

CDC Full Council September 27th 2022

Motion from Cllr Richard Plowman, seconded by Cllr Martyn Bell

That this Council instructs the Executive to investigate the setting up of a specific multiagency (CDC, CCC, WSCC , BID) Chichester City Centre Task Force to ensure the City Centre defined as the Chichester Conservation area has an attractive and well maintained Public Realm through enforcing Planning Conditions on premises; Regulation 7 removal of unsightly “to let” boards; graffiti; litter; unnecessary and redundant signs; and “A” boards. Enforce no cycling, pedlars and busking rules in the precinct and parks. Ensure premises are in a good state of repair and decoration and to research and understand the factors that have resulted in a decline in footfall.

Background information.

The state of the City centre was brought home in a statement from a young couple who returned back to live in the centre of Chichester after several years overseas. They love Chichester but said it was very noticeably how shabby it had become.

Even before the pandemic, city centres were in decline. The reasons for this decline are complex as several factors may be at work and slightly different for each city centre. Factors often quotes are internet shopping, high city centre rents and rates, the state of the pavements, excessive car parking charges, increased product offer and convenience of out of town shopping, the high cost of a reduced public transport service. Working from home is now also becoming an important factor. The result, in the case of Chichester is a significant (up to 50%) drop in footfall since 2007. The loss of footfall is one of main reasons given by businesses for closing. It was particularly true for long established quality shops such as McDowell's , Messams, Rowlands of Bath, Gerry Webber, Country Casuals. Footfall was also a factor in the closing of House of Fraser and the Main Post office. People are not returning to the City Centre and this is particularly true of people in the north of the District. The offer and balance of the City Centre has also changed and the offer is skewed towards, coffee shops, restaurants and pizza places. Although there have been welcomed additions such as the Ivy, it will be hard to see that the current footfall will sustain such an up market restaurant. Markets and events are important but the recent events are not attracting the necessary footfall and we need to be realistic in the evaluation of these events on the effects of the local economy.

Most recently the cost of living rises particularly energy cost and inflation increases means more pressure on businesses and also reduced disposable income. The hospitality business is finding recruiting staff very difficult. All these concerns have been expressed by both residents and businesses.

Other cities seem to have taken more focussed action and are fairing much better as confirmed by a recent visit to Winchester. It is time to get our house in order and ensure adequate enforcement and clean up the public realm.

Chichester with its Cathedral, Theatre, Art Galleries, Market Cross and fine Georgian buildings will always have a core to sustain visitors but we need to understand through consumer and business market research what are the influencing factors for Chichester and

then make sure we act on them and restore footfall. Otherwise a steady decline of Chichester will occur with a consequential reduction in revenue for the whole of the District