CERTF Sub Group – Town Centre Vision

# 4/12/20 - Inception meeting

**Present**: Andrew Booton, Diane Savory, Bernice Thompson, John Rowley, Jackie Jobes, Belinda Hunt, Mike Holmes, Nicola Inchbald, Ian George, Alisdair Garbutt, Phil Williams, Joe Roberts

**01 Planning Policy**

* Somewhat complicated as a mix of retained policies from 2006 local plan, JCS (under review). Policy context isn’t as restrictive as we think. Negative policy is primary shopping frontage that restricts uses, but with changes to use class order overlaid over this, broader uses are permissible.
* New Commercial Class E makes changing use much easier without having to go through any planning process.
* From broader business perspective perception is that planning is a barrier. How can we respond to this positively?

**Action** – To create a positive narrative on opportunities for class changes. Delivering positive statements that do not require consultation.

* There is need to look through the lens of the occupier and of the landlord – both with different views. We are open for business. Protection of the environment.
* What are the barriers? Collaboration is important, enabler, understanding the art of the possible, are there some good case studies we can pull into the narrative? Could do on the back of the changes to the Use Class Order – audience landlords/developers/investors

**Action** – once narrative agreed, re-engage with landlords to reframe the conversation. Cheltenham is open for business, we want to see creativity and innovation, come and talk to us now you can be part of it.

**02 Town Centre Zones**

* What are our priorities, what is the narrative in terms of regeneration/recovery?
* There is need to constrain what we focus on in order to achieve quick wins, too big to deal in one go, needs to be broken down and prioritised, with the need to demonstrate progress and outcomes. Think about smaller areas of focus within each zone. What are the greatest areas of potential? Does this mean focussing on specific buildings/spaces?
* Perception – public understanding of the zoning, what and why, positive messaging needed.

**Action** – positive narrative about each zone – Needs to be visionary. Devise a template for each zone.

* Where is the need greatest? Agreement that High Street T should be our priority, with thoughts to split down further to help prioritisation.

**Action** – Priority focus is the High Street T / Promenade – to begin developing a strategy going forward.

* Lower High Street has managed well during Covid due to the nature of businesses, with many food shops and takeaways that were once seen negatively.

**Action** – Bernice to help create a narrative for the LHS.

* There is an emotional attachment to the Promenade, whether you shop there or not. How do we sell the idea of investing, supporting and promoting the Promenade that has a perception of servicing high end retail and wealthy people?
* Bottom up culture – how do places like The Prom be accessible? Pop up mentality could give a rebirth for town centre locations
* Need to be directed by the data e.g. vacancies, use of upper floors, planning interest.

**Action** – to explore and gather in data for vacancies and use.

* Digital, strength of culture and cyber – what can we influence? Need to focus resources on doing something big.
* There is an importance to be visionary and creative. Previously ground floors of schemes would have funded development, but now this is carrying little value – what do we do with these? What feels right in each area and how do we help to support developers to be innovative. Mixes of uses will be important to bottom out. Residential is not a solution on its own. Important that values do not drive development, but we take the opportunity to take the opportunity for disruption.
* Bottom up culture – how do we make places like The Prom accessible? Pop up mentality could give a rebirth for town centre locations.
* Landlords Group had experience of disengaged Landlords and agents. We need to gain unity across the landlords across a given location – can we gain agreement so we can make impact. Smaller areas will be easier to work on and gain the support we need.
* Large festivals are focussed on open spaces, how can these be drawn into town centres?
* For young people, Cheltenham is perceived as boring. How can we shape the strategy to read to different demographics?
* Is there are opportunity to look at grants? Funding opportunities needs to be part of the assessment of each zone.

**Action** – Analysis needed to pin down funding opportunities. Activities we can fund would naturally be a priority to begin with.

**Action** – To determine the optimum timescale for things like pop ups – how do we optimise programming, peak times during festivals for example?