

Report to Wednesbury Levelling Up Partnership Board

18 April 2024

Subject:	Wednesbury Town Centre Masterplan and Public Realm Works
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To set out the draft masterplan for Wednesbury Town Centre and proposals for public consultation
- 1.2 To set out the findings of the Public Realm consultation following public consultation held 29 January to 11 March 2024
- 1.3 To set out final designs for the Public Realm works to be funded through the Levelling Up Partnership funding

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the WLUP Board recommend to the Assistant Director – Spatial Planning and Growth and Cabinet Member for Regeneration and WMCA that public consultation on the draft Wednesbury Town Centre Masterplan commence.



- 2.2 That the final public realm consultation report be received.
- 2.3 To approve that project delivery commence for the public realm project (public realm works) subject to S151 Officer sign-off.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Wednesbury Town Centre Masterplan and Developing the Public Realm in Wednesbury Town Centre (Public Realm) projects aim to conduct a strategic review of the Town Centre (including a review of its current uses and future opportunities) to provide a solid base for future intervention, and to implement some of the proposals in the masterplan to improve the attractiveness and safety of Wednesbury town centre.

Masterplan

- 3.2 Wednesbury Town Centre does not currently have a Masterplan in place. A strategic review of the Town Centre has been undertaken including a review of its current uses, constraints, and future opportunities to provide a solid base for future intervention in the longer term.
- 3.3 The purpose of the masterplan is to create a place-based vision and strategy for future uses, which informs a range of potential interventions which are realistic and deliverable, including areas for development and associated infrastructure. The draft masterplan provides the basis on which to revitalise and diversify the town centre placing it as a social, cultural and economic hub for the local community and surrounding area.

It sets out 6 strands as follows:

- Grow the evening economy offer including leisure and entertainment and places to eat and drink
- Transform the public realm to a consistent quality improving pedestrian connectivity and making the most of public spaces
- Consolidate and strengthen the retail offer and enhance walking routes along key frontages



- Reimagine the link between the town centre and tram stop creating a high-quality gateway into the town centre
- Diversify land uses integrating residential development and tackling vacant and under used sites through phased redevelopment
- Promote a welcoming and inclusive town centre experience for all visitors including through events and animation and revealing the towns heritage

3.4 Input to the draft masterplan was provided by WLUP Board Members at a working group meeting held in March 2024. Key points raised in discussion were that:

- The plan was felt to be in line with residents needs
- The proposed retail diversification provided a broader appeal
- There needs to be a leisure offer available for families
- The metro and bus link had been requested by residents for some time and was glad that was part of the plan
- It was suggested the local market has not taken off well and if that could be remarketed and promoted
- An events programme with an essential focus on the heritage and history of Wednesbury was welcomed
- Proposals for the nighttime economy should incorporate families
- There is community spirit in Wednesbury and the heritage needs to be highlighted to the public
- Board members mentioned that they and residents felt unsafe and uncomfortable as the streets are not well lit and there is a lot of traffic
- To incorporate the community into the consultation to make it successful and build ownership

3.5 Public consultation on the masterplan is due to take place from 7 May – 11 June 2024. A draft consultation plan is attached at Appendix 1.



- 3.6 The WLUP Board Communication and Engagement Working Group is due to review the details of the public consultation proposals at a meeting in April 2024 and feedback will be provided during the meeting.
- 3.7 To promote the consultation exercise a leaflet drop to Wednesbury town centre businesses and key buildings in Wednesbury will be scheduled alongside a social media communication promoting the consultation launch and a survey via Sandwell Council's Consultation Hub. Additionally, the Council will host workshops with community groups and two in-person events to provide an opportunity for all stakeholders to comment on the draft masterplan.
- 3.8 The Council's Cabinet agreed a delegation to the Assistant Director – Spatial Planning and Growth in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and WMCA to approve public consultation in relation to Wednesbury Masterplanning.
- 3.9 Endorsement from the WLUP Board to commence public consultation is sought.

Public Realm

- 3.10 Public consultation on the public realm proposals took place between 29 January and 11 March 2024. The consultation involved a survey and a series of engagement events in and around Wednesbury Town Centre.
- 3.11 Interim consultation findings were presented to the WLUP Board in February 2024 and a delegation put in place to enable the project to move to delivery phase (procurement) as soon as possible. Authorisation was given to the WLUP Board Chair to review the final public realm consultation findings in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and WMCA and the Assistant Director – Spatial Planning and Growth. The WLUP Board approved that project delivery commence for the public realm project (public realm works)



subject to S151 Officer sign-off, and the WLUP Board Chair's review of the final public realm consultation findings.

3.12 The final consultation report and final designs are now available. Taking into account that S151 Officer sign off is scheduled to take place after the WLUP Board meeting and that procurement will not commence until the approval from the S151 Officer is granted, the Chair has requested that the approval to commence delivery be referred to the Board rather than enacting the previously agreed delegation.

3.13 The final consultation report is provided at Appendix 2. Key findings from the consultation were:

- Safety is the highest priority and better lighting, and more CCTV should be the focus of the public realm works
- More trees and planting are supported in the town centre but consideration will need to be given to maintenance
- More benches and places to sit are required but the design should adequately consider accessibility, ASB, crime, litter and homelessness
- More events are needed to activate underused spaces in the town centre
- Movement and transport will need to be considered in more detail particularly at Market Place and pedestrian crossings at Holyhead Road
- That proposals reflect the heritage and culture of Wednesbury

3.15 Key areas of suggestions raised in the consultation were:

- Safety – respondents stated there should be an increased police presence, better lighting and CCTV
- Vehicular movement – respondents raised issues at Market Place and difficulty crossing at Holyhead Road



- Parking – respondents commented on the cost of parking and the lack of parking metres which allow them to pay with cash
- Appearance of the town centre – respondents commented on poorly maintained buildings
- Antisocial behaviour – respondents stated their concerns on various issues such as drug dealing and usage, drunk and disorderly behaviour particularly in the evening
- Market – respondents have referred to the market moving location and the market offer
- Use types – respondents commented on the number of food takeaways, hairdressers and nail bars in the town centre
- Public amenities – respondents suggested there should be a children’s play and event spaces, a public toilet, more benches and places to sit and bins
- Retail environment – respondents suggested there should be an improved variety of shops, market offer, potential canopy on Union Street and better maintained buildings

3.16 Final designs will be presented during the meeting. The key areas of the design are:

- Wednesbury Great Western Street Metro stop – improve appearance of the entrance to this space through new seating, tree planting and wayfinding signage
- Victoria Street – improve street lighting
- Victoria Street/ Holyhead Road Junction – reduce planting to improve maintenance and views to and from the town centre
- Union Street – repave, increase planting, provide new seating, lighting and improve drainage
- Hitchen’s Croft, Church Hill and Spring Head – improve lighting
- Upper High Street/ High Bullen – close pedestrian link

3.17 Project cost estimates exceed the available £2m budget by £250,000. The estimate includes contingency costs and fees. A project change is



requested to move money from the site improvement budget within the overall £4.5m allocation. In the event that the change is not approved, the project will be value-engineered to de-scope materials / works to ensure that the output can be achieved within the available budget.

Public Realm Site Improvements

- 3.18 In relation to site acquisitions and improvements to progress with the LUP funding, an options analysis of sites in Wednesbury Town Centre has been undertaken.
- 3.19 Input was gained from the WLUP Board working group meeting held in March 2024 to help prioritisation of the sites to improve within the LUP programme.
- 3.20 The options appraisal took into account the following factors:
- Costs and value for money
 - Deliverability (including the timescales for spending the LUP grant)
 - Risks to the Council (including commitment to future spend)
 - Grant outputs - requirement to deliver improvements to 3 sites
- 3.21 The options appraisal and site recommendations are presented in a separate report to the Board.
- 3.22 Proposals for the other sites identified within the options appraisal but not recommended to progress through the LUP programme will continue to be developed as part of the longer-term masterplan work to regenerate Wednesbury Town Centre.

Financial Implications

- 3.23 A breakdown of the project budgets are provided below:



Wednesbury Town Centre Masterplan Project	Revenue	£130K
Developing the Public Realm Project	Intervention on Key Sites	£2.5m
	Public Realm Improvement Works	£2m
	Total Capital	£4.5m

- 3.24 High level cost estimates to deliver the site improvements schemes are under £2m. These estimates will be further refined as ground conditions are understood and negotiations commence.
- 3.25 Taking into account the ambition for the scale of public realm works and the suggested costs for the site improvement works, it is recommended that a change be made to the project budgets within the £4.5m granted for both public realm schemes. The change is set out in a separate project changes report for consideration by the WLUP Board.
- 3.26 A capital appraisal for the public realm project will be undertaken by the Council as part of project assurance arrangements. Project delivery will not commence until this review is complete and authorisation provided by the Council’s S151 Officer. This is expected to conclude in April 2024.

Consultation and Engagement

- 3.27 Initial engagement around the masterplan has taken place through the Safer 6 campaign activities and a bespoke survey was hosted on the Consultation Hub.
- 3.28 Draft Proposals for public consultation on the masterplan are set out in this report and in appendix 1. The consultation period is planned to last for 5 weeks.
- 3.29 In relation to the public realm improvements, public consultation took place in February and March. The consultation findings report is set out in appendix 2.



3.30 The Communication and Engagement Working Group is meeting in April 2024 to consider proposals for the Masterplan consultation.

Monitoring and Evaluation

3.31 Project output measures were submitted to DLUHC as part of a return made prior to the Grant Funding agreement being issued. The output measures relating to the Masterplan and Public Realm project were set out as follows:

- 14000m² of improved pedestrian area
- 3 problem sites improved
- Completion of masterplan for Wednesbury Town Centre

3.32 All outputs are on track for achievement. Current designs for the improved pedestrian area are based on an assumption that approval will be given to change the project budget within the £4.5m allocation for the public realm project to move £250,000 from the site improvement budget to the public realm works budget. In the event that the change is not agreed, the scheme will be value engineered to ensure the 14,000m² improved pedestrian area is delivered within the £2m available funding.

3.33 In addition to the outputs submitted to DLUHC, the replacement of retail signage in the conservation area for up to 15 sites will be undertaken.

3.34 The masterplan and public realm projects are expected to contribute to the LUP programme outcome measures of:

- Resident satisfaction with their local area as a place to live
- Business vacancy rate in Wednesbury Town Centre / Business Growth Measure / equiv.

3.35 Any actual or forecast overspend on the total project budget will be reported to the WLUP Board as part of ongoing monitoring.



3.36 Project Milestones are set out as follows:

	Milestone	Date
Developing the Public Realm	Preliminary works (site investigations and designs)	Complete
	Public Realm consultation	Complete
	Approval to move to delivery phase	WLUP Board & S151 Sign off April 24
	Public realm/ urban greening works commence	May 24
	Completion of public realm/ urban greening improvements	Mar 25
	Completion of site improvements (as required)	Mar 25

	Milestone	Date
Masterplan* *Milestones reflect revised project plan	Inception meeting with consultants	Complete
	Baseline study and initial site valuations complete	Complete
	Draft Public realm and urban greening strategy complete	April-24
	Draft masterplan document ready for consultation	April-24
	Six-week public consultation ends	June-24
	Cabinet approval of masterplan	Jul-24

4.0 Implications

Resources:	<p>£160,000 revenue has been granted for the Wednesbury Town Centre Masterplan project.</p> <p>£4.5m capital has been granted for the Developing the Public Realm in Wednesbury Town Centre project (this includes funding for public realm works and improving problem sites).</p> <p>Current designs for the improved pedestrian area are based on an assumption that approval will be given to change the project budget within the £4.5m allocation</p>
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	<p>for the public realm project to move £250,000 from the site improvement budget to the public realm works budget. In the event that the change is not agreed, the scheme will be value engineered to ensure the output of 14,000m2 improved pedestrian area is delivered within the £2m available funding.</p> <p>A capital appraisal has been undertaken for the masterplan project.</p> <p>A capital appraisal for the Public Realm Project is underway and is expected to conclude in April. Delivery will not commence until authorisation from the Council's S151 Officer is made.</p> <p>The LUP Grant includes the requirement for all spend to be made by March 2025. Delivery is on track to meet the timescale.</p>
<p>Legal and Governance:</p>	<p>Procurement for the project will be in accordance with Sandwell MBC's Financial Regulations and Standing Orders for Contracts.</p> <p>A subsidy control screening has been undertaken for the public realm works and no subsidy issues have been identified.</p>
<p>Risk:</p>	<p>A project risk register is in place and this is reviewed as part of the project capital appraisal.</p> <p>There are currently no significant project risks.</p>
<p>Equality:</p>	<p>An EqIA has been undertaken and has been reviewed following final designs being produced for the public realm improvements.</p> <p>The EqIA identifies no negative impacts on people with protected characteristics.</p> <p>The EqIA is attached as an appendix to the report.</p>



<p>Health and Wellbeing:</p>	<p>The underpinning objective of the LUP is to ‘level up’ and reduce inequalities. The proposed interventions focus on tackling health inequalities in a multi-faceted way and compliment public health programmes.</p> <p>Improvements to the public realm are expected to lead to improvements in residents’ satisfaction with their local areas as a place to live.</p>
<p>Social Value</p>	<p>The proposed interventions will be delivered in accordance with the Council’s Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules and will deliver social value in line with the council’s requirements.</p> <p>In relation to the masterplan, consultants are due to deliver a business upskill session, and a school careers talk.</p> <p>The Council will work with the public realm contractor to identify appropriate social value interventions.</p>
<p>Climate Change</p>	<p>The public realm proposals include an element of urban greening which will make a positive contribution to the natural environment.</p>
<p>Corporate Parenting:</p>	<p>Young peoples’ views and opinions (voice of the child) have been considered through the public realm consultation and are being sought for the masterplan</p>

Appendix 1 – Wednesbury Town Centre Masterplan Draft Public Consultation Plan

Appendix 2 – Public Realm Consultation Findings

Appendix 3 – Wednesbury Town Centre Public Realm Equality Impact Assessment

