



RUGBY TOWN CENTRE ACTION PLAN 2016 – 2020





INTRODUCTION

Rugby's one of the fastest growing boroughs in the country, with major new housing, retail and employment developments driving growth and investment.

We have a rising population, set to reach 130,000 in the next 15 years, and ambitious plans for the future, including the opening of the World Rugby Hall of Fame.

Like many town centres across the country, Rugby town centre has faced a number of challenges in recent years.

In order to thrive, our town centre needs to change and adapt to meet these challenges.

Working with our partners and in consultation with businesses and residents, we have drawn up the Rugby Town Centre Action Plan to support the delivery of a town centre fit for the future.

The action plan outlines a vision to build on the town centre's strengths – the strong independent retail sector, the wide range of food and drink outlets, and its cultural offer: Rugby School, Rugby Art Gallery and Museum, and the Rugby Football Museum.

We also aim to capitalise on the success of our Rugby World Cup 2015 celebrations, with the World Rugby Hall of Fame the centrepiece of our plans going forward to maximise the potential of Rugby's unique status as the birthplace of the game.

As a council, we're just one of a number of key stakeholders who have an important role to play in reinvigorating our town centre.

However, by working together to deliver this action plan, we can take significant steps towards making Rugby town centre a better place to live, work and visit.



Cllr Heather Timms,
Portfolio Holder for
Growth & Investment
Rugby Borough Council



BACKGROUND RESEARCH AND CONSULTATION

At the end of 2015 a consultation took place with residents, businesses and key stakeholders to develop a new action plan for the town centre.

In addition to telephone and on-street surveys, businesses and organisations with an interest in the town centre were invited to workshops, which provided an opportunity to generate ideas and ask questions on the future direction of the town centre.

The focus of discussions covered four main areas, which now form the basis of the action plan:

- physical environment
- town centre uses
- marketing
- investment

Following the consultation and the announcement of the World Rugby Hall of Fame opening in Rugby, a fifth area of focus – the visitor economy – has been added to the action plan.



THE VISION

"A prosperous and attractive town centre which complements and connects to the retail parks on Leicester Road, offering a wide range of shops, leisure and entertainment opportunities for both residents and visitors, alongside public services and new homes for residents."



OBJECTIVE 1: DELIVER IMPROVEMENTS TO THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE TOWN CENTRE

Rugby town centre offers a generally attractive shopping environment, with many streets protected by conservation areas.

There is a long-term vision to enhance the accessibility and quality of the public realm, which would require potential investment from not only the local authority, but key partners.

A number of short, medium and long-term recommendations have been developed by an

independent consultant, providing a framework for future improvements. This promotes open/green spaces, shared surfaces between pedestrians and cars, whilst looking to link areas of the town, including out-of-town shopping, more effectively.

The market is viewed as an asset which could be better used, attracting shoppers to the town centre; therefore a review will take place to determine how to achieve this.

Action	Lead organisation	Key partners	Timescales
Assess the feasibility of delivering a public realm enhancement scheme in the heart of the town centre	Rugby Borough Council	Warwickshire County Council	September 2017
Review the market's, positioning, function and how it is promoted	Rugby Borough Council	Rugby First, market traders	July 2017
Review the current provision of car parking spaces and identify regeneration opportunities	Rugby Borough Council	Rugby First	July 2017
Make internal and external improvements to the Clock Towers shopping centre, alongside a marketing rebrand	Clock Towers Shopping Centre	Rugby Borough Council	TBC
Prioritise other areas in the town centre to extend the public realm enhancement scheme	Rugby Borough Council	Warwickshire County Council	June 2020
Improve connections between the town centre and out-of-town shopping areas	Rugby Borough Council	Warwickshire County Council	June 2020



OBJECTIVE 2: ENCOURAGE AN INCREASED NUMBER OF RESIDENTIAL DWELLINGS IN THE TOWN CENTRE, CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT FOR FOOD AND DRINK, LEISURE, CONVENIENCE SHOPPING AND INDEPENDENT RETAIL

In December 2015, the council’s development strategy team published a draft of the emerging Local Plan, setting out a vision, policies and proposals for future growth in the borough up to 2031. The Local Plan will contain planning policies that will regulate development within the town centre during this period.

Changes to existing adopted policies have been proposed in order to support the town centre in adapting to changing circumstances. It is proposed to alter the boundary of the town centre so a smaller area is designated - this will allow for the ‘deregulation’ of areas on the periphery of the town centre, increasing flexibility for the change of use or redevelopment of buildings.

The area designated as the ‘primary shopping area’ is also proposed to be reduced, with primary and secondary frontages introduced within it. This allows for the protection of the retail core of the town centre but also provides more flexibility around the types of business that can occupy units in other areas.

This proposal aims to support retail in the town centre and also promote a strong food, drink and leisure sector.

Finally, the emerging Local Plan proposes the introduction of more residential units across the town centre at first floor level and above, or as part of redevelopment. This proposal aims to increase the number of people living in the town centre, which in turn has a positive impact on its viability and vitality.

The timetable for the development of the Local Plan will see adoption during 2017.

Action	Lead organisation	Key partners	Timescales
Reduce the primary shopping area through the borough’s Local Plan, creating more flexibility for the uses of town centre units	Rugby Borough Council	N/A	July 2016



OBJECTIVE 3: DEVELOP AN EFFECTIVE AND COHESIVE APPROACH TO MARKETING THE TOWN CENTRE WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS

There are currently a number of different brands, events and activities, managed by several stakeholders, used to promote Rugby town centre. An external marketing agency has been engaged to review these approaches, identifying their key characteristics, target groups, strengths and weaknesses. Following this, a structured marketing plan will be developed with key stakeholders. The approach will ensure partners are working together to promote the town centre in a cohesive way, including the development of a new or existing brand.

Marketing activities will cover a website, social media, email communications and printed publications.

This will link to a plan to promote the free public wi-fi network and benefit from the associated marketing opportunities.

An annual programme of events will also be continued and reviewed on an on-going basis to ensure the delivery of desired outcomes.

Action	Lead organisation	Key partners	Timescales
Develop a new or existing brand for the town centre and the associated marketing tools	Rugby Borough Council	Rugby First	July 2016
Define a strategy for customer data collection and analysis	Rugby Borough Council	Rugby First	July 2016
Deliver a social media campaign on multiple platforms	Rugby First	Rugby Borough Council	August 2016 onwards
Manage mailshots and promotions to town centre customers	Rugby First	Rugby Borough Council	August 2016 onwards
Update, print and distribute publications to target audiences	Rugby First	Rugby Borough Council	August 2016 onwards
Maintain a website promoting the town's retail and leisure offer	Rugby First	Rugby Borough Council	September 2016 onwards
Promote and manage the town centre public wi-fi network	Rugby First	Rugby Borough Council, Elephant wi-fi	September 2016 onwards
Update the content and maintain visitor interpretation boards around the town	Rugby First	Rugby Borough Council	September 2016 onwards
Deliver an annual programme of events covering culture and food and drink	Rugby First	Rugby Borough Council	On-going



OBJECTIVE 4: PROMOTE THE TOWN'S VISITOR ECONOMY AND BUILD ON RUGBY'S LINKS TO THE GAME

Events and activities for Rugby World Cup 2015 had a very positive impact on the town centre economy and it is important to build on this legacy.

The recently opened World Rugby Hall of Fame attraction provides a huge opportunity to do this, better linking attractions and businesses in the town.

Work will take place to improve Rugby as a visitor destination and attract people from local, regional, national and international markets, through a partnership approach.

Action	Lead organisation	Key partners	Timescales
Open a World Rugby visitor attraction in the existing Art Gallery & Museum building	Rugby Borough Council	World Rugby	November 2016
Promote coach parking facilities at Westway for tour groups	Rugby Borough Council	Rugby First	November 2016
Develop better links with key attractions in the town, promoting a more cohesive visitor experience	Rugby Borough Council	Webb Ellis Rugby Football Museum, Rugby School	November 2016
Support the continuation of the Town Guides volunteer scheme	Rugby Borough Council	Webb Ellis Rugby Football Museum, Rugby School	On-going
Establish a Destination Management Partnership (DMP) for Rugby	Rugby Borough Council	Rugby First, Webb Ellis Rugby Football Museum, Rugby School, Warwickshire County Council, local businesses and hotels	April 2017
Strengthen relationships with Rugby World Cup organisers and promote the town during Japan 2019	Rugby Borough Council	Rugby First, Webb Ellis Rugby Football Museum, Rugby School, Warwickshire County Council	September 2019



OBJECTIVE 5: DEVELOP A PLAN TO ATTRACT INVESTMENT AND NEW BUSINESSES IN THE TOWN CENTRE

In recent years, a business start-up service and grants schemes have helped new businesses to locate in the town centre. The same level of support will be continued, but with a greater focus on providing existing businesses with additional skills to grow, for example through seminars or coaching.

The national landscape of business rates is changing, with a number of reforms announced by the government in the 2016 budget coming into effect from April 2017.

At the same time, the Valuation Office, responsible for setting business rates, will revalue all properties in the UK, a process which takes places every five years.

Rugby First has taken the responsibility of encouraging businesses to contact the Valuation Office to ensure the rateable values for individual properties is correct and will continue to do this until revaluation takes place.

It is hoped this will ensure town centre businesses are paying a fair level of business rates and ultimately save money in the long term.

Action	Lead organisation	Key partners	Timescales
Deliver a seminar and coaching scheme helping town centre businesses to grow	Rugby First	Rugby Borough Council, Warwickshire County Council, Chamber of Commerce	On-going
Attract investment through commercial property enquiries and retail exhibitions	Warwickshire County Council	Rugby Borough Council	On-going
Encourage businesses to request revaluations of property rateable values	Rugby First	Valuation Office	April 2017
Continue to monitor the impact of changes to business rate legislation nationally and locally	Rugby Borough Council	Rugby First	On-going

COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

If you require any further information, or have any ideas on how the action plan can be implemented, please contact Michael Beirne, Economic Investment Officer, Rugby Borough Council, Town Hall, Evreux Way, Rugby, CV21 2RR.

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