

Portsmouth's Shopping Areas: Driving local growth and regeneration

This paper is a submission to the ECDL Scrutiny Panel that responds directly to Cllr Julie Swan's report, 'The Future of UK High Streets: Driving local growth and regeneration'. It aims to pick up many of the points raised by Cllr Swan and to provide additional information to the Scrutiny Panel to inform their ongoing consideration of the role of local shopping centres in driving growth and regeneration.

I have worked closely with the Museums Service Manager to identify a way forward for Cllr Swan's proposal for moveable exhibitions to be housed in empty shops. While the current capacity of the Museums Service offers a particular challenge to extending service delivery beyond Museum buildings in terms of staffing, funding, and ensuring care of collections to professional standards, we have set out a proposal to carry the idea forward that builds on a range of successful community engagement projects across the city, including *Lest We Forget* and *A Tale of One City* (for reference, brief outlines of these projects are included as Appendix 1).

Proposal

Building on recent community outreach work within Museums, it is possible to envisage a community-based project, in the spirit of Cllr Swan's idea, delivered with the support of external funding (e.g. Heritage Lottery Fund) which would:

- Attract footfall into under-used shopping areas
- Showcase community identity and pride
- Address the under-representation of some local communities in city collections (Paulsgrove for example)
- Can easily partner with any additional locally-based campaigns to support the role of town shopping areas in local economic growth and regeneration, building and supporting the role of local communities in driving forward growth and regeneration.

We propose to create an outreach project based in an empty shop within town shopping areas. The shop would host a wide range of activities utilising local collections that support communities to research and present elements of their own history, as identified by the community itself.

Previous projects undertaken by Museums have built strong links with local community groups, including in Copnor, Baffins, Paulsgrove and Cosham, which can be utilised to attract and recruit people into the project.

For example, a Paulsgrove-based project focused on collecting stories and photos of Paulsgrove past and present would also address the under-representation of Paulsgrove in city collections, while providing the community with a unique opportunity to explore and present the history of the community. Activities could be based in the empty shop that facilitate this exploration and also train community members to develop and care for a heritage collection and curate an exhibition. The Service could also train and support community volunteers to staff the venue.

Funding for the project would be generated through an HLF bid for £75k to cover the costs of delivering and running the project, including buying in staff to deliver and oversee it. Match-funding from the local authority would be required to support the bid and would comprise free use of the venue (no business rates, no rent, no service charges etc).

Identified issues for high streets and how to move forward

Cllr Swan's paper also raises a range of issues that have been the focus of work within the City Development and Cultural Services, including within a recent paper on developing Portsmouth's local and specialist street markets that highlighted the potential for local markets to contribute to skills development (including developing business skills for young people and marginalised communities) and supporting local start-ups. The campaigns raised by Cllr Swan (Great British High Street; Christmas Market Action Day; Pop-Up Shops) have been utilised all over the country and provide a pragmatic research base and best-practice models for carrying such ideas forward locally.

As the Panel will already know, to move forward with many of the ideas being examined during their investigations, engagement with local communities will be vital. Local communities are in the best position to identify localised issues and possible solutions and are absolutely vital in driving forward buy-in among local residents, ensure spaces are used and even reduce anti-social behaviour.

- Ideas of a Shop Local/Use It or Lose It campaign is a good way to kick-start meaningful engagement with local communities on what is valued locally in the high street.
- Street audits in shopping areas have been used in other areas (e.g. Brighton) to capture how local shopping areas and high streets are being used, which people visit and why, what features are valued by the local community and how local communities are using and moving around high street and shopping spaces. Street audits can also kick-start discussions in local communities about the importance of these spaces to Portsmouth's economic growth and regeneration. They are also useful in assessing different use of shopping areas and high streets by different groups during the day or night.
- Empty shops and unused spaces used as temporary or permanent community spaces. This has been achieved with great success in a number of areas. The Empty Shops Network has also worked in Portsmouth before and has experience of the local area. A 'mixed-economy' model of partnership working between public, private and voluntary sector works particularly well in these projects, particularly when partners are based in local communities.
- Culture on the High Street – the University of Portsmouth would be an excellent partner for supporting arts projects in the heart of local communities. The CCI faculty in particular has a legacy of community engagement and a wealth of experience in this area that would allow them not only to showcase the work of local students, but also support the creation of arts projects directly from local communities themselves.
- Makers Emporium – the ongoing success of makers markets at the Square Tower, Guildhall, and Palmerston Road highlight the potential for this proposal. Again, private, voluntary and public partnerships offer the strongest opportunity for delivery, bringing together makers in local communities with established creative industries, for example. The role of the local authority in this becomes central in facilitating the development of such projects, for

example, identifying sites, promoting and publicising through existing networks (e.g. Flagship).

- An audit of empty shops in local communities (or citywide) – audits are carried out most often by local authorities, either as a one-off snapshot or more regularly to provide local councillors and communities with ongoing data on local and independent retail growth or decline. For example, Cherwell Council carried out an empty shop audit in Banbury Town Centre showing 53 empty town centre (ground floor) units in May 2014, which had fallen to 44 when the audit was repeated in September.

I hope that this submission is helpful to the panel in their considerations and welcome any questions that arise from it or throughout the Scrutiny process.

S Baily

Head of Cultural Services & Development