

**RURAL, ECONOMIC & ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**7 JUNE 2017**

**REPORT OF HEAD OF CENTRAL SERVICES AND HEAD OF REGULATORY SERVICES**

**MELTON TOWN CENTRE AUDIT REPORT**

**1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 To provide Members with information on a recent access audit of Melton Town Centre with the view of producing a prioritised action plan of the issues which were identified.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 **That the Committee:**

**(i) Notes the findings of the report**

**(ii) Agrees that further work be carried out to produce a prioritised action plan to be submitted back to the committee at a later date.**

**3.0 BACKGROUND**

3.1 Last year, Councillor Cumbers together with officers of the council met with the Chair of the Melton Access Group to discuss a number of accessibility issues which the group had raised about the town centre. The meeting concluded that the appropriate channel to further explore these issues would be to invite the Chair to a meeting of the Equalities Steering Group (ESG).

3.2 At a meeting of the ESG the Chair of the Access Group outlined some of his concerns which included; 'A' boards littering the street and making access difficult for people with visual and mobility impairments; difficulty in accessing a number of shops; too many cars using the pedestrian centre for access and then parking inappropriately; the use of seating/benches for 'A' boards restricting places for people to sit.

3.3 The ESG felt that a more in-depth assessment of the town centre was required in order to make an informed decision. As a result, the Centre for Accessible Environments (CAE) was commissioned to undertake the access audit. The CAE is a leading authority on inclusive design and has been in operation for over 40 years. Promoting Melton as an accessible place to visit, stay and shop could see a boost in its viability and amount of spend.

3.4 The access audit took place in July 2016 and consisted of a walkthrough of the town centre over a period of two days. It considered a number of inclusive design issues such as; how town centre information is presented on the council's website, way-finding and signage, parking, crossings, vertical and horizontal circulation, sanitary & welfare accommodation, street furniture, local shops and stalls.

- 3.5 A very detailed report of the auditor's findings was produced. A list of the actions relevant to Melton was presented to the Governance Committee in November 2016. Subsequently, a number of meetings have taken place with officers to decide who is responsible for each action identified. The most up to date list of these actions is attached at **Appendix A**. These are now in the process of being prioritised.
- 3.6 The action plan will also take into account the limited resources and funding. It is worth noting that some of the proposals related to Property have already been included in the support and maintenance programmes and some of the findings are to influence work around car parking and toilets.
- 3.7 Officers have also identified a number of proposed actions that are outside the remit of the Melton Borough Council. These have been forwarded to the appropriate authorities and progress recently sought. At the time of writing and despite follow up action being taken, we are awaiting a response.
- 3.8 It is important that development of the prioritised action plan involves relevant local groups (such as the access group or the one which replaces it). This gains their much needed input and is an important requirement in advancing equality of opportunity for disabled people and other protected groups.

#### 4.0 **POLICY AND CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 This report covers impacts on the Corporate priorities: 'promote a vibrant and sustainable economy, focused on growth and prosperity; Developing a thriving Melton Mowbray Town Centre that is at the heart of the Borough; supporting the most vulnerable to overcome disadvantage in order to live independent lives.

#### 5.0 **FINANCIAL & OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are possible long term financial implications in relation structural changes and upgrading the signage for example. When there is a clearer picture from the prioritised action plan it will be more feasible to consider what can be achieved within the funding available.

#### 6.0 **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS/POWERS**

- 6.1 There are no specific implications arising from this report. However, failure to comply with the public sector equality duties could result in the Council facing a legal challenge and its reputation being damaged.

#### 7.0 **COMMUNITY SAFETY**

- 7.1 There are no direct links to community safety arising from this report.

#### 8.0 **EQUALITIES**

- 8.1 The aim of the accessibility audit is to provide better access or 'inclusive design' for residents of Melton Borough Council including those with protected characteristics such as older people, disabled people and those who are pregnant or have young children. This is also a good opportunity to advance equality of opportunity for protected groups.

## 9.0 **RISKS**

9.1 There are no immediate risks identified from this report.

## 10.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE**

10.1 There are no climate change issues directly arising from this report.

## 11.0 **CONSULTATION**

11.1 Melton Access Group raised the issues in the first instance and met with Councillor Cumbers, officers and the ESG. There will be the opportunity to take forward the priority actions in partnership with the group and other relevant groups and agencies.

## 12.0 **WARDS AFFECTED**

12.1 All wards are affected.

Contact Officer: Martyn Bowen

Date: 10 May 2017

Appendices: Appendix A- Action List

A: Town Centre Audit action plan.