



Corporate & Scrutiny Management Committee

10 March 2014

Report of the Economic & City Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Night-Time Economy Scrutiny Review (Retail & Transport) –Final Report

Summary

1. This final report presents the findings and draft recommendations arising from the scrutiny review completed by the Economic & City Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee in support of the corporate scrutiny review into York's Night Time Economy.

Background to Review

2. At a meeting of the Corporate and Scrutiny Management Committee (CSMC) on 24 June 2013, members agreed a corporate scrutiny theme for this municipal year around the city's night-time economy, noting its connection to a number of the Council's key priorities in its Council Plan 2011-2015.
3. In July 2013 the Economic & City Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee (ECDOSC) agreed to proceed with their NTE review and a Task Group comprising Councillors Hyman (Chair), Semlyen, D'Agorne and Barnes was set up to carry out the review on the Committee's behalf.
4. The Task Group met for the first time in August 2013 to identify a suitable review remit and review workplan.

Aim

5. At the full meeting of ECDOSC on 24 September 2013 Councillor Semlyen relinquished her position on the Task Group, and the full Committee agreed the following review aim as proposed by the Task Group:

‘To improve diverse commercial opportunities after 5pm in, and evening transport to and from, York City Centre.’

Objectives

6. The Task Group met again on 15 October 2013 and agreed the following review objectives:
 - i) Identify barriers to evening retail opening hours by gathering the views of residents and retailers;
 - ii) Investigate solutions to barriers for extended retail opening hours in York
 - iii) Investigate options for improved public transport to support York’s night-time economy
 - iv) Identify suggestions for improvements.

Consultation

7. To support the Night-Time Economy Corporate theme it was agreed that an online survey “Yorkafter5” be undertaken. This ran between 14 October 2013 and 29 November 2013. The survey included questions in support of all the reviews except the health related review for which separate surveys were agreed.
8. Specifically in support of this review, the survey included a number of questions relating to:
 - How people travel into and out of the city in the evening and what factors influenced their choice of transport – see responses to questions 4-6.
 - Whether people would come into or stay later in the city centre if retail opening hours were extended – see responses to question 18.
9. The specific survey responses related to this NTE review were shared at a meeting of city centre retailers and transport operators – see paragraphs 44-67 below - on 10 December 2013.
10. In addition, in support of all the NTE reviews, a number of focus group meetings were organised by the Policy, Performance & Innovation Team to gather residents’ views

Background to the Issues

11. At present at the end of every working day thousands of people simultaneously make the journey home from York city centre, putting pressure on the transport infrastructure. This often leaves a lull of activity in the city centre until the night-time economy picks up, resulting in a disconnect between day and night.
12. Retailers with later closing times can attract people into the city centre and help to entice city centre workers to stay in the centre a little longer, cutting congestion at peak times, and increasing custom for the retail and service sectors.
13. A study of retail trading hours recently undertaken by the Association of Town Centre Managers (ATCM) stated that sales between 5pm and 8pm are typically 50% more than those between 9am and 11am pointing towards the possibility of retailers opening later and closing later to capture extra spend. The ATCM estimate that revising trading hours to open later and close later will increase sales by 10 - 12%.
14. The ATCM also promotes initiatives such as Alive after Five to create an early evening vibrancy with a good and diverse range of activities to cover the “dead period” between 5pm and 8pm. The aim is to bring visitors to city centres as well as encourage city centre workers to stay after work.
15. Should a need for change be identified it may well be that this would not necessarily result in longer working hours for retail staff – just working hours that are more compatible to the needs of the modern consumer.
16. In addition, getting people safely into the city and home again after an evening out is a prime requirement in improving the night-time economy. It is therefore acknowledged that there is a need in York to further develop a safe, affordable and regular late night transport system to serve the city centre as well as providing secure late night car parks.

Initial information gathered

17. The Task Group considered the findings from the last council review into the night-time economy “York After Dark” which was presented to the former Economic Development Partnership Board in 2007 – see: <http://modgov.york.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=123&MId=3041&Ver=4>

18. At that time the Board supported in principle the development of a vibrant, diverse and inclusive evening economy in York and called for a further report to be presented on a costed action plan to support the development of the evening economy in the city centre. However, the Board ceased to exist in 2008 and therefore never received the requested action plan.
19. To help their considerations the Task Group requested information on cities similar to York to establish a benchmark for the night-time economy and to look at best practice elsewhere.
20. Colchester: Extending retail opportunities was an ambition they shared but had not yet achieved. There was a need to achieve a “critical mass” of shops opening later but in a recession businesses were reluctant to risk more costs by having staff until 8pm. Some major retailers had tried to galvanise the rest of the centre by having late night shopping on Wednesdays but with little success.
21. Lincoln: Has managed to establish a modest Thursday night retail offer in the city centre but only until 7pm, backed mainly by the top dozen retailers. The numbers of shoppers for this was low but just about enough to make the offer viable and sustainable.
22. Sheffield: Some shops and traders stay open longer, to some degree, with John Lewis and Debenhams opening until 9pm on Wednesday. There has been some success in the city where a cluster of independent shops in The Forum, a smaller shopping hub, stay open until 9pm.
23. Bath: Thursday is the late night shopping day, although it tends only to be the major high street stores which open late every Thursday throughout the year, otherwise most shops open late each Thursday in the run-up to Christmas.
24. Chester: Most shops in the city centre close around 5.30pm although there is late-night shopping in the run up to Christmas.
25. Norwich: The Castle Mall, a complex of 70 shops in the city centre, is open until 5.30pm Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday; 8pm on Thursday and 6pm on Saturday while the Chapelfield Shopping Centre, another central location housing 90 shops, cafes and restaurants, is open until 6pm weekdays except Thursday when it is open until 8pm.

26. Oxford: The Westgate Centre comprises 40 outlets in the city centre and closed at 5.30pm with a late night until 8pm on Thursday. The Clarendon Centre, again in the city, opens until 6pm and 7pm on Thursday.
27. York: A sample survey (Annex A) was taken of the closing times of business premises in some of the main shopping streets in York city centre on Friday 1 November 2013. The businesses surveyed included 83 businesses that advertise opening and closing times at the front of the shop. A significant proportion of shops gave no indication of opening or closing times.

Analysis

28. The Committee may want to publicise the findings of the ATCM retail study which notes a significant increase in sale in the early evening compared to mornings - see paragraph 13.
29. In regard to the ATCM promotion 'Alive after Five' detailed at paragraph 14, whilst this does not fall within the specific remit of this review it should be noted that many cities acknowledge the biggest boost to the night-time economy is when special events are held. For example, Hull's Freedom Festival attracted 75,000 people for three days of live music, dance, theatre, comedy, street entertainment, eating, drinking and markets.
30. The brief study of the other cities (paragraphs 20-26) seems to indicate that few have been able to demonstrate any real success in extending retail opening hours in their city centres at night. However some success in extending retail opening hours has been achieved in areas where there are clusters of shops in city centres.
31. The predominant retail closing time in York's city centre appears to be 5.30pm or 6pm. The sample survey shows that of the 83 businesses, 37 close at 5.30pm and 33 close at 6pm or later. In addition 12 businesses close at 5.30pm but with at least one late night of 6pm or later. Only one business was found to close at 5pm.
32. In comparison, Monks Cross advertises its opening hours from 9.30am until 8pm (with the exception of supermarkets); the Designer Outlet from 10am until 6pm with late-night opening until 8pm on Thursdays while stores at Clifton Moor (with the exception of supermarkets) generally close at either 6pm or 8pm.

Further Information Gathered

33. In light of the evidence from the survey of other cities, which showed that opportunities for businesses to extend their opening hours was most easily achieved where there are clusters of shops, the Task Group agreed it would be useful to identify an area of the city centre containing a cluster of businesses where this approach might be further investigated.
34. With this in mind, the then Chair of the Task Group, Councillor Hyman, met with the manager of the Coppergate Centre on 15 November 2013. As well as being the home of the Jorvik Centre, Coppergate is a shopping hub featuring major high street stores including Top Shop, Boots, Fenwicks, Body Shop, and Clarks as well as smaller shops and cafes and is soon to be the site of a Primark store in the premises currently operated by Marks and Spencer.
35. The Chair was encouraged by the enthusiasm and positivity of the centre manager towards extending retail opening hours. The manager confirmed this is something that has already been discussed with tenants including the managers of Fenwicks and Top Shop

Further Analysis

36. In view of the information above the Committee should note that York appears to be doing as well as, if not better than, similar cities with regard to extending retail opening hours after 5pm. However, to further develop the night-time economy, the Committee may wish to consider how the Council may better encourage retailers to collaborate and co-operate in order to:
 - a) Optimise their opening hours
 - b) Capture maximum spend (see paragraph 13)
 - c) Benefit from working as a shopping hub e.g. like the Coppergate Centre
37. Evidence from the Task Group Chair's meeting with manager of the Coppergate Centre shows that one perceived barrier to extending retail opening hours in Coppergate is that Piccadilly Car Park closes at 6.30pm.
38. The committee may wish to investigate whether the opening hours of all the council's city centre car parks could be extended (i.e. those that

currently close before 8pm). Also, what would be the positive and negative effects of offering free car parking after 5pm on late night shopping evenings?

Focus Groups

39. To further consider the views of resident on the night-time economy, the Policy, Performance & Innovation Team held a number of focus group meetings in November 2013 and gathered the views of City of York Council staff
40. At the focus group meetings public transport was cited as a key issue and was seen as a barrier for some wanting to use the city centre at night. There was concern over the frequency and reliability of buses which included:
 - That passengers routinely had to catch one bus earlier to make sure they reach their destination on time;
 - That bus services were poor after the main commuter hours;
 - That the frequency and reliability of buses is not just a problem for people getting home from the city centre, but also for people getting into the centre after 7pm;
 - That park and ride closes too early for people to stay in the city centre later in the evening;
 - That it was difficult for people to attend the theatre or cinema as buses on some routes stop before the performance has ended.
41. The focus groups considered that between 5pm and 7pm there was little alternative in the city centre to frequenting bars, pubs and restaurants. There are few coffee shops open and no metropolitan atmosphere in the city centre. They felt shops need to stay open longer for working people who do not necessarily want to come into the city centre at weekends. Residents were in favour of later retail opening hours to encourage people to come into York city centre after 5pm or to stay in the city centre. They felt this would have the knock-on effect of people spending at other businesses, not just shops.

Key Partner Meeting

42. The Task Group had previously agreed that the transition from day to evening needs to become a more profitable period for the city centre and decided to invite the following to a meeting on 10 December 2013 to discuss the findings to date and the survey results, and to identify ways of developing the evening retail offer and any potential barriers:
- Representatives of York Retail Forum
 - The Federation of Small businesses
 - City Team York
 - Representatives of Bus Companies
 - Taxi and private hire federations
43. The meeting was well attended and included representatives of retail and transport groups as well as CYC's Sustainable Transport Operations Manager and the Economic & Enterprise Manager.
44. The Chair explained that the intention of the review was not just attracting people to the city centre it was also about finding ways of encouraging people, including the thousands of city centre workers, to stay in the centre longer.
45. He also explained that the Task Group was not a decision making body but sought to gather the views of people involved in York's night-time economy so recommendations could be made to the Economic & City Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
46. The findings from the Yorkafter5 survey specific to the Task Group's review were put to the meeting and discussed by the various representatives involved.

Retail

47. Retailers at the meeting were concerned that while the survey indicated an overall 80% of respondents would come into or stay later in the city centre if retail hours were extended, this did not appear to be the case on the evidence of support for late-night opening in the run up to Christmas. They considered that the late-night shopping offer had been failing for a long time.
48. They stressed that there were no retailers who would not switch their hours if they could make more money from it but that if the people were

not there the shops would not open as there is already a lot of pressure on shops and large chains have huge outgoings.

49. From a retail standpoint York was now a seven days a week city and this has affected late-night shopping. While there was support for the concept the Task Group was told that some retailers did not have the appetite for late-night opening and the majority who did open later were not making any money from doing so. The Retail Forum has already discussed the possibility of changing late-night opening from Thursday to Friday.
50. They considered the biggest barriers to extending retail opening hours to be:
 - a lack of coordination;
 - a lack of promotion and marketing;
 - car parking;
 - that pedestrianisation finishes at 5pm.
51. The Committee might want to consider that to change retail opening times there would need to be coordinated action backed up by solid promotion. The retailers felt there needs to be an explosion of events in the city to kick-start extended opening hours. There needs to be a diverse mix of activities combining culture, eating, drinking and retail.
52. There was a perception that the city closes down between 5pm and 7pm and what was needed was a complete cultural experience both to attract people and keep people in the city centre during this period.
53. The Task Group accepted that changes in retail opening hours could be a long process. Retailers suggested that a way forward could be to look to make any changes in December 2014 - December being the peak month of the year - monitor the response from customers and, if it is a success, build on that. A Task Group Member suggested a good time would be to link an extension of retail opening hour to the Tour De France Grande Depart in York.

Transport

54. Almost one-third of survey respondents commented on the availability and frequency of buses to and from the city centre with many expressing the view that some services finished too early while other were concerned about costs. A number of people also questioned the closing times of Park and Ride sites.

Buses

55. Bus company representatives accepted the concerns of the focus groups and the comments of people who took part in the survey over frequency and reliability, and agreed that reliability was key. They assured the Task Group that they did everything they could to review the operation of the transport network.
56. They made the point that York was a difficult city in which to operate buses because of the volume of traffic and that it did not take much, a badly parked car for example, to cause services to be delayed.
57. The representatives stressed to the Task Group that to bring more people into the city there needs to be something happening. They run extra services outside their contracts when special events are held.
58. They were concerned that late-night shopping could present a huge risk as there was uncertainty over demand compared to the costs they would incur with wages and fuel.
59. Bus companies were also open to the idea of being part of promoting the city, pointing out that they had hundreds of buses running round that could advertise what retailers were doing.
60. The Task Group noted that retailers were keen to work hand in hand with bus companies as the retailers did not want empty shops and the transport operators did not want empty buses.

Taxis and Private Hire

61. The Task Group was made aware that what was considered to be a dead period for many in the city centre was, for private hire operators, one of the busiest periods of the day. However, they pointed out that much of their business between 5pm and 7pm involved taking people home, not bringing them into the city centre.
62. Their biggest problem was traffic which made it difficult getting around the city with some thoroughfares being cut off by rising bollards.
63. One of their big concerns with any extension of retail opening hours and late-night shopping was that streets in the city would be closed and they would not be able to access the centre.
64. The Task Group was assured, however, that as an industry they were keen to help promote any measures that would improve the city.

65. The Chair mentioned that he had an app on his phone which gave him real time information on bus arrival times and was told by private hire representatives that similar technology was available to them to give them the exact location and arrival times of their vehicles. The meeting was encouraged that technology made it possible for businesses to be more customer focused.

Conclusions

66. Evidence from the focus groups and findings from the survey indicate that residents have an appetite for extending retail opening hours in the city centre. However, retailers were wary as this was not borne out in support for late-night opening in the run up to Christmas. Preliminary suggestions had emerged to trial and assess the results of later opening in December 2014 or to coincide with the Tour De France Grand Depart.
67. There is a general consensus that there needs to be a coordinated approach to any changes in retail opening hours with retailers working closely with CYC and transport operators.
68. Should there be a change this will need to be properly promoted so residents know when shops will be open and when buses will be running.
69. As was the case in other cities, retailers and transport operators agreed that special events in the city centre were a catalyst for attracting people into the centre and the Task Group may consider this was something that should be encouraged.
70. Transport operators agreed that reliability of their services was key and will do everything they can to review the transport network.
71. There appears to be an encouraging level of cooperation between retailers and transport operators and a willingness to work together to promote measures that will benefit the city centre.

Further Action

72. In December 2013 Councillor Hyman had to resign from the Task Group because of work commitments and the other two members agreed they needed a third person on the Task Group to progress the work. As a result, in January 2014 Councillor Semlyen offered to resume her role on the Task Group, which was ratified by the full Committee on 28 January 2014.
73. On 15 January 2014 the Task Group met to formulate recommendations to be made to ECDOSC on 28 January. Task Group Members

considered evidence gathered during the review with the aim of identifying measures to increase footfall in the city centre between 5pm and 7pm – based on the previous three month seasonal average bearing in mind major events, the weather and events beyond CYC control – to boost cultural and economic activity and reduce rush-hour traffic.

Recommendations

74. In relation to the specific aim and objectives of the review, ECDOSC recommends:

- (i) That the Economic Development Unit in conjunction with the new agency being developed in the city to promote inward and visitor investment:
 - (a) liaise with city centre businesses and the City Team York to agree a specific day or days of the week for appropriate late night opening by autumn 2014.
 - (b) work with City Team York to develop proposals for the Council to provide support and guidance for city centre businesses to help coordinate a city-wide marketing and branding strategy to promote late night opening hours;
 - (c) In relation to a potential city centre late-night opening pilot at Coppergate Shopping Centre:
 - hold further talks with the management of the Coppergate Shopping Centre to encourage the further development of a late-night shopping offer at the Centre.
 - hold discussions with the operators of the Jorvik Centre and other attractions near the Coppergate Shopping Centre (eg museums) to encourage them to open later on the days selected for late-night shopping.
 - enter into discussions with Primark at an early stage to seek to use their arrival at the Coppergate Centre as a catalyst for the further development of the Centre's evening offer.

- work with the Coppergate Shopping Centre to provide business confidence measures and encourages the Centre to share information on the success of any late night opening offers and the effect on their trading between 5pm and 7pm.

- (d) liaise with the City Team York and city centre businesses and attractions to encourage them, by the end of 2014, to clearly display their opening and closing times for each day of the week.

- (e) ask the City Team York to incorporate the request to encourage businesses to open later into its works programme for 2014, and incorporate research from bodies such as the Association of Town Centre Managers (ATCM)

- (ii) That the Sustainable Transport Operations Manager invite bus and Park & Ride operators to:
 - (a) discuss proposals for later buses to serve the city's night-time economy, particularly for the days chosen for later (post 6pm) opening and major cultural festivals, and the potential for discounted travel;

 - (b) consider ways of improving consistency in Park & Ride closing times, later closing times of the Park and Ride sites and consideration of extending the policy for pay on exit ;

 - (c) work with the City Team York and relevant city centre businesses to develop reciprocal promotion of any new offer with suitable discounts / advertising.

- (iii) That Director of City & Environmental Services explore options to change parking policy and charges to address retail and business needs for the future vitality of the city centre, to include:
 - (a) Exploring proposals for the Council's city centre car parks to be free to residents from 5pm (instead of 6pm at present), subject to ticket machine programming issues and associated

cost implications, in co-ordination with a consistent city centre car parking and public transport offer.

- (b) Considering extending the opening time of CYC secure city centre car parks until 8.30pm on most nights and 11.30pm on Friday and Saturday, providing this is consistent with other work being undertaken in this area, and pending revenue implications.

75. Finally, Economic & City Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee recommends that the Corporate & Scrutiny Management Committee note residents' views relating to transport and pedestrians in the city centre during the evening period. Whilst the concerns raised did not fit exactly with the remit of the review, the Committee were keen to highlight those views as part of their final report, as they agreed there was a problem with the speed of some vehicles in the pedestrianised area in the city centre in the evening.

Reason: To conclude this review in line with scrutiny procedures and protocols, and the committee's workplan.

Council Plan

76. The review would contribute actively to the following priorities identified by the Council in its Plan for 2011-15:
- Create jobs and grow the economy;
 - Build strong communities;
 - Get York Moving

Implications

77. Implications arising from extended, later opening hours have emerged as a result of the consultation undertaken by the Task Group. These range from the provision of city centre car parking, transport in and out of the city centre and promotion to the viability or otherwise for the businesses in York. Some of these will need to be taken into account during discussions with City Team York and retailers as any firm proposals develop.

78. In regard to possible changes in city centre parking arrangements the CBSS Finance Manager reported that the Council budgets for car parking income to provide total revenue of c.£6.0m per annum, which equates to 8.5% council tax. Over the last two years there has been a shortfall in income received compared to budget of £250k last year and a projected £200k this year. Offers to reduce charges inevitably reduce the amount the council receives. This therefore has to be paid from increased charges elsewhere or budget reductions.
79. There is no financial impact of keeping the car parks open to 8.30pm as the enforcement officers work until 10pm. However to keep them open to 11.3pm at a weekend would require additional staffing cover of approximately £10-£20k per annum.

Risk Management

80. There are no direct risks associated with the vast majority of the Task Group's recommendations, which largely invite discussions and put forward proposals with retailers and the City of York Team to improve diverse commercial opportunities in York after 5pm.

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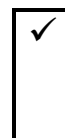
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Report Approved



Date 25/2/2014

All



Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

For further information please contact the author of the report

Annexes:

Annex A – Sample Survey of city centre closing times

Abbreviations

ATCM – Association of Town Centre Managers

CSMC – Corporate & Scrutiny Management Committee

CYC – City of York Council

ECDOOSC – Economic & City Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee

NTE – Night-Time Economy

P&R – Park and Ride