



## Cultural and Economic Services Committee

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**Date:** 7 September 2020

**Title:** General Service Updates

**Purpose of the Report:** To inform Committee of work activity

**Contact Officer:** Vivien Cannon. Head of Cultural and Economic Services Committee

<b>Corporate Objective/s:</b> LLTC Five Year Plan VIBRANCY AND VITALITY OF THE TOWN CENTRE: To continue to support a vibrant town through partnership working and initiatives including management of the street markets, support for local businesses, town and community promotions and town centre enhancements.
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<b>Implications:</b>		
<b>Financial</b>		
<b>Human Resources</b>		
<b>Operational/Service delivery</b>	√	General update information
<b>Procedural/Legal</b>		
<b>Risk/Health and Safety</b>		

### 1. RECOMMENDATION

Should members be minded, the recommendation is:

1.1 To note the report.

### 2. BACKGROUND

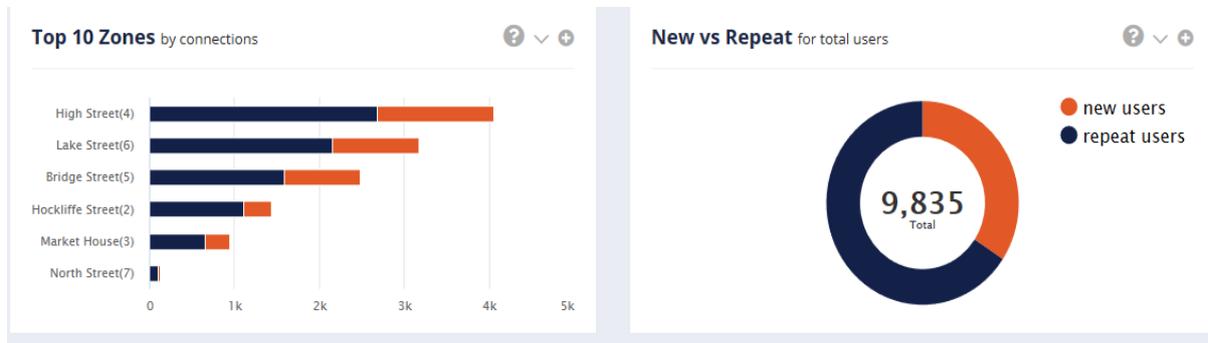
2.1 The activities and responsibilities of the Cultural and Economic Service (C&E) are broad and diverse. As with all Council services this financial year, 'normal' delivery of work has been interrupted and impacted upon by the COVID-19 pandemic. Below are brief updates on service activity to round-up the end of the financial year and inform Committee of projects completed and ongoing.

2.2 An updated service summary can be seen at **Appendix A**.

### 3 INFORMATION

3.2 Town Centre Wi-Fi

3.2.1. Between 2 January and 31 July 2020, a total of **9,835** connections to WiFi were made. Of that number, 6,460 were repeat users (65.7%), the remaining 3,375 users have logged on once (34.3%), see graph below.



3.2.2 In mid-July, the 5<sup>th</sup> WiFi point in North Street was installed following the awaited replacement of the old lamp column. This point only serves to expand the WiFi reach, not the Geo-Sensor footfall count.

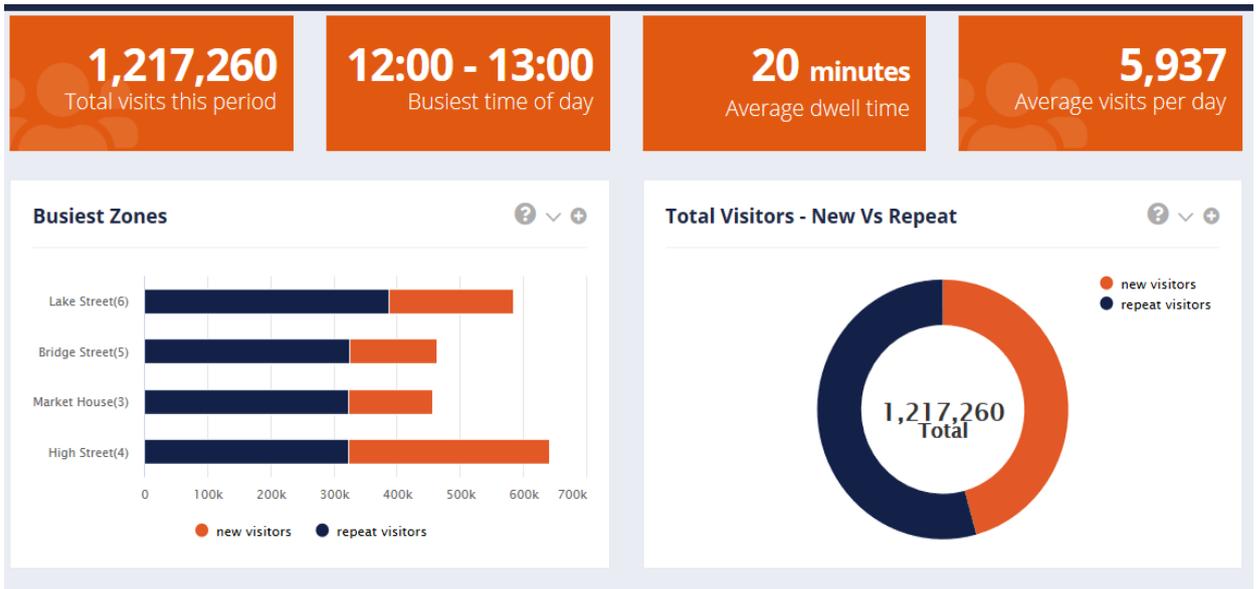
3.2.3 The service had a week-long outage in July when the lamp column replacement works were taking place in the Town Centre.

3.2.6 Given the number of visitors (see below), officers believe more promotional activity is needed to advise visitors of the free WiFi; more on-street signage.

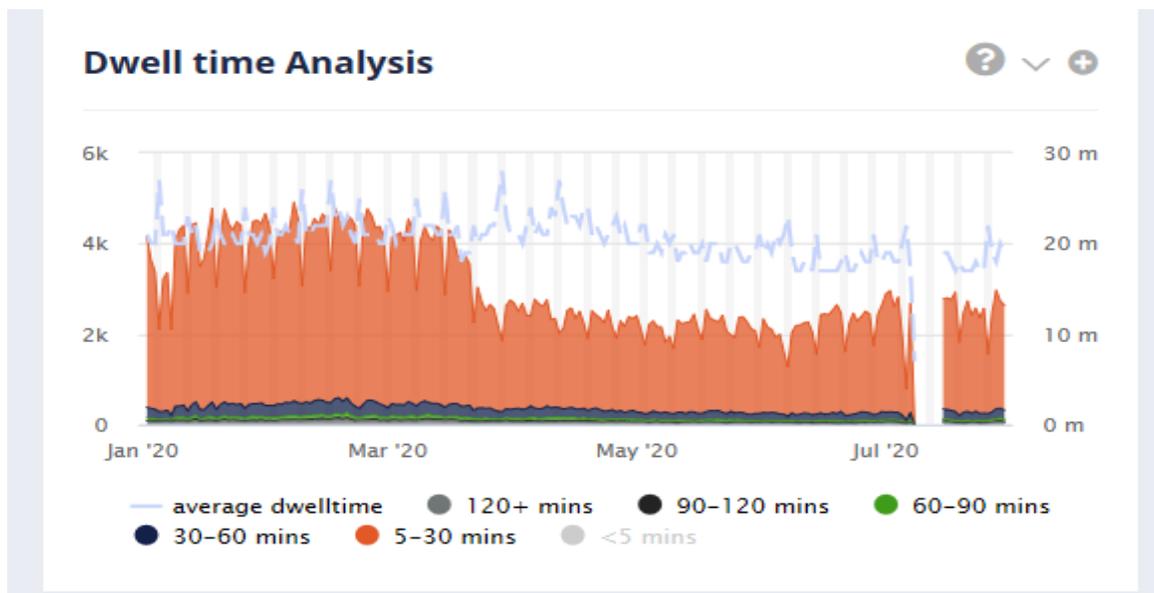
### 3.3 Town Centre Geo-Sense – footfall monitoring

3.3.1 There are 4 active Geo-Sensors coexisting with the WiFi equipment. Between the period of activation, 2 January to 31 July 2020, **1,217,260** visitors had visited the town (the count area). Of that figure, 661,111 were repeat visitors (54.3%) with the remaining, 556,149 (45.7%), being new visitors. See graphs 1. & 2. below.

Graph 1. Lake St and High Street show the highest pick-up points for footfall. Prior to COVID-19 lockdown, it was considered that these two roads reflected the drop off points for the buses.



Graph 2. The graph below clearly shows a drop in the amount of time people stay or 'dwell' in the town centre. The dwell time is beginning to pick up in July. The gap in July shows the week-long outage.



3.3.2 By no means will this year provide a baseline that depicts an average for 'normality'. Officers share the monthly statistics with officers from Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) to assist in the monitoring of the Town Centre's performance specifically during this period of the COVID-19 pandemic. CBC has also stated it relies on the Town Council to provide such monitoring.

### **3.4 Architectural Lighting**

3.4.1 Work to up-light Lloyds Bank is now able to proceed. Delivery is to be confirmed. Officers await CBC feedback on up-lighting of trees and from the Church Diocese for All Saints Church spire lighting. The planning application for the Waterborne Walk light projection is with the Council's surveyor who has been appointed to assist with this project. The Council's contracted electrician had been delayed in being able to access The Swan Hotel to assess the wiring for the lighting and draw plans ready for consent to be secured. Now that the hotel is open, that detail is being addressed. There has been little response at all from the owners of the building which houses Sue Ryder in Church Square. This element of the project will not be pursued. CBC has confirmed its agreement to undertake the works at Pizza Express however the tenant has been sent information and officers await their reply. Once other works are complete, officers will assess remaining funds and confirm alternative plans with Committee in the future.

### **3.5 Electronic signage**

3.5.1. The Sign on the by-pass remains unused and officers await an update from CBC about the proposal to relocate it. No doubt, COVID-19 has impacted on the projects receiving priority focus.

3.5.2 The day to day use of the signage is now coordinated through the Corporate Governance and Central Services administration team with all staff completing social media plans to advise the team when information is to be circulated.

### **3.6 Pigeon Management**

3.6.1 Officers have been in contact with CBC colleagues in the assets service who in August, confirmed that neither the Library nor multi storey car park can be used to host a pigeon loft. More positively, a potential rooftop has been identified and the idea has received an initial positive response from the managing agent. Time will now be spent on securing a more definite "in principle agreement" for Committee's future approval. Committee's work plan has been adjusted to reflect this and it is anticipated a proposal will be presented at the December meeting.

### **3.7 Section 106 approved projects**

3.7.1 Four projects were confirmed by Committee:

1. Town Centre free WiFi	Completed / ongoing	
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2. New location for the Town's Christmas Tree/pit	New pit complete and used in 2019. The final resurfacing remains outstanding. This work suffered from the COVID-19 pandemic as when dry weather arrived (needed to undertake the work), the contractor's staff were furloughed. Officers are pursuing its completion.	At its last meeting, Committee confirmed its agreement to install a pole and have guy-ropes leading off it like a tepee for flags to be hung from. This is yet to be undertaken.
3. Bell Alley resurfacing	Completed	
4. Road barriers in High St.	CBC officers had originally confirmed their assistance in exploring this idea.	The High Street is the subject of the Explementary Temporary Traffic Road Order which CBC is leading on and barriers are part of this.

### **3.8 Public Convenience (Multi-Storey Car Park)**

3.8.1 Installation of a Changing Places facility - The Council's contracted solicitor has reviewed and confirmed necessary amendments for the revised lease with CBC officers and will shortly send it back to CBC for the next stage of liaison between Councils. The Council will need to formally accept the new lease at a point when it is confirmed the facility will in fact be provided. Officers await confirmation from CBC on whether the planned installation will go ahead. It is understood that budget spend is currently being reviewed.

### **3.9 Older Peoples Task and Finish Group**

3.9.1 Despite the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the staffing resource and their ability to contact local groups and networks who ceased their activities, progress has been made on researching and gaining some level of feedback from residents.

3.9.2 Task and Finish Group members have been kept abreast on progress having had an informal online meeting on Thursday 13 August to be updated on the research gathered so far.

3.9.3 The online survey and group/activities research has been a valuable scoping exercise. It was however decided that in order to reach more vulnerable and socially isolated people in this age bracket, more effort is to be made by officers to get paper copies of the survey out in the community. This will be carried out by directly approaching independent living residencies (such as Greenfields) and partnering with Leighton-Linlode Helpers to assist in getting surveys to more isolated over 55s.

3.9.4 Formal Task & Finish Group (T&F) meeting will commence shortly and findings from the extended survey be presented back. Current draft ideas for a future activity for exploration include:

1. Exploring opportunities for collaboration with the CBC.
2. Consider a grant scheme like the Youth Promise Grant.
3. Consider working with a known charity/community group with shared aims and route support via this organisation.
4. Consider other ideas brought into play as a consequence of the final research presented back to T&F group.

3.9.5 It is hoped that the group will be better placed to present more developed options to C&E Committee at the 7<sup>th</sup> December C&E meeting.

## **4 SUMMARY**

4.1 Working collaboratively with external partners will always influence delivery progress. The additional impact of COVID-19 has served to restrict staffing resources and contact with partners. Work does however progress as Committee may note in the presentation of all Committee agenda items.