

EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MEETING 25TH JUNE 2018

09/18 **QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR S McKIERNAN**

(Bold font denotes question; regular font denotes response from the Leader of the Council)

In view of the announced programme of closures of Marks & Spencer, what is the Council doing to engage with and retain Marks & Spencer in Burton Town Centre?

Marks & Spencer are an iconic brand with a large store in the centre of Cooper's Square shopping centre. It would be devastating to the town centre if it were to close.

It is the only large clothing store left in the town, having lost Beattie's several years ago and having failed to attract Debenhams. Without it, I fear the town centre will wither as an attractive proposition for many residents and visitors.

Although acknowledged in a recent tv programme, the women's and menswear may increasingly appeal more to an older generation, I contend that it is this 'grey pound' which drives much of the local retail economy. It is predominantly the older generation who still travel into the town centre for their weekly shopping trip, whether through habit or not wanting or able to travel to larger towns. Older people tend to be the ones with the money to spend, whether through having higher pay via longer careers, being freed from childcare responsibilities, or pensions after many years of service. Younger people on the other hand are more likely to be working in short term, low paid jobs with little spare cash. They may use the pubs, fast food and coffee shops and help to drive the night time economy, but increasingly use online retailers to do their shopping. We need a thriving daytime, week long flow of shoppers to sustain the town centre in the long run. I for one, do not want to see the town degenerate into a sad gathering of discount outlets, charity shops and coffee bars as is happening in so many local towns.

Whilst Marks & Spencer's is a significant clothing retailer in Burton town centre, there are a number of other clothing stores in the town, such as Primark and Matalan, and others that have recently expanded or established in the town, such as Next and H&M. So it is fair to say that not only are there other large clothing retailers, but the existing conditions of the centre have already encouraged the growth of clothing retailers in recent times. It is those conditions that the regeneration programme will seek to develop in order to support the future growth of the town centre.

Retail is struggling in town centres and this can be seen nationally with the closure or decline of many household names such as Woolworths, House of Fraser, Toys r Us and others. The prosperity of Burton Town Centre is a key concern for the Council, however the Council cannot force businesses to remain open or relocate to the area, instead it is focusing on making sure that the town is an attractive prospect for investment, both for those businesses who are already in Burton and those who may seek to come here. As demonstrated by Corporate Plan targets PLEG 11 and 12, the Council is already working on encouraging investment in the area in partnership with both LEPs, which will be reviewed by March next year. As part of this, the

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Council is working on commissioning an investment prospectus that will provide existing and prospective businesses with information about the area in order to inform their decision making in terms of expansions or relocations. This will include key data such as industry growth rates, business support packages and employment information such as skills and travel to work figures.

The Council has not engaged Marks & Spencer's regarding their recently announced closures at this point however if the business took the decision to close the Burton store, the Council would speak to them about supporting staff in securing alternative employment opportunities, as appropriate.

How are the council working with retailers in the Regeneration Plan for Burton Town Centre? I want to see a lively, diverse town centre with a mix of branded and independent shops, with music and other entertainment, farmer's markets and a real welcome for visitors. The plans I've seen so far concentrate on traffic management and limited improvement to the pedestrian environment. This is a start but where are the plans to actively market the town and attract new businesses?

The Council is working on two priorities as part of a regeneration programme, the first relates to the production of a Regeneration Strategy for Burton upon Trent (corporate targets PSC 47 and 48), and the second to the improvement of the pedestrianised area of Station Street (corporate targets PSC 45 and 46).

1. Working in partnership with Staffordshire County Council ESBC has commissioned consultative support in the production of a thought provoking Regeneration Strategy for Burton upon Trent. The successful consultants, Cushman & Wakefield, have assembled an experienced team that has worked together for many years in the Midlands. Based on their acknowledged regeneration experience, the work they will carry out will analyse future opportunities that will lead to the creation of positive social and financial benefits for Burton upon Trent.

The final strategy will provide a forward view of short, medium and long term improvements and changes that need to be made to create the right conditions for liveability and growth over the next 30 years to ensure "a Better, Brighter, Burton".

2. The Council also holds an aspiration to improve the public realm of the pedestrianised section of Station Street in Burton upon Trent. Again working in partnership with SCC, the Council is proposing the immediate improvement in the attractiveness of the public realm of Station Street. Regeneration and public realm improvements are an economic driver in their own right but they can also encourage other economic activity. The Council is committed to bringing forward a high quality scheme that will increase foot-fall and encourage a broader range of retail businesses to this part of the town centre.

Both the production of the Strategy and the final design for Station Street will include the full consultation of local small, medium and large businesses, residents and visitors to the town.

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The regeneration strategy and the improvements to the public realm are an important step in the Council's regeneration programme to create a vibrant and attractive Burton which will have a unique place in the area's economy and be well placed to adapt to opportunities in the future.