

**DECISION ARISING FROM THE PRESENTATION OF A PETITION ENTITLED
"SAVE GAINSBOROUGH TOWN CENTRE"**

Extract from Minutes of a Meeting of Full Council on 12 November 2018

32 TO RECEIVE A PETITION ENTITLED " SAVE GAINSBOROUGH TOWN CENTRE"

West Lindsey District Council was presented with a Petition on 15 October 2018

The Petition was entitled "Save Gainsborough Town Centre" and contained over 1175 signatures at that date.

The Petition asked that: -

"the WLDC Conservative controlled Council to urgently improve the Town Centre"

The Chairman advised that the matter would now be debated, in accordance with the agreed Petition Scheme and therefore she welcomed Lead Petitioner, Councillor Trevor Young, to the meeting and invited him to make his five minute address to Members.

Councillor Young made the following Statement to Council: -

"The Liberal Democrat Group present this petition urgently requesting this council to improve the town centre, and to provide the necessary investment and resource to protect the existing businesses from further decline.

We call upon this council for this to be debated in this chamber this evening and an urgent paper to be prepared to the next relevant policy committee.

It is recognised that economic downturn in high street shopping is a national issue, however the Liberal Democrats firmly believe that in those towns where there is little effort to address the issue, they will suffer the worst.

- Currently in the Gainsborough Town Centre there are 1 in 5 shops empty, more than any other town in Lincolnshire.
- In the past year 13 businesses have been forced to close in the town centre, one every month?
- There is a risk of more retail closures in the next six months.
- The Gainsborough Market once recognised as one of the best in the county has almost disappeared.
- Trinity Street – which is the main gateway into the town now has 1 in 3 shops empty, which is hardly a good advertisement for a town looking to achieve growth and external investment.

The Liberal Democrat Group also surveyed all the town centre businesses and retailers.

- 84% reported that this Council does not offer enough support / advice / information to their business
- 76 % of businesses stated that Customer Numbers have massively decreased over the past Year.
- 74% of businesses think that the decline in the town centre is having a negative impact on their weekly trade.
- 92% of businesses feel that the Closure of Oldrids Store in the Town Centre has had a detrimental impact on trade
- 96% of businesses feel that the council could offer far more daily / weekly assistance.
- 100% of businesses feel that far more could be done with the market square with short term car parking in the market square being the number one priority.

Whilst it is agreed that there are many challenges regarding Town Centres competing with online shopping etc – It is a Myth that all Town Centres are Dying!

Retford, Newark, Worksop, Brigg and Boston all have vibrant town centres and markets, so what are they doing different to Gainsborough.

This council has a reputation of taking far too long to address issues, we have witnessed the creeping effect of the decline in the Retail Shops and the Market yet have failed to react in a timely manner.

The current administration's strategic plan regarding growth and regeneration is all based on medium to long term strategies, this petition is not against any of the current proposals and we hope that they all come to fruition, however there is an urgent need to start discussing the economic recovery plan for the town."

The Chairman thanked Councillor Young for his statement. Before opening the matter for debate, Members were reminded of three options available to them when considering Petitions. These being: -

- Take the action the petitioners have requested
- Not take the action requested for the reasons put forward during debate
- Or commission further investigation into the matter.

Debate ensued with the Leader of the Council making the initial response.

"Thank you Councillor Young for your petition inquiring what the administration is doing in regard to saving Gainsborough Town Centre. Due to the fact we are doing more than ever before I am pleased to list the following as an outline of our strategy and success to date:

- our aim is to Increase the population of the town from the current 21,000 to circa 30,000 through our Growth and Housing Agenda's – this is critical to the towns commercial viability. Increasing footfall is critical to achieving any level of success.
- We have plans to regenerate the historic town centre guided by our Heritage Master Plan and in partnership with the Town Council's Neighbourhood Plan. This will be very ably supported by the creation of a partnership with Muse.
- To this end secure the £1.8m grants funds we have been awarded from the Lottery to repair and restore the Market Place, Silver and Lord Street's
- We have already established support for town centre businesses through the Shop Front and Gainsborough Growth fund, and I am delighted to inform you that the GLLEP has agreed to fund our Living Over the Shop scheme.
- Using MSRL our joint venture company to refurbish 3 shops and create 3 new flats – WLDC's investment share was £400k
- Working with LCC to improve the appearance and use of the Market Place – and hopefully Beaumont street too.
- We are having a review of Gainsborough market at the next Prosperous Communities committee. You attended the member consultation last week.
- The Opening of Travelodge on the 20th of October with £1.4m investment from our reserves and the refurbishment of the Roseway car park. We now have a beautiful street scene and a hotel destined to increase the local GVA.
- We will continue the impetus of the regeneration of Market Street and the Roseway Quarter to draw/entice shoppers from Marshall's Yard into the historic town centre.
- We will Continue to work with the Lincolnshire Co-op to redevelop the Lindsey centre – this will provide a new anchor store and additional town centre car parking.
- And, redevelop the former Guildhall site into a 3 screen cinema with food and drink outlets – this is at the pre planning stage.
- Enhancement of Whittons Gardens and riverside walk will be implemented with the cinema scheme
- still to come is the drawdown of our £4m grant award for Gainsborough from the GLLEP

I will now ask the Director of Economic and Commercial Growth to say as much as she is able to with reference to other projects which are being worked up, whilst understanding we are in open session which means sensitive commercial detail cannot be revealed

The Director of Economic and Commercial Growth then addressed the meeting and provided updates in respect of the following projects, all aimed at improving the prosperity of the Town as a whole: -

- Stage 2 of the development partnership
- Riverside Gate Way and marina
- Japan Road
- Northern SUE
- Southern SUE
- Somerby Park / NNDR growth policy
- Place Board
- Trinity Street

The work being undertaken directly with Traders and the promotion of grants to assist them was outlined in detail. It was imperative the Council worked on initiatives to encourage footfall back into the market place and the Director of Economic and Commercial Growth gave assurance that there was market interest in the town. Growing the town's size was key to securing further investment and interest.

The Leader thanked the Director of Economic and Commercial Growth before concluding his address as follows: -

“As has been illustrated, we have and are very busy on a vast number of fronts. Recently the Town Council, who have embarked upon producing a Neighbourhood Plan has agreed to work with us on our regeneration projects and ambitions. We have already created an opportunity for businesses in the town centre to apply for funding specifically for a shop front face lift.

The success of the town centre regeneration initiative is very much dependent upon all incumbents of the town centre and the town council working with us. Especially the property owners. We cannot do it alone !

During this four year term of office, we have as an administration, and supported professionally by our officer team and staff, created an extensive range of opportunities for the district. We have won EU and UK bids to the value of £10m to help unlock sites for development, creating viability.

We are making unprecedented investments in other places such as Market Rasen with the proposed building of a dry surface leisure facility.

After several years of attempting to work with other agencies, a project for Caistor is looking promising.

We are enablers of investment and growth, long may it continue.

I move, no further action be taken.”

In the ensuing debate the majority of Members were in agreement that the Council had worked hard over recent years to make improvements to the Town. A Partnership approach was the only way to proceed with all involved having to take responsibility for their role. It was accepted that there was still a lot to do and number of keys areas which needed to be focussed on.

It was suggested by some that to constantly talk down the Town was not of assistance.

The Leader's earlier proposal to reject the action requested by the petitioners was seconded.

It was moved and seconded that any vote taken on the matter be by way of recorded vote.

Having been proposed and seconded earlier in the meeting, the motion was then put to a recorded vote, having had the earlier request for such also duly seconded.

Votes were cast as set out below:

For: - Cllrs, Bierley, England, Fleetwood, Howitt-Cowan, Kinch, Lawrence, G McNeill, J McNeill, Mewis, Milne, Palmer, Parish, Patterson, Rodgers, Smith, Strange, Summers, Waller, and Welburn.

Against: - Cllrs Boles, Bond, Cotton, Devine, Oaks, Rainsforth, Rollings and Young

Abstain: - None

With the majority of Councillors voting in favour of the motion (19), the motion was declared **CARRIED** and therefore it was **RESOLVED** that the request of the petitioners be rejected and no further additional action be undertaken at this time.

Councillor Young, as Lead Petitioner, was advised that he would be sent written notice of the decision and also a copy of this would be displayed on the Authority's website.