

## **Littlehampton Town Centre Strategy**

### **1. Introduction by the Town Mayor**

Littlehampton Town Centre is viewed as a vital area of the Town, providing residents and visitors with essential retail outlets, services – both public and private – and leisure space. Leadership from local authorities, other key stakeholder parties and the private sector is required to ensure the long-term viability of this asset.

Over many years, the District and Town Council have provided support to the Town Centre, originally through the Single Regeneration Budget funds, but also through attracting significant investment into such schemes as the current Public Realm Enhancements. A range of Strategies have been developed over that time, some overlapping, but a coherent strategy signed up to by all parties and focussed solely on the Town Centre has been lacking.

The Town Centre is largely perceived as retail focused. This is historically largely true, but given the trends facing the retail sector, this perception requires challenge. At a national level, at the end of 2020, just over 14% of High Street retail and leisure businesses were vacant in Great Britain (House of Commons, Briefing Paper no. 9218. May 2021). The recessions following the financial crises of the last 12 to 13 years and much more recently the pandemic have been damaging. However, one of the biggest negative factors quoted by traders, both nationally and locally, is the impact of business rates and rent.

The need for a strategy to lead all the parties through these difficult times has never been greater. Therefore, this Strategy, once signed up to by all key parties sets out clear aspirations as to what can make a positive difference, whilst also retaining a sense of what is realistic and achievable. It sets out clear aspirations. These will need to be reviewed regularly, but also underpinned by an achievable Action Plan.

All the partners who signed up to the Strategy will need to look to work to deliver the aspirations and the actions within the Action Plan and focus their budget and priorities accordingly. Paramount to the delivery of their objectives will be the leadership provided by elected representatives. Without this, the Strategy is likely to wither on the vine.

On a more positive note, the effective implementation of the Strategy should enable Littlehampton Town Centre to remain a vital element of a successful, vibrant Town, providing key services and recreation for all people. It should be attractive, safe, fun, robust, flexible and vital. Littlehampton has adapted to change in the past, be it moving away from a harbour-based town to more recent threats such as out-of-town Shopping Centres. It is in the nature of the businesses and residents to overcome once again.

**Councillor Jill Long**

## **2. Purpose of the Strategy**

### **2.1. The Target**

**By 2030 all those signed up to this strategy will have worked together to deliver positive change that places the Town Centre both at the heart of the Town and as a retail and leisure hub for the Eastern Arun area.**

### **2.2. Why Is A Strategy Needed?**

Since the early part of this Century, when the Town Centre was last the focus of cohesive partnership work, supported by Single Regeneration Funding, considerable change has impacted Town Centres across the nation, including Littlehampton. Many recognisable retail chains have disappeared; shopping trends have altered, particularly because of internet shopping; there has been more than a decade of national “austerity” and most recently the pandemic and cost of living crisis have impacted the nation, including retail.

Consequently, there is a need to develop a strategy that focusses on attracting investment into the Town Centre, as a revitalised community hub offering leisure, entertainment, arts, key services such as education and health, housing and office space, supplementing and in sympathy with the retail offer.

These should all be aligned with encouraging to people to visit and spend in the locality, whilst also enjoying their time there.

## **3. Informing the Strategy**

The Strategy has been developed using extensive knowledge of the recent history of the Town Centre, together with the threats, opportunities, and challenges it faces. This has been assisted by A Town Centre Health Check delivered for Arun District Council earlier this year, which is summarised below. The full Health Check and background analysis are attached as appendices to the Strategy.

### **3.1. Key Partners**

Arun District Council  
Littlehampton Town Council  
Littlehampton Traders’ Partnership  
West Sussex County Council  
Sussex Police

The key partners will lead on this work but other important players such as Health bodies, the Harbour Board etc will be needed to assist when matters cross refer to their area of expertise.

#### 4. Mission Statement

#### 5. The Ambition

### The Mission Statement

**Littlehampton Town Centre will be a safe and thriving centre offering a wide range of shops, excellent leisure facilities, high quality office premises, residential opportunities, and a full range of community services for the local and wider community.**

**In achieving this, there will be a high quality of design with an attractive street scene and easy access to the centre with good public transport and an emphasis on pedestrian priority.**

Wide consultation identifies that Littlehampton Town Centre should be:

- Welcoming and safe
- A vibrant place that drives out localised anti-social behaviour
- Supportive of schemes which benefit the whole town and its community
- An accessible and attractive place to visit, work and live
- A place that stands out from other destinations, offering something 'different'
- Accessible to everyone and well signposted in a way that connects the Town to the waterfronts, making pedestrian access to business areas much easier.
- A place with a good public transport system including good commuter links and public car parks
- Environmentally sustainable
- A hub for connecting people of all ages through cultural activities that compliment local businesses and showcase local talent.
- A place that provides essential services such as banks, Post Offices, and health care.
- A place that provides services such as hairdressers, beauty care, and leisure facilities, including eateries.
- Supportive of existing businesses looking to diversify.
- A location supportive of alternative commercial opportunities, such as markets
- Supportive of commercial investors
- Where businesses and residents mutually benefit each other
- Able to provide housing with support for the residents without detracting from the retail offer

- Linked to the whole town.
- A place that utilises virtual and online shopping methods to drive footfall into the physical offerings.
- A place with strong supporting infrastructure including public conveniences, seating, and accessibility.
- Home to a thriving evening economy attracting people of all generations.
- A town with businesses that attract people all year round.

These ambitions are strongly supported by the Town Council and form the spine of this Strategy.

## 5. Town Centre Health Check

Commissioned by Arun District Council, a health check was undertaken by Nexus Planners on the three Towns in Arun. Published in February 2022, this was particularly well-timed and has been included in its entirety as an Appendix to this Strategy. This provides good evidence to support the direction and Strategic Aims

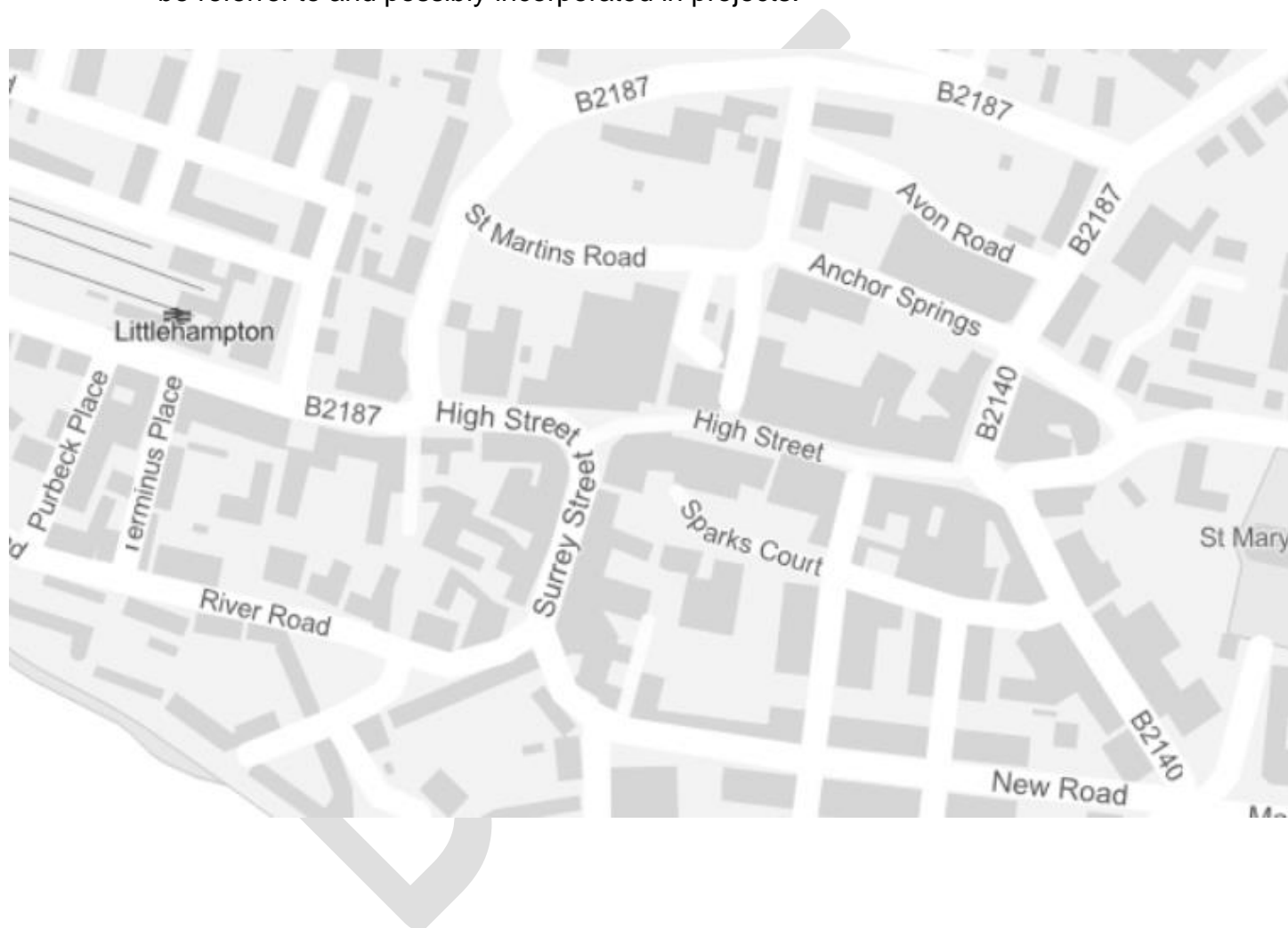
The key messages and findings regarding Littlehampton are:

- a. The acknowledgement of the need for planning authorities to support the viability and vitality of Town Centres (paragraph.1.2).
- b. The breakdown of types of use of premises in the Town Centre and vacancy levels are set out in figures 10 and 11. These also show vacancy rates which are largely better than the national average, but with the floorspace figure significantly impacted by the empty former Waitrose building.
- c. Figure 12 sets out the key trends, showing a growth in convenience stores; lower floorspace for comparison retailers than nationally and a significant growth in services, which now equate to more than 50% of the units in the Town Centre.
- d. The vacancy rate has worsened but remains within healthy tolerances and below UK averages.
- e. There is a relative lack of national multiples, but a higher than usual level of independent retailers.
- f. Prime rents are below those of Bognor Regis.
- g. Both ends of the High Street have good pedestrian flows.
- h. The disc-parking scheme is noted.
- i. Despite negative perceptions, the Town Centre was observed to feel safe.
- j. There is a limited evening economy.
- k. The Town Centre was thought to be attractive, with tired street furniture and the upcoming public realm works noted.
- l. The competition with larger retail hubs was noted, together with the range of vacant units that could allow a wide variety of investors to locate to the Town.
- m. The conclusion was that:
  - The composition of uses is broadly in line with UK averages with a lower-than-average vacancy rate
  - The street furniture was tired
  - Car parking was an issue at the time of the health check, but this could be as a result of the use of St Martins Car Park for COVID tests and the Public Realm.
  - Long-term vacancies such as the former Waitrose site and the Indoor Market were detrimental to the Town.

These findings broadly align with the thinking that had gone in to preparing a first draft of this Strategy but emphasise the importance of actively progressing an Action Plan to address the Strategic Aims set out in the body of this paper.

## 6. Area of Coverage

For the purposes of this Strategy, the Town Centre is taken as being the area shown in the map below. Pier Road has not been specifically addressed within this Strategy, but its proximity and importance to the local linkages will mean that it will be referred to and possibly incorporated in projects.



## **7. The Strategic Objectives**

To achieve the Vision a range of Strategic Objectives will need to be achieved. It is envisaged that the lead on this will be a newly constituted Town Centre Action Group, details of which are covered under section 9.

The Strategic Objectives that have been identified for progression by the Town Centre Action Group are:

1. Draw up and progress a realistic and achievable Action Plan renewable by partners annually.
2. Participate in regular forums involving the Traders Partnership to develop and steer the Town Centre Action Plan.
3. Focus on addressing problems relating to crime, antisocial behaviour, drug usage, and street drinking.
4. Recognise the importance of Community and Public Sector Services as key providers for the future Town Centre.
5. Encourage further investment to complete the public realm works.
6. Encourage a more diverse retail sector, robust enough to meet changing shopping trends and cater to all those visiting.
7. Investigate opportunities to seek to attract online shoppers into the Town Centre, possibly through locating collection facilities in the locality.
8. Develop the Traders Partnership to be self-sufficient and to represent all sectors of Town Centre commerce.
9. Consider how best to encourage leisure and key services to emerge in the Town Centre.
10. Prepare a proposal to deliver sympathetic housing that will uplift the Town Centre, whilst reducing, or at a minimum keeping to existing levels hostel accommodation.
11. To press West Sussex County Council, particularly in the light of the North Littlehampton development, to prepare a transport plan for the Town Centre, including improving disability access.
12. Prepare Marketing and Branding Plans and look to improve the offer of information for visitors in the town. Any branding initiative should be closely discussed with the Town Council who might be developing such an initiative for the whole Town.
13. Protect and market the heritage of the Town Centre.
14. Progress the promised Feasibility Study for the redevelopment of St Martins Car Park.
15. Look to work with those involved to assist in the taking forward of the proposals for the Hospital, Health Centre, Library and Fire Station sites.
16. To urgently investigate the need to action and deliver increased Charge Points in Town Centre Car Parks to meet the advent of electric vehicles and to relieve the parking congestion on nearby roads in the evening.

17. Set up links with landlords including a landlords' forum to involve them in the Town Centre planning and to maintain high quality building maintenance and appearance.
18. Develop and promote an all-year-long Events programme for the Town Centre.
19. Investigate and where practicable work with landlords to fill vacant shops and deliver pop-up shops.
20. Look to deliver 21<sup>st</sup> Century public conveniences, free from crime and antisocial behaviour.
21. Review the Car Parking Disc Scheme and look at easy, inexpensive alternatives. As the scenario cannot continue whereby small independent shops are subsidising nationals and determine whether this is the best way to use these funds in supporting the Town Centre.
22. Review the existing market arrangements, with other options to be considered, possible new markets and including creating a marketplace in St Martins Car park.
23. Addressing negative perceptions of the Town and Promotion.
24. Ensuring that the new roads to the North of the Town direct traffic to the Town Centre.
25. Similarly work to encourage mobility between the seafront, riverside and Town centre for pedestrians and to that end support the pedestrianisation of Pier Road, at least seasonally.
26. Ensure Town Centre Gateways – Railway Station and Anchor Springs – are inviting and attractive.
27. Focus on Culture, Fitness, and the Arts to uplift the image of the Town.
28. Encourage the service sector to work alongside the established retail core of the Town to reflect changes in consumer practice.
29. Look to improve the offer of information for visitors to the Town Centre and to attract those using other facilities in the area to visit.
30. Support and encourage new and young investors wanting to start a business in the town.
31. To urgently ensure that there is a marketing strategy in place for the completion of the public realm works.
32. To encourage a banking hub in the Town Centre.
33. Encourage the development of digital business in the Town Centre.
34. To investigate urgently the need for action to deliver charging points for residents and visitors to the Town Centre.
35. To urgently identify funding sources to allow improvements to progress.



## **8. The Action Plan and Town Centre Action Group – TCAG**

The creation and delivery of an Action Plan that is SMART and deliverable is essential to the success for this Strategy. Chaired by the Mayor the action group should comprise of the following Members:

### **West Sussex County Council**

- County Division Member and relevant Officers.

### **Arun District Council**

- Relevant Committee Chair, Ward Member and relevant officers

### **Littlehampton Town Council**

- Chair of Policy and Finance Committee; one other Member and relevant Officers.

### **Sussex Police**

- Divisional Commander and Relevant Officers.

### **Traders Partnership**

- Chair and Vice-Chair.

The Town Centre Action Group should meet at least three times a year and be underpinned by an Officer Task Group. The TCAG will be serviced by the Town Council, but the actions will need to be taken forward by partners. The minutes of meetings of the TCAG will be made publicly available, except where there is “Exempt” information. Partners would be expected to feedback on meetings to assist priorities and resourcing discussions within each organisation.