

LOOKING AFTER OUR TOWN CENTRES

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Cllr C Giel
LEAD OFFICER: Julie Betteridge – Head of Development Strategy
REPORT AUTHOR: Diane Ward & Carol Robertson - Development Strategy Officers

Summary and Recommendation:

Executive is advised of plans to allocate Copeland's funding from DCLG aimed at improving our town centres.

Executive is asked to;

a) approve the outline action plan to allocate the funding

b) approve delegation of detail decision making on the programme to Julie Betteridge (Head of Development Strategy) in consultation with Cllr C Giel (Development Strategy Portfolio holder) with regard detail spend within each town.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In August the Government announced a £3million funding package to help town centres through the recession.
- 1.2 Copeland is one of the successful Local Authorities to have been awarded funding and has been allocated £52,632 to fund creative ways to use its empty shops and re-open them as facilities for communities.
- 1.3 It is expected that by reducing the number of empty shops by either finding a new temporary community use or creating vibrant window displays, the negative impact empty shops can have on the high street will be reduced whilst consumer and business confidence will be increased.
- 1.4 The grants are part of a wider package of help the Government has put in place for town centres, including a new practical guide '*Looking After Our Town Centres*' which gives advice on how to help high streets combat the recession.

2. ARGUMENT

- 2.1 It is proposed that funding will be allocated to each town with decisions made locally, following broad consultation, regarding the schemes put forward.

- 2.2 Whilst there is scope to support events in town centres for example, it is expected that a significant proportion of the funding in each town will be targeted to improving the image of empty shops.
- 2.3 Examples of positive action already undertaken in some UK towns include:
- ... Local artists creating exhibitions in empty shop windows with guided tours and talks with residents and visitors (Malvern & Egremont [see appendix C])
 - ... A former Woolworth's storefront was used to highlight local facilities and attractions, and to promote a 'shop local' message (Chelmsford).
 - ... Temporary use was made of an empty shop to bring together local police community services, including crime prevention, access to SureStart, community rangers and neighbourhood housing (Dewsbury).
 - ... A farmers market has been introduced to revitalise weekend shopping (Brigg, North Lincs)
- 2.4 Whilst schemes will take some time to develop in order to both promote the project and ensure a swift presence within each town, it is proposed up to £7,000 will be used to enable the Pathways to Art project to establish a 12 month studio in Whitehaven and produce window displays in each town before the end of 2009, with a rolling studio programme in Egremont, Millom and Cleator Moor during 2010.
- 2.5 It is envisaged that existing business networks and community organisations will be used to lead the development of projects in each town as outlined in the attached action plan.
- 2.6 It is expected that the majority of the funding will be allocated within 2009-10, and spent by the end of 2010/11.

3. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

3.1 Option 1

Reject the outline action plan: Funding could be distributed differently, ideas for doing so would need to be generated and approved at the next Executive meeting which would delay planning and implementation and therefore also the visible difference on the high street.

3.2 Option 2

Approve the scheme development as outlined with delegation for decision making regarding individual town spend. This would enable the money to be allocated quickly allowing the towns time to plan and prepare their projects. This will enable the difference to be seen quickly on the high streets, important to encourage people to shop locally particularly in the run up to Christmas

3.3 Option 3

Defer approval until detailed scheme developed. This would retain control within the Executive but would delay implementation and provide no ability for the scheme to evolve or respond to changing circumstances.

4. RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 approve the outline action plan to allocate the funding
- 4.2 approve delegation of detail decision making to Julie Betteridge (Head of Development Strategy) in consultation with Cllr C Giel (Development Strategy Portfolio holder) with regard detail spend within each town.

5. FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOURCES OF FINANCE)

- 5.1 Whilst CBC will be accountable for the funding it is expected that the schemes for each town will be organised locally and therefore the majority of the human resource implications will be met through the local groups in each location, but with support from Development Strategy officers
- 5.2 Additional funding may be available through LABGI funding if the local groups choose to allocate their funding to the scheme. West Cumbria Development Agency has also shown an interest in supporting the scheme.
- 5.3 Artists can apply for Arts Council England (ACE) funding, as an extra £500,000 was announced by ACE to help artists turn vacant high street shops into attractive and vibrant places with funding preference being given to artists working in the area of a local authority which has received the additional town centre funding.
- 5.4 Whilst each town will develop its own creative ideas, the scheme as a whole will be project managed by Development Strategy officers who will retain the overview of the scheme, ensure spend is within budget, monitor progress and provide a final report on the impact of the scheme.
- 5.5 Advice has been, and will continue to be, sought from Customer Services to ensure compliance with business rate regulations regarding use of property.

6. IMPACT ON CORPORATE PLAN

- 6.1 This scheme supports the strategic objective 'to continue the development of a strong, diverse local economy (3) through ensuring the town centres remain vibrant and attractive throughout the recession to encourage future investment.

List of Appendices

- Appendix A - Outline Action Plan
- Appendix B – Copy of DCLG notification letter
- Appendix C – Creative Egremont 50a Gallery

List of Consultees:

Julie Betteridge – Head of Development Strategy
Cllr C Giel – Development Strategy Portfolio Holder
Cllr G Blackwell
Peter Tyas – Acting Cultural Services Manager
Corporate Team

CHECKLIST FOR DEALING WITH KEY ISSUES

Please confirm against the issue if the key issues below have been addressed. This can be by either a short narrative or quoting the paragraph number in the report in which it has been covered.

Impact on Crime and Disorder	Yes – vibrant town centres tend to suffer less crime and disorder
Impact on Sustainability	Yes – scheme is designed to support to give support through the recession to ensure sustainable town centres
Impact on Rural Proofing	Yes – Whilst town centre focused, Millom is considered rural.
Health and Safety Implications	All agreed uses would comply with relevant H&S regulations
Impact on Equality and Diversity Issues	Participation in the scheme is not exclusive
Children and Young Persons Implications	Potential for schools, colleges and youth schemes to be involved
Human Rights Act Implications	None
Section 151 Officer Comments	The grant will be reflected in an increase in the Council's approved budget, funded by external grant.
Monitoring Officer Comments	Legal services should become involved should legal agreements be required to use those empty premises. Otherwise no further comments on the report

Key Decision – Yes

Looking after our town centres - Draft Action Plan

Copeland Borough Council has recently received a grant of £52,631.58 to use as it sees fit on ideas to boost the town centres in the borough and transform empty shops into something useful such as a meeting place, a learning centre or a showroom for local artists.

Although the funding is not time limited, it is important that a difference is seen quickly in the towns. Whilst the planning and development of schemes within each town will take time, it is proposed that the Pathways to Art project will receive additional funding (up to £7,000) to enable the project to establish a base in Whitehaven before the end of 2009. The Whitehaven base will be retained for 12 months with a rolling programme in Egremont, Cleator Moor and Millom which will run for four months in each town during 2010, but each will have a window display of the artwork produced by recent participants before the end of 2009 to both fill an empty shop window and celebrate and promote the project.

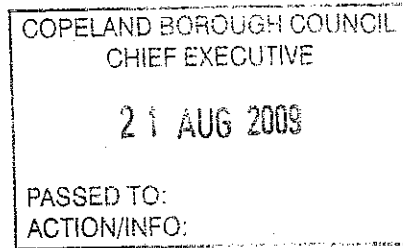
Action	End Date
Compile lists of empty shops and owners in the main towns of the borough.	30.09.09
Internal officers meeting (Julie Betteridge, Diane Ward, Carol Robertson, Bob Collins, Anne Spedding, Peter Tyas, Claire Winterson, Simon Walker & Sarah Mitchell): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ... Agreed need for 'quick win' to ensure project underway before Christmas – Pathways to Art 12 month presence in Whitehaven Town Centre with rolling programme for Cleator Moor, Egremont & Millom during 2010 ... Additional projects to be identified locally 	09.09.09
Approval by Executive for outline action plan, detail to be delegated to J Betteridge & Cllr Giel	22.09.09
Information out to members following Executive decision	23.09.09
Letter to shop owners/ agents summarising project and asking for interest.	30.09.09
Meetings with agents / owners where appropriate.	16.10.09
Discussions in each town with Councillors and relevant groups to generate ideas and identify best consultation method Whitehaven: Enterprise Whitehaven, Chamber of Trade Cleator Moor & Egremont through Cleator Moor Business Forum, RNEC and EARP Millom: South Copeland Tourism Group, MHEDG, Town Council and Chamber of Trade/ Business Network	16.10.09
Agree accommodation for Pathways to Art project in all towns and establish project in Whitehaven	31.10.09
Consultation with public, community groups, schools colleges and local artists <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ... use an empty shop in each town to carry out consultation? 	31.10.09
Window displays from Pathways to Art project in place in Egremont, Cleator Moor	16.11.09

and Millom	
Clarify project process and guidelines including legal (Meanwhile leases etc.), financial implications and additional funding streams as required.	13.11.09
Agree project delivery in each area	20.11.09
Implementation Expect window displays in each town before xmas from variety of groups	10/09 – 12/10
Project Evaluation	31.03.11

Whilst it is hoped that a full scheme will be underway by early 2010, it is hoped several window displays will be in place on the run up to Christmas.

Given the variety of potential uses / displays, preparation time and coordination needed it is unlikely that a full scheme will be developed in its entirety by early 2010, rather the schemes will evolve in each town over a period of time.

Mr Fergus McMorro
Chief Executive
Copeland Borough Council
The Copeland Centre
Catherine Street, Whitehaven
Cumbria
CA28 7SJ



19 August 2009

Dear Mr McMorro,

EXTRA SUPPORT FOR TOWN CENTRES – GRANT DETERMINATION

I am writing about the £3 million funding package to support town centres announced by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, John Denham, on 13 August. Your council is one of the local authorities that is receiving a share of this funding, and **I enclose a copy of the grant determination confirming the amount (£52,631.58) that your authority will now receive.**

The announcement follows the publication in April of the Government's guide "*Looking after our town centres*", a copy of which is enclosed with this letter.

Town centres are facing various challenges as a result of the recession. The sight of boarded-up shops is depressing and can damage people's confidence in their local high street, perhaps prompting them to shop elsewhere. This is especially a problem in more deprived areas that may be less able to absorb the impact of shop closures, and where the recession may be exacerbating existing conditions.

"*Looking after our town centres*" provided practical help for town centres and high streets in response to the recession. It:

- set out the benefits of looking after our town centres, showing how strong partnerships and positive management can help keep them attractive and vibrant places;
- highlighted the range of powers, guidance and tools that can help town centres, and showed some of the creative approaches that local partnerships are already taking in response to the downturn;
- explained the steps that the Government is taking to help local authorities and their partners take positive action in their town centres, particularly in enabling temporary use of boarded-up shops.

Examples of positive action being taken include:

- *Slough* – the Community Multi Services satellite centre occupies a vacant unit on the Slough Trading Estate. As well as catering for people who work in the surrounding businesses, the centre provides computer and internet training for the local community, a job club, and specialist training for those who don't speak English as a first language.
- *Dursley, Gloucestershire* – a parade of vacant shop windows were adapted to display work by local artists, in return for which the artists helped to repaint the shop fronts.
- *Blackburn* – licensed public space used for continental markets, community events, parades, and fairs.
- *Malvern* – local artists created exhibitions in empty high street shop windows. The project also involved guided tours and talks with residents and visitors.
- *Preston* – artists led participatory carnival-making workshops for shoppers in empty retail units in the town centre.
- *Margate* – Thanet District Council's "Windows of Opportunity" scheme, where local artists are bringing new colour to empty shops in Margate, and in the process finding out what types of retail residents want to see in the town in the future.
- *Brigg, North Lincs* – a farmers' market has helped to revitalise weekend shopping.
- *Chelmsford* – use of a former Woolworth's storefront to highlight local facilities and attractions, and to promote a "shop local" message.
- *Dewsbury* – temporary use of an empty shop to bring together local police community services, including crime prevention, access to Sure Start, community rangers and neighbourhood housing.

These and other examples show that local authorities and their partners are already being creative in thinking of ways to support their town centres and local high streets. The additional funding that we are allocating to your authority recognises its relatively high level of deprivation and the high vacancy rate for retail units within your authority.

As "*Looking after our town centres*" highlighted, local authorities who have taken action have found that town centre partnerships including, where relevant, local town councils, business representatives, community organisations, and local service providers, offer a strong foundation on which to plan and implement strategies for keeping centres looking attractive for local people and visitors.

The following paragraphs provide advice on where you can go for additional ideas and support.

CLG are working with the Development Trusts Association to support the Meanwhile Project. This aims to re-animate vacant spaces by allowing local people and community groups to experiment with new projects and enterprises, thereby relieving the burden for landlords of an empty property, and supporting high streets by stimulating new footfall and users in the town centre. To find out more about what other town centres are doing to encourage "meanwhile" community uses of empty shops, have a look at the website at www.meanwhile.org.uk. This includes information about emerging and planned projects and a

link to the meanwhile network where people can share experiences on uses, leases, insurance, rates and other issues.

Arts Council England has made available additional funding of up to £500,000 to support artists and arts organisations who wish to develop projects which animate spaces in town centres, including empty shops. The Arts Council intend this funding to target those areas in receipt of CLG funding to help them carry out artistic activities. Local authorities that choose to use some of this funding to promote arts related uses in town centres are encouraged to work in partnership with artists and arts organisations who can apply for additional and complementary funding from the Arts Council. For further information about this funding through their Grants for the Arts programme please contact the Arts Council on 0845 300 6200 or see details on the website at www.artscouncil.org.uk/actiononrecession.

DIUS (now BIS) published *The Learning Revolution* White Paper in March 2009. It committed to setting up a **£20m Transformation Fund for informal learning** offering grants to partnerships with innovative proposals for opening up learning to new groups and strengthening the informal learning infrastructure during 2009-10. By the 12 July deadline, BIS had received around 1,300 bids from public, private and third sector partnerships. Successful bidders will be informed in early September so that projects, some of which will use vacant premises, can get started. For further information about the Learning Revolution go to www.dius.gov.uk/learningrevolution.

The new Champion for Digital Inclusion, Martha Lane Fox, is launching "**Race Online for 2012**" and is keen to promote the opening of temporary Race Online centres in vacant retail space. For more details about Race Online for 2012, or to find out more about setting up temporary **pop up UK online centres** to help disadvantaged local residents, please contact Graham Walker in the Office of the Champion for Digital Inclusion: graham@digitalinclusion.org.uk.

We would encourage local authorities to share the new and innovative approaches that they are developing for boosting their town centres. Forums and events provide ideal opportunities for this to happen; for example the Local Government Association, with the support of the Association of Town Centre Management, will be holding a conference in London on 12 October 2009 on "*helping our high streets on the road to recovery*".

Yours sincerely,



MIKE DESBOROUGH
Head of Local Place Management Team

Creative Egremont

50a Gallery

West Cumbria

Creative use of an unused shop to provide a new arts space for exhibitors and visitors

Egremont in West Cumbria is undergoing a period of extensive regeneration - and when one shop in a renovated building proved hard to let, it was recreated as a new gallery space.

The whole building in question was renovated as part of the Market Town Initiative regeneration project, which is funded by the Northwest Regional Development Agency.

When the owner of the building could not find a tenant for one part, community arts organisation Creative Egremont stepped in with a new idea - to use it as a gallery.

Creative Egremont, a partnership between Grizedale Arts and Egremont and Area Regeneration, delivers a diverse programme of arts and culture as part of the town's regeneration process.



50a Gallery. Photo: Karen Storr

Simon Walker, programme manager at Egremont and Area Regeneration Partnership, said: 'The space for the new gallery was generously donated by the owner rent-free for a minimum of a year, and is offered for free to both exhibitors and to visitors. It aims to be challenging, and also to give a new and exciting aspect to the streetscape, attracting the interest of passers-by and engaging people in the arts as they go about their day-to-day life.

'It has allowed young artists, especially from the University of Cumbria, to be able to exhibit in an interesting and affordable space.

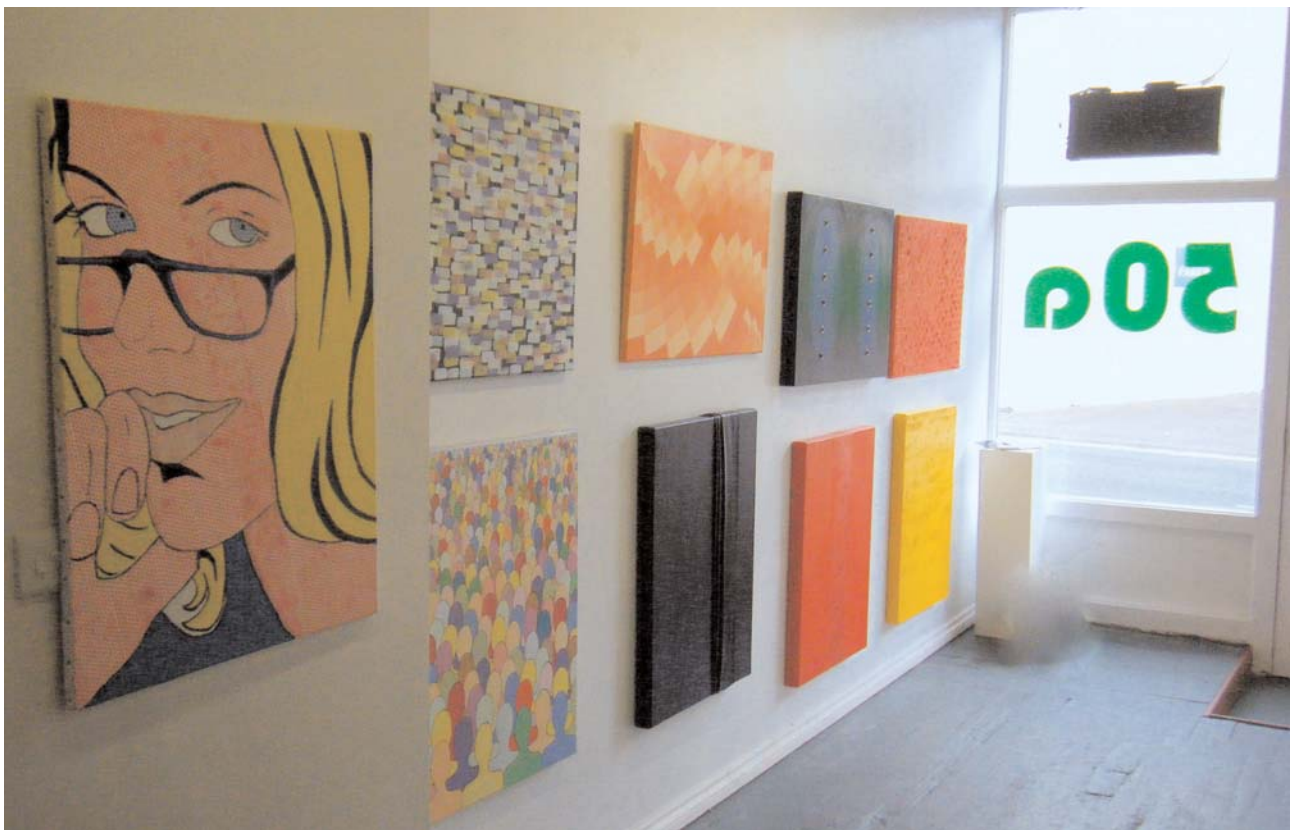
'Adding an additional gallery space

complements the existing arts and crafts galleries, and also permanent works of art such as Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane's Greasy Pole sculpture.

'It is helping us to build the critical mass required to promote the town as a centre of activity in the creative and cultural sectors.'

Creative Egremont receives support from a wide variety of organisations. Arts Council England, North West contributed to its funding with £120,000 from our Grant for the arts scheme. Grizedale Arts is also an Arts Council regularly funded organisation.

<http://www.creative-egremont.org/>



50a Gallery. Photo: Karen Storr