



High Wycombe Regeneration Strategy

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Recommendations:

- a) That the Committee consider the Vision, Themes and Places proposed within the strategy and provide feedback.
- b) That the Committee note the progress made on key project updates

1. Background

In 2019 Wycombe District Council established a Regeneration Strategy that included Princes Risborough, Marlow and High Wycombe. Since becoming a unitary authority and following the COVID-19 pandemic, the strategy has been refreshed to consider the new environment we're in. It has been refreshed to include a focus on High Wycombe town centre with the inclusion of Cressex Business Park.

Key local stakeholders are currently providing feedback on the content of the Vision, Themes and Places. The Strategy is driven by the High Wycombe Regeneration Board and is due for completion in early 2023.

Whilst the strategy is being developed, a number of key projects in the town centre continue to progress which we did not want to hold up until after the strategy.

2. Main content of report

- 2.1 The country has changed following COVID-19 and we've identified national and local factors that have influenced the refreshed strategy.
 - 2.1a COVID-19 has shifted attitudes towards how we live, work, travel, shop and socialise
 - 2.1b Buckinghamshire has more business 'deaths' than 'births'
 - 2.1c 50% of towns across the country are over-spaced for retail
 - 2.1d Employees are now spending an average of 2.8 days in a commercial environment
 - 2.1e Housing affordability now stands at 11 times earnings
 - 2.1f We have a decreasing population of 20-30 year olds (15.84%) and an increasing over 65 population (8.5%) between 2015-2020.
- 2.3 The Vision for regeneration within High Wycombe needs to be ambitious, reflect the history and culture of the area whilst also looking forward towards new opportunities.

The proposed vision is:

By 2030, High Wycombe will be a thriving, resilient town with a strong identity and a hotbed of talent.

The town centre and its surrounding areas will set a new standard of business and community infrastructure, attracting inward investment, stimulating growth into new sectors, and creating new thriving entrepreneurial areas.

It will be a stunning and unique place to live and work, with beautiful amenities and a high quality of life and wellbeing. The green and blue infrastructure will be a key feature, enabling an environmentally sustainable town centre. The new High Wycombe is ready, and open for business.

- 2.4 To ensure that the Strategy maintains a focus on the things that matter most, four themes have been identified.

Resilience – High Wycombe must be resilient and flexible, able to withstand national and international changes in employment and habit.

Retention – The town can become a place in which people want to live, with the jobs, amenities and infrastructure to retain and attract the best.

Connectivity – Leveraging its already superb location, High Wycombe can become connected both internally and to the surrounding areas.

Identity – High Wycombe can be a place with a unified sense of identity and a strong pride of place.

- 2.5 High Wycombe has distinct areas that can be enhanced by regeneration activity. By focusing on each of these destinations in turn, the strategy will aim to create a holistic plan for High Wycombe town which delivers a sustainable regeneration strategy across the entire town centre. Only by a joined-up consideration of each part can the town reach its regeneration potential. The following areas have been proposed:

Old Town – Attractive and laden with heritage, the Old Town can be a place of continuous activity, with local, independent shops, a programme of on-street events and essential services such as doctors' surgeries, dentists, and nurseries. As a channel that people pass through across the day and the main connector between the centre and the Eastern Quarter, it has enormous potential and high significance as the 'first impression' of the town.

New Town – This space is dominated by Eden Shopping Centre and The Chilterns Shopping centre. there are clear opportunities for public realm enhancements and increased experiential usage.

Eastern Quarter – The Eastern Quarter provides a significant opportunity for High Wycombe. Due to its incredible connections to central London and the surrounding

region, it could be transformed into a popular location. As High Wycombe's main public transport gateway, in the short-term it should become the key connective core of the whole town. There could be links to the bus station, better cycling and pedestrian infrastructure. The area can become a central node of the town's placemaking and wayfinding.

Desborough – Desborough provides an ideal backdrop to curate a maker and start-up community, unique to High Wycombe, that draws on the town's exceptional location. Desborough can be a vibrant, thriving destination for start-ups and creatives in the town, providing a direct link to courses at Buckinghamshire New University. This can strengthen talent retention, drive demand for food, beverage, and entertainment uses which will complement the wider town centre offer.

Gown, Town & White coat – The Hospital and University are a valuable commodity within the town and links to enhance the scope of joint works is essential.

Cressex Business Park - The business park is now supported by a BIDCO and has huge potential for the growth and development of local businesses. The opportunity is to transition the park into a high output, high growth business hub, unlocking internal investment and contributing to the local and regional economies.

3. Overview of active projects

- 3.1 White Hart Street is a major public realm enhancement scheme seeking to address the poor-quality urban realm, anti-social behaviour and traffic issues in the area. Also, developing a change framework to monitor impacts of schemes/interventions that can be used throughout the town centre.

The vision is to:

Transform White Hart Street from a 'cut through' into a 'destination arc', connecting High Wycombe's historic core and Eden Shopping Centre by creating a distinctive and beautiful public realm which celebrates local heritage and natural assets.

This can be achieved by the following objectives:

Social – An important space within a wider network, that sets high standards for future public realm investment (high quality, celebrates heritage, accessible for all)

Economic – Reprioritise people and local businesses by minimising traffic, to create a standalone destination

Environmental – Reallocate space for nature and Sustainable Underground Drainage Systems to create a beautiful place to dwell, which is climate resilient

We are currently engaging with key stakeholders and developing concept designs that achieve the above objectives. Development of preferred option will be

December 2022-Jan 2023 with construction delivery (incl. detailed design) in spring 2023 onwards.

- 3.2 Oxford Road is a key priority for 2022/23. Major surfacing and repair works were completed in October 2022 along the stretch of road from M&S to the traffic lights at Bellfield Rd.
- 3.3 Works on Brunel Shed were completed in April 2022. Significant interest was received in the building from multiple parties. With negotiations ongoing throughout summer 2022, legal process and internal sign off is nearing completion with a planned announcement of the tenant due in the next few weeks.

When the tenant takes possession in the next few weeks and commences an internal fit out, a launch will be planned for early in the New Year.

- 3.4 The Council is working closely with Network Rail and London & Continental Railways and will be commissioning an initial study that will consider the future of the 'Eastern Quarter' (the railway station area). This will involve a high-level masterplan setting out potential challenges and opportunities for the area in line with the HW Regen Strategy.

The Council is also considering opportunities in and around its Duke Street assets separately.

- 3.5 Dandara is redeveloping the Chilterns Shopping Centre. This will see a new avenue created between Frogmoor and Priory Road and the delivery of 313 build-to-rent homes with 116 parking spaces. Commercial units will be included with new shops proposed on the ground floor along Church Street and Queens Square. The development will also seek to retain, restore and renovate some of the listed buildings within the site. Dandara will manage their site on a long-term basis.

The Council is keen to see improvements to the public realm in Frogmoor. Dandara want to understand the synergies between Frogmoor public realm and the White Hart Street project and reflect these in proposals for the area. The planning application is anticipated in the early part of 2023.

4. Next steps and review

Incorporating feedback into the Strategy following a number of engagement sessions. An updated High Wycombe Regeneration Strategy will be taken to High Wycombe Regeneration Board in Dec 2022. The strategy is due to be signed off early 2023.

In the meantime, we continue to focus our efforts on key projects that support the town centre to remain vibrant and relevant. The Council is working in Partnership

with a number of key stakeholders to ensure this and also explore any new opportunities to be progressed.

5. Legal and financial implications

As the programme of activity and projects develops, the Council will continue to explore both internal and external funding streams as well as opportunities for collaboration with Partners, that can support the realisation of these projects.

6. Corporate implications

- 6.1 Improving the environment – the strategy’s central vision envisages an improved environment for High Wycombe and sets out how to achieve it across a range of dimensions – physical, social and economic- pulling them together into coherent themes underpinned by current and future projects.
- 6.2 Property – NA
- 6.3 HR – NA
- 6.4 Climate change – A sharp focus on climate change is woven through the strategy. We are already exploring what this means in detail through our White Hart Street public realm improvement project and intend to use the lessons we learn, to roll out environmentally friendly, climate resilient projects wherever we deliver and can influence development.
- 6.5 Sustainability – In taking a short-, medium- and long-term view, the strategy allows the Council to plan and communicate actions to ensure that High Wycombe can become the place of our vision in an environmentally, economically and socially sustainable way.
- 6.6 Data – NA
- 6.7 Value for money NA

