

**WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**THURSDAY 17 MARCH 2016**

**MARRIOTTS WALK UPDATE**

**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

**(Contact: Simon Wright, Tel: (01993) 861533)**

(The report is for information)

**1. PURPOSE**

To provide the committee with an update on the Marriotts Walk Shopping Centre.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That, the report be noted.

**3. BACKGROUND**

3.1. In 2013 the committee established a small working group to consider the impact of the Marriotts Walk development from an economic development perspective both in Witney and the surrounding area.

3.2. A report produced by that group was considered at the November 2014 meeting and it was agreed to note the conclusions and receive an annual update in respect of progress at the centre.

3.3. The main conclusions of the review were as follows:

Challenges for Traders in Witney

3.4. The Review Group noted the rapid growth of internet retailing and the variation in rent and business rates between prime town centre property and edge and out of town developments. However, with regard to internet sales, it was noted that both traditional stores and some companies that had been established as on-line retailers were becoming multi-channel operations.

3.5. The threat to independent retailers of the underlying viability of their business when faced with rising costs. It was acknowledged that business rates were often perceived as a key factor in this respect but this only represented a relatively small proportion of operational overheads when compared to rent and staff costs.

3.6. It was recognised that future retail development proposed in the County, and in particular the redevelopment of the Westgate Centre in Oxford, could have a detrimental impact upon retailing in the town and Members were keen to ensure that the Council exercised its influence to strengthen and support the retail sector as far as possible.

3.7. The committee should also note the separate initiative approved by Cabinet to support independent retailers in their business planning. This demonstrates that measures are being taken which are of relevance to issues raised during the review.

Car Parking

3.8. The importance of free parking, together with the revised parking strategy, in supporting the viability of town centres was noted.

## Economic Climate

- 3.9. The Review Group noted that the reduction in disposable income and fall in consumer confidence occasioned by the financial climate at the time had suppressed retail demand. However both the Marriotts Walk development, Woolgate Centre and other retailers continued to trade well and remained relatively content.

## Overall Conclusions

- 3.10. The Review Group considered that in a difficult economic climate the performance of the Marriotts Walk centre had remained strong as had retail generally in Witney.
- 3.11. It was acknowledged that there were still a lot of challenges and was an issue that the committee could monitor in coming years by way of update reports taking in to account the issues raised during discussions and any other factors that may arise in respect of the centre.

## 4. UPDATE/CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1. Overall the centre is still performing well with high occupancy of the retail units, only the unit adjacent to Marks and Spencer is vacant, and whilst there has been a couple of units closing these have been re-let quickly.
- 4.2. Retail trading in Witney as a whole has generally remained strong with very few vacant units in the primary shopping areas. Since the review the Woolgate shopping centre expansion has opened and is fully occupied.
- 4.3. The redevelopment of the Westgate Centre in Oxford is underway and is scheduled to be completed in Autumn 2017 so the impact on retail in Witney cannot be assessed at the current time.
- 4.4. A review of the Council's Car Parking Strategy is being undertaken including all the car parks in Witney. A public consultation has been carried out and the results will be considered by Cabinet and the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
- 4.5. Officers will also be liaising with the centre manager and a verbal update will be given at the meeting.

## 5. ALTERNATIVES/OPTIONS

None

## 6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None

## 7. RISKS

None

## 8. REASONS

The success of retail in the district accords with the Council aim to work in partnership to sustain vibrant, healthy and economically prosperous towns and villages with full employment

Keith Butler - Head of Democratic Services

(Author: Simon Wright, Tel: (01993) 861533; EMail: [simon.wright@westoxon.gov.uk](mailto:simon.wright@westoxon.gov.uk) )

Date: 7 March 2016

Background Papers: None