

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE			
PORTFOLIO AREA: COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES/HEALTH & WELL-BEING/ECONOMIC PROSPERITY			
Date of Meeting:	17th December 2001		
Public			
Key Decision:	Yes	Recorded in Forward Plan:	No
Inside Policy Framework			

Title: LONGTOWN MARKET TOWN INITIATIVE

Report of: DIRECTOR OF LEISURE & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Report reference: LCD 95/01

Summary:

To report on the progress to date of the Longtown Market Town Initiative.

Recommendations:

The Executive is requested to note the progress of the Longtown Market Town Initiative and the Council's role in it.

They are further requested to note the financial commitment required of them in terms of a three year contribution to the proposed Manager's post and agree to finding the money from it's own budgets, if any of the other options outlines in Section 8 of this report are not successful.

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND OPTIONS

1 Introduction

1.1 Market Town Initiative is one of a eight measures coming out of the Rural White Paper and detailed in Our Countryside: The Future (DETR 2000). Longtown has been chosen as one of nine Cumbrian market towns to be accepted into the Market Towns Initiative (MTI). There are fifteen in the North West Region. The Countryside Agency is responsible to the Government for delivery of the programmes.

1.2 *"Market Towns are seen as a focus for growth in areas which need regeneration, and more generally as service centres and hubs for surrounding hinterland, exploiting their potential as attractive places to live, work and spend leisure time". (DETR 2000)*

1.3 What this means at local level is that Longtown and surrounding parishes will go through an audit process (Health Check), to assess the current situation in relation to the economy, environment, transport, accessibility, social and community issues. The purpose of this exercise is to provide a 'snapshot' of the town and surrounding countryside with factual information about existing services and facilities. This background information will then be balanced with the communities' aspirations, which will form an Action Plan to be delivered over three years.

1.4 The 'health check', which requires knowledge of statistical and local evidence, is being carried out by City, County and Parish Council officers, together with members of the Longtown Investment Partnership and working groups.

2 Co-ordinator's Role

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2.1 One of the first requirements of the Countryside Agency is that Co-ordinators are appointed for up to six months to see that a partnership is formed, that a 'health check' is carried out, and that communities are actively involved in the entire process. The Co-ordinator, working with the partnership must prepare an Action Plan, capable of delivering a programme of projects, to regenerate the market town. The Countryside Agency provides funding up to £20,000 to enable the co-ordination of these specified duties. They also

provide a mentor for the Co-ordinator, and to give support and ensure adequate training is provided to assist the process.

2.2 Recognising the importance of the opportunities the Market Town Initiative presented to the Longtown community, the Community Support Officer with responsibilities for rural areas, requested that she be allowed to carry out the duties of Co-ordinator for the Longtown MTI.

2.3 Acceptance of this, presented another opportunity for Longtown, in that the key partners, Arthuret Parish Council and the Co-ordinator used the matched funding opportunities of Carlisle City Council and the Parish Council support, to draw down £20,000 to meet a number of long held objectives for Longtown; these being that the economic position, built environment, and personal development opportunities, be properly explored, and improvements in all of those areas implemented enthusiastically.

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2.4 The offer of £20,000 was agreed with the proviso that Carlisle City Council would bank roll the amount and measures for this are in place.

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3 Longtown Investment Partnership

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3.1 The Partnership, formed to drive forward the Market Town Initiative process, is made up of local people, including City, County and Parish Councillors, with a good cross section of interests and skills. The collective years of involvement in the local community by those members is in excess of 800 years. There has been no duplication of existing groups as these have become an integral part of the partnership, and many of the partnership members are involved in the other groups. The Countryside Agency has permanent representation on the group. North West Development Agency has asked to be invited to attend meetings and will attend as appropriate.

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4 Consultants

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4.1 Two consultants have been appointed by the Partnership, one to draw

together the first round of a Heritage Lottery Townscape Initiative bid and the other to draw together economic, learning and skills dimension to economic recovery, together also with elements of the Townscape Initiative.

5 Community Consultation Process

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5.1 Every household in Longtown and surrounding parishes (approx. 3000) have been sent a questionnaire covering the core areas where information is needed to inform a regeneration programme. The last similar consultation in Longtown was undertaken in 1968 and produced an 82% return!

5.2 There have also been meetings of interest groups, and community consultation will continue throughout the process. Longtown and many of the parishes have already been involved in community consultations over a number of issues, and this information will be used and built upon.

3. The Economic Development Unit and the Small Business Service are addressing business concerns by focus groups and questionnaires, and will contribute to the writing of the Action Plan.
4. Other methods of Consultation are also being carried out, including one specifically targeted at children and young people.
5. There is an internal Market Towns Initiative Officer's Working Group which is ensuring a co-ordinated response from the Council's point of view.

6 Implementation and Timings

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6.1 The deadline for production of the Action Plan is 15 February 2002. This may be an unrealistic deadline, but the prime motivation for attempting to reach an early conclusion is the repeated message that funds may be available for suitable projects within the current financial year.

6.2 If alternative mechanisms are found to fund agreed projects within this financial year, which do not conflict with the overall aim of the MTI Action Plan, then it would be wise to ensure the Action Plan is a thoroughly thought out, and community agreed strategy and is not compromised by timescales. This does not imply that there should be a dragging of heels in any aspect of this work, because funding is still the objective of the exercise, and in this case, subject to competition from a number of high calibre pieces of work throughout the region.

6.3 The Market Town Initiative must also meet the objectives of a series of other strategy documents, which will need a co-ordinated approach from local authority staff and other agencies.

7 Market Town Manager

7.1 As part of the MTI process, a Market Town Manager must be appointed for three years to encourage and enable the implementation of the Action Plan. A template for the Job Description for the Co-ordinator and Manager's posts has been provided by the Countryside Agency, these are not prescriptive and are provided as a guide to the type of person the Partnership should be looking for.

2. The Countryside Agency will provide £15,000 a year from 1 April 2002, towards a three-year post, and there is an expectation that Local Authorities will be the employing agents for the Manager. There is also an expectation that Local Authorities will secure at least equal financial contributors for that post.

1. Financial Implications for City Council

1. The City Council is contributing to the Health Check through the involvement of various officers, particularly the temporary 'secondment' of the Rural Support Officer to enable the co-ordination of the Action Plan.

2. The Market Town Initiative guidelines stress the important role Local Authorities can play in enabling the process to be turned into positive action. In Longtown's case the City Council has already demonstrated this by providing for the co-ordinator's post. Experience from other towns has shown that the role of a Market Town Manager is vital to the successful implementation of any regeneration programme and it is therefore considered an important role for the City Council to assist by securing a funding package for the Longtown Manager to be in place, say from April 2002.
3. Clearly, the expectation of further Local Authority support will be to help secure a minimum of 50% of the cost of the Manager's post.
4. The local Partnership has not yet agreed a salary for the post, nor confirmed the likely level of administrative support which will be required, but the cost will certainly not be below £30000, including on-costs, of which, the Countryside Agency will contribute a maximum of £15000.
5. There are several options open to the Council to find this contribution, including;
 - a. A bid to the NWDA's Rural Development Programme through which other similar posts have been funded in the past. This programme was established to deliver a wide range of social, economic and environmental benefits to rural areas closely matching the MTI themes. There is a confident expectation that such a bid would be successful and although it is unlikely that it would be agreed for a 3-year period, it could be carried forward on an annual basis subject to satisfactory progress being made.
 - b. A bid for ERDF Objective 2 funding. Again there is an expectation that such a bid would be successful, but because of the business development bias of the required outputs, it would have to be more tightly focused than a generic manager's post. If not used for the manager's post the funding would still be available for other economic development projects which emanate from the Action Plan.
 - c. The County Council could be requested to contribute to the post.
 - d. The possibility of a staff secondment, although this would depend on an officer wishing to apply for the post and being appointed.
 - e. The City Council making £15000 available, to be found either as 'new money' or taken from existing budgets across the range of portfolios which

the MTI Action Plan will cover.

8.6 It is of course likely, that the Council will at some stage, also be requested to make contributions in various ways to some of the various projects which result from the Action Plan, but until the Plan has been developed, there is no indication as to what level or type of support that might be.

2. CONSULTATION

1. Consultation to Date – As outlines in Section 5. Also there is an internal Market Town Initiative Officer's Working Group.
2. Consultation proposed.

3. STAFFING/RESOURCES COMMENTS

Member of CSU 'seconded' temporarily as Co-ordinator. Possible implications for future secondment for Manager's Post.

4. CITY TREASURER'S COMMENTS

Included via CMT.

5. LEGAL COMMENTS

Included via CMT.

6. CORPORATE COMMENTS

CMT discussed on Monday 3rd December.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT ASSESSMENT

To be included in Action Plan.

8. EQUALITY ISSUES

To be included in Action Plan.

9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

To be included in Action Plan.

10. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

To be included in Action Plan.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Executive is requested to note the progress of the Longtown Market Town Initiative and the Council's role in it.

11.2 They are further requested to note the financial commitment required of them in terms of a three year contribution to the proposed Manager's post and agree to finding the money from it's own budgets, if any of the other options outlined in Section 8 of this report are not successful.

12. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The recommendations are made in order to expedite progress on the Longtown Market Town Initiative Action Plan and provide a new post crucial to the implementation of the Plan.

EUAN CARTWRIGHT

Director of Leisure & Community Development

10th December 2001