



Report For:	Cabinet
Date of Meeting:	Cabinet 21 October 2019
Part:	Part 1 - Open

SUMMARY	
Title of Report:	HIGH WYCOMBE TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN AND PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENTS.
Cabinet Member: Officer Contact: Direct Dial: Email:	Councillor David Johncock John Callaghan 01494 421507 John_callaghan@wycombe.gov.uk
Ward affected:	Abbey
Reason for the Decision:	To celebrate the achievement of the High Wycombe Town Centre Masterplan Programme, release funds for major works to the town centre as per the agreed approved budget, and note the continuing need and opportunities for future public realm improvements, including in the context of the Councils bid for Future High Street Fund
Proposed Decision:	That: <ul style="list-style-type: none">(i) Cabinet agrees to delegate authority to the Head of Planning and Sustainability, in conjunction with the Head of Finance, for the release of £500,000 from the High Wycombe Town Centre Masterplan Future Phases/ Public Realm Improvements budget for a major works programme centred on the High Street;(ii) Cabinet notes the opportunities to make use of the remaining £3.111m funds in the High Wycombe town Centre Master Plan Future Phases/public realm budget, as set out in Appendix A; and(iii) Cabinet recommends that Buckinghamshire Council undertakes a review of High Wycombe Town Centre improvements, and sets out an implementation plan
Sustainable Community Strategy/Council Priorities - Implications	Strategy: The High Wycombe Town Centre Masterplan is included in the Delivery and Sites Allocations Plan, which was adopted in 2013. A Public Realm Action Plan was agreed at Cabinet in May 2012 (alongside the draft DSA) presenting a 'menu of choices' to improve the town.

	<p>This work will support and complement the work in the emerging Regeneration and Transport strategies.</p> <p>In September of this year the Council heard it has been successful in its Future High Streets Fund application, and work is now progressing on a further bid for funding.</p> <p>Risk: There are no risks associated with this decision.</p> <p>Equalities: There are no equalities issues associated with this decision.</p> <p>Health & Safety: There are no health and safety issues associated with this decision</p>
Monitoring Officer/ S.151 Officer Comments	<p>Monitoring Officer: There are no other apparent direct legal implications for the subject matter of this report, other than those stated within the report.</p> <p>S.151 Officer: This work can be met from within the approved 2019/20 budget and will be reviewed to match the envisaged phasing. This will be fed into the 2020/21 Buckinghamshire Council budget setting process.</p>
Consultees:	The Council would undertake public consultation on individual schemes that would be funded from this budget where these result in significant changes to the current layout.
Options:	Cabinet could choose to do nothing.
Next Steps:	To be taken by Buckinghamshire Council.
Background Papers:	Business case undertaken to support the release of the LGF from the LEP (May 2016)
Abbreviations:	<p>CIL Community Infrastructure Levy HWTCMP High Wycombe Town Centre Masterplan DSA Delivery and Site Allocations Plan LEP Buckinghamshire Local Economic Partnership CIL Community Infrastructure Levy WDC Wycombe District Council BCC Buckinghamshire County Council IRC Improvement and Review Commission FHSF Future High Street Fund LGF Local Growth Fund (NB 'public realm' refers to the everyday external places in our towns that are accessible to all: streets, roads, parks and public spaces.</p>

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This report summarises what has been achieved under the umbrella of the High Wycombe Town Centre Masterplan (HWTCMP).
- 1.2. It proposes that delegated authority is granted for the release of up to £500,000 for a major works programme centred on the High Street.
- 1.3. It also notes the continuing need for a public realm improvement budget, of which £3.111m will remain (subject to agreement on the recommendation (i)), and recommends that a review of potential improvements be carried out to produce an Implementation Plan. Potential projects are outlined in Appendix A.
- 1.4. The Council adopted the Delivery and Site Allocations Plan (DSA) in 2013. It contains a vision for High Wycombe:

High Wycombe town centre will be uniquely appealing and attractive destination with a thriving economic centre, and a high quality public realm, which emphasises the natural, historic and cultural assets of the town. The town centre will be a place where people choose to live, work and visit, with a variety of uses that include a good retail offer, high quality office and residential accommodation and cultural and educational opportunities centred around the Swan Theatre and bucks New University campus.

The town centre will be well connected and accessible on foot, by road and by public transport. The provision of an improved street network will allow for greater integration of the historic and expanded town centre with new high quality public spaces connecting key areas together through more direct and attractive linkages for pedestrians and cyclists and creating opportunities to enjoy the River Wye.

- 1.5. The DSA remains a current plan, forming part of the Council's Development Plan. The new Local Plan is read alongside the DSA.
- 1.6. A key part of delivering to this vision has been the improvement of the public realm in the town centre, including the structural change to the highway network through construction of the alternative route, enabling the downgrading of, and reduction of traffic on Abbey Way flyover, creating opportunities for public realm improvement, and improved connections within the town, and restoring Queen Victoria Road and Easton Street to two-way traffic.
- 1.7. The Council is in the process of finalising a Regeneration Strategy. This covers more than just High Wycombe, but the vision reinforces the need for a people-centred approach to future changes. The vision reads:

"By 2050, through sustainable growth in High Wycombe, Princes Risborough and Marlow we aim to have doubled the size of the local economy, boosted productivity and cemented Buckinghamshire's reputation as a world class location for business. The greater Wycombe area will be one of the best places in the UK to work and invest in with world leading business productivity and connectivity. Growth will be harnessed to enable businesses and communities to prosper, thrive and enjoy one of the highest qualities of life in the country. Complementing all of this, the region will have outstanding sustainability credentials."

- 1.8. A Transport Strategy is being developed in parallel with the Regeneration Strategy. This is specifically for High Wycombe. It has identified a draft vision (subject to consultation).

A Vision Statement for High Wycombe 2050

By 2050, High Wycombe will be among the best connected and most innovative towns in the London-Oxford-Cambridge 'Golden Triangle', where all journeys, from start to finish, are emission-free, seamless, and safe for all residents, businesses and visitors.

Under the vision are three themes: Connecting Locally; Connecting regionally and connecting green spaces, with the following statement on the town centre under connecting locally:

The town centre will be a destination of choice, bolstered by streets that are inclusive, accessible and safe by design – it will be a vibrant place to live, shop, visit and conduct business.

- 1.9. To meet all these strategic ambitions, ensuring the public realm of the town is of a high quality, and a good place for pedestrians, is clearly essential.

2. Detailed Report

Looking back

- 2.1. There have been a number of important changes to our public realm over the last seven years. All of these changes have been to improve High Wycombe as a 'people place'.
- 2.2. Even where the changes have been to affect structural change to the town centre, they have been implemented to ensure the resulting roads are designed to be more attractive to non-motorised road users, and easier to cross, than roads typically built in preceding decades. This is key to delivering the vision in the DSA, and the emerging visions in the Regeneration and Transport strategies.
- 2.3. A central programme of improvements became known as 'the Masterplan', comprising structural changes to the highway network, including the alternative route and making Queen Victoria Road and Easton Street two-way.
- 2.4. This programme had an initial budget of £14.526m, made up of £8.480m from the Government's Local Growth Fund – through a bid made by the LEP, and £5.301m from CIL, with 0.575m from BCC and £0.170m from WDC that included a contribution in kind of staff costs.
- 2.5. This budget was adjusted to reflect the decision to deliver the Queen Victoria Road/Easton St scheme rather than Oxford Road, and the delivery of the gas works link road by Inland Homes Ltd via a CIL payment in kind agreement with WDC, at a value of £2.182m. WDC. Following this WDC increased its CIL contribution of £5.301M to £6.193M to offset a projected shortfall in funding. The effect of these was to adjust the total income for the delivery of the Masterplan schemes up to £15.068M. It is anticipated, allowing for residual costs, this budget will be spent out with the completion of these works.
- 2.6. Since 2012 when the CIL was introduced the Council has allocated CIL funds every year (sometimes as well as s106 funds) to support town centre masterplan and public realm improvements. Last year 3.1m of CIL was allocated, which added to funds allocated from previous years, and was intended to allow work on masterplan/public realm improvements beyond the current programme of works that are now concluding with construction of the gas works link.
- 2.7. The alternative route runs from the bottom of Marlow Hill along Queen Alexandra Road, through the former Gas Works (Suffield Hill) along a new link road, along part of Desborough Road and through a new link extending Westbourne Street, up to the

Oxford Road. This was built in a number of phases, starting in 2014, and concluding with the opening of Suffield Hill through the Gas Works this month (October 2019).

- 2.8. The road design has been deliberately to keep traffic moving, but at a slow and steady pace, to make the environment less hostile to pedestrians and cyclists. A central 'median strip' has often been provided which, for many users, makes streets much easier to cross. The needs of disabled users have been taken into account in the design, including through the choice of materials. A buff resin-bound gravel has been used on the pavements, which is visually more attractive than and, together with the granite kerbing, contrasts well with the tarmac carriageway.
- 2.9. This programme has also restored two-way traffic along Queen Victoria Road and Easton Street, substantially improving the public realm and sense of place, and reducing journey times for many road users. This was completed earlier this year.
- 2.10. The programme identified other areas for public realm improvement:
 - The Marlow Hill/Abbey Way gyratory ('magic roundabout')
 - Oxford Road, from Bellfield Road to Archway
 - Downgrading Archway and re-purposing the space.
- 2.11. When the LGF funding was awarded it was known that it would not be possible to complete the whole programme. The alternative route was prioritised because it was seen to create the best opportunities for town centre regeneration in the short medium and long term. The remaining budget was insufficient for the Marlow Hill/Abbey Way gyratory. Queen Victoria Road/Easton Street was chosen over Oxford Road, to allow time for the Task and Finish Group set up by IRC to report on the potential to re-open the river. A response to the work of the IRC is elsewhere on the agenda of this Cabinet meeting.
- 2.12. Other public realm projects that have been implemented, reflecting priorities in the public realm action plan were:
 - Abbey Way crossing to the Rye – providing an 'at grade' crossing to make it easier to get from the town centre to the Rye, implemented in 2013.
 - Pauls Row – transforming the street which had very narrow pavements and all the characteristics of a service backstreet into a generous space, now supporting a thriving café culture, implemented in 2014.
 - Frogmoor parking – introducing short term shopper parking, and environmental improvements, implemented in 2015
- 2.13. In 2013-2014 a programme of town centre decluttering was undertaken that allowed visitors to appreciate the historic town centre. CIL funds over and above routine maintenance funds were also put towards enhanced maintenance of the paving in the historic town centre to reduce whole life costs and to reduce the need for unsightly patchwork repairs.
- 2.14. A Memorandum of Understanding concerning proactive highway inspections in the town centre and identifying the potential for further funding was put in place in October 2018. Following on from this BCC and TfB have put forward a major works programme for the High Street and the historic core. This includes:
 - Lifting and relaying York setts to the high street carriageways and parking bays

- Lifting and relaying York flag paving to a north eastern section of the High St around 'Iceland', around 'Hobgoblin Alley' and around the Cornmarket.
- Lifting and relaying tegula blocks and setts to the south side of the High St east of the junction with Corporation St
- Lift and relay York setts and York flag paving to sections of Church St, where required.

It is proposed to reuse existing materials where possible with good quality second hand stones used as and when required; these are more cost effective, fit better with the appearance of the existing stones and are more sustainable than sourcing new stone

2.15. Discussions are taking place to confirm the programme of works is the most appropriate and to provide assurance on costs. Subject to decisions on the release of funds it is anticipated that work could get under way starting early in 2020.

Looking Forward

2.16. WDC has successfully gained funding as part of the Government's Future High Streets fund. This is a two stage process. The Government has awarded WDC funding to work up more detailed proposals, and those proposals are themselves subject to further competition.

2.17. Any funding from this FHSF is for 'structural' interventions:

- Physical infrastructure
- Acquisition and assembly of land including to support new housing, workspaces and public realm
- Improvements to transport access, traffic flow and circulation
- Supporting change of use including (where appropriate) housing delivery and densification
- Adaptation of the high street in response to changing technology.

2.18. The second stage Future High Streets Fund bid will in effect become the strategy for the next stage of improvements to the town centre and the Business case is due to be submitted at the end of June 2020. However no more than 5% of this funding can be used for public realm improvements. With the increasing pressure on high street retail in the town centre, and acknowledgement nationally that the physical fabric, 'feel' and attractiveness of town centres is an important factor in their success, it is considered that there should be a complementary programme to continue to improve the public realm of the town.

2.19. The remaining £3.111m (assuming cabinet support to release £500k) may be used towards a number of improvements. The strategy that is to be prepared as part of the Future High Streets Fund will need to identify what improvements are prioritised, and how they are funded. There are a number of potential projects, including remaining elements of the masterplan and these are set out as in Appendix A. If those projects exceed the remaining budget, there are CIL allocations which are available which could be used for this purpose. These will need to be considered within the budget setting process of the new Buckinghamshire Council.

2.20. It is therefore recommended that the new Buckinghamshire Council undertakes a review of High Wycombe Town Centre improvements, and sets out an implementation plan to, complement the Future High Streets Fund proposals taking account of potential projects in Appendix A.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1. WDC, the LEP and BCC have invested over £15m in the alternative route and Queen Victoria Road/Easton Street, and further funds in a number of other improvements.
- 3.2. There will be a need for continuing investment in High Wycombe Town Centre to make it an attractive place, and this has been identified in a number of strategies.
- 3.3. The Future High Streets fund programme will provide the strategic focus for the next phase of improvements to the town centre, and public realm improvements need to co-ordinate with that strategy.
- 3.4. Undertaking £500,000 of major works centred on the High Street will help to improve its attractiveness for visitors and for businesses in the near term, and reduce future maintenance costs and potential claims. These are within existing approved budgets.
- 3.5. The remaining budget from the High Wycombe Masterplan future phases /public realm improvements will enable some public realm improvements and the priorities for these should be set out in an Implementation Plan. The scope of this will depend on the availability of funding.
- 3.6. It will be for the new Buckinghamshire Council to prioritise schemes, and consider further funding as part of a wider strategy for High Wycombe town centre.