



Report for Cabinet

Date:	7 th May 2024
Title:	Aylesbury Town Centre Public Realm Scheme
Cabinet Member(s):	Cllr Martin Tett (Leader), Cllr Peter Strachan Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regeneration, Cllr Rachael Matthews Deputy Portfolio Holder for Town Centre Regeneration, Cllr Steve Broadbent Cabinet Member for Transport, Cllr John Chilver Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing & Resources
Contact officer:	Richard Harrington, Service Director: Economy & Skills
Ward(s) affected:	Aylesbury North
Recommendations:	<p>To note the progress of the improvement works for Market Square, Kingsbury (TRO) and Cambridge Street.</p> <p>To agree the transfer of the remaining capital budget of £4.772m (former Kingsbury and Market Public Realm scheme) to the Aylesbury Public Realm scheme (Gala Bingo Hall and the northern end of Exchange Street Car Park).</p> <p>To agree the recommended preferred option (5) meanwhile use and public realm at the northern end of Exchange Street car park together with long term mixed use development situated on the footprint of the former Gala Bingo Hall.</p> <p>To release the budget of £1,382,400 to fund the demolition of Gala Bingo Hall and professional fees associated with the demolition and the scheme development of the meanwhile use, public realm, walkway and temporary car parking.</p>

To note a future decision will come back to Cabinet once a full business case and design work has been undertaken.

To provide delegated authority to the Service Director for Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration for the following:

To procure and undertake all relevant workstreams that facilitate the advanced demolition works and scheme development as set out in the report.

To undertake a procurement exercise for a demolition contractor and to then subsequently enter into a demolition contract to advance the demolition works with the preferred contractor and to enter into any necessary agreements with adjoining landowners to facilitate the demolition works of Gala Bingo Hall.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides a progress update on the improvement works for Market Square, Kingsbury and Cambridge Street and seeks authority to transfer the capital funding from the Kingsbury & Market Square public realm scheme to the new Aylesbury Public Realm scheme which progresses the ambitions of the Aylesbury Regeneration Strategy.
- 1.2 In addition, authority is sought to advance the demolition of the former Gala Bingo Hall situated on the High Street and progress with the scheme development of a meanwhile use and public realm on the northern end of Exchange street car park as set out in this report.

2. Background

- 2.1 With the adoption of the Aylesbury Regeneration Strategy in Autumn 2023, a key priority for regeneration is the redevelopment of the former Gala Bingo Hall situated on the High Street. This is aimed at regenerating the High Street and enabling better connectivity with the successful Exchange area and improving footfall in this part of the town centre.
- 2.2 In 2023, a design and cost review of the former Kingsbury and Market Square public realm scheme was undertaken. The review concluded that the scheme no longer offered value for money. This project seeks to maximise impact of the funding available following the improvement works on Market Square, Cambridge Street and

Kingsbury (TRO) to an alternative Public Realm scheme which includes the regeneration of the former Gala Bingo Hall.

2.3 This new scheme has the potential to have a greater impact on the town centre.

2.4 It should be noted that, within the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan (VALP), Exchange Street and Waterside North car parks are highlighted as sites designated for long term regeneration.

3. Progress to Date – Aylesbury Town Centre Public Realm (Improvement Works)

Market Square & Cambridge Street – Improvement Works

3.1 Following the design and cost review of the Kingsbury and Market Square public realm scheme it was concluded that Market Square and Cambridge Street would benefit from some critical and visible improvement works. These works are integral to the delivery of the wider Aylesbury Public Realm proposals and will improve the environment in these areas.

3.2 The proposed improvement works to Market Square and Cambridge Street have been approved by Leader Key Decision and the Traffic Regulation Orders for Kingsbury are also subject to a Leader Key Decision. These works are a series of improvements in Aylesbury town centre and form part of the wider Aylesbury Public Realm scheme.:

- **Power Upgrade (Market Square)** - increasing power availability to many more market stalls, allowing for more traders and variety with a new layout. Greater power capacity will also provide scope for more varied and bespoke public events, attracting more residents and visitors to the area.
- **Lighting enhancements (Market Square)** - including a newly designed lighting scheme to celebrate and illuminate the historic features of the square, also restoring power to historic lanterns and lighting the clock face on Market Tower.
- **Cleaning and repair works** - to the statues and monuments in Market Square.
- **Public realm improvements to Cambridge Street** - to introduce a permanent pedestrianised section with brand new street surface and lighting.
- **Making permanent the Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders in Aylesbury Town Centre** - to make the temporary traffic orders in Market Street, George Street, Cambridge Street and Kingsbury permanent. The statutory consultation period for the Traffic Regulation Orders took place in February 2024. The feedback from the consultation will be presented in a Leader Key Decision Report to agree and implement the new Traffic Regulation Orders.

4. Gala Bingo & Exchange Street Car Park

- 4.1 Following a cost and design review exercise on the former Kingsbury and Market Square public realm scheme, it was determined that the scheme was no longer viable in the current financial climate and did not offer value for money. This new scheme has been developed to regenerate the high street and drive increased footfall to the town centre by creating an exciting new provision whilst addressing the deteriorating former Gala Bingo Hall. It will create a seamless connection with the Exchange area development which has been hugely successful.
- 4.2 The strategic positioning of the Exchange Street car park next to the Gala Bingo Hall Site offers the opportunity to deliver a wider regeneration project which includes a new walkway connection to the High Street, enhanced public realm and meanwhile use (new business spaces). The proposed new walkway link to the High Street will greatly improve walking and connectivity around the town centre which in turn would enhance economic activity.

Meanwhile Use

- 4.3 Purchased for regeneration purposes some years ago, the Gala Bingo Hall has remained empty with no viable uses identified. Given the poor condition of the building it was identified as a priority for action in the Aylesbury Regeneration Strategy. As part of a wider site including the Exchange Street car park an opportunity area was identified as a location for development in the long term with scope in the medium term to make use of the space for the benefit of community cohesion, placemaking and enterprise in what is known as meanwhile use activity.
- 4.4 Meanwhile use opportunities enhance the town centre by offering affordable and flexible easy access space for startup businesses and community enterprises.
- 4.5 The implementation of meanwhile use with high quality public realm can also create a multipurpose space, allowing for the provision of pop-up events which, if surrounded by independent retailers and food & beverage, would make the town centre attractive and popular to visit helping tackling issues of low footfall in the evenings and Sundays.
- 4.6 In November 2023, a meanwhile use viability study gave a high-level assessment of whether a potential meanwhile use in the town centre would be appropriate. It concluded that a mixed-use scheme in the heart of the town centre would be greatly received.
- 4.7 Following this work a specialised Socio-Economic Impact Assessment (SEIA) was undertaken to understand the benefits of the various delivery options ranging from a do nothing option (option 1) to a meanwhile use together with long term development on the Gala Bingo site (option 5). These options are shown in confidential appendix B,

each option was tested against key criteria including the number of jobs created, value for money, benefits to society and added social value.

4.8 Below are examples of meanwhile business units elsewhere in the Southeast for illustrative purposes.



Options

4.9 Each of the options has been appraised to establish the number of direct and indirect jobs created. This was informed by the consultants specialised knowledge of employment numbers produced on schemes of a similar nature in the Southeast. They were also able to estimate the potential impact that the improved amenity would likely have on the overall economic health of the town centre.

4.10 The Socio Economic Impact Assessment considered many contributing factors such as value for money, demand, anti-social behaviour (ASB) and deliverability. These key criteria enabled a more refined set of delivery options; these options are demonstrated in the table below. The assessment of options 1-4 are contained within confidential appendix B with the report focused on the preferred option 5.

1	Do Minimum Option: Clear site and make safe
2	Public Realm Scheme with Pop-Up uses
3	Public Realm with full meanwhile use offer
4	Permanent Development only (Gala Bingo site only)
5 Preferred option	Meanwhile use plus permanent development (situated on Gala Bingo site)

***It is to be noted that all the options are based on the full demolition of the Gala Bingo Hall.**

Preferred Option 5 – Phase 1 Meanwhile Use Plus Phase 2 Permanent Mixed-Use Development

- 4.11 The scheme will be delivered in two phases with phase 1 being the demolition of Gala Bingo and the delivery of a new walkway, meanwhile use and public realm.
- 4.12 Phase 2 is the long-term development of the former gala bingo site. This would be funded and delivered by a third-party developer with the ground floor unit potentially retained by the Council and the upper floors as residential.
- 4.13 For the purposes of the Socio-Economic Impact Assessment, the assumptions made are based upon the land value being cost neutral (i.e. that any costs incurred by the Council would be neutralised by the Council's receipt for the land from a developer); development viability will need to be investigated further once the Council has determined its preferred housing solution.
- 4.14 The SEIA assumes that the mixed-use development will be built in five years' time as a second phase of delivery, allowing time for the meanwhile use to establish this part of the town centre as a key destination for footfall – potentially boosting the commercial viability of a mixed-use development.
- 4.15 With the intention to construct a mixed-use development on the Gala site, the meanwhile element would be concentrated on the northern end of Exchange Street car park. Until long term development is achieved, the Gala site would be cleared and made safe.
- 4.16 Given that the SEIA assumes that the long-term redevelopment of the Gala Bingo site will be delivered at a later date, the temporary installation of circa 43 parking spaces as detailed above on the Gala Bingo site as a part of phase 1 will minimise the overall loss of car parking spaces at the Exchange Street to 34.
- 4.17 Should the Council wish to pursue phase 2 - the long-term regeneration of the Gala Bingo site for mixed use residential lead scheme - it would result in the overall loss of 77 car parking spaces from year five. However, this loss will be displaced over other Council owned car parks, therefore, resulting in no loss of income for the Council.
- 4.18 The preferred option will enable the Council to deliver not only much needed housing in the town centre but also small business spaces that will help to grow new businesses, where there is no provision for them in the town centre.
- 4.19 The tangible benefits are demonstrated in confidential appendix C, which is attached to this report, an indicative layout of the preferred option is contained within Appendix A.

Socio-Economic Appraisal

- 4.20 The 'Theory of Change model', which is attached in confidential appendix B, illustrates, and summarises the linkage to each option and demonstrates the tangible outcomes and impacts each option will achieve, this shows that the **preferred option (5) produces the highest level of benefits to Aylesbury Town Centre.**
- 4.21 It is important to note that the Socio-Economic Impact Assessment does not address the development viability but seeks to understand the wider benefits that can be achieved.
- 4.22 With the establishment of each of the options (confidential appendix B), a Socio-Economic Impact Assessment was undertaken. The table below is a snapshot of the key take aways that demonstrate the value of each option both financially and socially to the Council.

	Option 1 Demolish and clear site up only	Option 2 Demolish Public realm + pop ups	Option 3 Demolish, public realm + meanwhile	Option 4 Demolish with permanent development on Gala only	Option 5 Demolish with meanwhile use, public realm on Gala & future permanent development
Present Value Socio-Economic Benefits	£1.23m	£3.64m	£20.50m	£10.40m	£29.40m
Net Present Social Value	£0.04m	£0.97m	£15.14m	£9.31m	£24.03m
Direct Jobs	0	0	70	30	100
Indirect and induced Jobs	2	5	14	9	18
Total number of Jobs	2	5	84	39	118

- 4.23 The conclusion of the SEIA states that the preferred option creates the most tangible benefits for the Council and the town of Aylesbury. It creates the highest number of jobs as well as the largest level of growth for the local economy. In addition, option five will create new housing in the town centre.

Demolition & Current Costs for former Gala Bingo Potential Advance Works –

- 4.24 The property was purchased for the purposes of regeneration. The building is in poor condition and has increasingly suffered from vandalism and is now internally in a poor state of repair.

- 4.25 A structural engineering report was commissioned to understand the methodology for demolition and whether the façade of the Gala Bingo Hall could be retained. The report concluded that retaining the façade would become very costly and not add any additional benefit to the long-term development of the Gala Bingo site. The full demolition including façade was estimated to be deliverable in the current budget envelope .
- 4.26 It is important to note that from a heritage perspective the retention of the façade would be preferable. However, as discussed above the level of costs associated with the retention has deemed that option not viable.
- 4.27 Demolition is proposed to take place as soon as possible in order to signal the commencement of regeneration of the area and minimise ongoing costs of managing the building. Officers will work with a framework construction manager to prepare and submit a Section 80 notice required for the advancement of the demolition this will enable the Council to accelerate the demolition. A planning consultant will be procured to assist with the preparation and submission of a planning application for the installation of the proposed walkway, temporary car parking, meanwhile use and public realm, these steps are discussed in the next steps section of the report.
- 4.28 The current costs of managing and maintaining the Gala Bingo Hall are shown in the table below. In late 2023, the building was broken into and severely vandalised, therefore additional measures have been put into place above the expected normal operating costs.

Ongoing Costs for Gala Bingo	Costs Per Annum (2023)
Business Rates	£14,000
Managing Agents Fee	£500 (vacant property charge)
Insurance Premium	£1,456 (it is expected that the annual premium will significantly increase due to vandalism)
Security Costs	£9,100 (N.B this does not include additional requests for entry to the building for example surveys required)
Additional Costs incurred	
Additional costs incurred within 2023 to combat the vandalism incurred including asbestos removal due to vandalism	£11,398
Total	£36,454 per annum

	(N.B it should be noted that given the building has been vandalised, the Asset Management team are expecting the insurance premiums to increase for 2024/25)
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4.29 Below are some images of the former Bingo Hall



5. Parking Study – Exchange Square

5.1 In November 2023 a parking study was commissioned to look at the potential displacement of car parking spaces at Exchange Street car park (87 car parking spaces in total) should the Council wish to pursue the option to regenerate this section of the car park.

5.2 The study considered the following:

- Any revenue impact on the potential loss of parking/displacement.
- The displacement of car parking spaces vs net loss.
- Proposed mitigation against any negative impact or loss of parking spaces.
- Any improvements that can be taken in council owned car parks in the immediate area and, in particular, Exchange Street car park

5.3 Having taken the key considerations into account, the study concluded that the footprint of the former Gala Bingo site once demolished would be able to accommodate 43 additional spaces, with a further 5 car parking spaces on Exchange Street car park. There is also the ability to accommodate an additional 5 spaces on the High Street.

5.4 This would result in a displacement of 34 car parking spaces which would be absorbed into nearby Council owned car parks such as Waterside North, Upper Hundreds and

Friars Square Multi Storey. Therefore, the proposals for meanwhile use (business spaces) and public realm at the northern end of the car park would not adversely impact on the ability of the Council to retain and grow parking income.

- 5.5 The study also noted that the installation of the meanwhile use provision at the northern end of Exchange Street car park would be an attractor to the town centre and could see the Council car parks achieving a higher demand / income across the day and week.

6. Regeneration Strategy

- 6.1 The Aylesbury Regeneration Strategy was adopted in 2023 as part of the overall Regenerating Buckinghamshire Framework. That document outlines how regeneration will be spearheaded by creating vibrant and attractive town centres that celebrate Buckinghamshire's heritage and provide an attractive offer to residents, visitors and businesses alike.
- 6.2 A number of key sites and development opportunities were identified in the strategy including the former Bingo Hall.
- 6.3 This project represents a significant first step forward in that ambition and builds on the successful regeneration project of the Exchange to create a lively new quarter to attract the growing Aylesbury population into the town centre.
- 6.4 The project will deliver against a number of the ambitions in the strategy including,
- creating a multi-purpose hub of activity and experiences to create a vibrant environment and distinct independent offer
 - foster the town centre opportunities for a business hub offering spaces to meet modern needs including start ups
 - creating attractive streets and spaces that are well connected and accessible
- 6.5 Alongside this project the council will also be bringing forward another important site in the vicinity, the Old County Offices. That project will see an important heritage building preserved and developed for residential living which will also contribute to the vibrancy of the town centre. The council has been successful in bidding for £690k Brownfield Land Release funding from government to facilitate delivery of this project.

7. Legal & Financial Implications

- 7.1 **Capital Budget Implications:** The total budget for Aylesbury Town Centre Regeneration is £5.362m, however after the town centre improvement works at £590k approved by a Leader Key Decision, the total available budget is £4.772m.

- 7.2 **The current available capital budget of £4.772m covers the demolition of Gala Bingo Hall, meanwhile use installation, public realm, new walkway and temporary parking only. The budget does not cover the long-term development of the Gala Bingo site and it has been assumed that the long-term development will be completely funded and delivered by a third-party developer.**
- 7.3 **The full business case for the meanwhile use will be subject to future review and Cabinet approval. It is important to note that should the current proposals for meanwhile use exceed the final available budget then there is an opportunity to scale down the proposals in order to remain within the capital budget envelope.**
- 7.4 To progress the recommended option (option 5 – demolition of Gala, meanwhile use, public realm and permanent mixed-use development) officers will work with a meanwhile use operator and specialist architect to produce the required next design stages these are discussed in section 12 - Next Steps & Review.
- 7.5 To advance the delivery of the meanwhile use, walkaway, temporary car parking, public realm and demolition of the Gala Bingo Hall, Officers are seeking a Cabinet Decision to transfer the remaining capital budget of £4.772m from the former Kingsbury and Market Square public realm scheme to the new Aylesbury Public Realm scheme.
- 7.6 Contained within confidential appendix D is a detailed breakdown of the projected costs of delivering this scheme. It is to be noted that the Council has commissioned a structural engineering survey to provide the costs for demolition. In addition, the Council through the Socio-Economic Assessment has been provided the costs for the construction of the meanwhile units.
- 7.7 At this stage we are seeking release of £1.385m of the overall budget, to fund the demolition and professional fees. The scheme development will be subject to governance gateways, this will ensure that at every key stage of development the project continues to be viable within the allocated budget and remains in full alignment with the agreed objectives.
- 7.8 It is to be noted that the sum of £590,000 has been allocated from the Kingsbury and Market Square budget to the agreed improvement works to Market Square and Cambridge Street.
- 7.9 **Revenue Budget Implications:**
- a) Car Park Income – no expected overall impact. There is a potential impact on car park revenue income of £73,000 (potential loss of revenue at the Exchange Street location for 77 car parking spaces at year five). However, it has been demonstrated that this is likely to be mitigated by displacement to spaces re-provided on the Gala Bingo Hall site and other Council owned car parks.

- b) Property Running Costs – saving of £36k. As set out in section 4.29, the Gala Bingo site currently costs us £36k per year to run, mainly in business rates and security costs. The demolition of Gala Bingo would realise savings of £36k which could help Property to meet its existing MTFP target (of delivering savings/new income of £0.5m on strategic assets by 2026).
- c) It is anticipated that the maintenance of the meanwhile use units and public realm will be managed by the preferred meanwhile use operator over the proposed 10-year period. It should be noted that the Council will however need to renegotiate terms with the meanwhile use operator should the Council wish to continue with the scheme beyond the proposed 10-year period.

7.10 **Director of Legal & Democratic Services comment**

The Director has read and approved the report.

7.11 **Section 151 Officer Comment**

The Section 151 Officer has read and commented on the report.

8. Corporate Implications

- 8.1 The Aylesbury Public Realm scheme is in line with the corporate aspirations to deliver successful regeneration within Buckinghamshire and aspirations of the Aylesbury Garden Town Masterplan.
- 8.2 **Property** – The Council has significant assets and land ownership in Aylesbury. The project will help set the scene for future regeneration in the town centre. The Gala Bingo site is currently in a poor condition and suffering regular anti-social behaviour. It is a priority to bring forward plans to regenerate it.
- 8.3 **HR** - There are no direct implications.
- 8.4 **Climate change and sustainability** – The regeneration of Gala Bingo and minor improvements of Market Square, Kingsbury, TRO's and Cambridge Street will transform the town centre; it will seek to mitigate climate change through elements of the design such as sustainable drainage where possible.
- 8.5 **Equalities** – The regeneration proposals will help create and enable inclusive and diverse spaces. It will not have any disproportionate impact upon people with protected characteristics. An initial Equalities Impact Assessment has been prepared and will be refined through the design progression and the consultation and engagement activities will enable all users to participate.
- 8.6 **Data** – A Data Protection Impact Assessment may be required; it will be prepared at the appropriate time.

8.7 **Value for money** – officers are in the process of procuring principal designers for the Cambridge Street minor public realm scheme and Aylesbury Public Realm (walkway and enhanced public realm).

8.8 It is anticipated that the construction manager role for the demolition, walkway and temporary car parking will be undertaken by the Highways term contractor. In addition, the appointed Highways term contractor will support the procurement of the main works contractor for Cambridge Street and Market Square improvement works. It is anticipated that an open procurement exercise will be undertaken for the demolition of the former Gala Bingo Hall.

9. Local Councillors & Community Boards Consultation & Views

9.1 Local Members have been engaged in relation to the improvement works proposed for Market Square, Kingsbury, TRO's and Cambridge Street. Officers will continue to engage with local members as the works progress and the meanwhile scheme in the Gala/Exchange site is developed.

10. Communication, Engagement & Further Consultation

10.1 Initial communications have focused on the delivery of the improvement works to Market Square, Kingsbury, TRO's and Cambridge Street. The future focus will be the wider regeneration of the former Gala Bingo Hall and the northern end of the Exchange Street car park. The Communications Strategy will ensure that all stakeholders will be engaged at the appropriate points including around the development of the meanwhile provision and public realm.

10.2 In relation to the minor improvement works for Market Square and Cambridge Street, officers will continue to keep local ward Councillors and key stakeholders informed throughout the delivery process.

11. Next Steps & Review

11.1 To progress the development of the Aylesbury Public Realm scheme the following workstreams will be undertaken. It is to be noted that Cabinet authority to proceed with a meanwhile use operator via a lease arrangement and the construction of the public realm and meanwhile use business units will be sought once all necessary due diligence has been undertaken through the design and early development stages.

Activity	
Stage 1	Advanced works - demolition of Gala Bingo and design of the proposed new walkway and temporary car parking

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procurement of a Construction Manager (management of the demolition works and installation of the new walkway and temporary car parking) • Preliminary and detailed design of walkway and temporary car parking • Procurement of a Party wall surveyor to provide all necessary agreements with adjoining landowners • Procurement of a heritage consultant to support the Section 80 notice for the demolition of Gala Bingo • Undertake all necessary surveys and workstreams to facilitate the demolition of Gala Bingo and design of the new walkway and temporary car parking • Preparation and submission of a Section 80 notice for the full demolition of Gala Bingo • Commence the advance demolition works for Gala Bingo Hall
Stage 2A	<p>Meanwhile use and public realm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procurement of Meanwhile Spaces CIC in a consultant capacity • Procurement of a specialist architect for public and meanwhile space • Procurement of a planning consultant to prepare and submit a planning application for the installation of the new walkway, public and meanwhile use (it is to be noted that a separate planning application may be required for the walkway and temporary car parking should the Council wish to advance the installation of these key components ahead of the meanwhile use and public realm) • Preliminary design of meanwhile business spaces • Engagement with key stakeholders and local businesses • Soft market testing of tenants and potential operators • Outline business and potential operational models for consideration by the Council • Surveys: Topographical, Buried Services (utilities), Ground Penetration Rader (GPR) to inform the preliminary and detailed design for the meanwhile use and public realm
Stage 2B	<p>Detailed design and refined operating model for meanwhile use and public realm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalise business model based upon the Council's preferred operating model • Detailed engagement and tenant mix/offer defined • Marketing materials production



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agree fitout budget• Preparation and submission of planning application for meanwhile use, walkway and public realm• Social value programme setup• Preparation of a full planning application for meanwhile use and public realm
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Your questions and views (for key decisions)

If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report, please contact the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider, please inform the democratic services team by 5pm on 2 May 2024. This can be done by email to democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk.

