

Town Centres & Parades Strategy

2023 - 2024

Foreword

The pandemic over the last two years have been incredibly challenging for everyone within our communities. Whilst there have undoubtedly been some people within the business community who have seen their business sectors do very well, across the board there have been many that have suffered. Spelthorne Borough Council has been very active and highly visible in providing a huge range of support for businesses, including the administration and distribution of mandated and discretionary grants.

But the long-term effects of the pandemic, coupled with new challenges such as the energy crisis and the highest inflation levels for 40 years presents new problems. We now need to better understand the current health and confidence of our town centres, and retail parade businesses so we can better target support where it is most needed as this will ensure we use limited resources and funding effectively.

Whilst the Council cannot control every aspect of our town centres and parades, we can ensure that we work collaboratively with our businesses and other stakeholders to sustain and build upon the well-being of our communities. I believe this Action Plan will help us to achieve this.

Councillor Sinead Mooney
Chairman Economic Development Committee

Introduction:

This Town Centre Strategy covers the towns of Ashford, Shepperton, Sunbury and Retail Parades throughout the borough.

In order to sustain the vitality and viability of our town centres, we will work with the business community in each town centre to improve the commercial well-being of that town based on the following principles:

- **Involving and communicating** with all stakeholders
- **Promoting** the towns as attractive sustainable environments, and by taking and creating opportunities to draw attention to local achievements and attractions
- **Working with** other Council departments and agencies who provide services within the town to provide an efficient and consistent response

Scope of the Action Plan

Whilst the exact mix of businesses and public areas in our town centres is determined by several external stakeholders including Surrey County Council, landlords and businesses, Spelthorne Borough Council plays an active role in influencing several factors that will help the well-being of our town centre communities. This includes working to make improvements to the public realm, accessibility, amenities, activities and continued support for, and engagement with, our business community will all help to do this.

As such, this Action Plan is designed to identify small scale active interventions and incremental improvements that we can adapt and develop as needed in future years. It also takes account of the resources available, as this covers three towns, all shopping parades and will be delivered almost solely by the Town Centre Manager, with support from the Economic Development Team when required.

For instance, where appropriate, encouragement will be given to restaurants and cafes to embrace an al fresco style approach to eating and drinking by obtaining appropriate consent to locate removable tables and chairs on the path adjacent to premises. This will provide those businesses with the opportunity for increased income, whilst also providing an outdoor environment for those that would prefer it and fostering a 'café culture' image in our town centres.

Survey of Businesses 2022

Throughout June and July 2022, a survey was undertaken with the businesses within our town centres and retail parades to better understand the current challenges and opportunities faced by our business communities.

The returned survey results, coupled with SWOT analyses and face-to-face consultations, have provided the evidence for a series of actions and interventions that will help to sustain and improve the commercial well-being of our town centres and parades. Many of the issues identified by businesses in the survey were common to all areas, so the Action Plan reflects this. Where there are town specific requirements, such as with regards to activities/events, the strong feedback was to offer help and add value to the areas that have existing activities and to investigate new, where they do not. The survey results also provide a baseline from which we will be able to measure the impact the support and interventions outlined in the Action Plan have had.

Ashford

Ashford is situated in the north of Spelthorne and the main shopping/town centre area of Ashford, comprises the businesses in Woodthorpe Road, Station Approach, Station Road, Church Road, New Parade, Church Parade & Fir Tree Place.

The High Street/Town Centre area of Ashford comprises approx. 162 units/businesses and is a busy commercial sector with a good selection of retail stores which are mainly independent although there are clusters within the retail sector along the high street including nail bars and hairdressers / barbers.

Ashford is a vibrant and busy commuter town with a traditional High Street layout with a train station at one end that runs regular service to London. Most of the retailers are small independents with a wide variety of shops that serve most everyday needs. There is a wide variety of speciality food shops and eateries, coupled with traditional food offerings.

The main areas of business concern highlighted in the survey were: -

1. Parking – either customer or business
2. Cleanliness/attraction of town centre
3. Promotion of town
4. Support on issues such as energy costs, rates and rent

Shepperton

The riverside village of Shepperton is known the world over as the home of Shepperton Studios, a major employer in the area.

the main shopping/village centre area of Shepperton comprises the businesses in High Street with some ancillary areas such as Araby Corner, Old Chorlton Road, Station Approach and Green Lane.

Most of the businesses are retail with a limited number of non-retail businesses spread throughout. The town benefits from a petrol station, which also includes a small M&S convenience store, on the High Street.

Shepperton High Street has the look and feel of an old-fashioned 'village'. There is a strong business community within the village and a strong sense of community and pride in the village in general.

The main areas of business concern highlighted in the survey were: -

1. Cleanliness/attraction of town centre
2. Promotion of town/footfall
3. Support on issues such as energy costs, rates and rent

Sunbury

There are two distinct areas of Sunbury, Sunbury Cross and Lower Sunbury.

The Sunbury Cross area comprises approx. 47 units/businesses including a shopping centre, which has a few well-known national brands including an M&S Food Hall.

The opposite side of the main road (The Parade) has a good selection of small independent retailers as well as some known brands such as Greggs, Papa Johns & William Hill as well as a small number of non-retail businesses.

Lower Sunbury has the advantage of its position close to the Thames and is home to several attractive 'riverside' pubs as well as the 'gem' of the Walled Garden. Sunbury Park is central to the area. It is a very attractive and inviting place and has the feel of a quaint village.

The retail areas are mainly spread over the 3 roads; The Avenue, Thames Street and Green Street, which can make the different areas feel disconnected. The units are all small / independent and there is a good relationship between the retailers especially in The Avenue where there is a thriving 'business community'.

The main areas of business concern highlighted in the survey were: -

1. Cleanliness/safety of retail area
2. Promotion of town/footfall
3. Support on issues such as energy costs and better communication of business support

Parades around the Borough

The process of engaging on a regular basis with the business situated on the smaller parades around the borough is in its early stages but is proving to be extremely useful. There are some very common issues that a number of 'straight line' parades face and, therefore, we can work on some immediate actions to help address these.

For instance, there is a great opportunity for some economies of scale solutions around waste and recycling collections for these small collections of businesses.

The pressures on our Town Centres and Parade businesses are huge; having managed to survive the effects of the pandemic, they are now facing significant costs increases related to the impact of the energy crisis and the highest inflation for 40 years. In addition to increasing costs, the spending of their customers is reducing as cutbacks must be made as the cost-of-living spirals. Additional support will be provided through the TCM with regular and consistent engagement with businesses; this is where they will also be signposted to support mechanisms and grants available to help their businesses through the latest crisis.

Below is a detailed Action Plan that sets out the key areas of support over the next 12 months that have taken cognisance of the survey results from businesses and are designed to help each of the towns become stronger and attract additional footfall.

The governance for this strategy will be through the Economic Development Committee who will receive an update in relation to achievements and issues at each of the meetings throughout the year, the regular updates are suggested as this is a strategy delivered over just 12 months.

Given the turbulent nature of the economy, a 6-month review of the plan will take place to ensure we are reacting to any new developments.

Town Centres and Parades Action Plan

Ref	Action	Implementation	RAG
A1	Provide a voice for the 3 main towns outside of Staines and bring together a thriving business community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Develop a new business forum in each town - Ashford, Shepperton and Sunbury; updates are shared through newsletter, TCM visits, website, and social media b) Make available £1,000 for each forum to help kickstart activities. <p>Timescale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. By spring 2023 b. By spring 2023 <p>Measure of Success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Minimum of 5 people attend each forum. b) Activities are identified and agreed to help promote each town 	
	Introduce a Borough wide retail forum	<p>Identify guest speaker(s) to present and take Q&A's. Designed to showcase best practice, highlight industry trends, national benchmarks and provide networking opportunities.</p> <p>Timescale:</p> <p>At least once a year starting 2023</p> <p>Measures of Success</p> <p>At least 20 retailers attending – identifying issues and potential solutions. A feedback form will be used post event and at least 7/10 satisfaction will be achieved</p>	

Ref	Action	Implementation	
A2	Provide support and a voice for the shopping parades throughout Spelthorne	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Monthly visit to each parade will take place. Regular communication will ensure the full range of council services and available support is promoted effectively. b) Explore the introduction of WhatsApp groups for the various parades to help improve communications. Use of the specific 'business' WhatsApp platform will be investigated <p>Timescale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. January 2023 onwards b. Commence January 2023 <p>Measure of Success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Concerns of retailers will be identified and worked on; information and details of any relevant support / grants available will be circulated. To receive at least 1 unsolicited emails/phone calls per month requesting advice, support or raising an issue. b) WhatsApp communication system installed at those parades that are keen. 	
A3	Improve the communications and access to information within the town centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Quarterly town centre newsletter highlighting what is going on, actions, activities, best practice and potential services for businesses b) Deliver monthly Meet the TCM Retail Surgeries within each of the 3 towns <p>Timescale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) January 2023 onwards b) Immediate effect – monthly <p>Measures of Success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Feedback provided via the new Business Forums b) Attendance figures at the surgeries will show popularity or not required. 	

Ref	Action	Implementation
A4	To make our towns more accessible and inviting to visitors	<p>a) Engage with local restaurants / café's pubs to make our town centres more accessible by the promotion of free use of shops/cafes toilet facilities for non-customers. We will produce a large logo on door/window to signal involvement in the new scheme and availability to the public. This will be promoted via social media and both SBC and SBF websites</p> <p>Timescale:</p> <p>a. January 2023</p> <p>Measure of Success</p> <p>a) Minimum of 2 outlets per town being part of scheme</p>
A5	Help make our towns more attractive to visitors and investment.	<p>a) Introduce a community clean up with businesses and promote the businesses engaged via social media, newsletter, bulletin.</p> <p>Timescale:</p> <p>a. From Spring 2023</p> <p>Measure of Success</p> <p>a) Minimum of two clean-ups per year in each town</p>
A6	Promote enhanced connectivity between retailers, councillors and SBC	<p>Councillor walkabout: Introduce a town centre / parade walkabouts with local councillors and joint visits with other offices from SBC</p> <p>Timeframe</p> <p>Commence Spring 2023</p> <p>Measure of Success</p> <p>Feedback from councillors and retailers will be positive and result in an even better service for our retailers.</p>
A7	Promote the SBC waste collection service	<p>Collaborate with Spelthorne Direct Services to help increase the take up of our waste and recycling service by retailers/businesses in town centres and parades.</p> <p>Timescale</p> <p>January 2023 onwards</p> <p>Measure of success</p> <p>Identifiable cost savings for all businesses and increase the number of new contracts with SDS through the TCM by at least 6 per year</p>

Ref	Action	Implementation

Actions: People

Ref	Action	Implementation	RAG
A8	Help businesses become more cost effective and energy efficient and promote a greener environment within the Borough.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Promote energy audits to help businesses focus on areas where greatest savings can be made. b) Actively promote the Green Initiative Fund and LoCASE c) Deliver a Greener Business Event Designed to showcase all the options and benefits available for businesses to be greener, best practice, savings, alternative technologies and any grant support available. <p>Timescale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) January 2023 onwards b) September 2022 c) Before June 2023 <p>Measure of Success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Minimum of 15 audits with tangible savings identified. After 1 year the amount saved will be collated and used to encourage other businesses to participate. b) Spelthorne will be in the top 4 local authorities in Surrey where businesses have applied for funding. LoCASE funding ends in March 2023 c) 30 businesses attending – minimum average of 7/10 feedback 	
A9	Increase footfall for retailers in town centres.	Explore with retailers, SBC colleagues (especially the Neighbourhood Services/Parking team) and Surrey County Council the possibility of	

Ref	Action	Implementation	
		<p>introducing parking meters at shopping parades whilst retaining “1st hour free” element.</p> <p>Timescale:</p> <p>Spring 2023</p> <p>Measure of Success</p> <p>Implementation of measures to improve parking availability that retailers endorse</p>	
A10	National store liaison	<p>Liase with national stores to access any local discretionary budgets they have as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) to work with the business community</p> <p>Timescale:</p> <p>Annually</p> <p>Measure of Success</p> <p>At least 2 businesses a year to contribute towards a good cause or town centre activity.</p>	
A11	Support businesses during the festive season	<p>a) Collaborate with businesses in each town to assist with their Christmas promotions. Current energy costs may impact on light displays so alternative ideas will also be considered.</p> <p>b) Organise themed social media campaigns in the run-up to Christmas – “elf on the shelf” - to promote town centre offering.</p> <p>Timeframe</p> <p>a. Annually b. Beginning November 2022</p> <p>Measure of Success</p> <p>a) Feedback from businesses post-Christmas b) Feedback from businesses post-Christmas</p>	

Ref	Action	Implementation	
A12	Promote national campaigns for retailers and make best use of associated publicity to support retailers.	<p>To actively encourage and engage retailers with national campaigns, such as Small Business Saturday. Ensure all “tools” are available to local business and arrange complementary activities and promotions to coincide.</p> <p>Timescale:</p> <p>a) Annually</p> <p>Measure of Success</p> <p>Feedback from businesses</p>	
A13	Develop better communications and relationships with key parties within the retail sector.	<p>a) Create database of landlords and commercial agents responsible for units in town centres and parades</p> <p>b) Working with council colleagues to understand and engage with the commercial decision makers and property owners in our town centres.</p> <p>c) Create a specific ‘welcome pack’ for new businesses / retailers and commercial agents highlighting the support new businesses to the borough will receive.</p> <p>Timescale:</p> <p>a) Summer 2023 b) Summer 2023 c) Summer 2023</p> <p>Measure of Success</p> <p>New businesses coming to the borough feel welcomed, and better engagement with property owners and the promotion of Spelthorne services will result in a more informed and joined-up business community.</p>	

Actions: Consolidating and growing current actions

Ref	Action	Implementation	RAG
A14	<p>Raise awareness of support available, particularly the services provided via the ARG and any other support through the Levelling Up Fund.</p> <p>The ARG funding is now closed but part of the ARG funding was used to identify these areas of business support that could be delivered over a longer period of time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Promote free professional business advice to Spelthorne businesses and residents via the business support procured via the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) for all businesses as well as new-start businesses and people thinking of starting a business. b) Signpost businesses to the availability of 9 training sessions on 'Social Media for Business' over the next 2 years c) Identify businesses that would obtain significant benefit from having their own website which would be free of charge to businesses. d) Identify businesses that would benefit most from free or discounted 1 year membership to the Federation of Small Businesses. This would mainly be businesses that are evidencing growth and taking on staff. e) Provide support for businesses to help reduce costs of running a business, especially energy costs. <p>Timescale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) By February 2023 b) By August 2024 c) By April 2023 d) By August 2023 e) By June 2023 <p>Measure of Success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Positive feedback collected over the delivery period including possible case studies b) Positive feedback after each course with at least an average of 7 out of 10 in satisfaction. c) Positive feedback as well as evidence from google analytics d) Feedback from a dip sample of those who benefitted from this support. e) Positive feedback with physical evidence of savings for our businesses. 	
A15	Social media support for retail business	<p>The Economic Development Team will provide 1-1 support and guidance for businesses not confident with social media.</p> <p>Timeframe Starting in 2023</p> <p>Measure of Success At least 5 retail businesses will be supported, and feedback will be at least a score of 7 out of 10.</p>	

Ref	Action	Implementation	RAG
A16	Delivering 'what works' and identifying new methods of support	<p>Work with stakeholders to help facilitate and add value to existing activities and investigate new where appropriate.</p> <p>b) Ashford business group, Ashford Wide, with their activities. Continue to support existing group, Ashford Wide, with their activities.</p> <p>c) Lower Sunbury existing business group with Christmas Fair Continue to support existing business group with Christmas Fair</p> <p>d) Sunbury Cross Shopping Centre to have Christmas attraction Build on Christmas tree and lights from 2021 – investigate with Shopping Centre to have Christmas attraction</p> <p>e) Shepperton Launch a regular monthly artisan market to showcase the town and attract footfall. Investigate holding an irregular 'brocante' and / or vegan market to attract new clientele.</p> <p>Timescale:</p> <p>a) Ongoing</p> <p>b) Oct/Nov 2022</p> <p>c) Oct/Nov 2022</p> <p>d) October 2023</p>	