

# Report to Cabinet

**17 July 2024**

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| <b>Subject:</b>         | Long-Term Plan for Smethwick  |
| <b>Cabinet Member:</b>  | Regeneration & Infrastructure<br>Cllr Peter Hughes  |
| <b>Director:</b>        | Executive Director Place<br>Alan Lunt<br>Assistant Director Spatial Planning & Growth<br>Tammy Stokes |
| <b>Key Decision:</b>    | No  |
| <b>Contact Officer:</b> | Regeneration Manager, Jenna Langford<br>jenna_langford@sandwell.gov.uk                                |

## 1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That Cabinet receives the progress made on the development of the Long-Term Plan for Smethwick to be submitted to the Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities by the 1 August 2024;
- 1.2 That Cabinet receives the approach and outline content of the Long-Term Plan for Smethwick as of 18 June 2024.

## 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 On the 13 March 2024 Cabinet resolved:
  - the Assistant Director of Legal & Assurance in consultation with the Assistant Director for Growth & Spatial Planning, and Cabinet Member for Regeneration & West Midlands Combined Authority be authorised to establish a Smethwick Long-Term Plan Board through undertaking necessary selection processes to make appointments to the Board and finalise the associated Terms of Reference.
  - authority be granted to the new appointed board, once constituted to develop a Long-Term Plan for Smethwick, to include public



consultation, and to submit to Government, subject to S151 Officer authorisation.

- the Assistant Director of Growth & Spatial Planning in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration West Midlands Combined Authority to make any necessary representations to Government to amend the Long-Term Plan for Smethwick Investment Boundary in consultation with the new Board.
- the Assistant Director for Growth & Spatial Planning, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration & West Midlands Combined Authority be authorised to approve public consultation in relation to the Long-Term Plan for Smethwick.

2.2 This report provides Cabinet with an update on progress against these resolutions, along with the approach being taken to develop and submit the Long-Term Plan for Smethwick. The requirements set out by Government included establishing a Town Board by the 1 April 2024. The purpose of the Board is to bring community leaders and representatives together to produce, oversee, and deliver the Long-Term Plan. Government also stated that where a town already has a Town Deal Board this could be repurposed to a Long-Term Plan Board. Given Smethwick has a Town Deal Board, it was agreed that a process be undertaken to include statutory Board members and to identify broader community representatives to meet Government requirements. Required statutory board members are:

- Chair
- Vice-Chair
- Cabinet Member Portfolio holder
- Town Lead Member
- MP
- Police and Crime Commissioner

2.3 To ensure wider community representation, a call for Expressions of Interest took place which were then assessed, and appointments made by a panel comprising:

- Chair of Smethwick Towns Fund Board
- Town Lead



- Cabinet Member for Regeneration & West Midlands Combined Authority
- Independent Chair (Wednesbury LUP Board)
- SCVO

- 2.4 This approach was presented and agreed by the Economy, Skills, Transport, and Environment Scrutiny Board on the 7 March 2024. All Government requirements were met by the 1 April 2024 deadline, and £200,000 of capacity funding was released to the Council to assist the production of the Long-Term Plan. This funding is in addition to the £50,000 previously received, providing a total budget of £250,000 to produce the Long-Term Plan for Smethwick. The Smethwick Partnership Board convened on the 7 May 2024 charged with producing, overseeing, and delivering the Long-Term Plan for Smethwick. The Terms of Reference and Board Members are appended to this report (Appendix 1).
- 2.5 Following a competitive tender process Lambert-Smith Hampton in partnership with Cavendish were appointed on the 4 April 2024 to support the Smethwick Partnership Board in the community engagement activity and the production of the Long-Term Plan for Smethwick. The Long-Term Plan comprises a 10-Year Vision and a 3 Year Investment Plan. Commissioning consultancy support was necessary to ensure that appropriate resources were in place to be able to achieve the government-submission deadline of the 1 August 2024.
- 2.6 Government provided a boundary plan defining where the £20m Long-Term Plan investment could be targeted within Smethwick. This boundary plan was not an accurate representation of Smethwick, in that it did not align to the Smethwick Town boundary and omitted green and open spaces. A revised boundary was developed by Council officers to address these omissions, which was approved by Cabinet on the 17 March 2024. Following submission to Government, the revised investment boundary for the Long-Term Plan for Smethwick was approved (Appendix 2).
- 2.7 Ensuring the Long-Term Plan for Smethwick is community driven and based on the priorities of local people is a challenge with the plan submission timescales imposed by government. This was further complicated by the Local Elections taking place in May and now the pre-general election period which limits promotion and engagement activity. Community Engagement was scheduled to commence following the local election, comprising:



- Resident Survey
- Workshops
- Engagement with Community Groups and Stakeholders

2.8 The announcement of the General Election for the 4 July 2024 has now seriously impacted on the council and the Smethwick Partnership Board to undertake community engagement activity to inform the development of the Long-Term Plan, as we are now constrained by the pre-election period. The resident survey has been able to continue, however all planned workshops had to be cancelled on the advice of the Monitoring Officer. Although the Monitoring Officer has approved alternative approaches, these are limited to direct one-to-one contact only with stakeholders. This direct engagement is necessary for mapping out current projects and shaping the future vision for Smethwick which will inform the Investment Plan.

2.9 This has resulted in the approach to the Long-Term Plan for Smethwick having to be reconsidered, and recommendations were presented to the Smethwick Partnership Board and subsequently approved on the 4 June 2024. The agreed approach is to base the Long-Term Plan for Smethwick on the indications from the resident survey and supplementary data and evidence available from stakeholders. However, this is not enough to definitively determine the priorities of local people and what interventions the Long-Term Plan funding should support. It would not be in the 'spirit' of the fund to submit detailed proposals for investment on very high-level community engagement. The agreed approach is to utilise the first year of the 3-year investment plan to undertake in-depth community engagement activity, so the Board and the Council as the accountable body can be assured that the investment is going to local priorities that are also aligned to the government investment themes of Safety, Regeneration, and Transportation.

2.10 This approach is supported following advice from Government, that towns may wish to consider the first year of the investment plan to undertake this activity. Whilst the pre-election period has presented a challenge, it has also presented an opportunity to undertake in-depth engagement with the communities of Smethwick post- election. It is important to note that the






Long-Term Plan for Smethwick is over a 10-year period and community engagement is an on-going activity and there will be continual opportunities for this to take place unhindered by pre-election constraints.

2.11 The consultants have been instructed by the Board to ensure broad engagement and responses are obtained to the resident survey, and they engage with all identified stakeholders to obtain supplementary data and evidence to support the submission by the 1 August 2024. In addition, they have also been instructed to develop and engagement plan for the Long-Term for Smethwick for the 1<sup>st</sup> Year of the 3 Year Investment Plan. This ensures that engagement activity with communities can commence upon approval of the Long-Term Plan for Smethwick by government and that we can assure government that we have an engagement plan in place.

2.12 On this basis, the consultants are now working with the Smethwick Partnership Board to draft the content of the Long-Term Plan in the line with the agreed approach, along with timescales for completion (Appendix 3). It is to be noted that the timescales for completion and submission of the Long-Term Plan for Smethwick means that it is not possible to present a significant draft to Cabinet ahead of submission. However, a further update report will be presented to Cabinet on the 11 September 2024.

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

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|  | <p><b>Strong Resilient Communities</b><br/>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><br/>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> |
|  | <p><b>A Connected and Accessible Sandwell</b><br/>Transport and Connectivity is an investment theme of the Long-Term Plan funding programme which will support a connected &amp; accessible Sandwell.</p>  |



## 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 such as regenerating local high streets and town centres or securing public safety. The announcement was accompanied by the publication of '*Our Long-Term Plan for Towns*' prospectus.
- 4.2 Each of the 55 towns selected are to 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 need to produce a Long-Term Plan for Smethwick, based on the priorities of local people, and put to local people for consultation.
- 4.7 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 funding is delivered through the powers are set out in Section 50 of the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020.
- 4.8 Government 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.
- 4.9 On the 18 December 2023 DLUHC released further guidance 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 would 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 and has now been received.

4.10 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.

4.11 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. 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. Interventions for Smethwick will now be considered and developed within the 1<sup>st</sup> Year of the 3 Year Investment Plan to ensure they are aligned to local priorities.

## 5 Alternative Options

5.1 Not applicable.

## 6 Implications

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| <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.                                       |





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| <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.  |

## 7. Appendices

1. Smethwick Partnership Board Terms of Reference
2. Investment Boundary Plan
3. Long-Term Plan Content Outline

## 8. Background Papers

None.

