

Chichester District Council

PLANNING COMMITTEE

08 July 2020

Response to Covid-19 – Signage to Support Public Safety and High Street Recovery

1. Contacts

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2. Recommendation:

- 2.1 **That the committee note the proposed approach for the provision of signage to support public safety and high street recovery in our town centres**

3. Background

- 3.1. The Council's High Street Recovery Group, which comprises officers from Public Relations (PR), Sport and Leisure, Development Management, Economic Development, Health Protection, Licensing and Environmental Protection, has been working during the Covid-19 pandemic to manage the Council's response in respect of impacts upon the town centres within our District. This includes measures to support business and protect public health in the centres of Chichester, Petworth, Midhurst, Selsey and East Wittering.
- 3.2 A key element of the work has been in connection with ensuring our residents, businesses and visitors are aware of the social distancing requirements, and messages regarding social distancing have been publicised through a range of channels. One of the methods used to ensure social distancing is maintained within our centres is the provision of signage using fixed signs within car parks and streets, and stencils on the ground. As the town centre businesses have been re-opening and our centres have become busier it has been identified that there are some locations where additional signage is required. As more businesses open in the coming weeks it is recognised that particular areas within our centres may benefit from additional signage to promote social distancing amongst visitors.
- 3.3 In addition to the need to provide additional signage it has been recognised that existing empty shops within our centres do little to maintain our usually attractive and active high streets. Also, a desire to actively welcome people back to our town centres has been noted by some of our parish councils.

3.4 In accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisement) Regulations 2012, as amended, the Council has deemed consent to display adverts within its town centres provided the signage supports a function of the Local Authority and the sign does not exceed 1.55m² in size. It is considered that the signage which directs visitors to adhere to social distancing guidance is an important function of the Council, as is supporting the local economy. Therefore the majority of the fixed signs being erected by the Council on existing street furniture do not require advertisement consent. However, some of the required signs would exceed the size limitation and there is no deemed consent for landlords to display the proposed signs on their premises. Therefore, advertisement consent would be likely be required for the some of the proposed signage.

4. Outcomes to be achieved

4.1. Agreement with the proposed approach will:

- Create a cohesive and consistent approach to signage across the district's town centres that is attractive, visually sensitive and easy for our residents and visitors to understand
- Provide necessary signage in areas that currently do not benefit from a sufficient level in the interests of public safety
- Provide a strong public safety message whilst also encouraging economic recovery
- Provide certainty for landlords that there are no risks to them if they are asked to display a sign in their vacant shop window
- Assist negotiations with Clear Channel to display signage on bus shelters within the town centres

5. Proposal

5.1 In order to facilitate the needs identified in section 3, above, consideration has been given to how best additional signage can be provided within town centres without obstructing footways, existing infrastructure and street furniture such as cycle racks, benches and existing directional signage, whilst respecting the visual amenity and character of our high streets. The proposed approach combines a number of suggestions, including;

- provision of vinyl signs within the shopfronts of vacant units
- provision of signs within or close to our car parks to welcome people to the town centre and to remind visitors of the need to maintain social distancing, and
- provision of vinyl signs on existing bus stops within the ownership of the Council

5.2 The proposed signage would reflect the appearance of the fixed signs being installed within the town centres, which are specific to each centre and include a graphic of key features in the area and the message 'stay safe, leave a space' and a tagline 'shop local spend local support local'.

- 5.3 In order to provide the necessary signage in the areas where it is needed without delay it is proposed that for a temporary period until April 2021 the Council would not seek to enforce the requirements of the advertisement regulations for the signage referred to within this report.
- 5.4 The size of the proposed signage would be dependent on their proposed location, particularly in respect of vinyl's which would be designed to fit the shopfront or bus stop. A standardised approach to size of vinyl's has been considered, however through experience, the Council's PR team found that unless a vinyl is bespoke to the size of the window it is not successful in terms of design or its appearance. Officers from the Development Management team form part of the High Street Recovery Group and will be involved with the design process for the signs, and regard will be had to any impacts upon heritage assets and the character of the streetscene when deciding the exact location, design and size of each sign.
- 5.5 The Planning Committee are asked to note the intended approach not to require planning permission for this signage, provided it is not displayed beyond March 2021.

6. Alternatives considered

- 6.1 Consideration has been given to providing additional fixed signage within the town centres, however a range of constraints have been identified including; the impact on the fabric of listed buildings, lack of existing infrastructure to which signs could be attached, impact upon the use of facilities such as cycle racks and benches and obstruction of pavements.
- 6.2 The Local Planning Authority could require applications for advertisement consent for those proposals that would not benefit from deemed consent. However this would likely be time consuming and individual applications necessary for most signs.

7. Resources and Legal Implications

- 7.1 It is anticipated that the costs of the proposed signage would be met by the 'Reopening high streets safety fund' (RHSS fund) which is part of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The RHSS fund operates on a 'spend and reclaim' basis, and therefore the signage would not be funded by monies already obtained by the Council in relation to its work during the Covid-19 pandemic.

8. Consultation

- 8.1 The proposed approach has been discussed and endorsed by the Council's High Street Recovery Group, and consultation with regards to the proposed design has been carried out with the parish councils serving each town centre.

9. Community Impact and Corporate Risks

- 9.1 The impact on the local community is expected to be positive. The public health message to maintain social distancing will be more present in our town centres than it is currently. The signage should assist compliance with the social distancing guidance and help visitors feel that their town centres are safe places to visit. The signs will also help local businesses and the economy due by encouraging residents and visitors to 'shop local', and the creation of a visual feature within the street in place of vacant shop fronts would have a positive impact upon the attractiveness of our town centres.
- 9.2 There are no corporate risks.

10. Other Implications

Are there any implications for the following? If you tick "Yes", list your impact assessment as a background paper in paragraph 13 and explain any major risks in paragraph 9		
	Yes	No
Crime and Disorder The Council has a duty "to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area". Do the proposals in the report have any implications for increasing or reducing crime and disorder?		✓
Climate Change Are there any implications for the mitigation of or adaptation to climate change? If in doubt, seek advice from the Environmental Strategy Unit (ESU).		✓
Human Rights and Equality Impact The provision of signage important to the Covid-19 emergency will not impact upon human rights or equality of groups of people.		✓
Safeguarding The Council has a duty to cooperate with others to safeguard children and adults at risk. Do these proposals have any implication for either increasing or reducing the levels of risk to children or adults at risk?		✓

11. Background Papers

- 11.1 None