

**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING, ECONOMY AND REGENERATION**

**REOPENING OUR HIGH STREETS SAFELY**

**Cabinet Member(s):** Councillor Graeme Barnell, Cabinet Member for Planning & Regeneration

**Responsible Officer:** Mrs Jenny Clifford, Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration

**Reason for Report:**

The Reopening High Streets Safely Fund (RHSSF) provides £50 million nationally from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to put in place measures to establish a safe trading environment for businesses and customers, particularly in high streets. Of this figure, this Council has been awarded £73,686.

It is vital that the Council considers its response to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the District's economy. The RHSSF enables the Council to put in place urgent measures to support economic recovery in our towns, particularly in the high streets, by establishing a safe trading environment for businesses and customers through a mix of advice / support and implementation of a range of measures.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- 1. That the report be noted.**
- 2. That the action plan to date be approved and delegated power be granted to the Group Manager for Growth Economy and Delivery and the Group Manager for Corporate Property and Commercial Assets in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration to continue to develop and review the action plan, to implement or fund measures within scope of the Government guidance in accordance with the action plan.**

**Financial Implications:** £73,686 has been granted by the Government to this Council through the ERDF to implement a range of measures that will allow for the safe reopening of high streets and to also provide business advice and support in terms of the same.

Local authorities will be able to spend money on eligible activities from 1 June 2020 to 31 March 2021 and claim it back from Cities and Local Growth Unit (CLGU) in arrears. Up to 4% administration costs can be claimed from the fund amount. Claims will be paid quarterly. Evidence of each transaction must be retained, and include;

- Invoices/receipts, purchase orders/contracts, payroll records, bank statements and accounting records;
- Employment and salary costs must be evidenced by job descriptions; contracts of employment, payroll records and bank statements;
- Core documents for any procurement carried out; and copies of all publicity materials

- Details of procurements included in the claim
- A progress report for the claim period
- Additional reporting including footfall should be retained

**Budget and Policy Framework:** Due to funding via the ERDF, it is not expected that the measures in question will directly impact upon the Council's budget in their implementation.

**Legal Implications:** The detail of the requirements of this ERDF grant will be covered in a Funding Agreement which in guidance, the Government states it expects to have agreed with all local authorities by the end of June 2020. This will establish the basis for the grant and that it cannot be used to support capital expenditure.

**Risk Assessment:**

In considering measures to support the safe reopening of the high streets within the District as a result of COVID-19, a risk assessment led approach has purposely been followed. Risk assessments have been carried out for all towns within the district incorporating a series of on-site assessments. Guidance and advice on safety in a post COVID-19 world has been at the core of this risk assessment process and is vital to ensure that risk is reduced and customer and trader confidence.

A copy of the risk assessment is attached to this document within **Appendix 1 at Annex 1**.

**Equality Impact Assessment:** The risk assessment process undertaken had regard to equality issues at this stage. As the project goes forward it will need to consider the views from representatives from protected groups that the project has the potential to impact upon.

**Relationship to Corporate Plan:** The reopening of our High Streets safely contributes particularly to the following three themes: economy, community and environment and is central to the delivery of many of the aims identified within the Corporate Plan. It is a significant intervention to safeguard the welfare of our residents, visitors and businesses and crucial to our economic recovery.

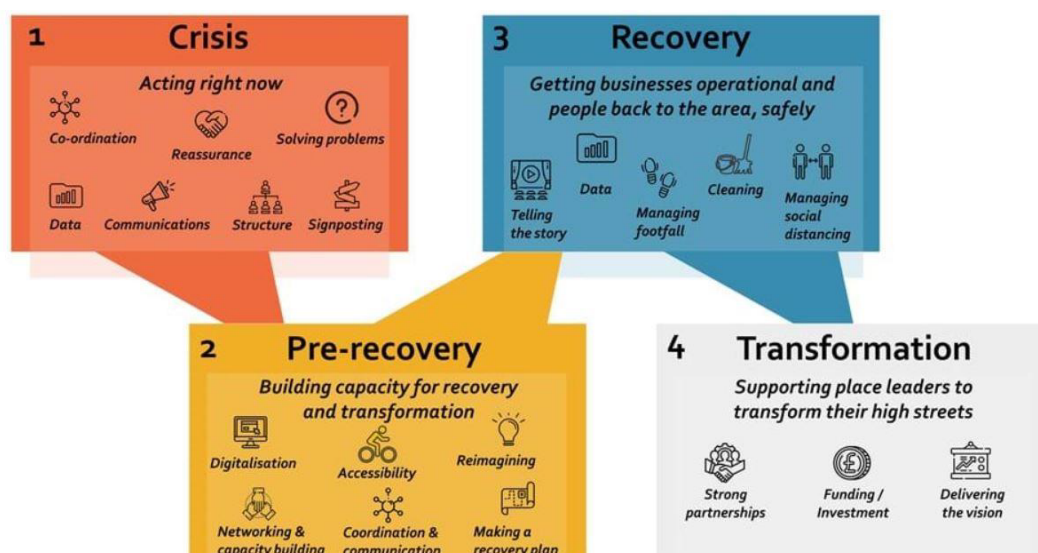
**Impact on Climate Change:** The reopening the High Streets safely initiative will help local residents to 'buy local'. It also considers sustainable transport options as part of the ongoing assessments including pedestrian and cycle arrangements. This initiative will complement emerging recovery plans which will place emphasis on building back our economy better by actively pursuing opportunities to help tackle climate change and support green businesses.

**1.0 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND**

1.1 Monday 15<sup>th</sup> June 2020 saw the permitted reopening of our High Streets with restrictions on non-essential retail being lifted. Up until that date, activity deemed to be 'essential' during the pandemic lockdown period were the only businesses legally able to remain open. As the COVID-19 pandemic is still very much with us, this latest round of easing of restrictions are part of the Government's phased response

to the crisis and therefore need to be accompanied by careful consideration to public safety whilst also endeavouring to rebuild customer confidence.

- 1.2 The recently established ‘Reopening your High Streets Safely’ fund is an early step with regard to economic recovery. Officers are currently engaged in working closely with partners on recovery plans. The Government recommends using the High Street Task Force COVID-19 Recovery Framework as a guide to help formulate and deliver recovery. This framework is made up of four phases shown below. This grant allocation relates primarily to the pre-recovery and recovery phases.



## 2.0 THE REOPENING HIGH STREETS SAFELY FUND

- 2.1 The **Reopening High Streets Safely Fund** is intended to assist local authorities to put in place additional measures to establish a safe trading environment for businesses and customers, particularly in high streets. This ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) grant will be available until the end of March 2021; however given the fund is to respond to the immediate needs in 2020 the government is encouraging early spend. The fund is not intended for capital works and is focussed on:

- Supporting development of an **action plan** for how the local authority may begin to safely reopen their local economies;
- **Communications and public information activity** to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely;
- **Business-facing awareness** raising activities to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely; and
- **Temporary public realm changes** to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely.

- 2.2 Government guidance on the operation of the fund sets out using examples the activities that are in, or out, of scope for the fund.

In scope	Out of scope
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Updates to public realm changes, if social distancing rules are updated.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Place marketing signage or activity</li> </ul>
Signage aimed at increasing safety <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pavement markings</li> <li>• Lamppost banners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cleaning</li> <li>• Staff or contractor costs for cleaning</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hoardings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consumables</li> <li>• Pressure washing</li> </ul>
<p>Financial Partnering with other Tiers of Authority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LA's in receipt of RHSS funds can where appropriate establish formal Delivery Partner arrangements with other Tiers of Local Authority.</li> </ul>	<p>Financial support to businesses on the High Street / NSA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grants to businesses</li> <li>• Provision of PPE / cleaning / shop adaptations</li> <li>• Financial support for a business to extend their licensing / permissions (e.g. for outdoor tables and chairs).</li> <li>• Business to business or Business to customer campaign collateral</li> </ul>
<p>Traffic management on the High Street or NSAs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pedestrianisation of High Streets / NSAs</li> <li>• One way traffic systems that are temporary and linked to the pedestrianisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff or agency costs for traffic management</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Widening footpaths</li> <li>• Temporary barriers</li> <li>• Markings outside shops to manage queuing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greening of streets</li> <li>• Artwork, planters, vinyls etc to increase attractiveness of area or disguise empty shops</li> <li>• Seating areas</li> </ul>
<p>On-street parking, where the temporary change is to remove existing parking facilities to allow for social distancing (e.g. by widening pedestrian routes)</p>	<p>Car parks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes to signage</li> <li>• Changes to layout</li> <li>• Both public and private car parks are out of scope</li> </ul>
<p>Information Officers working with SMEs to provide advice on safe reopening</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employed by the Local Authority</li> <li>• External consultants which have been procured in an ERDF-compliant manner</li> </ul> <p>1-2-1 advice to SMEs is eligible as long as it is available to all businesses on that High Street / NSA</p>	<p>Staff to manage or support the public on the High Street</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High Street ambassadors</li> <li>• Hosts</li> <li>• Stewards</li> <li>• Security staff</li> <li>• Public information officers</li> </ul>
<p>Adaptations to existing cycle lanes within the defined high street and NSA areas linked to change to footpaths (to enable social distancing)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New cycle lanes</li> <li>• Provision of cycle racks / storage</li> </ul>
<p>Hand sanitiser stations on supported High Streets / Neighbourhood Shopping Areas (NSAs)</p>	<p>Toilets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adaptations to public or private toilets</li> <li>• New toilet facilities</li> <li>• Staff costs to clean or manage toilets</li> </ul>
<p>Communications and public information activity to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital</li> <li>• Media and press</li> <li>• Print and publications</li> </ul>	
<p>Creation or development of a Local Authority action plan to reopen High Streets safely</p>	

2.3 Grants will be awarded to local authorities on the basis of population which will serve as a proxy for the footfall anticipated on the high streets and the degree of safeguarding required. Mid Devon District Council has been allocated £73,686.

2.4 The project must comply with ERDF grant funding requirements and measures must use the ERDF branding requirements.

### 3.0 ACTION PLAN

- 3.1 Initial work has been undertaken to form an Action Plan, however this is very much work in progress. It is important to note that this action plan is a live document and will be updated over the coming months as risk assessments in our town centres are reviewed. **Appendix 1** is the latest position at the time of writing. Given that this is a fast changing situation a verbal update will be provided at the meeting.
- 3.2 The Action Plan sets out the District Council's proposed approach to implementing measures to establish a safe trading environment for businesses and customers in our town centres in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It does not go into the wider issues of recovery planning such as those we are currently working on with Devon County Council and partners; however it is mindful of the Re-start, Re-grow and Re-set concepts that underpin that emerging work. It also is informed by the High Street Task Force COVID-19 Recovery Framework referred to above.
- 3.3. The scope of the Action Plan covers the following towns: Tiverton, CREDITON, Cullompton and Bampton. Bradninch, which does not have any significant non-essential retail provision, is not included; however officers have been and continue to be in discussion with Bradninch Town Council to share risk assessment work and provide assistance.
- 3.4 This Action Plan is broken down into a three stage implementation process. A phased approach is considered appropriate given that the situation is ever changing. The first relates to the immediate measures that were needed to be implemented prior to High Streets opening on the 15<sup>th</sup> June. The second phase covers the medium term actions (2-3 months) informed by ongoing dialogue with the Town Councils, business organisations/trader groups and DCC. The final phase will respond to any changes needed over the autumn which could arise from a number of issues including customer/trader perceptions and behaviour, changing government guidance and crucially the extent of the virus at that time.

### 4.0 INITIAL WORKS UNDERTAKEN IN ADVANCE OF HIGH STREETS OPENING

- 4.1 The Action Plan (Appendix 1) sets out a range of the initial temporary measures implemented within the first phase. These have included reconfigured pedestrian arrangements in the following locations:
- In Tiverton the Pannier Market area will have separate entry and exit points on all sides, next to Boots pedestrians are asked to keep left and at Westex North there is a one-way system to and from the shops.
  - In Cullompton from Station Road (Forge Way) car park it will be one-way to the shop beside Clarks Court returning via Higher Mill Lane.
  - In Crediton from High Street (St Saviours Way) car park pedestrians are asked to keep left in Silbury Place to the shops and on their return.

- 4.2 Other changes members may have noticed in our larger towns include some of the following:
- Signage to maintain social distancing: throughout our town centres, car parks and open spaces
  - Changes to some paths and walkways: you may see barriers indicating one-way systems and no entry points.
  - Signs providing advice at gathering points: such as at bus stops / bus station / seating areas / bicycle parking and ticket vend machines
  - Space will be created on footpaths to allow queuing outside shops. Shops will have their own markings and instructions for their customers that you will need to follow.

## 5.0 **ENGAGEMENT**

5.1 Owing to the need for expedience in delivering immediate safety measures liaison was focussed on local ward members, the Town Councils and the Local Resilience Forum. The business community were also contacted through business fora and trader organisations to share information and advice via our webpages.

5.2 A forum for discussion with the Town Mayors has also been established which has proven to be very useful. This has led to greater collaborative working and has been instrumental in better understanding any immediate changes sought to the emergency public realm measures and changes have been made where possible. More liaison opportunities will develop through the process. For instance Tiverton Town Council, with the support of Mid Devon, have recently set up a webinar to assist Cafes, pubs and restaurants with their reopening requirements for 4 July 2020.

5.3 It should be noted that as further measures develop over the coming months the subsequent phases will involve still closer working with the Town Councils, local ward members, business organisations, traders and the County Council.

## 6.0 **LOVE YOUR TOWN CENTRE FUND**

6.1 Members may recall that at the informal meeting of the Economy PDG in February we discussed setting up a fund for supporting local initiatives to assist the revitalisation and regeneration of Town Centres. Given the importance of town centre recovery and revitalisation at this time, and following discussion with the Economy PDG Chair and the Portfolio holder for Planning and Regeneration, a fund is being set up from within existing budgets. The first tranche of which has taken the form of providing a grant to the three largest Town Councils (Crediton, Cullompton and Tiverton) of £5k to spend on quick-win projects that support:

1. the safe resumption and use of our high streets and town centre activities
2. activities that increase shopper confidence in our town centres

6.2 The Town Councils have been notified and they are currently considering projects to fund. We have encouraged the Town Councils to supplement this fund where possible. The Town Councils will be accountable for managing

the grant towards projects in its town centre. As the fund exists to help identify new ideas to benefit town centres, it is not anticipated that the fund should be used for existing town centre activities or events, unless it is specifically for a new element/phase of that project.

- 6.3 The Town Councils are welcome to spend the fund on projects identified by themselves or may wish to ask local organisations to put forward and deliver ideas. However, we would expect the fund to be spent within the next six weeks.
- 6.4 It is envisaged that the Town Centre grant would be a first phase of grant funded support to assist with the regeneration of our town centres. We intend to make a second tranche of funding available soon which will be run and administered by the District Council. We would also very much welcome the Town Councils engagement with that fund along with other town centre partners. More information will be made available to members soon.

**Contact for more Information:** Adrian Welsh, Group Manager – Growth, Economy and Delivery  
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**Circulation of the Report:** Cllr Graeme Barnell

**List of Background Papers:**

Reopening High Streets Safely Fund Guidance

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/888818/Reopening\\_High\\_Streets\\_Safely\\_Fund\\_-\\_Guidance\\_-\\_Final\\_v2.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/888818/Reopening_High_Streets_Safely_Fund_-_Guidance_-_Final_v2.pdf)

Reopening High Streets Safely Fund Frequently Asked Questions

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/893067/Reopening\\_High\\_Streets\\_Safely\\_Fund\\_FAQ\\_V3.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/893067/Reopening_High_Streets_Safely_Fund_FAQ_V3.pdf)