation and face to face engagement. This will look at the governance, operation and future priorities. By doing so, they will identify any proposed changes necessary to the Town Centre Management Groups. Pre-consultation representations have been made by Bathgate Community Council.

A further report will be brought back to this PDSP in Spring 2023 to outline the review findings and recommendations.

E. CONCLUSION

The Town Centre Management team, within the Economic Development service, continues to provide pro-active support to the evolving development of thriving local town centres in our five traditional towns located in Armadale, Bathgate, Broxburn and Uphall, Linlithgow and Whitburn. This ongoing support extends in particular to the facilitation role for the established Town Centre Management Groups across West Lothian.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

None

Appendices/Attachments:

Contacts:

Jim Henderson, Business Development Manager, jim.henderson@westlothian.gov.uk

Stewart Ness, Tourism and Town Centre Manager; nairn.pearson@westlothian.gov.uk

Craig McCorriston
Head of Planning, Economic Development & Regeneration

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