

## **Retail Support + Wincanton Town Centre Issues**

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### **Purpose of the Report**

To provide an update on the Retail Support Initiative (RSI) during the first six months of 2015/16.

### **Public Interest**

Supporting and helping to improve the retail offer in the towns and villages across Area East.

### **Recommendations:**

- (1) To note the update on the Retail Support Initiative
- (2) To note the proposed course of action in respect of 24 High St, Wincanton

### **Background**

Members will be aware that the Retail Support Initiative (RSI) was set up eight years ago with a focus on town centres; it was subsequently extended to include village & farm shops. Over this time the scheme has been well received making 40+ grant awards across the area during the last five years.

In July 2014 Members approved the principle of a Wincanton 'top-up' scheme, the detail of which was worked up by officers. Members approved the top-up scheme in October 2014 and a member of the Area Support Team visited eligible businesses in Wincanton during October/November last year. A follow-up exercise was undertaken this Autumn across the three towns. As far as possible a 'face to face' approach was adopted but in some instances a leaflet was left. Eligible businesses outside the three market towns are emailed details of the scheme.

As part of our more general town centre 'health check' monitoring, vacant shop units in the town centres are recorded. We provide a comprehensive trend assessment as part of the annual out-turn report but as at November 2015 there were 19 empty units across the three towns. A list of these units is attached at Appendix 1.

The current Operating Criteria is attached at Appendix 2 and an Assessment Form is attached at Appendix 3.

### **2015/16 Operation**

Members received a report on the operation of Retail Support Initiative during 2014/15; the awards made between April and October 2015 are listed below:

<b>Business</b>	<b>Amount Awarded</b>
Alex Appleton Jewellers, Wincanton	£2,500
Trowbridge Gallery, Castle Cary	£975
Bishops Electrical, Castle Cary	£1,000
Wincanton Wholefood, Wincanton	£300

### **Wincanton Town Centre Issues**

For some time Members have expressed concern about the state of certain shop units in Wincanton.

Through a discretionary planning power known as a Section 215 Notice (of Town & Country Planning Act 1990) the District Council, as Local Planning Authority (LPA), has the power to require land or buildings to be cleaned up where they adversely affect the amenity of the area. A notice is served on the owner, setting out the steps to be taken and the timescale allowed to remedy the situation. Normally we would approach the owner informally first and only serve the notice if they do not respond. Ultimately we have powers to carry out the work and recover the cost from the landowner if the circumstances warrant it.

As a first step a letter has been sent to the owners of 24 High Street, advising that if prompt progress is not made to improve the poor external condition of the premises and a guarantee given that works will be undertaken forthwith, the Council will progress enforcement action by way of a Section 215 Notice.

Permission has recently been granted to split the unit in two, these premises would qualify under the Retail Support Initiative 'top-up' grant (maximum £2,500) in Wincanton.

Marketing of 2 Silver Street is currently underway on Rightmove and there are agents handling the sale of the premises. If this does not translate to the sale and their subsequent improvement, it is suggested that a Section 215 Notice be considered for these premises in the future.

### **Financial Implications**

There are currently the following unallocated balances available for the Retail Support Initiative including reserve balances

Revenue element - £7,525

Capital - £1,212

Wincanton 'Top-Up' - £8,700

### **Implications for Corporate Priorities**

A well supported business community

Measured by: An increase in satisfaction by businesses with the specialist support they receive in South Somerset

A vibrant and sustainable Yeovil, Market Towns and Rural Economy

Measured by: Increasing local sustainability measured by the average level of self containment for South Somerset Wards

**Other Implications**

Included within the Area Development Plan

**Background Papers:** Area East Agenda + Minutes June 2015

## Appendix 1

### Empty Shops November 2015

Wincanton	Castle Cary	Bruton
4 Church Street 7 church Street 1 Market Place 3 Market Place 5 Market place Applegarth Mall 24 High Street 36 High Street 47 High Street	2 Market Place Fore Street Cavendish House, Fore St Feature Stone, Station Rd The Triangle The Farthings	6 High Street 78 High Street 91 High Street Bruton House, High St

## Appendix 2

### Operating criteria 2015/16

Percentage contributions cannot exceed 50% of costs and **no** retrospective applications are eligible (i.e. in respect of works which have already been commissioned/started).

Applications over £1000 will be considered by Area East Committee on a monthly basis. Amounts up to £1000 may be considered at any time as a delegated grant in consultation with the Chairman & Ward Member(s).

Area-wide grant levels: **£1,500 to a maximum 50% of project costs as follows:**

#### Eligible costs:

Shop-front improvements, if they enhance the High Street  
Business rates assistance – a contribution to the amount payable for new businesses (which do not compete with another business) in their first two years of trading  
Exceptional projects which add to viability of towns/villages

#### Wincanton top-up

In addition to the area-wide scheme the 'top-up' scheme for Wincanton also offers:

- Maximum grant £1,000 for businesses wishing to move into one of 7\* units currently empty in the town, these are listed at Appendix 2 **or**
- Maximum £300 available to new **and** existing businesses for business improvements and marketing initiatives. For new businesses this could be used towards stock too.

Grants are only available to proprietors/owners with one business/premise and will not exceed 50% of project cost.

\*Eligible empty units in Wincanton at July 2014:

3 Market Place – The Red Lion  
6 High Street – Digital Error  
24 High Street – formerly Green Dragon  
36 High Street – formerly Alldays  
13 Market Street – formerly Boots Chemist#  
1-3 High St – formerly Brocks#  
6 High Street – formerly Chicken Grill/Yummy Yummy#

# now occupied/partly occupied

## **Process**

Applications for Grants are accessed and recommendations made on the basis of a fully completed application form and two 'like for like' quotes. Self-help/DIY schemes may complete the application form and supply a project budget with supporting information.

All grant recipients must accept that the grant may be used for publicity purposes by the District Council. Payment of the grant is done retrospectively, for a completed programme of works on the basis of receipted invoices. Exceptionally officers, in consultation with the Chairman, may release partial payments where there is clear justification for doing so.

The existing assessment and current scoring mechanism favours businesses:

- employing more than 2 people
- in prominent places
- key rural stores/Post Offices
- retailers

**The award is subject to the following standard conditions:**

- The grant award may be used by SSSC for promotional/publicity purposes;
- Grants are paid for approved works/purchases on production of receipted invoices;
- Awards are subject to a summary of the benefit of the scheme being supplied;
- Applicants will normally be expected to draw down the grant within six months of the offer and if not will have to inform us of the reason(s) for the delay. If there is a valid reason, officers can provide a 6 month extension, but beyond this the grant would either be withdrawn or referred Area East Committee to be re-affirmed;
- That appropriate consents are obtained;
- Works requiring listed building/planning consents or building regulation consent will be required to be signed off by the appropriate officer prior to the release of funds;
- If, within three years of a grant award, the business ceases to trade the District Council reserves the right to reclaim the grant on the following basis; year one –100%, year two – 75%, year three – 45%.

**Retail Support Initiative Grant Assessment Form****Date of Assessment:** xx xx 2015**Name of Business:** xx**Date of Application:** xx xx 2015**Project:** xxxxxx**Amount requested:** £xx**Total Project Cost:** £xx**Amount requested (as percentage of the total project cost):** xxxx

Application details completed	
Quotes and other information supplied	
Tenure acceptable	
Delegated decision	
Training need identified	
Consents obtained (specify what/when)	
Grant	
Other issues – parking, access, loading etc	

*(Above section to be completed prior to assessment commencing)***Assessment 1-5 (five being highest/best)**

<b>Business activity</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Period trading (1-5 years)		
Business organisation		
Experience of running a business		
Applicant has clearly identified 'success measures'/milestones		
Duplication with existing retail (scaled, 5=none)		
Financial predictions realistic		
Premises definition *		
2 + employees (< or 2 = 3, >2 = 5)		
Subtotal		

<b>Location</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Local benefit/appeal		
Niche product attracting people to town		
Unit turnover (low turnover = 5)		
Unit profile		
Significant shop front improvement		
Supports wider community activity		
Key rural store (0 or 3)		
Subtotal		

