

# Report to Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board

**7 March 2024**

<b>Subject:</b>	Long Term Plan for Towns – Smethwick
<b>Director:</b>	Assistant Director Growth & Spatial Planning, Tammy Stokes
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Regeneration Manager, Jenna Langford <a href="mailto:jenna_langford@sandwell.gov.uk">jenna_langford@sandwell.gov.uk</a>

## 1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Board considers and comments upon the Long-Term Plan for Towns – Smethwick arrangements, as prescribed by Government guidance.
- 1.2 That the Board considers and comments upon the list of interventions as prescribed by Government.
- 1.3 That the Board considers and comments upon the proposed revised investment boundary.

## 2 Reasons for Recommendations



- 2.1 The Long-Term Plan for Towns was announced by Government in October 2023, and Government Guidance was issued on the 18 December 2023. A board to lead, develop, and deliver the Long-Term Plan is to be established by the council for the 1 April 2024, with the Long-Term Plan for Smethwick to be submitted to Government no later than the



1 August 2024. A Cabinet Report has been submitted for consideration on the 13 March 2024.

- 2.2 Government have provided a list of interventions which have already been assessed as having a strong case for investment, value for money and benefit-to-cost ratio by Government (see appendix 2, pages 40-43).
- 2.3 The Government have based the investment boundary on the Office for National Statistics (ONS) 'Built Up Areas' (see appendix 3) and as such the boundary excludes investment in key open spaces such as Black Patch and Warley Woods. The boundary does not conform to the ward boundaries of Smethwick Town and includes part of Oldbury (Bristnall) within the boundary, and by Government's own guidance the investment boundary must represent the town as intended. The proposed revised investment boundary aligns to the Smethwick Town boundary, encompassing Abbey; Smethwick; Soho and Victoria; and St Pauls wards in their entirety. Open Spaces are also included. Subject to Cabinet endorsement and Board approval the intention is to submit representation to DLUHC by the 1 April 2024 to amend the investment boundary accordingly (see appendix 4).

### 3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p><b>Strong Resilient Communities</b> Safety and Security is an investment theme of the Long-Term Plan funding programme which will support strong and resilient communities.</p>
	<p><b>A Strong and Inclusive Economy</b> High Streets, Heritage and Regeneration is an investment theme of the Long-Term Plan funding programme which will support a strong and inclusive economy.</p>





## A Connected and Accessible Sandwell

Transport and Connectivity is an investment theme of the Long-Term Plan funding programme which will support a connected & accessible Sandwell.

## 4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 In October 2023 the Government Department for Local Communities and Housing (DLUHC) announced their *'Long-Term Plan for Towns'* an investment programme of £1.1 billion into 55 towns for local people's priorities. The announcement was accompanied by the publication of *'Our Long-Term Plan for Towns'* prospectus (appendix 1).
- 4.2 Each town selected will receive £20m 'endowment-style' funding to invest over the next 10 years. Town selection for funding allocation was undertaken by Government according to the Levelling Up Needs Index which considers metrics covering skills, pay, productivity, and health, as well as the Index of Multiple Deprivation. For Sandwell, Government have selected Smethwick to receive Long-Term Plan for Towns funding. Other Black Country towns allocated funding are Darlaston (Walsall), Dudley (Dudley), and Bilston (Wolverhampton).
- 4.3 The Government intention is for the £20m endowment style funding (25% revenue / 75% capital) over a 10-year period will provide long-term certainty to deliver a range of interventions within three broad investment themes to be driven by the needs and wishes of local communities:
1. Safety and Security
  2. High Streets, Heritage and Regeneration
  3. Transport and Connectivity



- 4.4 The view of Government is that this flexibility means Towns such as Smethwick are more able to capitalise on private and philanthropic investment, aligning timings with businesses and investors to maximise the benefits for local people.
- 4.5 The funding will be devolved directly to Sandwell Council and will be able to roll over funding into future years. As the Local Authority, Sandwell will be the accountable body and will remain responsible for ensuring good use of public funds through the existing duties of the Section 151 officer.
- 4.6 To access the £20m endowment-style funding Sandwell will need to produce a Long-Term Plan for Smethwick, based on the priorities of local people, and put to local people for consultation. A Town Deal Board for Smethwick for the purposes of the Long-Term Plan will need to be established that brings community leaders and representatives together to produce, oversee, and deliver the Long-Term Plan.
- 4.7 The terms of reference for the Board will be based on learning from the Towns Fund Programme Governance model, adapting arrangements from the existing Town Deal Board for Smethwick. The new Board once constituted will review and finalise the terms of reference at its first meeting. The proposed terms of reference will then be submitted for approval by the Assistant Director of Legal & Assurance in consultation with the Assistant Director for Growth & Spatial Planning, and the Cabinet Member for Regeneration & West Midlands Combined Authority. The terms of reference will comprise the following components:

- Governance Model
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Board Positions
- Code of Conduct
- Decision Making
- Scrutiny
- Transparency and Accountability
- Board Member profiles
- Conflicts of Interest



- Scheme of Delegation

4.8 It is proposed that the existing positions and members of the Smethwick Town Deal Board be retained for the Long-Term Plan Board:

- Chair of Smethwick Town Deal Board
- Deputy Chair of Smethwick Town Deal Board
- Cabinet Member Regeneration & West Midlands Combined Authority
- SMBC Smethwick Town Lead

The other existing positions will also be retained, though the process of repurposing the Town Deal Board for the Long-Term Plan will provide an opportunity to review these positions in the revised context. Where additional representation is required it is proposed to advertise the board positions, requesting that expressions of interest be submitted for the retained Board members to consider and appoint by panel.

4.9 The Long-Term Plan is to comprise the 10-year vision for Smethwick and a 3-year investment plan, setting out how the funding will be allocated and spent, with the local authority as the body ultimately accountable for funding. The endowment approach means that funding is released over a 7-year period and local authorities have the flexibility to spend it over 10-years, with 'light touch' assurance from DLUHC. The full funding profile will be available in early 2024. The funding is delivered through the powers are set out in Section 50 of the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020.

4.10 Government have stated that where a Town Deal Board is already in place (Smethwick Town Deal Board), this can be re-purposed to meet the needs of the Long-Term Plan for Smethwick. As with Town Deal Boards, Government expect the Town Board to be chaired by a businessperson or a local community leader. On the 15 November 2023 the Smethwick Town Deal Board were advised of the Long-Term Plan announcement from DLUHC and the option to re-purpose the Smethwick Town Deal Board to align with the requirements of the Long-Term Plan programme.



Smethwick Town Deal Board members present were supportive of being involved with the Long-Term Plan for Smethwick.

- 4.11 On the 18 December 2023 DLUHC released further guidance (see appendix 2) confirming that £250k capacity funding (RDEL Grant) is to be issued to Local Authorities to cover the costs of establishing the Town Deal Board and preparing the Long-Term Plan for submission. The capacity funding will comprise £50k, which has been received by the council, to establish the Town Deal Board. Once established the remaining £200k of capacity funding will be released to develop the plan which is to be submitted by the 1 August 2024. Government expect this funding to be utilised for convening a Town Deal Board, community engagement, support to the Town Deal Board to develop the Long-Term Plan, and technical expertise for project development including feasibility studies and business cases. The £250k capacity funding is deducted from the £20m funding allocation.
- 4.12 The plan is to set out a 10-year vision that is long-term, strategic, and backed by insights gained through engagement with local people. The plan is to comprise a vision statement, a strategic case for the future of the town, the priority outcomes for 2034, planned interventions across the three investment themes, evidence the plan is community led, how the board will attract additional investment, and high-level milestones.
- 4.13 The Government have based the investment boundary on the Office for National Statistics (ONS) 'Built Up Areas' (see appendix 3) and as such the boundary excludes investment in key open spaces such as Black Patch and Warley Woods. The boundary does not conform to the ward boundaries of Smethwick Town and includes part of Oldbury (Bristnall) within the boundary, and by Government's own guidance the investment boundary must represent the town as intended.
- 4.14 Government advised there is scope to make representations to the department to alter the Long-Term Plan investment boundary, where an amendment remains within the spirit of the programme and includes, as part of the revised area, the town that was originally selected and must





remain contiguous. Any representation to amend the investment boundary need to be confirmed by 1 April 2024 and must have been agreed by the Town Board. Having reviewed the Long-Term Plan investment boundary as provided by Government it has been necessary to consider amendments.

- 4.15 The proposed revised investment boundary aligns to the Smethwick Town boundary, encompassing Abbey; Smethwick; Soho and Victoria; and St Pauls wards in their entirety. Open Spaces are also included. Subject to Cabinet endorsement and Board approval the intention is to submit representation to DLUHC by the 1 April 2024 to amend the investment boundary accordingly (see appendix 4).
- 4.16 A data pack for Smethwick, produced by the Department for Levelling Up's Spatial Data Unit and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has been provided to the council (see appendix 3). The pack includes a raft of local data across the three themes for investment: safety and security; transport and connectivity; and heritage and high streets. The data sources in the pack are the latest available as of 30 November 2023.
- 4.17 Government have provided a list of interventions which have already been assessed as having a strong case for investment, value for money and benefit-to-cost ratio by Government (see appendix 2, pages 40-43). Should the Board pursue these interventions, a business case will not be required as part of the assessment process. However, should the board wish to pursue bespoke or 'off-menu' interventions an outline business will be required.
- 4.18 The timescales for the Long-Term Plan development and submission set by Government are incredibly ambitious and for Sandwell much of the time will be during purdah. Legal advice has been sought and establishing the board is business as usual and therefore does not contravene purdah regulations. In-terms of plan development, the council will appoint consultancy services to provide the necessary expertise and support to the Board to develop the plan. During purdah this activity will comprise data collection, analysis, and meeting with local communities to harness



their local priorities. No public consultation will take place until the purdah period has concluded.

## 5 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	Resources will need to be funded from the Long-Term Plan fund to ensure the council's cost of programme management and accountable body responsibilities are funded, this will include finance officer resource. This will also include capacity to review and update the investment plan after the 3-year period.
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	Should the plan submission be accepted, the council will be required to enter into a funding agreement with Government. Governance arrangements for the board will be established and approved by the Assistant Director of Legal & Assurance and will be reviewed annually.
<b>Risk:</b>	We are yet to have sight of the funding agreement with Government, so it is not possible to assess risks at this stage.
<b>Equality:</b>	The Long-Term Plan is yet to be developed.
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	The Long-Term Plan is yet to be developed.
<b>Social Value:</b>	The Long-Term Plan is yet to be developed.
<b>Climate Change:</b>	The Long-Term Plan is yet to be developed.
<b>Corporate Parenting:</b>	The Long-Term Plan is yet to be developed.





## 6 Appendices

- 1) Prospectus
- 2) Guidance
- 3) Data Pack & Government Investment Boundary
- 4) Proposed Investment Boundary

## 7. Background Papers

None

