

Report to Wednesbury Levelling Up Partnership Board

29 February 2024

Subject:	Levelling Up Partnership Programme Overview
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide an overview of progress of the Levelling Up Partnership (LUP) programme including project delivery progress.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the WLUP Board note the information contained in this report.

3. Background

- 3.1 In March 2023, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that Sandwell was one of 20 places to be invited to form a Levelling Up Partnership (LUP).
- 3.2 Levelling Up Partnerships are targeted interventions designed to identify practical, tangible actions to support priority places to 'level up' and to help government develop a more holistic understanding of place. It is a programme within the Government's overall Levelling Up agenda which includes the Towns Fund Programme (£67.5m investment in Sandwell),



the Levelling Up Fund (£58m investment in Sandwell), and Long Term Plan for Towns (£20m for Smethwick).

3.3 In September 2023, details of the Levelling Up Partnership (£20.4m) were formally announced by Government. This followed a set of Cabinet approvals in September to establish governance arrangements, approve the target geography as Wednesbury, and to agree the set of projects as follows and outlined in appendix 1:

- Friar Park Urban Village
- Wednesbury Community Safety Scheme
- Wednesbury Town Centre Improvements
- Wednesbury Greenspaces Improvements
- Friar Park Millennium Centre expansion

3.4 The first meeting of the Wednesbury Levelling Up Partnership (WLUP) Board was held in December 2023. This meeting included an overview of the programme including the deep dive evidence base and an introduction to the projects within the programme.

3.5 The remainder of this report sets out a progress update on:

- LUP Programme Outcomes and Project Outputs
- Project Delivery Progress
- Risk Management
- Communication and Engagement

LUP Programme Outcomes and Project Outputs

3.6 At their last meeting, the WLUP Board requested further clarity around the project outputs and outcomes of the LUP programme. Outputs and outcomes are expressed in appendix 2 and listed below by project:

LUP Project	Outputs	Outcomes
Wednesbury Town Centre Improvements	Masterplan for Wednesbury Town Centre	Long term plans created for Wednesbury Town Centre



LUP Project	Outputs	Outcomes
(Masterplan and Public Realm)	14,000m2 improved pedestrian area	More people and businesses attracted to Wednesbury Town Centre
	3 Problem sites improved	Improved quality of built environment Improved connectivity Increased biodiversity
	New planting and greening	
Friar Park Urban Village	27ha Land Remediated	New homes built Open space created
Community Safety	26 New/ upgraded CCTV cameras 8 deployable cameras upgraded Locations with new inhibitors installed Business Radio Link scheme	Deter ASB and Crime Increase enforcement activity in relation to ASB Improved perceptions of ASB and crime
Greenspaces	Footpath improvement works and lighting Planting and re-wilding Refurbished changing rooms	Improved connectivity Improved quality of 4 greenspaces More usable community space and facilities Improved perceptions of ASB and crime
Millennium Centre	Improved library facility Extended meeting spaces Improved kitchen / storage facilities	Improved access to learning / training opportunities More usable community space and facilities More community activities taking place Community cohesion between existing and new community in Friar Park



3.7 The LUP programme will deliver on the Government's Levelling Up outcomes of:

- **Boosting productivity, pay, jobs and living standards** through increasing skills and attainment levels and enabling new housing
- **Spreading opportunity and improving public services** through tackling crime and ASB hotspots and increasing skills and attainment levels and enabling new housing delivery
- **Restoring a sense of community, local pride and belonging** through improving perceptions of safety and the quality of built environment and green spaces
- **Empowering local leaders and communities** through creating long term plans to revitalise Wednesbury Town Centre

3.8 To monitor the impact of the LUP programme, a set of outcome measures has been identified as follows.

- Number of new homes enabled
- Resident satisfaction with their local area as a place to live
- ha new open space enabled
- Business vacancy rate in Wednesbury Town Centre/ Business Growth Measure / equiv.
- Residents Perception of Crime and Antisocial behaviour
- Recorded crime and ASB in Wednesbury
- Number of nuisance bike reports in areas with new measures installed
- Quality score for green spaces
- Skills/qualifications gained / equivalent measure
- Numbers of participants in community activities / equivalent measure

3.9 The next steps will be to confirm data sources, benchmarking and reporting arrangements linked to the recent publication of the Government's Statement of Levelling Up Missions.

Project Delivery Update



3.10 A summary of project delivery progress as at end January 2024 is provided below. Further detail is contained in Appendix 3. Project Leads will provide a summary update during the WLUP Board meeting.

Project	Progress Summary
1. Masterplan – Wednesbury Town Centre	Capital Appraisal approved Consultants appointed Risk around timescales for approval but no impact on spend deadline
2. Community Safety	Capital Appraisal approved CCTV installation to commence
3. Public Realm	Public Consultation launched (closing 11 March)
4. Friar Park Urban Village	In expression of interest phase for Developer Partner Risk around timescales. Escalated to programme risk register
5. Millennium Centre	Initial designs produced and being reviewed Risk around timescales and costs. Options under review.
6. Greenspaces	Capital appraisal approved subject to recommendations In procurement for first 3 greenspaces schemes Initial design work underway for Hydes Road Risk around costs – controls in place to review project budget following procurement phase
Financial position at end January 2024	
£37K spend to date All projects forecasting within budget	

3.11 A programme level risk register and individual project risk registers are in place as part of risk management arrangements. The programme risk register is provided at Appendix 3.

3.12 There are 2 programme red risks as follows:

Risk Title and Description	Grant Conditions: Delivery Timeline & S151 project sign-off
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	If programme delivery cannot be completed by 2024-25 financial year (March 2025) and/or there are concerns around project delivery from S151 assurance, there is a risk of grant clawback, reputational damage and missed opportunities to deliver the benefits of the programme
Controls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seeking clarification from DLUHC around grant clawback position and parameters for second year grant allocation - Regular reporting on progress of project delivery and spend is in place - Capital appraisal to be completed for all projects - S151 sign-off of spend in advance of capital appraisal
Risk expected to reduce	When clarification is received from DLUHC around the clawback position and/or carry forward position

Risk Title and Description	<p>Delivery of Friar Park Urban Village Project</p> <p>Risk relates to delivery of project within March 2025 deadline due to risk of delays to obtaining EA licenses and/or delays to developer partner procurement process</p>
Controls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Early engagement with EA has been undertaken and consultants (technical experts) procured to support the engagement process - Legal review of proposed approach has been undertaken - Full risk assessment to take place to understand issues from proposed approach - Capital appraisal review underway - Seeking clarification from DLUHC around grant clawback position, carry forward to 2025-2026, and parameters for second year grant allocation



Risk expected to reduce	When EA permitting process concluded and delivery partner is procured And/or When clarification is received from DLUHC around the clawback position and/or carry forward position
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Communication and Engagement

3.13 A programme level communication and engagement strategy has been developed based on initial input from the WLUP Board, and a further discussion with a working group of the WLUP Board. The draft strategy and project communication and engagement plans are included on the WLUP Board agenda.

4. Appendices

1. Levelling up Partnership Scope and Intervention Descriptions
2. Levelling up Partnership Outcome and Output Map
3. Summary of Levelling Up Partnership Project Delivery
4. Levelling Up Partnership Programme Risk Register

5. Background papers

Background to Levelling Up Partnership - Report to Wednesbury Levelling Up Partnership Board 18 December 2023

[Sandwell Council Cabinet Report – Levelling Up Partnership 13 September 2023](#)

[Statement of Levelling Up Missions, DLUHC, January 2024](#)

