

Report to Wednesbury Levelling Up Partnership Board

29 February 2024

Subject:	Developing the Public Realm in Wednesbury Town Centre
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To set out the progress of the Public Realm Project and seek approval to proceed to delivery phase for the public realm works

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the WLUP Board Chair be authorised 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
- 2.2 To approve 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



2.3 That a working group meeting be held in March 2024 for Board Members to discuss the Wednesbury Town Centre Masterplan and options for site improvements to inform the development of the draft Masterplan.

3. Background

3.1 The Developing the Public Realm in Wednesbury Town Centre project aims to keep the Town thriving through improving the attractiveness and safety of Wednesbury town centre. The project builds on the improvements already made through the Wednesbury High Street Heritage Action Zone which included improvements to Market Place and forthcoming improvements through the [Green Roots programme](#) to provide space in the Towns Centre for retailers and restaurants to plant seasonal vegetables and flowers outside their shops.

3.2 Wednesbury Town Centre has recently benefitted from public realm improvements and the relocation of an outdoor market to the traditional Market Place. However, this investment (Historic England) was geographically constrained to the Conservation Area, which is a small area around the Clock Tower on Market Place.

3.3 A budget of £4.5m capital has been allocated for the public realm improvements and intervention on key sites (where possible).

3.4 In relation to Public Realm Improvements, public consultation has been underway since 29 January 2024 and is due to close on 11 March 2024. The consultation involves a survey and a series of engagement events in Wednesbury Town Centre.

3.5 As the WLUP Board meeting is taking place near to the end of the consultation period, interim consultation findings are appended to the report and update will be provided to the Board during the meeting together with proposed designs.



- 3.6 In order to meet the challenging delivery timescales in the LUP programme, it is recommended that the Board consider approval for the project to progress to delivery phase (public realm works) on the basis of the interim consultation findings report.
- 3.7 At the end of the consultation period, a final consultation summary will be produced and circulated to WLUP Board Members. In the event that the Chair, in consultation with the Cabinet Member Regeneration and WMCA and Assistant Director Spatial Planning and Growth, finds that the final consultation report deviates significantly from the interim report, the Chair will consider options to bring the matter back to the WLUP Board for consideration.
- 3.8 In relation to site acquisitions and improvements, an options analysis of sites in Wednesbury Town Centre is underway linked to the Town Centre Masterplan work.
- 3.9 A WLUP Board working group meeting is proposed to be held in March 2024 to inform the draft masterplan and the options for key sites that will be targeted. The Board will be asked to approve consultation proposals on the draft Masterplan in April 2024.
- 3.10 Within the project budget, funding has been earmarked to upgrade retail signage in Wednesbury conservation area adding further improvement to the visual appearance of the Town and creating immediate impact of the LUP alongside other programmes such as the Green Roots programme. Signage upgrades were intended to be delivered within the Heritage Action Zone programme but have not been possible within the required timescales.
- 3.11 A capital appraisal 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.
- 3.12 A breakdown of the project budget is provided below:



Intervention on Key Sites	£2.5m
Public Realm Improvement Works	£2m
Total	£4.5m

Consultation and Engagement

- 3.13 Public consultation is currently underway and will close on 11 March. The consultation includes a survey and face to face events in Wednesbury.
- 3.14 A working group of the Wednesbury Levelling Up Partnership Board met in January to consider and input into the proposals for consultation before it was launched.
- 3.15 An interim consultation report is provided as an appendix and an update will be presented to the Board during the meeting.
- 3.16 A working group of the Wednesbury Levelling Up Partnership Board is proposed to be held in March to discuss the draft masterplan vision and priorities.

Monitoring and Evaluation

- 3.17 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 Public Realm project were set out as follows:
- 14000m2 of improved pedestrian area
 - 3 problem sites improved
- 3.18 The outputs are on track for achievement.
- 3.18 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.
- 3.19 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.

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

3.20 Project Milestones are set out as follows:

Milestone	Date
Preliminary works (site investigations and designs)	Jan -24
Public Realm consultation	Mar 24
Approval to move to delivery phase	WLUP Board Feb 24 S151 Sign off Mar 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

4.0 Implications

Resources:	<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>A capital appraisal is pending for the Public Realm Project and 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. This is on track.</p>
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Legal and Governance:	<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 will be undertaken.</p>
Risk:	<p>A project risk register is in place and this will be reviewed as part of the project capital appraisal.</p> <p>A significant project risk is associated with delivery timescales by the March 2025 deadline. The risk is being controlled through regular overview of progress and scheduling the public realm consultation to complete in March 2024.</p>
Equality:	<p>An EqlA has been undertaken and will be updated following final designs being produced for the public realm improvements.</p> <p>The EqlA identifies no negative impacts on people with protected characteristics.</p> <p>The EqlA is attached as an appendix to the report.</p>
Health and Wellbeing:	<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>
Social Value	<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>



	The Council will work with contractors to identify appropriate social value interventions.
Climate Change	Climate change impacts will be considered as part of the emerging proposals for the public realm improvements from the masterplanning work. The proposals will include an element of urban greening which will make a positive contribution to the natural environment.
Corporate Parenting:	Young peoples' views and opinions (voice of the child) will be considered through the public realm consultation.

Appendix 1 – Interim Public Realm Consultation Findings
Appendix 2 – Wednesbury Town Centre Public Realm Equality Impact Assessment

