



Report to High Wycombe Town Committee

Date: 23 September 2021
Title: Update on Regeneration in High Wycombe
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Recommendations: To note the activities of Buckinghamshire Council in the delivery of Regeneration in the town centre of High Wycombe

Background

- 1.1 Since the Unitary Council of Buckinghamshire's formation in 2020 a greater emphasis is being placed on regeneration of Town Centres in the County. This means current plans will be incorporated into a wider Buckinghamshire Regeneration Programme but also that greater capacity and skills are being incorporated into the Team.

Main content of report

This report provides an update on current and proposed regeneration activity in Buckinghamshire with an emphasis on High Wycombe Town Centre

1.2 Future High Streets Fund

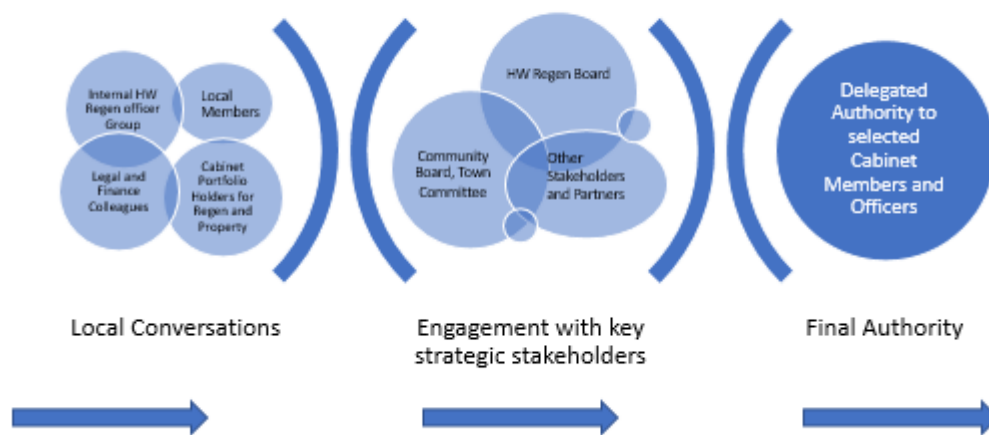
Bucks Council have been awarded a total of £11.8m with Council match funding of £3m over 3 years. Current progress is that we have received £6.7m in June, with the rest to be distributed at different intervals. We are talking to MCHLG about possible substitutions due to not all the initially identified projects going ahead. The current progress updates are included in presentation slides. Acquisitions will require sign-off by the leader and members for new schemes.

The old Argos building is currently being used by DWP as a pop-up job centre, where they have taken out a 5-year lease on the building.

Information sharing and keeping stakeholders and Members up to date on this programme is important. It was proposed that before any major decision and final sign off is made on a project, there will be information sharing on this at the local level where Members, Stakeholders and Partners will be updated. Some of this will

happen via the Regeneration Board, some of it will happen at the local level with Ward Members and Town Committee. We have set out how we are going to do this by using the following process –

Flow of conversations to share information and raise awareness of FHSF allocations as per agreed programme of projects



1.3 Buckinghamshire Regeneration Framework

The Economic Growth and Regeneration Team (EGR) will be undertaking work to develop a Buckinghamshire wide Regeneration Framework. This will be a high-level document which sets out key principles that shape and inform regeneration plans for our Town Centres. Partners, Investors and stakeholders can also be directed by such principles which can help inform their plans. The Framework will be developed with input from a range of Partners and Members with the Regeneration Board helping move it forward.

1.4 High Wycombe Regeneration Strategy Refresh

EGR Team is also looking to update and refresh the High Wycombe Strategy so that it is relevant to current times and has incorporated and responded to the current shocks of Covid 19 and related economic factors. The Strategy will refresh its evidence base, factor in latest trends and market sentiment and review current governance arrangements to support swift and efficient delivery of major regeneration projects. The refreshing of the strategy will happen in consultation with local Members, Town Committee, stakeholders, and Partners. Further plans on this will be shared when developed.

1.5 High Wycombe Regeneration Board

As part of the refresh of the Regeneration Strategy a consideration will be made about the governance for delivery of our large strategic regeneration projects. We would want to see the Regeneration Board playing a big part inputting into strategic design and schemes and taking a much more forward plan, long term visionary approach to regeneration in Wycombe and having greater connections with other Boards delivering regeneration across Buckinghamshire. Therefore, we would want to make sure membership of the Board reflects this aspiration and that people are equipped with adequate skills and information to do this. The day-day operational issues in Wycombe Town Centre would get considered in other forums with Officers that are able to respond in a speedy and efficient way.

1.6 Welcome Back Funding

Government provided an allocation of funding to all Councils to support them in reopening their High Streets Safely. The Welcome Back Funding allows for local places to develop projects that will encourage shoppers, communities, and visitors to return as well as to help businesses reopen. There are caveats and criteria around what this money can be spent on and we have to 'spend at risk' and claim back.

Although there is a range of initiatives already in our High Streets such as planters, new shop windows, and events; there is current engagement underway for Community Boards and stakeholders to identify further projects that can help our High Streets welcome back shoppers. New project ideas are being checked against Welcome Back Funding criteria to develop delivery plans.

1.7 Markets

The Markets offer in the Town Centre is delivered under contract by Saunders Markets and this Committee is provided with a six-monthly update on the market activity (July and January). As advised in these update reports Bucks Council will be looking at market delivery countywide offer for all our Town Centres to ensure vibrancy, opportunity, and value for money.

1.8 Footfall Monitoring

As part of the Reopening High Streets/Welcome Back Funding we have secured footfall data from March 2020. This provides an important baseline to monitor the effectiveness of our animations and activations (as delivered by HWBIDCo and the market for example). Data and reporting is available from October onwards, we will be able to provide this information at that point.

1.9 Wye North (Eastern Quarter)

Programmes and schemes for the Wye North Station area were already in place pre unitary. The Regeneration Strategy refresh will consider the existing plans to ensure

deliverability and uses post Covid 19. Opportunities for funding continue to be explored for individual schemes in this area.

1.10 **Cressex Business Park**

Recognised as an important economic cluster of businesses for High Wycombe. Discussion started with business in 2018/19 about creating a second industrial park business improvement district (BID) as a sister to that established at Globe Business Park in Marlow in 2015. A business-led Steering Group is in place. This project activity was placed on pause due to Covid-19 and will be progressed further over the coming year with a ballot targeted for 2022. This will help businesses of the area have much more input into the projects that are needed to tackle the issues on the Business Park.

1.11 **DWP Partnership Agreement**

Given the rise of unemployment levels in Bucks and the impacts of Covid 19 on the economy, businesses and residents; a new Partnership approach is being undertaken by Bucks Council and Department of Works and Pension (DWP). This outlines priority groups so that support can be directed to them that will help them back into employment as quickly as possible. In addition, the Job Centre Plus is growing its estate in High Wycombe so that it is accessible to local residents where they can access advice, support and referrals to support and training. The priority areas of the Agreement fall into four broad categories–

- a. **Unemployment Trap** – those that are on the cusp of losing their job or have just lost it which will cause them to spiral into a whole raft of social or physical challenges including mental health. Their employment was the only thing saving them from such issues
- b. **Accelerated Pathways** – this is a set of short and accessible training provision that will enable people to reskill quickly into an employment sector that has jobs growth in it. Examples are where people have been made redundant from retail but can quickly retrain to go into Health and Social Care, Construction etc.
- c. **Enterprise Start Up** – some people have aspirations to set up their own business but just need a little guidance and advice which can help them on their way.
- d. **Young People** – data shows that young people are one of the most adversely affected group from Covid 19. Kickstart and other such schemes are enabling young people to gain experience, grow confidence and get back into employment but other initiatives need to be established that can support young people.

1.12 **Economic data**



In July 2021, **12,805** Buckinghamshire residents were claiming ‘out-of-work’ related benefits (the Claimant Count).

There were **7,265** more claimants in Buckinghamshire in July 2021 than at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020.

Within Buckinghamshire, the Claimant Count rate is highest (and above the national average) in the **Wycombe** parliamentary constituency area (5.7%).

25-49 year olds make up a slightly greater proportion of all those claiming currently than in March 2020, whilst a smaller proportion are aged 50+. The proportion of claimants aged 16-24 is the same.

London has experienced the largest increase in Claimant Count rates since the start of the pandemic, with edge-of-London areas (particularly those close to Heathrow and Gatwick airports) tending to see higher than average increases in Claimant Count rates and higher than average levels of furloughing.

Table 1: Claimant Count – July 2021

Area	March 2020		July 2021		March 2020 - July 2021	
	Number	%	Number	%	Change	% point change
Aylesbury	1,420	1.8	2,975	3.8	1,555	2.0
Beaconsfield	820	1.4	2,200	3.7	1,380	2.3
Buckingham	710	1.1	1,820	2.8	1,110	1.7
Chesham and Amersham	750	1.4	1,820	3.3	1,070	1.9
Wycombe	1,840	2.6	3,990	5.7	2,150	3.1
Buckinghamshire	5,540	1.7	12,805	3.9	7,265	2.2
England	1,063,505	3.0	1,946,790	5.5	883,285	2.5

Source: DWP, via NOMIS



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LOCAL ENTERPRISE
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Next steps and review

- As the projects listed above develop further with more detailed plans surrounding them, further information can be shared at regular intervals to this Committee. Where there are opportunities to collaborate, consult and engage, Bucks Council will formally discuss with Town Committee on the best approach for this.