Reopening High Streets – Fenland’s Market Towns

9th June 2020

Briefing note for distribution to all FDC Members and Town Councils

This briefing note covers the early steps taken by the council to support the successful and safe wider opening of retail shops from Monday 15th June 2020.

The Government’s Covid recovery strategy ‘Our Plan to Rebuild’ sets out the roadmap for recovery in our communities. This briefing covers the council’s plans to support the first phase of businesses to open, the retail sector.

Since the introduction of social distancing and wider ‘lockdown’ requirements the council has made appropriate changes to how services are delivered to protect residents. The focus of advice had been on staying indoors, undertaking only essential tasks and exercising only once a day.

The Government’s recovery plan sets out a staged approach to coming out of lockdown and next steps include the retail sector opening more widely from 15th June 2020 (only food retail has been open since the end of March). Retail is the first business sector to open and we do expect other sector announcements in the coming weeks.

In order to respond to these recovery steps and to support the Fenland economy as best as possible a council wide project team has been created to ensure the appropriate support, messages of reassurance and steps to ensure safety are implemented. The project will fall into 4 key work streams with an initial phase supporting the opening of high streets and the retail sector in particular.

Government has announced a retrospective funding stream of approximately £90,000 (which is claimed for in arrears) for FDC to help deliver recovery actions in the town centres and this funding will be accessed for relevant considerations (signage, communications and business compliance support).

4 Key Work Streams:

- Public Realm changes
- Open Spaces changes
- Supporting businesses to adapt to become Covid Secure
- Communications

Public Realm Changes

An audit of high street and town centre locations has been undertaken by both county highways and FDC staff. This has resulted in a plan for increased signage in identified locations such as car parks, pedestrian pinch points, busy or narrow footways. These
locations can be found at the foot of this note. Once shops begin to open these actions will be reviewed and built upon where necessary.

County Council signs will be placed mostly at the gateways to the high street locations. FDC’s signage and banners will supplement that from CCC Highways signage.

In addition cleansing of public open spaces and town centres will take place from 05.30 in the morning 7 days a week, with a regular cleansing routine in place, including the FDC managed public toilet facilities in each town.

Open Spaces Changes

Open spaces have remained open during the lockdown period with certain restrictions in place. The recovery plan encourages more outdoor time for everyone. FDC already has signage up in key open spaces, along with ongoing social media messages, and this will be reviewed and increased as required from 15th June.

Currently play areas remain closed. Skate parks could potentially re-open, but would send a confusing message to park users. FDC is expecting to wait until 4th July to reopen skate parks – with or without the reopening of play areas at this time.

Supporting Businesses to adapt to become Covid Secure

During the period of closure for many businesses the council has delivered a number of funding schemes and support mechanisms. Where businesses were able to stay open and remain compliant (for example food delivery / take-away) the council has actively encouraged this and supported particularly the small to medium sized enterprises to remain Covid compliant. This included support to change their business model from ‘eat in’ to ‘take away’.

Although these early steps to reopening only include the retail sector at present announcements are soon anticipated about the reopening of the catering and hospitality industry. There will be many challenges and complex issues facing this industry sector. In order to better understand these challenges, and to support the early steps from 15th a business survey (https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/L7H8D3X) has been initiated to gauge the level of support required. Officers anticipate that smaller businesses will require greater support, particularly with regard to meeting new compliance requirements. This survey will help to understand the level of support which may be required to help local businesses open safely and successfully as swiftly as possible.

Communications

Our communications will centre on ‘shop locally’ and ‘support your local business’ with messages highlighting social distancing, washing your hands and other key government guidelines.
Initial actions (this week) will focus on getting clear messages out to the community regarding the opening of our high streets. Physical signage, banners, lamp post signs and pavement signs, will be displayed in and around our town centres.

We will also promote the opening of the high street with publicity via a programme of press releases and social media, outlining our approach and the support we are giving businesses to ensure our high streets are open and a safe place to shop.

Further communications will be developed as the project progresses and we know the results of the business surveys and once the high street shops are open.

**Key audit outcomes by towns:**

The positioning of signs has been discussed with County Council Highways who have proposed signage in a number of town centre locations. FDC signage will be supportive of, and complimentary to, CCC Highways signage, as well as covering FDC’s own properties such as car parks. These locations will be subject to review and changes made in response to public concerns, suggestions or identified need, with FDC’s Streetscene officers able to react promptly to additional requirements to support the towns.

**March – signs to be placed in:**
- City Road, Broad Street, Acre Road, River Walk, West End, Dartford Road, Darthill Road, Station Road, Fenland Walk, Nene Parade, Market Place (market days).
- Chatteris – signs to be placed in Furrowfields, High Street, Station Street, King Edwards Road, Rosemary Lane.
- Whittlesey – signs to be placed in Grosvenor Road, Eastgate, Market Street, High Causeway, Queen Street, Broad Street,
- Wisbech – signs to be placed in Old Market, South Brink, Bridge Street, High Street, Hill Street, Horse Fair, Church Terrace, York Row (one way), Post Office Lane, North Brink, Ghost Passage, New Inn Yard, Post Office Lane, St Peters Garden, Norfolk Street.

**15th June onwards**

This briefing covers very early steps in what will be a longer term project and feedback mechanisms will be developed to capture wider views and concerns.

Clearly there will be a need for support in areas outside of our town centres and these considerations will be fed into future phases of the project as we develop aspects of the plan and receive feedback from elected Members and communities with regard to local priorities.

On 15th June Streetscene Officers will be on patrol in each of the towns to offer guidance and support to shoppers and to respond to immediate issues of concern. These patrols will continue as usual and as required.