



REPORT FOR DECISION

Item No:- FC24/84

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| Committee:- | Finance and Governance Committee |
| Date:- | 23 rd April 2025 |
| Author:- | Martin Hammond, Clerk |
| Report Title:- | Smart Hubs |
| Wards Affected:- | William Knibb, St Michaels and Wicksteed, All Saints and St Peters |

1. Purpose of Report

To advise members on discussions that have taken place with a company wishing to install smart hubs around the centre of Kettering and to seek views on potential locations.

2. Recommendations

Members views are sought

3. Information

3.1. The Council was approached in late 2024 seeking views on the potential installation of on street interactive “smart hubs” by a company specialising in their provision. The product is called Pulse and it has been installed in a number of cities and towns in the last twelve months. Their marketing research identified Kettering as their preferred location in Northamptonshire.

3.2 Included here is a brochure setting out the product <https://pulsesmarthub.co.uk/>. Appendix A also shows the product as installed last year in Newton Abbot.

The brochure is quite long, so to summarise:-

- The smart hubs are about the size of a phone box, although slimmer, and are designed to provide free phone and wi-fi connectivity to local people, using modern technology.
- They enable wi-fi provision to nearby users and the ability to make phone calls free of charge and to charge a phone.
- They are a platform for public services, emergency services and charities to

- Advertise events and services
 - Communicate emergency messages
 - Provide touch screen access to public sector websites and
 - Advertise local venues and businesses
- They incorporate a defibrillator and other life saving equipment (e.g. bleed kits) and the ability to call up emergency services

3.3 The hubs are free to use and would be free to the Council to make use of for advertising. They are designed to support uniformity on the high street and support de-cluttering because of the range of features all within a single device. Pulsehub have partnered with, for example, British Heart Foundation in respect of their defib. rollout and Avon & Somerset Police and Heartsafe in respect of bleed control kits.

3.4. The units will need planning consent; they have secured 70 or so planning approvals to date.

3.5. Potential locations – the clerk has been in dialogue with Pulsehub about possible locations in or near to the town centre. Eleven possible sites have been identified and they are shown here :-

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1EPSTlxzAiz4tzXh3ADR-ikUlqwlTJol&usp=sharing>

It is probable that a smaller number of units will be installed initially and of course planning approval will determine the suitability of each site.

Members views on these locations are sought.

3.6. Whilst the units have many advantages and features and are free as far as users and local service providers are concerned, there are some aspects which will need further examination

- engagement with the police, NNC and other service providers has not taken place yet by Pulsehub and no approach has yet been made to the planning authority.
- NNC installed a similar but less multi-faceted smart hub in High St in 2020 but this has been poorly understood and used and seems not to function all the time, all features which will need to be overcome by Pulsehub when installing and explaining their product.
- some locations could attract anti-social behaviour – the attractiveness of the units to young people might mirror the experience around McDonalds – this would be off putting to other users, and intensify the problem already in play in town at certain times of the day. Pulsehub have the ability to shut units down for periods of time or parts of the day if they begin to attract ASB in order to disrupt that behaviour.

3.7. The Council did intend to provide a digital notice board itself until power supplies made that a longer term project but the units could provide a free means of communicating our events, projects, services and meetings.

4. Consultation and Engagement

Some feedback from the neighbourhood planning engagement has been that some people feel that communication about events and services doesn't reach them. Another feature of that engagement has been people's keen-ness to see town centres thrive as a hub of the community and remain central to leisure and lifestyle choices.

Pulsehub would need to do a great deal of communication about these hubs – it is felt that they might expect or need the Town Council to support them in this, by endorsement.

5. Finance, Legal and Resource Implications

There are no financial implications for the Town Council except that feeding information to the smart hubs would become a regular feature of our communication practices.

6. Climate change implications

Making the town centre more attractive and increasing facilities within it will encourage greater footfall and reduce out of town journeys.

7. Policy Implications

The Council's policies include

1. The Council will support growth and the continuing economic welfare of the town, provided this growth is as sustainable as it can be.
2. The Council will support the town centre - through encouraging and delivering facilities, through putting on events and markets, and will help to make the town centre safe, attractive, interesting and varied, with local businesses thriving alongside national retailers and service providers.
3. The Council will support measures to improve physical and mental health wellbeing, through its own services and in partnership with others.
4. The Council will support measures to improve public safety, road safety, and the safety of the night time economy in Kettering.

Background Papers

Email communications from Pulsehub and attached brochures/links

