

**ECONOMY PDG**  
**6<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2018**

**SECOND GRIMSEY REVIEW OF TOWN CENTRES**

**Cabinet Member(s):** Cllr Richard Chesterton  
**Responsible Officer:** Jenny Clifford, Head of Planning, Economy & Regeneration

**Reason for Report:** To brief members on the second Grimsey Review of town centres.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That the report be noted and that the findings of the Grimsey Review inform the emerging Economic Strategy and Masterplans for the District's three towns.

**Relationship to Corporate Plan:** The Grimsey Town Centre Review is relevant to all four priority areas identified in the corporate plan: Economy, Homes, Community and Environment. However, it is particularly of relevance to the corporate objectives for the economy.

**Financial Implications:** There are no additional financial implications arising from the report. The Grimsey Review will however inform emerging strategies and potentially subsequent prioritisation of investment in town centres.

**Legal Implications:** None

**Risk Assessment:** None

**Equality Impact Assessment:** None anticipated

## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 Bill Grimsey produced a report in 2013 'The Grimsey Report. An Alternative Future for the High Street' which contained 31 recommendations for where the future lay in High Streets. This followed the 'Mary Portas Review' of 2011, a report which he felt failed to highlight the dramatic structural changes impacting on the retail industry through the convergence of consumer behaviour driven by technology.
- 1.2 Following a BBC invite to comment on the state of the 'UK's High Streets' in 2017 Grimsey embarked on a review of his previous work to see what had changed, what had worked and what had not. It was now time to see 'where we are today' and what should be done to improve our High Streets and Town Centres. The review is informed by various data sources and case studies. It attempts to cover all aspects of commercial and social activity impacting on town communities and not just focused on shops. The review has identified what has changed in the last five years and reached conclusions based on where we are today and what might happen in future.

## **2.0 Key Findings**

- 2.1 The Grimsey Review 2 identified four specific key findings:
- “1** *There is a need for all towns to develop plans that are business-like and focused on transforming the place into a complete community hub incorporating health, housing, arts, education, entertainment, leisure, business/office space, as well as some shops, while developing a unique selling proposition (USP).*
  - 2** *The key to success is outstanding, talented and committed leadership. Whether this is elected mayors with the mandate and authority to get on with the job, or local government bringing all stakeholders, including the community to develop and implement a plan for the location, strong leadership and vision are essential.*
  - 3** *The curating of a place based on its distinct heritage is multi-dimensional and complex but should feature strongly when developing the “offer”: Why would people want to live, work, play, visit and invest in the “place”? What does it stand for?*
  - 4** *Where we see genuine high street innovation, best practice is often not shared and far too many agencies remain in silos. There is a need for Economically Rational Areas to be established that can draw on the examples of Scotland and Wales to get things done. An independent body (not a membership organisation) is needed to support, question and signpost for local authorities and act as a driver for stakeholder support.”*

## **3.0 Barriers to progress**

- 3.1 Grimsey suggests that there are a number of reasons why progress is often not made. He describes them as three barriers to progress and he recommends that government undertake a serious independent review of these issues. These barriers are as follows:

**“1** *Business Rates have grown into a massive tax collection vehicle for government (circa £29bn annually of which retail represents almost one third – £8bn). This colossus has grown and grown, it does not reflect the additional costs to provide services to those businesses any more. It is a complex property and services tax that has spawned an entire industry of lawyers, advisors, appeal courts and other specialists. The Valuation Office Agency (VOA) has also grown accordingly, without the data structure or technology to service the increasing demands placed upon it. There is now a very strong case for replacing it with an alternative tax and this should be seriously considered.*

**2** *The complex layers of local government are confusing and overly bureaucratic; parish, town, district and county councils, each with different remits and different ownership of public realm, frequently throw up red tape that often prevents progress. Can it be simplified to empower local communities so that they can manage their own “place” more effectively?*

**3** *Financing change has become a major issue as many local authorities are becoming increasingly “entrepreneurial” with local community assets to plug budget gaps and survive let alone finance investment in a regeneration plan. What is the best way to do this?”*

#### **4.0 Grimsey's Recommendations**

- 4.1 This second review undertaken by Grimsey culminates in 25 recommendations. He has set these recommendations out under three headings: Create a more supportive Environment, Government and planning and Smarter use of technology. These recommendations are appended to this report.

#### **5.0 Implications to Mid Devon**

- 5.1 Clearly many of the issues and recommendations relate to Government Policy. However there are a significant number of issues referred to in the Review that we can get involved in at a local level. Importantly for the towns of Mid Devon there is already progress in a number of areas identified in the Review.
- 5.2 All three towns are set to have Masterplans developed and we are well advanced with the production of an Economic Strategy for the District. It should be noted that the results of this comprehensive town centre review can feed into these documents. In Tiverton a new Town Centre Partnership is currently being established with engagement from a variety of different businesses in the town. The findings of the Grimsey Review will be considered by the Partnership.
- 5.3 Community engagement and activity is an important observation of the Review. There is a great deal of community activity generally across the three Mid Devon towns with good practice of shared community space such as the Culm Valley Integrated Centre for Health in Cullompton.
- 5.4 Co-ordination of events is an area which there has been significant progress in recent months but there is still much more that can be done. Greater co-ordination of events is being advanced in Tiverton as a sub group of the Town Centre Partnership.
- 5.5 There are a number of planning and fiscal changes which are recommended at a National level which would impact on the District Council and its statutory duties. Time will tell whether such national policy changes are made.
- 5.6 Members of the Economy PDG will have the opportunity to consider the Grimsey Review 2 findings in more detail in its informal workshops to inform the Economic Strategy as part of the work on the emerging theme of ‘Place’.

## **6.0 Government Panel On High Streets**

- 6.1 Members should also be aware that High Streets Minister Jake Berry MP has recently announced his intention to set up a panel of experts to investigate issues that currently affect the health of our high streets and advise on the best practical measures to help them thrive now and in the future.
- 6.2 The panel will be chaired by Sir John Timpson (Chairman of Timpson, the multiple retailer). Membership of the panel will consist of a number of experts who have a wealth of experience in retail, property and design sectors. The review will look at the current challenges and work out options to ensure our town centres are vibrant.
- 6.3 Later this summer the expert panel, in conjunction with the Ministry of housing, Communities and Local Government will put out a call for evidence seeking what members of the public (young people in particular) want from the high streets of the future.

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**Circulation of the Report:** Cllr Richard Chesterton

**List of Background Papers:** The Grimsey Review (2013)  
<http://www.vanishinghighstreet.com/the-grimsey-review/>

The Grimsey Review 2 (2018)  
[http://www.vanishinghighstreet.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/GrimseyReview2\\_new1.pdf](http://www.vanishinghighstreet.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/GrimseyReview2_new1.pdf)