

Report to Cabinet

17 July 2024

Subject:	Wednesbury Town Centre Masterplan
Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Infrastructure, Councillor Peter Hughes
Director:	Alan Lunt – Executive Director of Place Assistant Director – Spatial Planning and Growth, Tammy Stokes
Key Decision:	Yes
Contact Officer:	Clinton Felicio - Senior Planner Rebecca Jenkins - Levelling Up Partnership Programme Manager







1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That Cabinet consider the results of the public consultation on the Draft Wednesbury Town Centre Masterplan as set out in the Consultation Report (Appendix 2).
- 1.2 That Cabinet Receive a verbal update on the Draft Wednesbury Town Centre Masterplan from the Wednesbury Levelling Up Partnership Board including their recommendation to Cabinet.
- 1.3 That approval is given to the Wednesbury Town Centre Masterplan subject to consideration of the recommendation of the Wednesbury Levelling Up Partnership Board.
- 1.4 That delegate authority is given to the Assistant Director – Spatial Planning and Growth in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Infrastructure to make amendments to the final Masterplan document as detailed in section 4.16 in this report plus any additional non-material amendments.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Approval of the Wednesbury Town Centre Masterplan will provide the council with a long-term strategy to guide further regeneration of Wednesbury.
- 2.2 On 13th September 2023, Cabinet authorised public consultation to be carried out on the draft Wednesbury Town Centre Masterplan.
- 2.3 The Masterplan has been prepared following a series of engagement activities including discussions with the Wednesbury Levelling Up Partnership Board, Ward Members, members of the public, stakeholders and council officers.
- 2.4 Consultation on the Draft Wednesbury Town Centre Masterplan was undertaken between 7 May 2024 and 11 June 2024. From the consultation process 50 survey responses, along with additional comments from workshops, and in-person events, were received.
- 2.5 In addition, the findings from consultation and engagement conducted through the Safer Six campaign in 2023 and consultation on public realm improvements in early 2024 have been taken into account in drafting the Masterplan.
- 2.6 The Wednesbury Levelling Up Partnership Board is due to meet on 16th July 2024 to consider the public consultation findings and to endorse the Masterplan prior to Cabinet taking a decision. Due to the timing of the Board meeting, Cabinet will be updated verbally on the recommendation from the Board during its meeting.
- 2.7 This report requests that the Wednesbury Town Centre Masterplan be approved (subject to some minor amendments set out in para 4.16). The Masterplan will provide a framework to guide future development decisions within Wednesbury town centre. The Draft Wednesbury Town Centre Masterplan and Consultation Report are appended.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>The Best Start in Life for Children and Young People Proposals within the Masterplan consider the need for new education facilities</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 The document will promote a successful, distinctive centre, and aid community life.</p>
	<p>Quality Homes in Thriving Neighbourhoods Residential redevelopment is a key component to bolster a smaller more viable centre. Quality, sustainable homes serviced by excellent facilities are to be an objective of the documents. Developing a long-term vision for Wednesbury through a masterplan will function as a catalyst for the regeneration of Wednesbury Town Centre.</p>
	<p>A Strong and Inclusive Economy The document seeks to repurpose vacant land & sites and increase footfall and activity in the town centre. This will help local companies to grow, attract inward investment, and protect jobs. Developing a long-term vision for Wednesbury through a masterplan will function as a catalyst to improve the quality of public spaces in Wednesbury Town Centre; helping the town to thrive and retain and attract businesses.</p>
	<p>A Connected and Accessible Sandwell The document promotes better connection to public transport and improving all modes of transport. Developing a long-term vision for Wednesbury through a masterplan will function as a catalyst to improve the quality of public spaces in Wednesbury Town Centre, including connections between Wednesbury Town Centre and the Metro.</p>

4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 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 place. Sandwell and Hull were the first of 20 areas selected to form a Levelling Up Partnership.

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

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

4.3 A key output required as part of the Wednesbury Levelling Up Partnership (LUP) is a spatial Masterplan. The purpose of the Wednesbury Town Centre Masterplan is to create a place-based vision and strategy for future uses, which informs a range of potential interventions that are realistic and deliverable, including areas for development and associated infrastructure.

4.4 The Masterplan document was written using a robust, evidenced-based approach and is underpinned by a series of technical studies. These included a baseline and market assessment, viability and site capacity studies in order to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the town centre.

4.5 The draft Masterplan sets out a vision that:

'The town centre will be revitalised as the vibrant heart of Wednesbury, a historic Black Country market town with a proud heritage, and a contemporary place where people live and work that supports the needs and wellbeing of local communities.

A distinctive visitor experience will combine shopping with a diverse evening economy and cultural offer that welcome a broader range of visitors from across Sandwell's communities.'

- 4.6 The draft Masterplan sets out six aims to create:
- A welcoming and inclusive town centre
 - A well-connected place
 - A transformed environment
 - A consolidated and strengthened retail offer.
 - A diversified mix of land uses
 - An active and vibrant place
- 4.7 This is underpinned by 5 strategies focusing on:
- Development
 - Movement
 - Public Realm
 - Greening
 - Sustainability
- 4.8 Regeneration is proposed through a range of discrete projects which accord with and contribute to delivering the vision and strategies set out in the Masterplan. A set of short and long-term proposals are suggested to deliver the Masterplan, together with setting out information around opportunities and constraints to provide key information to guide future development.
- 4.9 Early project work to support the Masterplan is taking place through the LUP funding. This includes:
- developing the public realm in the Town Centre at key locations including new seating, street furniture, new paving, street lighting and urban greening by March 2025
 - a series of interventions around community safety including new and upgraded CCTV cameras, new deployable cameras, and a Business Crime Reduction Partnership
- 4.10 To develop the draft Masterplan, feedback was sought from local stakeholders regarding their priorities for the town centre. In November 2023, an engagement survey was promoted alongside the Safer Six Campaign and provided 115 survey responses. Between January – March 2024, 147 survey responses and comments were received from consultation workshops and in-person events, relating to the Public Realm and Urban Greening project, which helped to inform and shape the Masterplan.
- 4.11 To further promote the consultation exercise on the Draft Wednesbury Town Centre Masterplan, a leaflet drop was

undertaken to Wednesbury town centre businesses and key buildings in Wednesbury. Social media communication was used to promote the consultation launch, as well as signposting to a survey on Sandwell Council's Consultation Hub. The Council also hosted workshops with 7 community groups, Wood Green Sixth Form students and one in-person drop-in event to provide an opportunity for as many stakeholders as possible to comment on the draft masterplan.

4.12 Input to the draft masterplan was provided by Wednesbury Levelling Up (WLUP) Board Members at a working group meeting held in March 2024 and subsequent board meeting in April 2024. The WLUP Board is due to meet on 16 July 2024 to consider the consultation results and make final comments. Due to the proximity to the Cabinet meeting, a verbal update will be provided to Cabinet during the meeting.

4.13 A total of 50 survey responses were received, alongside a range of comments, following engagement with over 200 stakeholders during the in-person event, workshops and conversations with business owners in the town centre. The Consultation Report provides further detail on the survey and qualitative responses gained during the workshops and in-person event.

Key Consultation Survey Results:

- **62%** of respondents agreed with the vision for the masterplan compared to **26%** who disagreed.
- **66%** agreed with the aims for Wednesbury town centre. **14%** disagreed.
- **64%** of respondents were supportive of new homes in the town centre compared with **10%** being unsupportive.
- **76%** support the ambitions for new leisure and cultural venues in the town centre compared to **4%** who were not in support.
- **58%** of respondents said that the proposed changes in the masterplan would make them more likely to attend events in the town centre compared to **6%** who said that the changes would make it less likely to attend.

4.14 Respondents raised concerns around safety in the town centre in the 'further comments' section in the survey. The comments raised issues around a fear of crime, particularly in the evenings, as well as a prevalence of anti-social behaviour and a lack of a police presence. These comments were consistent with the Wednesbury

findings from the Sandwell Resident and Wellbeing Perception Survey 2022 and 2023. Other issues included a desire for initiatives to improve shop frontages, with many respondents identifying problems relating to the condition of shop fronts and empty retail units. Further comments raised included concerns about the relocation of the former outdoor market, lack of public toilets, and the need for improved lighting.

- 4.15 The implementation of the Masterplan aims to tackle many of the issues raised in the consultation. For instance, the development of new housing will increase footfall, bringing more people into the town centre and enhancing surveillance. This, combined with the new CCTV and the Council's ongoing collaboration with partners, aims to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour. Additionally, improving the appearance of the town centre will boost market confidence and encourage more residents to visit.
- 4.16 Subject to Cabinet approval and final comments from the WLUP Board, minor amendments to the Masterplan document are required, these include:
- Expanding the 'Delivery Strategy' section to include project priorities and phasing, a delivery strategy, delivery mechanisms and next steps.
 - Reorganisation of the document for easier reference to the vision, aims and delivery proposals.
 - Minor text, plans, and illustration adjustments to ensure accessibility for all audiences.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 Wednesbury Town Centre does not currently have a Masterplan in place. A strategic review of the Town Centre has been undertaken including a review of its current uses, constraints, and future opportunities to provide a solid base for future intervention in the longer term.
- 5.2 Funding from the Wednesbury Levelling Up Partnership has enabled the Council to prepare a detailed masterplan. This will assist in providing to investors and developers more clarity and certainty with regards to the type of development the Council considers would be most appropriate. Having a Masterplan in

place will assist in the decision-making process for future proposals.

- 5.3 Cabinet could determine not to approve the Masterplan for Wednesbury Town Centre. Development proposals would come forward ad-hoc which may not meet the aspirations of local communities. The Council would not have a framework to promote development opportunities or provide a strong base to bid for further funding. The continued regeneration envisioned for the town centre is unlikely to be achieved.

6 Implications

Resources:	<p>The masterplan provides an overarching vision and set of priorities for the Town Centre. Any resource implications arising from proposals within the Masterplan brought forward to delivery will be considered through individual decisions.</p> <p>Costs to bring forward the Masterplan have been provided by the LUP Grant and the use of existing staffing resources.</p>
Legal and Governance:	<p>Cabinet authorised public consultation to be carried out on 13th September 2023.</p> <p>Outputs of the LUP Grant are for a masterplan to be completed for Wednesbury Town Centre. This is on track.</p> <p>The LUP Grant includes the requirement for all spend to be made by March 2025. This is on track.</p> <p>Procurement to produce the Masterplan was undertaken via a full tender process.</p>
Risk:	<p>A project risk register is in place to assist project management of the delivery of a Masterplan. There are currently no significant project risks.</p> <p>Risks associated with the delivery of the Masterplan will be assessed as part of bringing forward individual proposals and decisions.</p>

Equality:	<p>The consultation activity has included engagement activity with people with protected characteristics through relevant community/faith groups.</p> <p>EqIAs will be undertaken, as required, for any projects brought forward to delivery as a result of the Masterplan.</p>
Health and Wellbeing:	<p>The underpinning objective of the LUP is to 'level up' and reduce inequalities. The draft masterplan sets out priority actions to regenerate the Town Centre providing a more welcoming environment for residents contributing to health and wellbeing.</p>
Social Value:	<p>Social value has been considered through the contractor appointment to develop the masterplan. Consultants are due to deliver a business up-skill session and a school careers talk.</p>
Climate Change:	<p>The draft masterplan includes consideration of sustainability matters. Climate change impacts will be considered as part of the delivery of components of the masterplan.</p> <p>The direct implications of the consultation activity include minimising the amount of paper and printed materials to support the consultation.</p>
Corporate Parenting:	<p>Young peoples' views and opinions (voice of the child) have been considered through consultation activities with schools and youth groups.</p>

7. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Draft Wednesbury Town Centre Masterplan
Appendix 2 - Consultation Report

8. Background Papers

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