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| Briefing Paper  To  Overview & Scrutiny Committee (Place)  On  13 April 2021 |
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| **TOWN CENTRE UPDATE** | |

**1. SUMMARY**

* 1. This briefing paper gives Overview & Scrutiny Committee (Place) an update on the services provided by Town Centre Operations.
     1. This format for giving members regular briefing papers to update on certain areas of interest has been agreed in consultation with a former Overview & Scrutiny Committee (Communities) Chairman and the former Corporate Director – Housing & Environment.

**2. BACKGROUND**

2.1 In consulting on the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (Communities) work programme in November 2013, the former Overview & Scrutiny Committee (Communities) Chairman and Corporate Director – Housing & Environment agreed to place updates for members into an easy-to-understand format of briefing papers.

2.2 The areas in this paper are bullet-points for Town Centre Operations.

**3. MARKETS**

3.1 Market Stall Occupancy Rates

The stall occupancy rates are not comparable to the same period in 2019/20 due to the 3rd lockdown and the restriction of non-essential retail only being allowed to trade.

3.2 Market Income

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Jan - Mar** | |
| **Year** | **Income** | **% change** |
| 2019/20 | £25,115 | - |
| 2020/21 | £3,071 | -88% |

The income is not comparable to the same period in 2019/20 due to the third lockdown as only essential retailers could stand.

Detailed in the table below is the annual income for 2020/21 compared to 2019/20.

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Annual Income** | |
| **Year** | **Income** | **% change** |
| 2019/20 | £144,068 | - |
| 2020/21 | £39,196 | -73% |

On the 12 April 2021 all non-essential retail re-opened therefore the layout has reverted to the December plan and the fencing from around the stalls has been removed.

The staff also continue to sanitise the stalls each evening and alternative waste disposal continues to be in operation to reduce the risk to staff from handling it. Once the trader occupies the stall each day they are then responsible for the sanitisation of the stall and ensuring they manage their queues and customer safety.

**4. CAR PARKS**

4.1 Car Park Income

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Jan - Mar** | |
| **Year** | **Income** | **% change** |
| 2019/20 | £324,551 | - |
| 2020/21 | £71,826 | -78% |

The car park income for the fourth quarter is £71,826 due to the impact of the third lockdown even though normal fees and charges were re-introduced on the 1st January 2021.

Detailed in the table below is the annual income for 2020/21 compared to 2019/20.

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Annual Income** | |
| **Year** | **Income** | **% change** |
| 2019/20 | £1,536,564 | - |
| 2020/21 | £240,986 | -84% |

Walkden Street car park cladding works are yet to be completed and therefore the car park has still not been handed back into our control.

There is a significant amount of remedial works that needs to take place in the form of painting, re-commissioning services, i.e. lifts, dry risers, car park equipment etc. which could not be done by our own staff.

We are currently in the process of obtaining quotes and commissioning works.

In addition to this work we have been exploring options as to how the car park will operate 24hrs a day / 7 days a week so hotel guests and members of the public can use it for overnight parking. The following options are being considered:-

* 2 Hours free parking from 0800 to 1000 hrs
* 2 Hours free parking from 1500 to 1700 hrs
* £5.00 overnight parking charge

In addition to this we are looking at options for CCTV, securing upper levels, including lifts and stairs, emergency arrangements and technical options to reimburse hotel guests.

**5. SHOPMOBILITY**

The Shopmobility service was closed during the 1st lockdown, but re-opened in June 2020 and has continued to operate through the 2nd and 3rd lockdowns from the shop unit in the Four Seasons shopping centre.

However, due to first lockdown, the drop in overall footfall and a high number of users shielding the income has seen an 85% reduction this year, from £3,915 in 19/20 to £584 in 20/21.

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|  | **Annual Income** | |
| **Year** | **Income** | **% change** |
| 2019/20 | £3,915 | - |
| 2020/21 | £584 | -85% |

**6. PUBLIC CONVENIENCES**

The charges for using public conveniences were waived at the start of the Covid pandemic to ensure that people had access to facilities whilst lots of businesses were closed and to encourage hand washing to reduce the risk of transmission. The charges have not been re-instated up to the 31st March 2020.

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|  | **Annual Income** | |
| **Year** | **Income** | **% change** |
| 2019/20 | £32,377 | - |
| 2020/21 | £0 | N/A |

It was agreed at a meeting with Cabinet and the Head of Neighbourhoods that charges would be re-introduced on the 1st April 2021.

**7. FOOTFALL**

Please see the Appendix 1 attached for the up to date footfall data.

**8. PUBLIC REALM**

The resurfacing works that had been agreed with NCC / Via prior to Covid have not been carried out. The damaged blocks and black tarmac has been removed on West Gate / Regent Street junction, the front of the Market Square and the fountain area outside the Town Hall and replaced with buff coloured tarmac. This surface is sympathetic to the surroundings but it more durable to cope with the wear and tear from heavy vehicles.

There has been some black tire marks left on the surface and we are currently in talks with Via how best to resolve this situation, either through sealing or cleaning.

The block pavers that have been removed from West Gate in particular have been reused to further up to replace the black tarmac squares in the old tree pits, which has had a significant improvement on the overall aesthetics of that area.

I have recently asked Via for an update on the street lighting trials that took place prior to March last year and I’m awaiting their response.

Town Centre Operations staff have also been looking at getting the town ready for re-opening, by cleaning benches, checking and replacing signage, deep cleaning some problem areas and removing vegetation.

**8. URBAN GREENING PROJECT**

* Feasibility and high level options/costing report completed and received by MDC on 16/03/2021
* 5 sites prioritised for most impact
* Walkden Street Pocket Park – greening plus dwell time encouraging public realm features with options around children’s play and scope to value engineer costs down if required
* Bus station underpass – general clean and tidy including repainting and repair of any damage to lighten the area and to encourage footfall through the route (particularly effective once SGN is completed)
* Stockwell Gate Gateway – General public realm improvements with options around art installations if necessary
* Stockwell gate bridge (Beales) – installation of movable lighting to brighten dark underpass
* Town Hall Car Park – Remove all car parking on this site, and implement ‘greening’ within the budget constraints available (including screening/greening of the rear of the OTH)
* All of the above will now move to detailed design, mobilisation and delivery stage with first sites coming online summer 2021.
* Via and Edge team to be retained through procurement framework – administrative process to set this up is ongoing with County Procurement.
* MDC to be fully involved in design choices and to maintain control of overall costings

**9. EVENTS**

The event programme for 2021 was discussed with Cabinet on Monday, 29th March and the draft Event Strategy that was approved in principle by them is attached as Appendix 2.

**10. STAFFING**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our electricians Andy Powers and Darren Hardy on the installation of last year’s Christmas lights across the district, which was particularly challenging for them last year with the Covid restrictions and reduction in staffing, but as always they did a fantastic job of bringing festive magic to our district and always with a smile on their face, they are a credit to the council.

**11. COMMENTS OF HEAD OF SERVICE**

11.1 The Town Centre Team have been working with partners to prepare for each stage of the national lockdown, including planning for additional footfall after schools return, and most importantly the re-opening on non-essential retail and personal care services

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