

RETAIL DEVELOPMENT PROPERTY BRIEFING PAPER 12

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Funding the Improvement of Town Centres & Town Centre Management Schemes

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In the current planning climate increasing pressure is being placed on town centres to accommodate a greater mix of uses and higher densities. If our cities and towns are to cope and deliver the facilities and services which business and the public need then town centre improvements and management will have to be embraced effectively.

This paper gives an overview on how this can be achieved.



Introduction

It is now widely recognised by Local Authorities that in order to sustain the vitality and viability of town centres it is necessary to be proactive towards enhancing their attractiveness to shoppers and other users.

Although some Local Authorities have appointed Town Centre Managers and sought to implement town centre management schemes in many cases this action initiative struggled against a lack of funding. Local Authorities have sought to form partnerships between the public and private sector and some successes have been achieved but generally it appears that the results have been modest.

Making significant physical and other improvements to town centres is very expensive. Even after the initial implementation there is the considerable ongoing cost of maintaining those improvements. A more radical solution to funding the improvement of town centres needs to be found.

A Combined Planning & Business Plan Solution?

At the same time as preparing a planning and transport strategy for their town centre, Local Authorities should also prepare an accompanying practical business plan. This should incorporate the following broad subjects: -

- the existing deficiencies of the town centre;
- the improvements that need to be achieved;
- the cost of those improvements;
- the way in which the improvements are to be funded and implemented;
- the target programme for implementation;
- how the improvements are to be maintained and managed;

A “Package Deal” Approach?

Any Town Centre Strategy must be sensitive to the practical problems of implementation and financial viability. Local Plan policies must be viable both physically and financially. There are too many historic examples of planning proposals that are not.

This necessitates the identification and assessment of self-financing packages to support proposals within an administrative area. It is clearly vital to generate both capital for the initial implementation of the sought after town centre improvements and income for the future maintenance of assets.

The packages could include permitting developments that would not otherwise be seen as being sustainable in isolation or on narrow planning criteria but will have beneficial or regenerative qualities which will act as a catalyst or support other initiatives as part of an overall plan. The developments might be on local authority owned land or privately owned land transferred to the local authority in order to generate long term income.

Depending on the circumstances, the plan can also accommodate requirements for integrated transport facilities and other matters covered by PPG13 such as car parking and park and ride arrangements.

The impact of competing centres and the potential for expenditure leakage must be addressed so that any business plan can allow for the effective promotion for the town centre to reverse any negative existing or future trends.

Possible Content of a Town Centre Improvement Business Plan

In considering the detail of the “business plan” the particular circumstances and characteristics of each town centre must be identified and appraised. No two business plans will be the same because of the uniqueness of every centre. Some of the detailed components are, however, likely to be:-

1. Existing Town Centre Strategy analysis.
2. Town Centre Vitality & Viability (Health Checks).
3. Public Consultation options.
4. Deficiencies of the Town Centre and competition.
5. Desired/Priority Improvements.
6. Outline Proposals and Costings.
7. Sources of Funding and Possible Partners.
8. Financial Returns/Implications.
9. Planning Implications.
10. Implementation and Programme.
11. Future Maintenance.
12. Business plan document and promotion.

Town centre management is an established subject but who pays and how it is implemented is not so clear. These hurdles must be overcome if our existing centres are to achieve the aspirations of all stakeholders and respond to the emphasis now being placed upon them.

What Next?

Chase & Partners have a team of planners, surveyors and advisers that can assist in the preparation and implementation of both business plans and supporting packages of proposals.

Where appropriate, such plans can be linked into established vitality and viability indicators as promoted in PPG6. If these Health Checks have not already been assessed or need upgrading then such an exercise can be undertaken as part of the business plan assessment.

Development options can also be considered in accordance with current Government guidance as set out in PPG6 in respect of the Sequential Approach for site selection.

Ongoing monitoring will be vital if initial improvements are to be maximised and future potential recognised and capitalised upon.

FURTHER INFORMATION

In recent years, Jim Morrissey has advised many private sector clients and over 50 Local Planning Authorities on retail strategies, policies and proposals as Planning Director of Chase & Partners, Commercial Property Consultants and previously as Director of Planning and Development Consultancy at Colliers Erdman Lewis, the West End Property Consultancy.

Graham Chase, Senior Director of Chase & Partners is the immediate past Chairman of the Commercial Market Panel of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and in his capacity of Retail Property Spokesman appeared before the House of Commons Select Committee investigating Shopping Centres and their Future.

Further copies of this and previous briefing papers may be obtained from Graham Chase as may additional information or assistance on planning and development issues.

Chase & Partners provide comprehensive retail planning and development services to the private sector and Local Authorities, including 'health checks' and retail impact assessments, and the sequential approach. Graham Chase and Jim Morrissey, Director of Chase & Partners, have advised over 100 private sector clients and 50 Local Authorities on retail planning matters in the past 4 years.

Prepared by
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