

Parish of St Helier Town Centre Recovery Plan
Request for Financial Support

This report concerns a request from the Connétable of St Helier for financial support in the sum of to assist with the execution of the pre-Christmas element of a Town Centre Recovery Plan.

Issue

1. The Minister will recall that the Covid-19 pandemic has already had a significant impact on the retail sector across the Island and in St Helier in particular.
2. Footfall figures for King Street illustrate the extent of the problem in the town centre. Measured footfall through 2020 has been as per the chart at Appendix 1. While there has been a notable improvement in footfall since the Island reached Level 1 of the Safe Exit Framework, the weekly numbers have remained consistently below even the levels normally experienced in late January. Indications are that a sustained increase in home working, increased inclination to shop online, low numbers of visitors and some residual public caution regarding the perceived risk of shopping in busier environments during the pandemic are all playing a part in suppressing town centre footfall.
3. Shop vacancy rates offer further insight. The Parish of St Helier reported a rate of just under 7% for Q3 2020, against a declared rate of 2% at the end of 2019. Both the Parish and Jersey Business are expecting the vacancy rate to rise significantly by Q1 2021 if the town centre experiences a poor rate of sales in the pre-Christmas period.
4. The Draft Interim Retail Strategy offers further analysis of the extent of the problem and outlines a series of four measures designed to support the sector through the short to medium term pending the identification of, and transition by businesses towards, the new normal. In the intervening period, however, there is a need to consider options to support town centre retail in the immediate run-up to Christmas.

Proposals

5. Recognising that implementation of the Interim Retail Strategy would require a period of several weeks to begin having a positive impact and given its ongoing annual Fête de Noué involvement, the Parish of St Helier Town Centre Management function leveraged its close links with retail stakeholders to develop a series of proposals designed to increase Islanders' confidence and inclination to shop in St Helier in the pre-Christmas period. These proposals, which were also informed by an extensive shopper survey commissioned by the Parish, were presented to the Minister by the Connétable of St Helier on 20th October.
6. As at the end of October, the Parish of St Helier was seeking £40,000 in financial support from Economy (with the parish covering the remainder), payable in November, in order to help deliver the following package of measures -

- Subsidised parking, to increase trading during known quiet times and support vulnerable people
- Technology costs, to support Covid messaging and generate the Christmas feel good factor with Covid restrictions
- Story time childcare
- Keeping people dry

Evaluation

7. It should first be noted that the total budget required for the full programme as outlined in the Parish presentation would be of the order of £80,000. The Parish has since evaluated what is practical to deliver in the available time and is expected to commit to a smaller but still significant sum.
8. A budget of approximately £14,000 to support limited parking subsidies is now not thought to be being pursued, on the basis that putting any concessionary measures in place before Christmas via the digital parking application will not be possible and because parking subsidy options are generally not well aligned with current transport or Car Park Trading Fund policy.
9. The remaining budget lines appear more viable. St. Helier envisages spending £10,000 on a 'Keeping people dry' initiative, either via temporary semi-open shelter spaces or alternative measures to mitigate store queues in poor weather. The precise shelter arrangements will require clearance from Public Health officials. A budget not exceeding £25,000 is earmarked for 'technology costs' including a range of measures from speaker systems playing festive music at a non-intrusive level through to the temporary installation of display screens in vacant shop units. A smaller sum of just over £1,000 is provisionally earmarked for childcare support at the Parish Hall.
10. It is further understood that the Parish may wish to use any residual balances to support Fête de Noué advertising and associated signage, to include Island-wide distribution of a Fête de Noué brochure.
11. The primary request from the Parish of St Helier is for financial assistance with the technology costs and keeping people dry budget. In this regard, significant efforts have been made within the Department to identify uncommitted funds that may be reallocated in support of the Parish initiative. The sum of £35,000 is considered to be the maximum that may be allocated without generating significant risk of an overspend position at year-end.

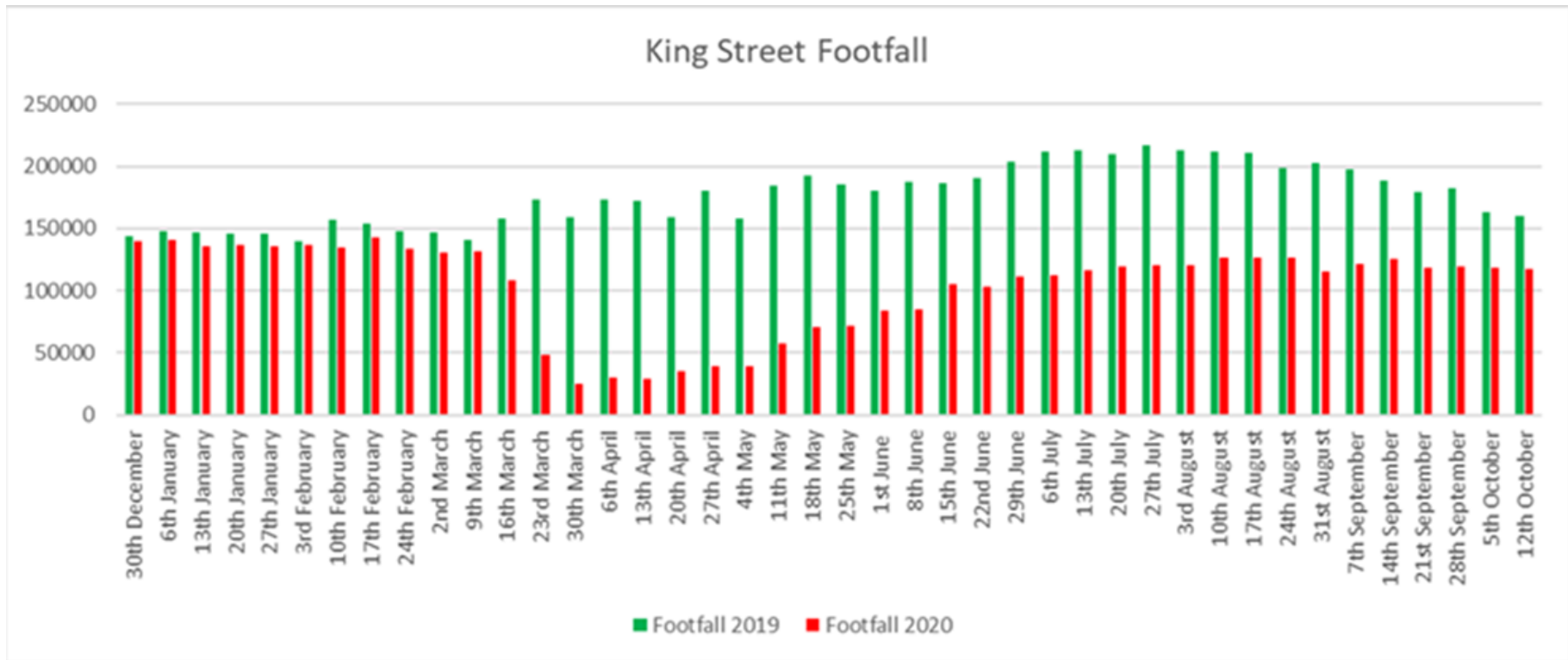
Recommendation

The Minister is recommended to confirm his support for the reallocation of a sum not exceeding £35,000 in support of the Parish of St Helier initiative.

Registrar of Aircraft and Shipping

6th November 2020

Appendix 1. King Street Footfall - 2019 – 2020 comparison



Minister for Economic Development,
Tourism, Sport and Culture

