1. **Meeting:** Regeneration Scrutiny Panel

2. **Date:** 8th May 2009

3. **Title:** Town Centre & Renaissance Marketing

4. **Programme Area:** Environment & Development Services

5. **Summary**

As part of the wider discussion relating to the image & perception of Rotherham, this report aims to set out the current considerations and approach to marketing and promotion of Rotherham Town Centre.

6. **Recommendations**

It is recommended that members of the Regeneration Scrutiny Panel note the contents of this report ahead of a presentation which will be made at the meeting.
7. Proposals and Details

Over the past few decades Rotherham has been subject not only to the changing demands of national retail and leisure trends but also to more localised pressures. The proximity of Sheffield, Meadowhall and Parkgate Shopping Centres has influenced the dynamics of the local economy, and the role and perception of Rotherham Town Centre at a local, regional and national level.

The current economic downturn further heightens the performance and perception of the Town Centre. Despite ongoing investment and development plans, town and city centres across the U.K are experiencing an increase in the number of vacant commercial units, a reduction in footfall and retail turnover. As a direct result Town and City centres need to further strengthen and invest in marketing and event activity to support existing businesses and attract new occupiers, alongside immediate initiatives which will enhance the physical appearance of the centre, maintain and increase shopper footfall and positively influence the satisfaction and perceptions of businesses, shoppers and residents.

Evidence from other town and city centres have demonstrated that investment in targeted place marketing and promotional activity can play a vital role in the economic well being and satisfaction of a town centre.

During 2008/2009 the marketing of the Town Centre was co-ordinated and delivered through the following:

- Town Centre Renaissance PR group (a stakeholder group including Yorkshire Forward, Chamber of Commerce)
- Town Centre Events Partnership
- RMBC Town Centre Management and Markets team activity (including specific joint marketing with developers and the Chamber of Commerce)
- Town Centre Events and BBC Big Screen programme delivered by Culture and Leisure Services
- Entertainment and events provided via local community organisations or partners, e.g. Ministry of Food, Rotherham Culture Company, Open Minds Theatre Company.

Funding and resources in previous years has been supported from RMBC Town Centre Management revenue budget, Yorkshire Forward (Rotherham Renaissance enabling programme), the Local Authority Business Growth Incentive (LABGI) and Westgate Demonstrator Sinking Fund. Whilst the aforementioned funding has been provided, it is important to note that some of this external funding may not be available in the future. In addition, there has been a continued requirement to identify efficiency savings within the RMBC budget setting process, which has resulted in marketing and promotions budgets being reduced. From 2009/2010 marketing and promotions budgets across RMBC have been centralised into a pooled budget and funding proposals will be submitted to secure budgets to deliver town centre activity.

Current marketing and promotions activity includes:

- Town Centre Events Programme (To drive footfall)
- Specialist & Farmers markets
- Town Centre Business Grants Scheme (to attract small niche independent businesses to the town centre through grant contributions to rent and fit out)
- Click-backs initiative (online shopping discount scheme)
- Rotherham Business Against Crime Partnership and radio link scheme (to address business crime and perception of safety)
- The marketing of All Saints’ Quarter specifically
• General Renaissance PR and Marketing activity to promote/raise awareness of the physical regeneration projects and level of investment in the town at a local, regional and national level.

During 2008 there has been a number of groups, projects and RMBC team activity in relation to the Town Centre marketing, PR and events, and it is recognised that priorities, resources & efforts should be co-ordinated to ensure maximum impact. A review of the Renaissance PR group has resulted in a change to its remit, and this has now been expanded and renamed as the Town Centre Marketing Group, to ensure an inclusive town centre wide approach to the marketing and image management of Rotherham Town Centre. Further consideration should now be given to whether the activity of other groups could be integrated to consolidate efforts. The Town Centre Marketing groups focus is to support the economic performance, image and perception through the co-ordination of marketing, event and communication activity and:

• To plan and implement a co-ordinated, cohesive and effective marketing plan for Rotherham Town Centre
• To monitor and evaluate effectiveness of the Town Centre Marketing Plan
• To identify and establish partnerships that will enhance the delivery of the plan
• To identify and establish partnerships/opportunities that will maximise resources
• To identify and secure funding sources to support the implementation of marketing and events activity within the plan.

The Town Centre Marketing Plan will be underpinned by a strong evidence base of customer research and be able to focus and coordinate efforts aimed at consumers, residents, investors and existing businesses. Priorities will be set based upon:

• Current perceptions, both positive and negative, taken from the Rotherham Renaissance road shows, Town Centre on-street shopper and borough wide telephone household surveys
• The success of previous marketing activities (e.g. by referring to the evaluation of past Renaissance marketing activity)
• Forthcoming challenges identified for the town centre (current economic climate)
• Opportunities identified for the town centre (grants scheme in place and Renaissance programme ongoing)

Where we are now:
The Town Centre Marketing Group have had their first meeting and the presentation at the Regeneration Scrutiny Panel (May 8) will be around the priorities identified by that group and suggested key marketing activities to fulfil the objectives of the Town Centre Marketing Plan.

8. Finance
The Community Strategy, Rotherham Economic Plan and RMBC Corporate Strategy identify Rotherham Town Centre is a key priority, and as such, budgets need to reflect this.

The aforementioned marketing plan will identify both free PR & marketing opportunities and financial costs for the activities necessary to achieve the plans objectives. This will then enable funding proposals to be submitted to the corporate Pooled Marketing budget.

Funding has been secured from Yorkshire Forward as part of the Renaissance PR enabling project; however a similar commitment is expected from the council and other
partners for Yorkshire Forward to justify their investment in town centre Renaissance marketing activity.

One full time Marketing Officer is also funded by Yorkshire Forward to concentrate on delivering Renaissance PR and marketing activities. Once again, a similar commitment needs to be made by the council to provide adequate resources for carrying out the strategy.

9. Risks and Uncertainties
Whilst marketing activity can play a vital role in the economic performance and perception of a destination, the wider economic climate and physical investment plans will also determine the future performance. However the potential risks of not undertaking and investing in the activities identified in the Town Centre Marketing Plan include:

- Potential further retail closures
- Lack of inward investment for the town centre
- Further reduction in footfall and spend
- A rise in vacant properties
- A reduction in public satisfaction with the Town Centre
- Potential long term impact to Rotherham Council’s reputation

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications
The proposed marketing plan will contribute to the following strategic priorities of the Community Strategy:

- Develop Rotherham Town Centre as a destination providing a mixed economy of specialist and quality shops, markets, housing and cultural life for all ages, & establish a strategy to ensure local centres complement the offer in the town centre

The marketing plan will support corporate objectives under Rotherham Achieving, Rotherham Proud and Rotherham Alive:

**Rotherham Achieving**
*Provide an Excellent Town Centre*  
*Improve the borough’s economy*
Create a successful town centre that acts as a hub for social, economic and environmental activity.

**Rotherham Proud**
*Promote Pride in the Borough*
Increase the number of residents who are satisfied with overall services provided by RMBC.

**Rotherham Alive**
*Increase retail and other business activity in the town centre*
Raise the footfall and spend in the town centre, making it a more vibrant place

**Sustainable Development**
A successful campaign could also be seen as contributing to the progress towards creating a *sustainable* town-centre economy

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