


REPORT TO CABINET

4 March 2020

Subject:	Wednesbury Town Centre High Street Heritage Action Zone Scheme
Presenting Cabinet Member:	Councillor Wasim Ali - Cabinet Member for Resources and Core Services and Inclusive Economic Growth
Director:	Amy Harhoff, Director of Regeneration and Growth
Contribution towards Vision 2030:	
Key Decision:	Yes
Cabinet Member Approval and Date:	Yes
Director Approval:	Amy Harhoff
Reason for Urgency:	Urgency provision do not apply
Exempt Information Ref:	3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)
Ward Councillor (s) Consulted (if applicable):	Not consulted
Scrutiny Consultation Considered?	Scrutiny has not been consulted
Contact Officer(s):	Tammy Stokes, Service Manager, Growth & Spatial Planning

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That, subject to a minimum financial appraisal score of 65% by the Strategic Investment Unit, the Cabinet:

1. authorises the Director-Regeneration and Growth, in consultation with the Executive Director-Resources, to enter into a grant funding agreement with Historic England to undertake a heritage regeneration project of £■■■■ million with a £■■■■m grant contribution from Historic England within the Wednesbury Conservation Area;
2. in connection with (1) above, authorises the Executive Director-Resources to allocate a total £■■■■m as project match funding, from the council's capital programme;
3. authorise the Executive Director – Resources, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resources and Core Services and Inclusive Economic Growth to implement the recommendations arising from the financial appraisal.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval to undertake a heritage regeneration project of £■■■■m with a £■■■■m grant contribution from Historic England within Wednesbury Conservation Area.
- 1.2 To seek approval for a £■■■■m contribution from Council Capital as part of match funding contribution over a 4-year period.

2 IMPLICATION FOR VISION 2030

- 2.1 The Wednesbury High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) contributes to several of Sandwell's Vision 2030 ambitions:

Ambition 7: We now have many new homes to meet a full range of housing needs in attractive neighbourhoods and close to key transport routes.

- Conversion of first floor floorspace to provide residential opportunities in a town centre location close to the bus station and metro station connecting to key locations.
- This complements the £250m Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro Extension.

Ambition 8: Our distinctive towns and neighbourhoods are successful centres of community life, leisure and entertainment where people increasingly choose to bring up their families.

- The restoration will bring back historic features, emphasising the strong heritage of Wednesbury.
- The image and status of Wednesbury will be enhanced, helping to restore business and shoppers' confidence.
- The aesthetics of the area will be improved and thus result in a more attractive environment where people choose to live and visit.
- Improving the conditions of buildings within the town centre conservation area provides an increased opportunity to attract investors to convert upper level floors to residential or office properties.

Ambition 9: Sandwell has become a location of choice for industries of the future where the local economy and high performing companies continue to grow.

- There is currently an economic decline and poor local employment opportunities. The redevelopment of shop fronts and buildings in poor condition, will make the town centre area more attractive for potential future businesses.
- Encouragement of a more vibrant night time economy.

Ambition 10: Sandwell now has a national reputation for getting things done, where all local partners are focused on what really matters in people's lives and communities.

- Entering into a partnership scheme highlights the council's ability and enthusiasm to work with partners to deliver regeneration projects throughout the borough.
- There is demonstration of public support for businesses within the town and this project demonstrates the councils support for local businesses.
- The project will enhance the image and economic performance of this core shopping area and so as a result would highlight the support of the council in enabling this to improve.

3 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 Sandwell Council have been successful in a competitive bidding process for a Future High Streets Fund scheme to regenerate historic high streets. This scheme is administered by Historic England and is known as a High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ). Sandwell has been afforded the opportunity to receive £■■■m grant from Historic England to undertake a heritage regeneration scheme within Wednesbury Market Place conservation area.
- 3.2 An appraisal of the Market Place Conservation Area in Wednesbury was conducted in 2013 and again in 2017, both of which identified a number of issues including: conditions of buildings, vacant properties, public realm issues and generally the poor quality of the environment.
- 3.3 The grant funding from Historic England would reverse many years of gradual decline of the buildings that enclose Market Place. £30,000 of enabling funding was made available by Historic England to undertake a detailed condition survey of the buildings of Market Place in 2018/19.
- 3.4 The Conservation Survey has identified, itemised and costed just under £■■■ of required/desirable remedial and restoration works (Appendix 2). The detailed survey work gives a solid basis to specify and contract the historical restoration and shop front improvements.
- 3.5 The funding provides an opportunity for private owners of those buildings to receive grant of up to 80% of costs associated with structural issues, the restoration of original historical features, and shop front improvements. The match funding required from the private sector is £■■■ in total.
- 3.6 The quality of the town centre environment is poor and visitor numbers are decreasing. The public realm improvements will help address the issue of a declining town centre suffering from a lack of footfall. The proposal to relocate the outdoor market to Market Place will help establish a clear centre for the town. The improvements will result in a high quality, attractive environment and the current outdoor market site on Union Street will become available for future development.

4 THE CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 Wednesbury town centre has a rich streetscape comprising of many fine buildings, with much of the area a designated conservation area. However, some buildings suffer from loss of historic features, poor condition shop fronts and general maintenance and repair issues. Improvements to public realm are also needed for a high-quality town centre. The Historic England grant provides the opportunity to improve Wednesbury's built environment, engage with the community and enhance economic performance with a focus on the heritage assets of the area.
- 4.2 The Conservation Area Appraisals of Wednesbury conducted in 2013 and 2017, both identified the following issues which are having a detrimental impact on the area:
- Economic decline and poor local employment opportunities;
 - The poor condition of the buildings and shop fronts in the main commercial core, centred on Upper and Lower High street;
 - Vacant upper floor space;
 - Size of shop units not being appropriate to market needs;
 - Some important 'Buildings at Risk' which require urgent attention – as a result of neglect and decay;
 - The re-fronting of building facades of important unlisted buildings has become widespread;
 - A number of empty sites, or sites where existing buildings make a negative contribution;
 - Inappropriate shop front alterations and excessive shop front signage;
 - Loss of historical material such as traditional timber sash windows and
 - Improvements to the public realm are needed, to provide for a consistent, high quality environment that reinforces a sense of place and improves economic performance.
- 4.3 Market Place is currently listed on Historic England's Risk Register meaning it is at risk of being lost as a result of neglect, decay, or inappropriate development. The condition of the area being noted as 'very bad' on a scale of 'optimal' to 'very bad'.

5 CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)

- 5.1 As part of the Conservation Survey carried out in July 2018, by Bryant Priest Newman Architects, identifying work to be carried out and costings, initial discussions have taken place with property owners within the Conservation Area regarding work recommended to be carried out to their property – this received enthusiastic feedback to potentially be involved.
- 5.2 Initial discussions have taken place between Planning and Markets Officers with some business owners within the conservation area outlining the scheme. As a result, an Expression of Interest list was collated with signatures of support from local business owners. A total of 50 signatures were received from shop and business owners on an expression of support list to demonstrate support for this scheme.
- 5.3 Discussions with local organisations have commenced and several organisations have demonstrated commitment to work in partnership with Sandwell Council to deliver the cultural programme of the scheme. There were 6 letters of support from community organisations.
- 5.4 The community consortia who would deliver the cultural programme as part of the proposed scheme would engage with the community to shape the proposals. Once these proposals have been developed, the consultation process will commence where the public will be able to feedback their comments and suggestions. Following this feedback, the plans will be amended as appropriate through the co-designed approach.

6 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

6.1 Do nothing

A strategy of appropriate and targeted intervention is considered essential as a catalyst to effect change. Without such measures the condition of the buildings, shop fronts and area of the main commercial core would continue to decline, leading to increased social, economic and environmental implications; this would result in increased long-term support being required overall. The number of empty shop units, currently standing at 16%, would further increase with unchecked retail decline. Safety and increased anti-social behaviour issues would not be addressed.

Wednesbury has suffered from a lack of investment in the past. Not capitalising on an opportunity such as the HSHAZ would mean that much needed investment would not be realised.

Consultation undertaken with local businesses to date has highlighted the demand for this project; doing nothing would not be responding to public concerns.

The conservation area would remain on Historic England's 'at risk' register.

6.2 **Scheme completed fully from council capital and revenue**

This would allow the council to have full control of the spending of the budget towards the scheme. However, this would require the council to identify further capital and revenue to undertake the £■■■■m programme. This option would result in less historic input from Historic England who have successfully completed many regeneration schemes of this nature and would be a valuable partner.

6.3 **Scheme completed in partnership with Historic England through High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ)**

Acceptance of the HSHAZ grant offer would offer the greatest project value with significant grant funding and reduced council capital required. This would create a scheme value of £■■■■m, with a contribution of £■■■■m from Historic England, £■■■■m from the council and £■■■■ from private owners/businesses.

This option brings about considerable benefits, including first floor residential conversion opportunities, improvements to shop fronts and partnership working with Historic England. It also provides wider benefits including a cultural programme for the town and public realm improvements. This option offers an opportunity for co-production and partnership working with Historic England, local organisations and the community.

This option offers the greatest opportunity for a project to provide environmental benefits, increased economic performance and increased social impact.

7 **STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 The delivery of the project is dependent upon application of the following funding:

- Historic England - £■■■■m
- Sandwell Council Capital – £■■■■m
- Private sector £■■■■m
- Sandwell Council Revenue - £■■■■m

7.2 This redevelopment will help contribute to Vision 2030 aims and ambitions, particularly ambitions 7, 8, 9 and 10 as described in Section 2 of the report.

- 7.3 A designated project manager will be employed on a fixed-term basis for the duration of the project (4 years), to project manage the scheme. This project manager will be 50% funded through Historic England and it is proposed that 50% will be funded through Sandwell Council's revenue contribution to the project
- 7.4 Day to day management of the project will be undertaken by the project manager. Planning Regeneration officers, the councils Conservation officer and Markets Manager will support the project manager. Amongst other council services who will contribute to the scheme including Urban Design, Highways, Culture and Tourism, Transportation Planning and Planning Policy.
- 7.5 Internal fees incurred by Urban Design Services or Highways will be funded by the Historic England grant (proportionately according to the grant aid split), where satisfactory evidence can be provided to Historic England.
- 7.6 The project programme and cost profile for the project show the following Council resource implications for Capital contributions. This split between financial years will potentially change however as individual project elements advance or slip according to unknown circumstances. Drawdown will be as close as possible however to the table below

	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	Totals (000's)
Council Capital	■	■	■	■	■

8 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 Advice will be taken from the Council's Procurement Strategy Officer and Legal Services to ensure that the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the council's procurement and contract rules are complied with.
- 8.2 The proposed public realm and highways improvement works are all on public highways land and thus in the control of Sandwell Council.
- 8.3 A State Aid Appraisal conducted by Legal Services has concluded there are no state aid implications arising from this programme.

9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment screening exercise has been carried out and a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required.
- 9.2 The redevelopment process will ensure that any development complies with both the Equalities Act 2010 and relevant Building Regulations. Overall the scheme will have a positive impact on equality consideration.

10 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

10.1 This report does not relate to the collection of personal information and therefore a privacy impact assessment is not required.

11 CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT

11.1 The Corporate Risk Management Strategy (CRMS) will continue to be complied with throughout, in identifying and assessing the significant risks associated with this strategic proposal. This includes (but is not limited to) political, legislation, financial, environmental and reputation risks. A project risk register has been compiled and will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis. The risk register will be monitored by the Project Officer. Based on the information provided, it is the officers' opinion that for the risks that have been identified, arrangements are in place to manage and mitigate these effectively.

12 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS

12.1 This project feeds directly into the Councils Vision 2030, adding sustainability to these proposals.

12.2 The Council has recently appointed a new Service Manager of Tourism, Culture and Leisure who is developing a cultural strategy which this project supports. This project will be embedded in the new five-year cultural strategy and therefore implementation is sustainable.

12.3 The opportunity for first floor residential conversion, alongside the developments within the town of the new cinema, will offer increased natural surveillance throughout the area, this also provides the opportunity for a newly developed evening and night time economy sustainable through residents.

12.4 The sustainability of the cultural programme is offered due to the co-production and partnership working and the councils newly developing cultural strategy. These two complement each other and there is demonstrable enthusiasm and local organisation support to deliver this in partnership with the council.

12.5 The restoration and development of the area brings back to use empty shop units, improves the area visually, is more attractive to visitors and enhances the history of the town. Making the buildings more attractive to investors and prospective shop owners will consequently reduce the number of empty units within Market Place. Shop owners of these properties will then be more likely to maintain the upkeep of the buildings in the future rather than being empty and deteriorating further or making no improvement.

These projects collectively work together to develop Wednesbury over the long term.

- 12.6 The materials used will be of sustainable quality and require minimal maintenance following the development works. Contractors will be selected from the councils approved list and therefore we are confident they will deliver work to a high standard.
- 12.7 A suite of robust planning instruments, listed building designations, Article 4 direction (restricting the scope of permitted development, requiring planning applications for works to buildings within the HAZ area to protect the character and appearance of the local area), area of special control of advertisements, Conservation Area Management Plan, shop front design guidelines and use of planning enforcement powers will be used to steer future development within the Action Zone area. The proposed Wednesbury Conservation Area Management Plan and associated planning controls including a potential Article 4 direction will lend legitimacy and 'buy-in' to measures that will particularly be of concern to town centre businesses. Endorsement from stakeholders will help to ensure compliance.

13 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)

- 13.1 The development of this scheme will support investing in businesses, people, jobs and town centres.
- 13.2 As part of this new project, Social Value will be considered to ensure that as consequence of the scheme programme, there will be demonstrable and measurable social value commitment. Therefore, creating employment and skills opportunities, engaging with the local supply chain and bringing a positive impact on the social, economic and environmental wellbeing for the local area.
- 13.3 The scheme will regenerate Wednesbury town centre whilst enhancing the historic fabric of the town. Currently, many buildings require structural and cosmetic repair and there is a vacancy rate of 16% within the Conservation Area. Redevelopment will improve the immediate area, public realm, street scene and heritage.
- 13.4 The cultural aspect of this programme will allow local organisations and residents to be fully engaged with the scheme and drive change within their town.
- 13.5 This scheme will have a wider benefit to the community through creating a town centre which gives an improved shopping experience to visitors and

residents in a more attractive environment where people choose to live and visit.

14 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND

14.1 The shops within the conservation area of Market Place are all in private ownership.

14.2 The proposed public realm and highways improvement works are all on public highways land and thus in the control of Sandwell Council.

15 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

15.1 The decline of Wednesbury town centre and limited regeneration and development has led to dilapidation, economic decline and decreased visitors within the area.

15.2 The redevelopment of Wednesbury will result in the following benefits:

- Circa 20 first floor residential properties developed and residential occupation after completion;
- 4430 m² of public realm improvements;
- Reduction in vacant shop units;
- Number of building shopfronts improved;
- Installation of new event/market shelters;
- Job creation through construction and a temporary council project officer role throughout the duration of the scheme;
- Increased footfall within Market Place and thus a positive impact on businesses and retailers;
- Increase in number of listed buildings within the conservation area
- Potential for removal of the Council's Wednesbury Market Place conservation area from Historic England's national 'At Risk' register;
- Sandwell Council will be shown to support to local businesses and help create new opportunities for local people;
- Wednesbury will be a more attractive place to visitors and of greater value to the public;
- Improved historic setting and area for the location of the outdoor Market;
- Improved safety for pedestrians;
- Improved market facility for traders;
- Increased community satisfaction, engagement and pride within the area;
- Reduction in anti-social behaviour, increase in natural surveillance and improvement of the visual amenity of this local centre;
- Encourage inward investment and wider economic and community benefits;

- Ongoing conservation of the heritage assets within the HSHAZ area.

15.3 This redevelopment will help contribute to Vision 2030 aims and ambitions, particularly ambitions 7, 8, 9 and 10 as described in Section 2 of the report.

16 **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

16.1 The SIU appraisal report is still awaited, following completion of the review by Strategic Finance. The final SIU appraisal report will be considered by the Executive Director for Resources, Director of Regeneration and Growth and the cabinet member for Resources and Core Services and Inclusive Economic Growth.

16.2 This is in accordance with the recommendation of this report which states that the appraisal score must achieve a minimum of 65% by the Strategic Investment Unit.

17 **APPENDICES:**

Appendix 1: Site plan of proposed scheme

Appendix 2: Conservation survey

Appendix 3: Project programme of proposed works and potential costs

Amy Harhoff
Director of Regeneration and Growth