

24 NOVEMBER 2022

Town Centre Delivery

Ward(s): St Matthew's

Portfolios: Regeneration

1. Aim

Walsall Council is showing leadership and vision by promoting growth and development in the town centre, to create an greatly improved environment which will encourage investment and greatly enhance the experience of all those who visit and regularly use the town centre.

2. Recommendations

Members are invited to comment upon the planned interventions in the town centre with particular reference to how we engage with our partners and communities, and how we ensure that all residents and businesses can benefit from the work of the Council with its funding and development partners. Members will be asked to consider this through a presentation given at the meeting.

3. Report detail – know

3.1 In 2019 the Council produced and published its Town Centre Masterplan. This identified a number of objectives to enhance the lived experience, built environment and economic performance of the town centre and the accompanying benefits to delivery. Elements considered included housing, jobs, land values, transport improvements, public and green spaces, health and wellbeing, investment attracted and revenue generated for the Council.

3.2 The Town Centre Masterplan also identified specific areas for development of retail, markets, performing arts, residential, commercial and educational uses. The plan went on to look at the Council's role in bringing some of these sites forward and delivering a set of strategic catalytic interventions which would accelerate progress and bring partners on board. Some of the core principles of the Town Centre Masterplan were as follows:

- Create quality leisure and cultural experiences
- Centralise the retail core
- Create strong visual links between transport hubs and key town centre locations

- Provide better pedestrian and cycle connectivity between town centre and key facilities
 - Linked quality public spaces which improve legibility and provide a range of public uses
 - Balanced residential offer which meets the housing need
 - Smart use of existing buildings to reduce carbon footprint
- 3.3 After the events of 2020 and the impact of Covid, it became necessary to consider specially designed interventions to support the recovery of the high street and a number of public health, safety and cleanliness activities were delivered funded by the government's Welcome Back Fund and Accelerated Towns Fund. The Council engaged with the public to understand the concerns of residents in terms of how they experience the Town Centre and accordingly addressed these concerns with funded programme activity to clean up the town centre and make it attractive for visitors once more. Public realm works such as the now famous plant pots were installed and this has increased the coverage of Walsall town centre in media worldwide.
- 3.4 In 2021 some significant funding was secured and programme activity designed for key regeneration schemes in Walsall. The Connected Gateway programme, funded by the Future High Street Fund, allocated £11.44m to Walsall to deliver a scheme which improves connectivity between the train and bus station, delivers greatly improved public space in between the two and delivers to the core of the town centre a space which is enjoyable and easy to use and visit. Walsall Council has invested £24.63m into this scheme, showing the commitment and leadership required to transform a town centre.
- 3.5 Also the government's Town Deal programme was agreed. The objective of the Towns Fund was to drive economic regeneration in order to deliver a legacy of long-term economic growth and increased productivity. In achieving those aims it funds schemes which deliver urban regeneration, skills and enterprise infrastructure and/or connectivity. Walsall was successful in securing, through locally developed Town Investment Plans, £21.3m each for Walsall and Bloxwich Town Centres.
- 3.6 Council Officers together with appointed consultants were asked by Government, as part of the bidding process, the Town Investment Plans (TIPs) for both Bloxwich and Walsall areas. Places were asked to develop a vision for each area, details of stakeholder engagement undertaken, together with details of the projects proposed, the funding requested, delivery / funding plans and the outcomes expected.
- 3.7 The Town Investment Plans were submitted to Government in February 2021 and in July 2021 the award offers of £21.3m each for Walsall and Bloxwich were made, a total of £42.6m investment in the borough of Walsall.
- 3.8 The response to Government from the Council, acting as Accountable Body, was been completed and all required project confirmation documentation and

financial profiles for all projects were agreed with government for both Town Deal areas.

- 3.9 The next step, as agreed by the Town Deal Board, was to develop business cases for each scheme in the form of the HM Treasury Green Book 5-case model. The scheme leads developed these business cases, bringing in specialist support where necessary; this complex and critical process is nearing completion and business cases are undergoing independent appraisal; these, on approval by the Board, will trigger release of the Town Deal funding.

Walsall Town Deal

3.10 Work is now ongoing to complete business cases for the projects set out in these Town Investment Plans. Programme activity is as follows:

- **Construction Skills Academy:** Providing a range of construction skills training to ensure Walsall residents benefit from the investment in house building and construction in the town and the wider area.
- **Advanced Electric Vehicle Technology Centre** The provision of a new training facility to provide learning opportunities in the new and emerging electric vehicle market, delivered in partnership with Walsall College.
- **Town Centre Theatre** An exciting new 1000+ seater, multi-use entertainment and performance arena within Walsall Town Centre, creating a destination venue.
- **Active Travel and Connectivity:** active connections including cycling and walking - between Walsall town centre, Bloxwich high street, and local employment sites such as Phoenix 10.
- **Digital Skills Hub** : Creating a new digital skills hub in Walsall town centre. Aimed at accelerating digital growth and a 'ready to go' employable workforce
- **The Creative Industries Enterprise Centre:** Creation of a makerspace, creative incubator and skills development hub. Aimed at small enterprises and local residents.
- **Active Public Spaces** Developing an inviting, engaging and quality public space which better links the high street to the New Art Gallery and edge of town retail.
- **Community Capital** :Grants programme for local Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and social enterprise organisations to bid into

Bloxwich Town Deal

3.11

- **Active travel & connectivity** - promoting healthy travel and links between the centre and employment area. A range of interventions to the road and canal infrastructure to improve the pedestrian experience and safety through improved footways, lighting, CCTV, signage.
- **Promotion of construction skills through regeneration**–Seeking applications from local housing associations and developers to support the remediation of existing derelict brownfield sites, and the environmental upgrading of existing dwellings. Leveraging local jobs for local people, use of

local supply chains and the delivery construction skills and training for local people

- **Community capital fund** - A small grants scheme for VCS organisations
- **Incubation space and digital access centre** -A facility on the high street to provide incubation space for local start-ups and small businesses and allow access to digital connectivity for local residents who do not have home access to broadband. Provision of co-working rented spaces for businesses to collaborate and provides an income stream for the facility
- **Green Bloxwich** - Improving community health and wellbeing. Creating multi-use spaces - new parks, sports arenas, allotment spaces for growing food and zones to attract and encourage wildlife. Including the refurbishment of heritage buildings with King George V Park, to bring them into economic use.

3.12 While working to develop and deliver these schemes, the Council is also working to understand the regeneration potential of key sites in the town centre, and identifying a role in terms of bringing the sites forward, working with partners to effect land assembly, funding, delivery plans and operator models. In this way we can lead a comprehensive package of investment and intervention which will deliver homes, jobs and thriving business and leisure activity in the town.

3.13 Given the many changes that have taken place through the pandemic in terms of town centre use, plus the funding opportunities that we are now managing in terms of Town Deal and Connected Gateway, it has been proposed that a refresh of the Town Centre Masterplan takes place. This will review the proposed use of space in the town centre to ensure that we are still working to create the best town centre for the needs of today's residents and businesses.

4. *Financial information*

4.1 The Council manages an investment pipeline which contains many regeneration elements and. Alongside the considerable amounts of external funding secured through regeneration bids, investment cases are made for match funding in order to ensure that the Council is matching and supporting the funding we receive from various sources.

4.2 Rigorous assurance processes go into building business cases for investment and the Council's Finance, Regeneration, Property, Procurement and Planning teams work successfully together to ensure that value for money and sounds delivery planning is carried out.

5. *Reducing Inequalities*

5.1 It is crucial that all residents, communities and businesses benefit from the interventions created to improve the town centre's development. To this end, equalities impact assessments are carried out on all schemes and community consultation is factored in wherever appropriate.

6. *Decide*

6.1 Options for scheme development and delivery are considered at Strategic Investment Board, programme governance groups and by Members through Cabinet and committees. These options include the “do nothing” choice alongside a variety of levels of investment and risk allocation. It is through groups such as Overview and Scrutiny that alternative options and risks can be raised and considered.

7. Respond

7.1 Options for delivery of these schemes come forward to Cabinet as they are developed and Members’ comments will be taken into account as received through various fora.

8. Review

8.1 The programme activity is reviewed and monitored through programme boards and through Council governance structures. There will also, with externally funded programmes, be reporting and monitoring requirements from the funder and these will be developed, scrutinised and signed off through internal governance structures.

Background papers

None

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