

**Sandwell Towns Fund Superboard
Rowley Regis Town Level Equality Impact Assessment**

Draft (June 2021)
Template V4: January 2019

Title of proposal <i>(include forward plan reference if available)</i>	Rowley Regis Town Deal
Directorate and Service Area	Regeneration and Growth
Name and title of Lead Officer completing this EIA	Towns Fund Programme Office
Contact Details	town_deal@sandwell.gov.uk
Names and titles of other officers involved in completing this EIA	Reviewed by Kashmir Singh and Rowley Regis Local Board
Partners involved with the EIA where jointly completed	
Date EIA completed	Draft Release June 2021
Date EIA signed off or agreed by Director or Executive Director	To be arranged following Superboard approval
Name of Director or Executive Director signing off EIA	To be arranged following Superboard approval
Date EIA considered by Cabinet Member	To be arranged following Superboard approval

1. The purpose of the proposal or decision required (Please provide as much information as possible)

Towns Fund Programme

On 6 September 2019 it was announced that 101 towns had been identified by Government to benefit from the £3.6 billion Towns Fund, with up to £25 million per town being available. The amount of funding allocated to each town will be based on a Town Deal agreed with Government.

The objective of the fund is to drive the economic regeneration in towns to deliver long term economic and productive growth through urban regeneration, planning and land use, skills and enterprise infrastructure and connectivity.

Rowley Regis, along with West Bromwich and Smethwick, have signed Town Deals with Government.

Rowley Regis put forward 6 projects. 5 are being progressed as part of the Town Deal.

Each project that is developed to Full Business Case will develop an Equality Impact Assessment in its own right. This Town-level assessment seeks to understand the cumulative impact of these proposals. It is produced first as a draft version to guide/shape the projects as they develop, and will then be finalised once each project has developed its own equality impact assessment as part of the Full Business Case process.

Project Selection and Prioritisation

The Local Boards and Superboard considered a range of information including statistical evidence, opportunities and strengths, engagement findings, project ideas raised and economic challenges facing the town. A long list of projects. These projects were assessed against a range of criteria including the Government's Towns Fund Intervention Framework, local need, the Town vision, contribution to the inclusive economy principles, Sandwell's vision and values, value for money and deliverability.

Rowley Regis Town Investment Plan (TIP)

The Towns Fund represents a unique and unprecedented opportunity for Rowley Regis. The TIP sets out a programme of interventions that will stimulate long-term economic growth and prosperity within the town, improve the health and wellbeing of residents and increase the vitality of Rowley Regis within the context of Sandwell and the West Midlands.

Through the six projects put forward, each quite distinct yet complementary across this wide and diverse area, connectivity is the common thread. Connecting our communities through safe and useable cycling and walking routes; connecting people to thriving town centres that offer a safe, enjoyable environment in which to shop and meet up; connecting people to well equipped, safe and beautiful parks or green spaces; connecting everyone to opportunities for education, training and skill development.

The Inclusive Economy Deal, published in 2020, is at the heart of the Rowley Regis TIP. As new opportunities arise, like the Towns Fund, we must ensure investments directly benefit local people and build community wealth.

Plans have been set out to radically transform the trajectory of the town through six projects submitted within the Town Investment Plan, each with a clear set of objectives and outcomes aligned to our Vision 2030, Inclusive Economy Deal and the Towns Fund Criteria.

Urban Regeneration, Planning and Land Use

The projects set out in the Rowley Regis Town Investment will contribute to the vision of Rowley Regis as a place that is fit for the future. They will provide transformational change for its residents and users and catalyse economic prosperity and regeneration for Rowley Regis.

Skills and Enterprise Infrastructure

The Rowley Regis Town Investment Plan Skills and Enterprise Infrastructure investments will allow residents to access educational opportunities locally, providing new routes to employment and further education. These projects will increase aspiration levels, create a more skilled workforce with specialisms in key growth areas, retain young professionals within the town and increase economic independence whilst encouraging and maintaining footfall within the town.

Connectivity

Connectivity is the common thread for all projects put forward within the Rowley Regis Town Investment Plan. Investments will create better connections between communities and green space, increasing vibrancy across Rowley Regis, boost footfall in town centres and provide the necessary provisions for residents to make use of low-cost and carbon neutral transport methods. This will have a clear impact on the areas carbon emissions, improving air quality and promoting healthier and more active lives.

2. Evidence used/considered

A variety of data streams have been used to formulate the Rowley Regis Town Investment Plan: -

- Town level demographic profile
- Identified trends in the local sectors, employment, business base and demographics, crucially analysing how the Rowley Regis economy operates
- Data collection provided by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) including census data (2011), town analysis (2019), population estimates (2013 - 2018), deprivation, employment/ GVA estimates, business base (UK Business Counts (2014 – 2019), BRES 2013 - 2018, spatial distribution of occupation, earnings and skills
- Data collection provided by MHCLG indices of deprivation (2019)
- Data collection provided by DCLG 2015
- Data collection provided by Cycling UK, Invest in Cycling, Data Portal (estimates of station)
- Data collection on Labour market in the regions of the UK Statistical bulletins
- Data collection provided by Public Health England (Local Health Profiles)
- Data collection provided by Department for Education (KS4)
- Digital Exclusion Heatmap 2017 (The Tech Partnership)
- Experian Goad Plan (2019)

- Data collection provided by UK Crime Statistics
- Data collection provided by Sandwell Trends 2012 - 2017
- Previous Engagement activities including Aspire Vision 2030 Survey, Sandwell Resident Inclusive Economy Survey (2019)
- Critical assessment and consideration of the economic opportunities and challenges for Rowley Regis
- Towns Fund specific online surveys with residents, community and businesses organisations
- Towns Fund specific Worksoop feedback with young people.
- Towns Fund specific workshop feedback with community and business organisations

3. Consultation

Consultation activities were carried out to inform residents and stakeholders about the Towns Fund opportunity, to understand a broad range of views about Rowley Regis to build on evidence and collate views and project ideas to help shape the TIP. This consultation consisted of: -

- Engagement with Local Board and Superboard members on a regular basis
- Consultation with residents and Rowley Regis communities via online surveys, social media, telephone 1-1 discussions and via Local Board and community networks to provide further evidence, collate feedback and help shape the TIP.
- Workshops with partners from the voluntary sector, community organisations and representatives.
- Workshops and youth groups with young people via world-café events, online surveys and face to face where possible to ensure input from young people.
- Consultation with elected members.

Consultation Findings

- Residents and young people agreed with the Town Priorities for Rowley Regis
- Residents identified additional priorities they would like to see including digital inclusion and refurbishment of shop fronts
- Young people expressed their desire for improved youth, recreational and leisure facilities, improvements to greenspaces and open spaces.
- Young people identified the need to post 16 education opportunities within the town but asked that this is matched with better job prospects
- Younger children felt constrained by their ability to play freely, referencing crime activities including gang activity, kidnapping and drug crime as their concerns.
- Residents want to see more 'brown land' to be used for redevelopment instead of greenspace
- Existing greenspaces to be improved
- Improved connectivity within the town including improved cycling routes
- Improved education and skills development opportunities within the town
- More affordable housing

The engagement findings contributed to project identification for the long list including the education facility for Rowley Regis, improvements to green spaces (through the accelerated funding proposals, and Britannia Park proposal), improvements to cycling routes through the travel scheme, exploration of stalled sites, addressing safety concerns through the designs of Blackheath Town Centre improvements, and walking and cycling routes.

Engagement will continue as each of the projects develops a Full Business Case. The objective of our engagement activity for Phase 2 is to engage with residents, partners and stakeholders to assist in shaping the details of projects and continue a dialogue to inform them about the progress of the projects. Engagement will take place at Programme Level and Project Level.

Covid-19 has impacted usual consultation and engagement methods. As a result, activities have been adapted (face to face consultation, events and workshops). The programme team continue to explore how to best engage with key stakeholders including residents, local communities and businesses.

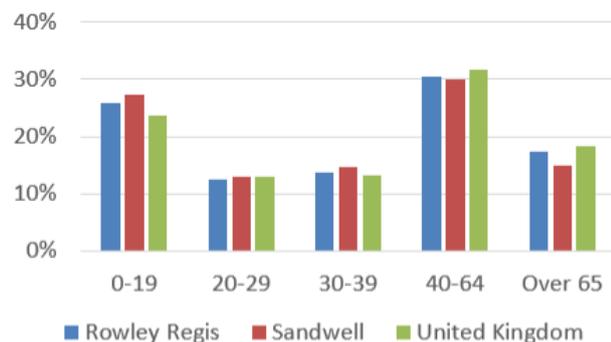
4. Assess likely impact

Context

Population

Rowley Regis is a diverse town, comprising a series of small towns and distinctive neighbourhoods. The town accounts for 51,482 residents, 16% of Sandwell's population and predominantly identifies as English, with just over 10% of residents identifying as BAME and other. Data shows there are marginally more Females (50.6%) than Males (49.4%).

The town has an older age profile than Sandwell; 31% of the town's population is between the age of 40 – 64 and 17% population is of the retirement age. This is 2% higher than the overall population of Sandwell's group of retirement age.



It has a lower portion of young individuals compared to other towns in Sandwell: -

- 0-19s make up 26% of Rowley Regis population.
- 20-29s and 30-39s constitute 26% of Rowley Regis population.

With a significant percentage of under 19s and a higher proportion of over 65s, the dependency rate of the town is 38.6%, making it the highest in Sandwell.

Rowley Regis' population is growing at a relatively slow pace, particularly when compared to some of Sandwell's other towns e.g. Smethwick and West Bromwich - just 3% growth between 2013 and 2018. This is due in part to the decline of 20 – 29-year

olds within the town. In the five years following 2013, there has been a 10% increase in the number of 30 - 39 year olds, which is partly driven by the proportion of existing residents that were previously within the 20-29 cohort. The number of 40 - 64 year olds, an age cohort approaching retirement age, remains the largest population despite a minimal growth rate of 1%. The youngest cohort, 0-19s represent the second largest group within the town.

This highlights the population is largely made up by under 19s and over 40s. The decline in 20-29s is also in part due to a greater out-migration of residents for either university or employment.

21% of Rowley Regis population have limited day to day activities. This is higher than the Sandwell Average (20.9%), England Average (17.6%) and West Midlands Region Average (19%).

Day-to-day activities not limited (%)	Day-to-day activities limited a lot (%)	Day-to-day activities limited a little (%)
79.0%	10.7%	10.3%

Diversity

Rowley Regis population is less diverse than its Towns Fund counterparts, West Bromwich and Smethwick. Its resident base predominantly identifies as English, with just over 10% of residents identifying as BAME and other.

Deprivation

Rowley Regis is on average less deprived than the Sandwell Borough average, but still more deprived than the average score across the rest of England. Whilst some areas of Rowley Regis are those of relative affluence, there are also a number of pockets of significant deprivation, often found in small, discrete and quite isolated communities This is highlighted by the paradox of the weekly wage of Rowley Regis residents being the highest of all Sandwell towns at £347, yet 16% of households in Rowley Regis are categorised as fuel poor.

71% of Rowley Regis Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are within the 30% most deprived LSOAs in England. Strikingly, it is the dependent population, totalling 38.6% of the total population within Rowley Regis, that are most at risk, with income deprivation affecting older people falling within the 10% most deprived LSOAs in the country while income deprivation affecting children averages in the 30% most deprived.

Education, Skills and Employment

Prior to the onset of COVID-19, Rowley Regis had the lowest unemployment of all towns in

Sandwell at 4.8%, 3.6% lower than the Sandwell average and 0.3% higher than the national

average. Alongside this, job growth in Rowley Regis had been modest at around 5%. It has the lowest jobs density of the towns, at 917 jobs per sq. kilometre. To a large extent, this reflects the fact that Rowley Regis is predominantly a residential area.

Though the number of businesses has increased by 13.6% since 2013, it remains lower than the borough (34.4%), region (23.7%) and nationally (23.2%) averages. 59% of the population of Rowley Regis' are qualified to NVQ Level 2 and above, significantly lower than Sandwell (67.7%), the West Midlands, (78.7%) and the UK (81.6%). Attainment levels across the three secondary schools within Rowley Regis are also lower than

borough, regional and national averages, with each school having a lower percentage of pupils achieving A* to C or NVQ level 4.

Crucially, aspirations amongst students at school age are also the lowest in the borough. In response to the statement 'working hard is important to me', Rowley Regis scored almost 10% lower than all other towns, with 81.9% of students in agreement.

The significance of this reality and these perceptions, across short medium and long-term timeframes, impact on the job prospects and employability of students who are to become Sandwell's future workforce. Equally, this represents a major challenge for existing and prospective local employers wishing to attract and retain highly skilled and well-motivated workers to help sustain and develop their businesses.

Raising education and skill aspirations for residents is critical to reversing longstanding challenges of low attainment, low aspirations and low skilled workers and to meet the wider challenge of continuing to reduce unemployment, particularly in challenging post-COVID times. The objective is vital to generating prosperity for future generations and creating economically independent active and resilient communities in areas of deprivation.

Connectivity

For many residents in Rowley Regis, poor transport connectivity is a key barrier to accessing employment opportunities. Job seekers in Rowley Regis, as elsewhere, who fall into these categories find that their search horizons become constrained. Low income households spend a relatively large proportion of their income on commuting costs (around 25% compared with the average of around 13%). A 2013 study of young low-skilled job seekers found that people without private transport had more localised outlooks, reducing their employment and training opportunities.

Digital connectivity in Rowley Regis is also poor, having ranked third highest of all Sandwell owns in its overall digital exclusion score. The important social indicators for greater inclusivity such as residents aged over 45, unemployed, student or economically inactive scored particularly poorly.

Heavy reliance on and use of private cars means Sandwell is a borough wide Air Quality Management Area (AQMA), due to its high levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂). Oldbury, Blackheath and Cradley Heath town centres have displayed high levels of NO₂ for many years.

Opportunities for low carbon transport methods and improved walking and cycling connectivity within and between communities is crucial to overcome deprivation, improve health and provide the unemployed access to opportunity, jobs and skills. It will also provide access to green spaces and make town centres and future housing sites more attractive, creating value.

Delivery Benefits

Through providing high quality transport links, enhancing natural assets and blue and green infrastructure, over 7km of improved canal towpath will be delivered, anticipated to see the use of the canals increase by 40%. To further improve connectivity throughout Rowley Regis and allowing safer and improved connections between town centres and

key transport links, there will be improvements to around 2000m of cycling and walking infrastructure.

The delivery of the new bus interchange within Blackheath town centre will see 360m of upgraded town centre road infrastructure, accompanied by a new social space.

Improving community space is also to be delivered within Britannia Park, with a new community space and changing rooms, alongside up to 20 new allotments and new sports pitches.

Development of a new education hub will assist around 500 new learners annually, including offering 150 Traineeship and Access to Apprenticeships/Study Programmes; this will be delivered within a new build facility offering circa 2000sqm of new educational space.

Alongside the new training schemes delivered through the new education facility, delivery of these projects will also allow for around 42 new roles, including 6 new apprenticeships and upskilling of existing staff.

The proposals overall, have no adverse impact on any individuals or groups with protected characteristics. It is assessed that proposals will have a positive impact on a number of groups in terms of having the increased capacity and accessibility to improved facilities and an increase of opportunities within Rowley Regis.

Please complete the table below at 4a to identify the likely impact on specific protected characteristics

4a. Use the table to show:

- Where you think that the strategy, project or policy could have a negative impact on any of the equality strands (protected characteristics), that is it could disadvantage them or if there is no impact, please note the evidence and/or reasons for this.
- Where you think that the strategy, project or policy could have a positive impact on any of the groups or contribute to promoting equality, equal opportunities or improving relationships within equality characteristics.

Protected Characteristic	Positive Impact ✓	Negative Impact ✓	No Impact ✓	Reason and evidence (Provide details of specific groups affected even for no impact and where negative impact has been identified what mitigating actions can we take?)
Age	✓			<p>The Town Investment Plan provides opportunities to all age groups, improving the social, cultural, educational and economic benefits by providing new and improved facilities that are accessible by all.</p> <p>A positive impact is likely to be realised for older people through the projects to improve Britannia Park, improvements to walking routes, and improvements to Blackheath Town Centre.</p> <p>Younger residents are likely to benefit from new facilities at Britannia Park and in Blackheath Town Centre.</p> <p>Residents of working age are specifically targeted through the Satellite Education Hub project.</p>

Disability	✓			<p>The Town Deal proposals are likely to improve mobility and accessibility for disabled users in the public realm specifically through the Blackheath Bus Interchange Project, and improvements to the walking and cycling network.</p> <p>General positive impact for these groups but not specifically targeted. The Town Deal projects are intended to bring economic benefits to all groups through improvements being made to connectivity, the local skills offer, maintaining a vibrant High Street in Blackheath and improvements to a local green space.</p>
Gender reassignment			✓	
Marriage and civil partnership			✓	
Pregnancy and maternity			✓	
Race			✓	
Religion or belief			✓	
Sex			✓	
Sexual orientation			✓	
Other				

Does this EIA require a full impact assessment? Yes No

If there are no adverse impacts or any issues of concern or you can adequately explain or justify them, then you do not need to go any further. You have completed the screening stage. You must, however, complete sections 7 and 9 and publish the EIA as it stands.

If you have answered yes to the above, please complete the questions below referring to the guidance document.

5. What actions can be taken to mitigate any adverse impacts?

N/A

6. As a result of the EIA what decision or actions are being proposed in relation to the original proposals?

To be considered by Rowley Regis Local Board and Sandwell Towns Fund Superboard.

7. Monitoring arrangements

As projects are developed to Full Business Case, they will each conduct a full equality assessment. This Town-level assessment will be updated to reflect the specific project-level assessments.

8. Action planning

Action 1 – To update this Town-level equality impact assessment on the completion of project equality impact assessments.

9. Publish the EIA

This draft EIA will be considered by the Rowley Regis and Sandwell Towns Fund Superboard. It will be published following the production of a final version.

Project-level EIAs will be published alongside the Full Business Case approval for each Towns Fund project.

