



Report to Growth, Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee

Date:	17th February 2022
Title:	Town Centre Regeneration
Cabinet Member(s):	Cllr Gareth Williams & Cllr Jocelyn Towns
Contact officer:	Lisa Michelson/ Shabnam Ali
Ward(s) affected:	All
Recommendations:	That the Committee note content of this report.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 Town Centre Regeneration will remain an important focus for the Council as it supports places to emerge successfully from the COVID pandemic.
- a) Regeneration success is achieved through clear vision and narratives that are locally developed and driven. It is essential that Buckinghamshire makes progress on this if our towns and villages are to achieve their ambition.
 - b) The Council is delivering an ambitious capital programme to invest in our town centres in the regeneration portfolio. These projects include delivering significant grant funding as well as projects which utilise council assets. Next year's capital investment budget sees £21.5m funding programmed for regenerating our places.
 - c) Recent work has recently been focussed on pandemic support for businesses and high streets which has been reactive. As we come out of the pandemic, it is important to reframe the next phase of regeneration into a proactive approach focussed on the medium and longer term.
 - d) Two years into the pandemic, we are able to see that some trends for town centres have been expedited (e.g. retail struggling) and other changes to behaviour related to increased home working and public safety (such as more activity taking place outdoors, weather permitting), which need to be factored into our thinking about the next evolution for the high street.

- e) The Council is supporting communities to develop their ambitions for their place and put local strategies into place to stimulate and coordinate regeneration investment. The Council is developing a Regeneration Framework for Buckinghamshire in order to pull a coherent approach to regeneration together across the whole of the county.

2. Delivering Regeneration in Buckinghamshire

- 2.1 Buckinghamshire as a county is not dominated by a single town/city, but instead made up from a thriving network of medium sized towns, market towns and large villages. Regeneration in these important towns and rural communities is essential to ensure their long-term survival and prosperity as well as to achieve the economic ambitions for Buckinghamshire.
- 2.2 Regeneration in Buckinghamshire is community led and delivered through partnership. Working with key public and private sector partners, the council provides local leadership and clarity for practical, long term vision which is essential to achieve consensus for strategic and local regeneration.
- 2.3 Working across Buckinghamshire partners, the Council plays a key role in spotting opportunities for investment and building momentum for that investment through a compelling narrative for communities. This is true for the two largest towns in Buckinghamshire, but also for other towns and large villages across the county.
- 2.4 Regeneration success is the realisation of locally determined strategies and vision from our places which achieve a thriving and prosperous Buckinghamshire.
- 2.5 Alongside essential strategy and vision development, the Council is delivering an ambitious capital programme of regeneration projects. These are funded through a variety of sources including grant funding, S106, or other capital funding. The list of the upcoming year's regeneration capital projects can be found in Appendix 1.

3. Town Centre Pandemic Support

- 3.1 Regeneration activities for the past two years have been focussed on the rapid and urgent support to our high streets and town centres during the COVID pandemic. While reactive in nature, a number of important initiatives have been designed and delivered.
- 3.2 **Reopening High Streets Safely and the Welcome Back Fund** – These two initiatives (where the Welcome Back Fund is a scheme which continues on from the Reopening High Streets Safely Fund) have provided support for our high streets and commercial areas during periods of the pandemic where lockdown and social distancing restrictions were in place. The combined funding of nearly £1m has:

- a) provided temporary street furniture and public realm improvements to enable businesses and restaurants to trade outdoors,
 - b) funded additional safety, sanitation, and hygiene measures,
 - c) delivered important communications campaigns to promote safe behaviour and encourage local shopping in affected businesses
 - d) created vibrancy through signage, bunting and events to encourage people to return to the high street
- 3.3 The Council has also supported Buckinghamshire's businesses through the efficient delivery of a number of successful business grants schemes. In particular, the Additional Restrictions Grant scheme was designed to support businesses and self-employed individuals who were not able to access other schemes or support. Over £22m in support was paid directly to thousands of businesses across the county starting at the end of 2020 and through to May 2021. New support measures were announced in December 2022 and the Additional Restrictions Grant Booster scheme was launched in January. This small scheme, which closes on the 23rd of February, provides businesses in targeted sectors with one-time relief grants of £1500.

4. The Changing High Street

- 4.1 Over recent years, town centres and high streets have been changing due to long term structural changes to the retail sector and online shopping, even before the pandemic's impact and the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions were put into place. Defining the post-COVID role, function and offer of town centres will form a key focus of town centre regeneration activities going forward.
- 4.2 The pandemic was a shock to many high streets when businesses were required to close and footfall collapsed. However, more recently, the High Street Task Force (HSTF - 2020/21 Review of High Street Footfall in England) has established that the vaccine roll out has supported considerable high street footfall recovery. This has though varied from place to place, with smaller centres recovering quicker than cities and regional centres. Early indications are that 'holiday' towns have recovered best, followed by 'speciality' towns. Comparison Retail Towns – reliant on traditional shopping centres – have fared less well.
- 4.3 At a national scale, several major brands and familiar stores have disappeared from our town centres, and many stores have diversified into online retail platforms. Such changes can bring opportunities for empty retail and commercial space repurposing such as for much-needed homes, new food and beverage space, public services, or to facilitate cultural activities.
- 4.4 Broadening the offer of high streets aligns with emerging trends showing more people coming to town centres for a range of different reasons. The public realm and green infrastructure can help drive more footfall to high streets and support events and

activities. Places with unique attractions and a range of services have fared better since the pandemic than those focusing on high street retail – reinforcing the importance of sense of place, heritage, greenspace and the ‘experiential offer’. Markets, festivals and events are often key parts of this offer. High streets are increasingly looking to become multi-functional – combining shopping, employment, and culture.

5. Defining and Delivering Regeneration for our communities

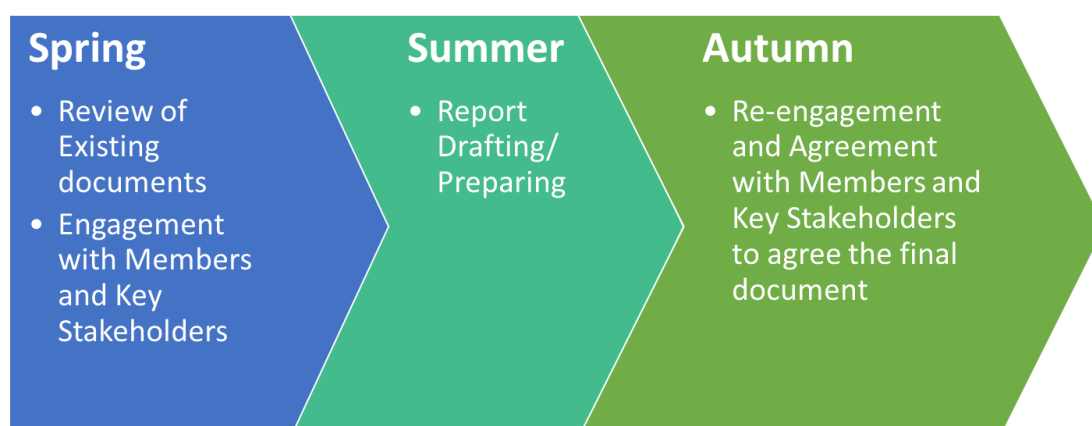
- 5.1 It is important that Buckinghamshire Council and key partners have a clear strategy and vision which drives our collective approach to regeneration.
- 5.2 Development is underway to produce and agree a new Buckinghamshire Regeneration Framework as the foundation strategy for investment and future place-shaping. Key priorities that drive the regeneration approach in Buckinghamshire include initiatives and strategies which:
 - a) Support in the development of an ambitious regeneration programme for Buckinghamshire.
 - b) Define the Buckinghamshire specific principles to underpin place-based regeneration of our town centres.
 - c) Ensure all Buckinghamshire communities share equally in the county’s, and the UK’s success including delivering against key Levelling-Up missions such as Pride of Place, employment and productivity, and Healthy Life Expectancy.
 - d) Articulate the unique network of towns within Buckinghamshire, drawing out how they individually and collectively contribute to the growth ambitions of the County.
 - e) Set priorities for town-centre-based regeneration at a high level, helping us to prioritise future economic investment and creating a basis for individual towns to progress local strategies, masterplans and delivery plans.
 - f) Define the governance arrangements required to drive forward regeneration, based on existing good practice from across the County, in particular those established for Aylesbury Garden Town.
 - g) Engage stakeholders to contribute to and play an active role in Buckinghamshire’s regeneration programme
- 5.3 The regeneration approach will not be looking to ‘standardise’ our places. Our places, be they villages, towns, cities or regions, are diverse and unique. They are shaped by their location, connections, natural surroundings, history, culture, economies, and the people who live, visit, and work in them.

- 5.4 The regeneration approach draws on and reflects key characteristics identified in the National Design Guide, the Egan Review of skills for sustainable communities, the BRE Excellence Framework for sustainable communities and the work of the High Street Task Force and Institute of Place Management, to ensure a town centre focus.
- 5.5 Against each theme, strategic principles speak to ‘what makes a good town centre’ – enabling the Council to define the high-level principles we wish all our towns to be based on going forward. To understand how these principles can apply to and are relevant for the towns across Buckinghamshire, an associated series of questions are being explored through evidence clinics with key officers (the theme headings are shown in the diagram below).



- 5.6 It is important that our strategy documents recognise the roles:
- Economy and service delivery play for our high streets and town centres and their relative performance
 - Connectivity plays with a need to address how people move about safely, seamless integration between modes of travel and the need for enhanced accessibility
 - Heritage, green infrastructure and character play to shape our places’ draw as destinations
 - Local leadership, management, marketing, networks of key local stakeholder and partnerships play in building momentum and driving regeneration forward.

5.7 Timeline for development of the Buckinghamshire Framework in 2022



6. Conclusion

- 6.1 Town Centre vitality and regeneration will remain a top priority for the Council. Further work to develop and deliver the Regeneration Programme will take place, working closely with communities. We are entering a new phase of regeneration work as we come out of the pandemic.
- 6.2 Regeneration is delivered across any number of local stakeholders. Having a clear vision and ambition for our towns and villages enables local places is essential. It enables communities to build both momentum for action and the basis for investment. The Council will support places in setting out clear strategies and deliverable ambitions, while considering the public sector assets in a place and what those could achieve.
- 6.3 Alongside further strategy and engagement activities, the Council is also delivering an ambitious programme of regeneration capital projects.

Appendix 1 – Proposed Capital Programme for Regeneration for the next 4 Years

Service Area	Project Group / Project	2022/23 £000's	2023/24 £000's	2024/25 £000's	2025/26 £000's	MTFP Total £000's
Economic Growth & Regeneration	Amersham Regeneration (St John's Build)	1,200	0	0	0	1,200
	Aylesbury Town Centre	800	2,000	200	0	3,000
	CIL Funded Regeneration	260	0	0	0	260
	Employment & Regeneration Led Opportunity	1,596	500	0	0	2,096
	Future High Street Funds	12,725	88	0	0	12,813
	High Wycombe Town Centre	200	1,455	1,456	0	3,111
	Retasking of Winslow Centre	530	1,000	2,000	5,700	9,230
	S106 Funded Projects	185	0	0	0	185
	Waterside North Development (OCO)	4,050	2,000	0	0	6,050
	Regeneration Total	21,546	7,043	3,656	5,700	37,945
Economic Growth & Regeneration Total		21,546	7,043	3,656	5,700	37,945