

14 April 2022

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Willenhall Framework Plan

Ward(s): Willenhall South; Short Heath

Portfolios: Regeneration

1. Aim

- 1.1 The preparation of the Willenhall Framework Plan is an essential first step to guide future housing development and economic growth and in Willenhall, making the most of the real opportunities to create a quality place and raising the offer presented by the borough as a whole. It establishes a context for future local planning policy and planning applications. The Framework Plan sets out a 10-year vision for Willenhall which provides an ambition for housing growth and healthy, prosperous communities. The vision is that *Willenhall will grow into a vibrant, connected and welcoming town with a strong sense of place which celebrates its diverse communities and promotes safe, healthy and active lifestyles. Quality design and sustainable construction will move Willenhall towards a healthy, prosperous and sustainable future.*
- 1.2 This report presents the Committee with a summary of work undertaken to date in relation to the Willenhall Framework Plan and information about future activities.

2. Recommendations

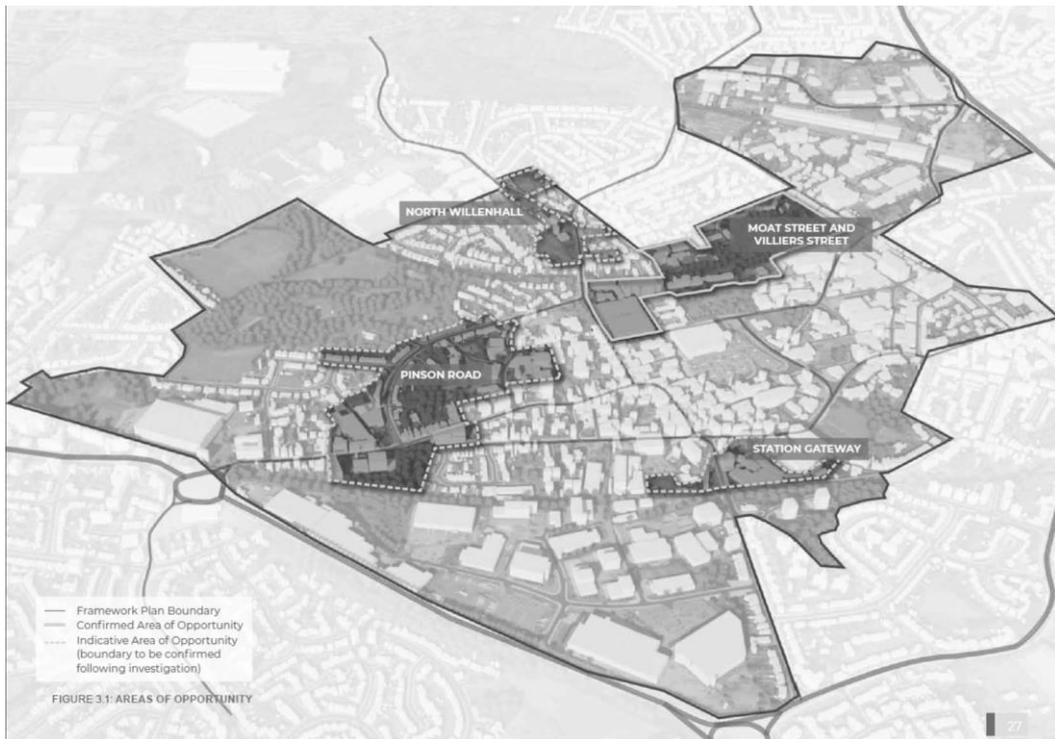
- 2.1 Committee is recommended to:
 - Note the objectives of the Willenhall Framework Plan.
 - Agree to receive a further report at an appropriate time setting out progress in the implementation of the Willenhall Framework Plan.

3. Report detail – know

- 3.1 At its meeting on 9 February 2022 Cabinet supported the Willenhall Framework Plan as a 10 year vision for housing growth and place making in the area as well as provided a number of related approvals. The Framework Plan is attached as Appendix A.
- 3.2 To achieve the vision the Framework Plan considers the opportunities and challenges that exist and identifies specific Areas of Opportunity within the wider Framework Plan boundary supported by strategies relating to movement, green spaces and place making. The proposed interventions seek to maximise the

benefits created by the new Willenhall railway station expected to open in 2023 which will see communities being far better connected to Birmingham, Wolverhampton and to opportunities across the wider region.

- 3.3 The area covered by the Willenhall Framework Plan has been identified to deliver comprehensive housing growth across the heart of the town. The Framework Plan aims to deliver around 500 high quality homes over the next 10 years. The housing delivered will include a mix of styles, types and tenures including specialist housing providing housing choice which addresses local need and attracts people to remain in and relocate to the area. Willenhall is key part of the wider Walsall to Wolverhampton Growth Corridor which has been identified as a strategic priority for the West Midlands in respect of housing delivery.
- 3.4 It is the intention that the Framework Plan will be developed into a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which will support the interventions through planning policy and Cabinet has supported further work to this effect. Whilst the Site Allocation Document will remain the foundation for the allocation of sites, the SPD will explain how the Council will apply its planning policies in respect of particular sites and how it will work with others to bring the identified sites forward.
- 3.5 The Framework Plan has carefully selected four Areas of Opportunity based on their current use as well as their ability to deliver the vision for Willenhall through comprehensive re-development. Proposed interventions in the Areas of Opportunity will begin to deliver structural change and economic growth in Willenhall. The Areas of Opportunity have been assessed against a series of criteria and are expected to incorporate new housing as well as green space, community facilities and improved walking and cycle routes creating a comprehensive approach to growth. As further investigation work progresses the boundaries of these Areas of Opportunity may require minor revisions.
- 3.6 The four Areas of Opportunity are:
 1. Moat Street/Villiers Street – to the north of the district centre with a number of derelict buildings.
 2. Pinson Road – to the east of the district centre comprising a mix of residential, industrial and unused land.
 3. Station Housing – to the south of the district centre comprising land around the site of the new railway station.
 4. North Willenhall – to the north of the district centre comprising industrial and unused land.



- 3.7 The Framework Plan acknowledges that significant investigation has already gone into Moat Street/Villiers Street where all the ownerships are known and engagement with owners has commenced. This Area of Opportunity has therefore been identified as Phase 1 and the initial focus for the Council. This reaffirms the identified position following conclusion of the baseline review which resulted in Cabinet approval on 10 February 2021 to commence negotiations with landowners and occupiers to understand the opportunity for land assembly.
- 3.8 The other Areas of Opportunity are still under investigation and further work is required to fully understand the level of opportunity. The boundaries of these areas may change and the Council will engage with owners and stakeholders in the areas before final decisions are taken.
- 3.9 It is acknowledged that the Areas of Opportunity contain existing businesses and therefore a draft Business Charter has been prepared setting out the Council's commitment to support businesses that may be impacted by any development proposals in Phase 1.
- 3.10 Phase 1
The proposed approach to delivery of Phase 1 is that the Council acts as a facilitator by acquiring the identified land parcels to create a developable site for housing. The Council will obtain outline planning approvals and then procure a partnership with a suitable private sector delivery organisation to deliver high quality housing and public realm. This partnership approach will allow the Council to retain significant control of the outcome whilst benefiting from the expertise and investment of a private developer.
- 3.11 By acquiring and assembling the land under a single ownership, the project seeks to unlock Phase 1 for the future development of circa 133 new homes within Willenhall district centre. This activity is proposed to be led by the Council in the absence of alternative public sector funding sources at this time for this type of

pre-development activity. This will demonstrate a clear message to the market that the Council are committed to transformational change of the area and thus help to stimulate private investment and the ability to secure external funding.

- 3.12 The Council will work towards successfully negotiating the acquisition of the required land interests but based on the engagement to date it would appear that there may be a need to utilise compulsory purchase order (CPO) powers in order to achieve timely delivery of the scheme. On this basis Cabinet has approved the use of compulsory purchase powers in-principle noting that any proposal to make a compulsory purchase order would be subject to a future Cabinet decision.
- 3.13 In order to progress the required land acquisitions for Phase 1 Cabinet has agreed a budget to fund purchase either by agreement or compulsory purchase following approval of an outline business case. Cabinet also noted that additional public sector funding to address the viability gap is estimated to be required to complete the scheme and that discussions to secure funding from partners such as West Midlands Combined Authority will be pursued.
- 3.14 Preparation of an outline planning application for the Phase 1 opportunity area has been progressed and will be submitted to the LPA in due course. Securing outline consent will demonstrate scheme deliverability required for land acquisitions, particularly for a compulsory purchase case if required. Consent will also de-risk the scheme for the preferred developer.
- 3.15 Cabinet also approved undertaking further work to develop draft heads of terms and identify a suitable procurement route with the outcome of this work, along with a full business case, to be considered at a future meeting. This work will explore procurement of a partner for Phase 1 only as well as the potential ability to extend any appointment to later phases at the discretion of the Council. It will also consider the ability to utilise a suitable framework as this will help to speed up the process.

4. *Financial information*

- 4.1 Cabinet has approved the reallocation of existing but uncommitted regeneration budgets to contribute to the project. The remaining budget for land assembly is included within the Council's capital programme (together with the revenue implications of borrowing i.e. MRP and interest), which was part of the budget plan reported separately to Cabinet on 9 February 2022. This will be funded from the allocation set aside for equity investment in 2022/23 and 2023/24.
- 4.2 Revenue costs are also required to fund the procurement process to secure a development partner, and site security post acquisition. Existing revenue reserves to the value of £450,000 are available within Regeneration, leaving a £760,000 requirement. This can be funded from existing capital investment revenue reserves.

5. *Reducing Inequalities*

- 5.1 The Willenhall Framework Plan will provide the framework to drive forward the regeneration of the area. It will set out the Council's aspiration to promote Willenhall as an area that is a sustainable place to live, work and spend leisure time and in turn contribute towards the Council's vision as outlined in the Corporate

Plan (2021-2022): Inequalities are reduced and all potential is maximised. The delivery of new housing in particular will aim to diversify the type and tenure of homes available in the area so that the needs of the community can be met.

6. Decide

- 6.1 The Committee is asked to consider the content of this report, provide comments on progress to date and confirm any specific information required for a subsequent project update.

7. Respond

- 7.1 The Council will seek to conclude negotiations for the acquisition of land within Phase 1 and submit the outline planning application for the proposed scheme to evidence deliverability. If acquisition by agreement is not possible then preparations for the compulsory purchase process will commence. In parallel work will be undertaken to identify the most suitable developer partner procurement route.

8. Review

- 8.1 In order to progress the project to this stage the Council and its advisors have held regular project meetings and these will continue throughout the delivery phase to monitor progress and deal with any issues as they arise.

Background papers

None

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