
REPORT TO:	Environmental & Development Services	AGENDA ITEM: 7
DATE OF MEETING:	7 March 2013	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	Mark Alflat Director of Operations	OPEN
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SUBJECT:	Our Town First – Funding for Town Team Partners	REF:
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	All	TERMS OF REFERENCE: EDS03, EDS10, EDS11 & EDS15

1.0 Reason for Exempt

1.1 Not applicable.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that the Committee supports the proposals for the allocation of the 'Our Town First' grant award, for the development of town centre initiatives during the remainder of 2012/13 and in 2013/14. Further to endorse the future branding of Swadlincote as the 'Market Town of The National Forest'.

3.0 Purpose of Report

3.1 To seek Member's approval to create a mechanism for releasing the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) un-ring fenced grant award of £10,000 to spend on initiatives that are congruent with the Action Plan of the Swadlincote Town Centre Vision & Strategy.

4.0 Executive Summary

4.1 Not applicable.

5.0 Detail

Background

5.1 The Government has expressed concern at the problems of High Streets and commissioned a study into the issue, one outcome of which was the 'Portas Pilots', involving Mary Portas. In two rounds, the Portas Pilot initiative generated over 400 applications nationwide for just 24 grants of £100,000, with applicants submitting a YouTube video with their application form. The South Derbyshire Partnership applied on behalf of a Swadlincote Town Team in both rounds.

- 5.2 Although unsuccessful in the main awards category, the Government awarded Swadlincote £10,000 under a programme called 'Our Town First'.
- 5.3 This Town Team Partner funding aims to give towns which produced quality bids the opportunity to get some of their plans off the ground, trailing some of their bid proposals or modifying them to take account of other opportunities in town centre management. In addition to the grant, Town Team Partners benefit from:
- an advice line and a network of advisers managed by the Association of Town Centre Management, as well as informative events;
 - direct mentoring and visits from a range of retail experts;
 - regular meetings with other Town Teams to share lessons learned, tips and ideas; and,
 - an online community to receive advice and information from retail experts.
- 5.4 In addition, some trade organisations, such as the National Association of British Market Authorities, have offered groups of towns working together discounts in purchasing goods and services.
- 5.5 To secure the funding, Town Team Partners were required to complete a proforma confirming the support of their local MP. Given the key role of the District Council in the development of the town centre, it is important to gain Members' views on the way forward. As a general approach, it would seem logical that the grant should be used to implement elements of the Action Plan of the Swadlincote Town Centre Vision & Strategy.
- 5.6 Working with Swadlincote Chamber of Trade, the South Derbyshire Partnership and other partners, a Town Team action plan is being created with a series of measures to make Swadlincote a more attractive place to visit, invest in and to increase trading opportunities. The Town Team action plan is exploring the use of the £10,000 to develop projects that will enhance the town's market town brand and reputation, encouraging greater footfall. One option is to develop the brand image of Swadlincote as the 'Market Town of The National Forest'.
- 5.7 The South Derbyshire Partnership Board discussed this and whilst several partners liked alternative strap lines such as "the Heritage Town of The National Forest" there was support for this 'brand'. The success of Swadlincote in winning the National Association of British Markets Award (NABMA) for Best Small Outdoor Market 2013 would underpin this approach and the Committee is invited to endorse the concept of Swadlincote as the 'Market Town of The National Forest'.
- 5.8 The Portas Pilot bids included a range of ideas such as: Flash events, entertainment and market town events (traditional and modern, including street markets); and, New retail enterprise initiatives and activities that combine the public realm, heritage and independent retailers (e.g. the 'Wedding Bells' idea which seeks to link related retailers and wedding venues across the town to retain as much wedding spend within the local economy as possible). Equally the competitive advantage of universally free car parking creates opportunities and investment could be made in smarter, safer parking to assist the town's visitors. Swadlincote's bid also identified the development of retail kiosks and an action research feasibility project is being considered if a construction training partner can be identified. Finding solutions to the small number of long term vacant premises was a theme of the original bid, especially encouraging dialogue and engagement with absentee landlords. Whilst

this work is probably beyond the scope of this funding, Town Team Partners will be looking to work in collaboration with other towns to mirror any successful interventions trailed elsewhere.

- 5.9 These ideas each need to be developed into more detailed proposals and plans are being finalised but the Partners would like to get going as soon as possible. It is therefore proposed that the Committee delegates sign off of the Town Team action plan to the Chair and Vice Chair of this Committee in consultation with the Chair of Swadlincote Chamber of Trade and the Chair of the South Derbyshire Partnership.

Service Proposal

5.10 It is proposed to put in place an action plan based upon the following activities:

- providing enterprise support to fledgling retailers (eg. offering business advice and training);
- seeking to maximise the usage of available parking spaces (eg. exploring a Park Smart Town Centre App);
- marketing the town and staging events (eg. developing the branding: Market Town of The National Forest);
- undertaking themed promotions (eg. developing the 'Wedding Bells' initiative); and,
- exploring the provision of start-up retail space (eg. 'pop-up' shops/kiosks).

6.0 Financial Implications

6.1 South Derbyshire District Council will be the accountable body for the DCLG grant.

6.2 The cost of implementing the proposals will be met from the DCLG grant and, should any additional funding be required, this will be met from existing budgets.

7.0 Corporate Implications

7.1 Supporting businesses in South Derbyshire contributes directly to the Corporate Plan's vision to 'make South Derbyshire a better place to live, work and visit' and to the theme of 'Sustainable Growth & Opportunity – strengthening South Derbyshire's economic position within a 'clean' and sustainable environment'.

7.2 The District Council will promote the activities to businesses in the area, through the Policy & Communications and Economic Development teams.

8.0 Community Implications

8.1 Supporting businesses in the area contributes directly to the South Derbyshire Partnership's Sustainable Community Strategy vision of 'a dynamic South Derbyshire, able to seize opportunities to develop successful communities, whilst respecting and enhancing the varied character of our fast growing district'. 'Sustainable Development' is highlighted as a key theme, with the aim of achieving 'sustainable existing and new communities that meet the population's needs and aspirations.

9.0 Conclusions

- 9.1 Approving a mechanism to begin work as soon as possible on investment in the town centre by allocating the 'Our Town First' funding is prudent and prescient. It will proactively assist in launching Swadlincote as the 'Market Town of The National Forest' and help new and existing town centre businesses to survive and grow in what are challenging economic conditions.

10.0 Background Papers

- 10.1 Letter from the Department of Communities and Local Government confirming the award.