

28 February 2023

Willenhall Framework Plan: Phase 1 Development

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, economic growth and place making in Willenhall. 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 provides the Committee with an update of work undertaken to date in relation to the Willenhall Framework Plan focusing on the delivery of Phase 1, Moat Street and Villiers Street.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Committee is recommended to:
 - Note the progress made by Officers to deliver Phase 1 of the Willenhall Framework Plan.
 - Agree to receive a further report at an appropriate time setting out progress in 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 providing a number of related approvals. The Framework Plan is attached as Appendix A. A report to Scrutiny Committee on 14 April 2022 provided detailed information about the Framework Plan and the four housing-led Areas of Opportunity, focusing particularly on Phase 1 of the Plan, Moat Street and Villiers Street. The Moat Street and Villiers Street project is the first phase of a wider housing programme to enable delivery of over 500 new homes in the Framework Plan area. Phase 1 is aiming to deliver circa 106 new high-quality homes, including new affordable homes, family-focused housing, and an improved streetscape.

- 3.2 Since the reports to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee in 2022 Officers have been progressing the development of Phase 1 by focusing on a number of key workstreams: land assembly, developer partner procurement and planning. These workstreams are considered to be the key activities required to deliver the c106 new homes. An update on each of these workstreams is provided in the following paragraphs. Officers have also submitted a bid for funding to the Government's Levelling Up Fund (LUF) Round 2 and an update is also provided in Paragraph 3.8.
- 3.3 Land assembly
As Committee Members will be aware, the Council has very little landholding within the proposed red line for Phase 1 and therefore needs to acquire the necessary land parcels. At its meeting in February 2022 Cabinet agreed to the in-principle use of the Council's compulsory purchase powers for Phase 1 where land cannot be acquired by agreement within a reasonable timeframe, noting that approval to make any compulsory purchase order (CPO) would be subject to a future Cabinet report.
- 3.4 The Council's appointed Property Consultants, Avison Young, are continuing to contact landowners to acquire the necessary land parcels by negotiations, offering business support where possible. In the event that the negotiations are not fruitful Officers intend to seek a formal CPO decision from Cabinet in Summer 2023.
- 3.5 Outline planning application
The outline planning application is continuing to be developed to ensure that it meets the Council's requirements for an outline planning application but also ensures that the Council is able to deliver a high-quality scheme. The planning application is due to be submitted imminently. It is envisaged that the outline application will include appearance and landscaping as reserved matters.
- 3.6 Procurement of a developer partner
Cabinet at its meeting on 14 December 2022 approved the use of the Homes England Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) to procure a developer partner, at the same meeting Cabinet also agreed for Officers to commence the procurement process. The DPS was recommended to Cabinet as the best way forward following due diligence undertaken by the Council's Strategic Advisor, Arcadis. The Homes England DPS will also enable the Council, at its discretion, to appoint the preferred developer partner to deliver the future phases of the Willenhall Framework Plan.
- 3.7 The procurement of the developer partner is progressing with an Expression of Interest (EOI) launched on 6 February 2023 to ascertain the level of interest in the project. The closing date for the EOI stage is 27 February 2023 and to date there has been a positive response to the EOI. Officers anticipate concluding the procurement exercise in Summer 2023 to enable Cabinet to take a decision on the appointment of the preferred developer partner in September 2023. Following which there will be a contracting period to the end of 2023.
- 3.8 Levelling Up Funding
It was announced by Government on 18 January 2023 that the £20million funding bid to LUF Round 2 for the Walsall North constituency has been successful. The bid was focused on two interlinked projects in Willenhall- 1) housing delivery (Phase 1) and 2) active travel/ highway improvements. LUF funding secured for

Phase 1 will be used to support enabling works. The Council is currently in pre-contract negotiations with the Department for Housing Levelling Up and Communities (DHLUC) and anticipates concluding these before the end of the financial year.

3.9 Indicative programme

The key project milestones for Phase 1 were submitted as part of the LUF bid. Since the submission of the bid the key milestones have been kept under review and the indicative programme for Phase 1 is as follows:

- Outline Planning Application approval – anticipated Summer 2023
- Developer Partner Procurement (to contract signed) – December 2023
- Early Works Completed – March 2025
- Current deadline for LUF2 spend – March 2025
- Main works completed – December 2026

These dates, and the detailed programme, are subject to continued review.

4. ***Financial information***

4.1 Supported by the Strategic Advisor, Officers have a robust cost estimate for Phase 1.

4.2 Walsall Council capital and revenue monies required for Phase 1 were agreed by Cabinet in February 2022 and these details were set out in the report to this Committee in April 2022. In addition to the Levelling Up Funding, the Council has also been successful in securing a £3.2m capital contribution towards Phase 1 from the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (BCLEP). This funding has been secured from the Land, Property and Investment Fund (LPIF) and will need to be spent by 31 March 2025.

5. ***Reducing Inequalities***

5.1 The Willenhall Framework Plan provides the framework to drive forward the regeneration of the area. It sets 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 (2022-2025): Inequalities are reduced and all potential is maximised. The delivery of new housing in particular will contribute to ensuring that everyone has the right housing in the right place.

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 continue to seek to conclude the initial 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 Cabinet will be asked to consider the use of the Council's CPO powers. In parallel work will also continue to procure a developer partner to deliver Phase 1.

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

Willenhall Framework Plan, Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 14 April 2022

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