

Report to Cabinet

21 June 2023

Subject:	Rolfe Street Masterplan – Approval
Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Regeneration and WMCA, Councillor Peter Hughes
Director:	Director of Regeneration & Growth, Tony McGovern
Key Decision:	Yes
Contact Officer:	Planning Regeneration Team Leader, Hayley Insley Hayley_insley@sandwell.gov.uk Planning Officer Kate Harris Kate_Harris@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the results of the public consultation undertaken on the Draft Rolfe Street Masterplan during February to March 2023 as set out in the Consultation Report be considered.
- 1.2 That, in relation to 1.1, approval is given to the Rolfe Street Masterplan as amended.








2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Authority to undertake community consultation on the Draft Rolfe Street Masterplan was granted by Cabinet on 18th January 2023. The Masterplan has been prepared following engagement with officers, Members, members of the public and stakeholders.
- 2.1 The period of consultation was undertaken between 6th February 2023 and 20th March 2023. From the consultation process 41 responses were received on the online questionnaire with additional letters received from other stakeholders, and the Masterplan has been amended wherever possible to reflect local views. This report requests that the final masterplan is approved with the proposed amendments in full, to assist with guiding decisions with development proposals within this area. The Masterplan, Consultation Report, Transport Assessment and Heritage Characterisation Study are appended.




3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?



	<p>The Best Start in Life for Children and Young People The proposals will provide quality homes and safe open spaces with improved routes to local schools.</p>
	<p>People Live Well and Age Well New housing proposed within the area will seek to address the needs of all members of the community and include improved public realm and green spaces, improved transport links and access to facilities and increase employment opportunities.</p>
	<p>Strong Resilient Communities New housing proposed within the area will seek to address the needs of all members of the community and include improved public realm and green spaces, improved transport links and access to facilities and increase employment opportunities.</p>
	<p>Quality Homes in Thriving Neighbourhoods The Masterplan will seek to attract a range of house types and tenures that are sustainable, attractive and will meet the needs and demands of the future residents.</p>
	<p>A Strong and Inclusive Economy We can utilise our council assets, in the form of our land, to drive forward regeneration in the area and show our commitment and capability through the successful delivery of our Towns Fund funding to enable similar funding opportunities to be gained in the future should they be made available.</p> <p>This site has strong locational links to the Midlands Metropolitan University Hospital and the site will benefit from the regeneration opportunities that will radiate from this building.</p> <p>Opportunities for local job creation will be encouraged at site preparation and at construction stage.</p> <p>Improvements to transport connections will improve residents' ability to access key transport hubs and hence</p>



	their access to employment and education prospects and will contribute to attracting and retaining businesses in Sandwell.
	<p>A Connected and Accessible Sandwell</p> <p>The Masterplan will identify a transport strategy that aims to consider current and future transport needs and promoting alternative safe and convenient modes of transport other than the private motor car, including new cycling and walking routes as well as identifying the potential location of a 'mobility hub' to encourage convenient access to these alternative modes of transport.</p>

4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 Sandwell Council has been working with the other Black Country authorities under the Black Country Collaboration Agreement since 2014. In November 2020, Cabinet resolved to enter into the Supplemental Deed of Variation to the Collaboration Agreement which allowed Sandwell to bid for an allocation of £250k per annum business rates surpluses generated across the Black Country Enterprise Zones. Even though Sandwell does not have an Enterprise Zone itself, the Governance Principles of that agreement allow the authority to have a share for five years from 2020-21 to support the development of projects in the Black Country Pipeline.
- 4.2 On 1 July 2021 the Black Country LEP Funding Sub Group considered and agreed to the spend proposal put forward by the Interim Director of Regeneration and Growth for the financial year 20/21. One of the projects named within the funding proposal was to commission a Masterplan for the wider Rolfe Street area in Smethwick from the Railway Station to Bridge Street North/New Street junction.
- 4.3 This area, close to Smethwick High Street and Rolfe Street Station, has been allocated for residential led mixed use since 2008. However, due to the fragmented ownership across the area, comprehensive redevelopment to deliver a housing led transformation has not materialised. Due to the nature of some of the uses that operate there, and the condition of some of the buildings, piecemeal development is not considered appropriate.



- 4.4 In February 2022 Cabinet approved the Smethwick to Birmingham Corridor Framework document which incorporates the land at Rolfe Street. The Framework contains guiding principles for this site and the others within the corridor area to assist in delivering the vision of creating a place where people wish to live, work and visit, which is well connected and providing sustainable transport choices.
- 4.5 In order to assist bringing forward the transformational change envisaged for this area, an application to Towns Fund to facilitate demolition of buildings and remediation of the land was submitted and approved by Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The project centres on the Smethwick Enterprise Centre, central to the Rolfe Street area, which will act as a catalyst for further regeneration opportunities to come forward in due course.
- 4.6 To facilitate the wider regeneration of Rolfe Street, it was considered that a more detailed masterplan was required. This would take the principles of the Corridor Framework and develop a coherent and comprehensive masterplan that would provide clarity to developers on the aspirations for the area to deliver a well design community environment.
- 4.7 A tendering exercise was undertaken earlier this year for a multi-disciplinary consultancy that could prepare the Masterplan, also undertaking a heritage assessment since part of the area is within the Conservation Area and providing a transport strategy that would address the quantum of new development expected to be delivered over time.
- 4.8 Following the tendering process, the council commissioned Glenn Howells Architects as the lead consultancy, with assistance from Stantec for the Transport Strategy, Donald Insall to undertake the Heritage Assessment and RPS as the Planning Consultancy.
- 4.9 The consultants have been working on the Masterplan since September, gathering evidence, undertaking the heritage assessment and producing options for the design and layout of the area. This has been an iterative process with weekly meetings between officers and consultants to discuss issues and ideas. Due to Covid, some of the data to undertake the Transport Assessment was not fully available as travel patterns had not stabilised. The masterplan also sets out an aspiration for transformational development of the area which seeks to reduce the parking provision normally associated with residential schemes. However, reasoned justification will be required when more detailed



proposals come forward to provide evidence that parking provision, highway issues and infrastructure can be delivered without detriment to the wider area.

- 4.10 The Masterplan takes on the principles of the Corridor Framework and develops it further to show the layout, design and quantum of development that could be accommodated within this area.

Public Consultation

- 4.11 Public consultation was undertaken between 6 February and 20 March 2023. To ensure a wide coverage of the consultation it was advertised through the council's social media linking to a dedicated webpage. There was an online questionnaire as well as hard copies which were left, with copies of the Masterplan itself, in Smethwick Library and Sandwell Council House. Relevant stakeholders were emailed with details of how to engage with the consultation and a face-to-face event was held at Smethwick Library on 1 March 2023. Members were kept informed of the forthcoming consultation at previous Town Members meetings.
- 4.12 Response to the public consultation was generally positive. Concerns were raised as to the impact of those in permanent moorings, that areas outside of the masterplan need improvement, improvements to the safety of Rolfe Street including additional pedestrian crossings were needed, retention of historic buildings, provision of carparking and ensure that sufficient school places were provided.
- 4.13 Following the public consultation the Masterplan has been refined, based on the feedback, prior to being presented to Cabinet meeting for approval.
- 4.14 Changes have been minor in nature and include:

Showing the location of schools/retail/medical centres on the location plan to show good access to these services

Attention shown to safety and security, especially to the canal showing overlooking and lighting



Provision, if financially feasible, of a community use/complementary uses to buildings adjacent the canal basin

Biodiversity and ecological permeability shown to canal and open spaces

Wording to encourage the use of car clubs.

Final Masterplan

- 4.15 The masterplan seeks to provide a distinctive well-designed community and sets out an aspiration of how this could be achieved.
- 4.16 The masterplan shows an indicative layout of about 600 residential units, comprised of 45% apartments and 55% housing, this represents an average density of 60dph. This density corresponds to its highly sustainable urban location next to Rolfe Street railway station and the High Street.

- 4.17 The Masterplan sets out a vision for Rolfe Street:

A place that is Smethwick-an exemplar for the past and future of the Black Country

A historic place-heritage at the heart of a new community

An aspirational place- high quality family homes for all

A connected place- a zero carbon mobility hub, heart of a cycling network, links to MMU hospital

A green place- new public spaces for a new community, the canal as a green lung, biodiversity net gain

- 4.18 The masterplan places the assets of the canal and heritage of the area central to its concept by; advocating the retention of key buildings within the Conservation Area (viability and condition allowing), providing buildings that reference the industrial architecture and evolution of the area within their orientation and appearance and which provide overlooking and enhance the setting of the canal.



- 4.19 Along with an apartment building and plaza, a Mobility Hub is suggested to be located on the site of the former Rolfe Street Baths, which provides a central location to find information and provides options for sustainable methods of travel.
- 4.20 Open spaces are shown throughout the scheme to provide opportunity for community access and events and enhancements to biodiversity. Opportunity to access the canal is aided by reopening the pedestrian access over the Engine Arm Aqueduct to provide better access for both new and existing communities to the canal and beyond. Provision of pontoons on the canal near the basin would allow easier access onto the canal for recreation and with potential to provide a community use/café close to the canal to enliven this space.
- 4.21 Central to the success of the scheme, methods are suggested to improve the environment of Rolfe Street, by limiting vehicular use, designing the street to ensure vehicles use/park in a safer manner and encouraging vehicles to use New Street and Bridge Street.
- 4.22 The Masterplan has been fully funded by the BCLEP Enterprise Zone Fund.
- 4.23 The Masterplan is not being adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document so will not form part of the statutory Local Plan. However, as part of the preparation of the new Sandwell Local Plan which will replace the current Local Plan on adoption, the Rolfe Street Masterplan may be included as a supporting appendix, thus giving it due weight when considering future planning applications.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 Despite the area being allocated for residential use since 2008, no comprehensive redevelopment has taken place. Proposals have been discussed over the years, but they have not come to fruition. Piecemeal development has been refused as it would be inappropriate to promote development in an area predominantly occupied by industry.
- 5.2 Funding from the BCLEP has enabled us to prepare a more detailed masterplan which will assist in providing the housebuilders more clarity



and certainty with regards the type of development the Council considers would be most appropriate. The Towns Fund project is now funded for the Smethwick Enterprise Centre which will act as the catalyst for future developer interest. Having a Masterplan in place will assist in the decision-making process for future proposals.

5.3 Not progressing with a Masterplan for the area would not create a platform from which to promote development opportunities in this area or provide a strong base to bid for further funding. The continued regeneration envisioned for this area will not be achieved and it would prevent the potential development of up to 660 much needed homes, within one of the most deprived areas of Sandwell.

6 Implications

Resources:	The Masterplan preparation is being developed by consultants funded by the LEP and supported by SMBC officers. The proposals contained within this document will assist in bringing forward some landholdings within public sector ownership.
Legal and Governance:	There are no direct legal implications in relation to this report. The Masterplan will be an informal non-statutory document.
Risk:	There are no direct implications with regard to risk in relation to this report.
Equality:	An EIA has not been carried out. The Masterplan does not create policy, it sets out the expected direction of travel of emerging policy, and can be a material planning consideration when determining applications
Health and Wellbeing:	The Masterplan will offer a range of health and wellbeing benefits through improving and developing new sustainable homes and public spaces, providing associated infrastructure to support new communities being created and assets and places for people to go



	and improvements to infrastructure including cycling and walking routes.
Social Value	The opportunities identified within the Masterplan will acknowledge how inclusive economic growth may be achieved.
Climate Change	The area is within a highly accessible location to allow future residents to make best use of sustainable modes of transport. The Masterplan will need to be read in line with both current local and national planning policy which includes policies on Climate Change such as encouraging tree planting within the street and a requirement to provide electric vehicle charging points.
Corporate Parenting	There are no direct implications arising from this masterplan that will affect the council in its role as a Corporate Parent. However, the Masterplan promotes good quality housing within sustainable communities in line with the council's ambitions to provide the best start in life for Children and Young People. This in turn may support those currently in or leaving the care of the council.

7. Appendices

Rolfe Street Masterplan
 Rolfe Street Transport Assessment
 Rolfe Street Heritage Characterisation Study
 Consultation Report

8. Background Papers

Smethwick to Birmingham Corridor Area Framework

https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/file/32149/smethwick_to_birmingham_corridor_framework_document

