

## Part A

**Report to:** Cabinet

**Date of meeting:** 7 October 2019

**Report author:** Project Manager

**Title:** **Watford High Street (North) and Cultural Hub Masterplan Progress Report**

### 1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report presents the initial findings from the recent consultation and engagement on the draft Watford High Street (North) and Cultural Hub Masterplan.
- 1.2 Consultation took place from 19 July to 13 September 2019 with a large volume of feedback which is summarised in Section 6. The Interim Stakeholder Consultation Report (Appendix 1) provides more detailed summary of the feedback received from the consultation.
- 1.3 Officers will review the full responses in further detail and then draft a final version of the Masterplan for adoption early next year. It will be presented to Cabinet with the final Stakeholder Consultation Report.
- 1.4 The final Masterplan will be used by the Council to further engage with landowners, stakeholders and developers to start delivery of its objectives.
- 1.5 The draft Masterplan was proposing a three phase approach to redevelopment, with Phase 1 taking around 5 years to deliver, while Phase 2 and Phase 3 were longer term (up to 20 years to complete).
- 1.6 Phase 1 encompasses the area north west of Rickmansworth Road, which is located around the Town Hall, Watford Central Library, Watford Colosseum and the surface level car parks at the Town Hall and The Avenue. The Masterplan will support Watford's Cultural Strategy by providing opportunities for cultural, community and creative uses in new and existing buildings.
- 1.7 Phase 1 involves relocation of the council offices, the preferred location for which is in the Phase 1 masterplan area as part of a new Cultural & Civic Hub.

1.8 Phase 2 includes the area south east of Rickmansworth Road to the Exchange Road flyover area and encompasses opportunities including Albert Road South, buildings facing The Parade and the Wellstones area.

1.9 Phase 3 involved the removal of pedestrian and vehicular underpasses outside the Town Hall on Rickmansworth Road. There were lots of concerns raised with this proposal. It is recommended, based on the feedback received from the consultation that, Phase 3 be taken out of the final Masterplan. This proposal will instead be looked at as part of the review of the longer term wider town centre transport network which will consider alternatives to the MLX and the impact of growth in the Town.

## 2.0 Risks

2.1 These were presented to Cabinet in July. There have been no changes.

<b>Nature of risk</b>	<b>Consequence</b>	<b>Suggested Control Measures</b>	<b>Response</b> (treat, tolerate, terminate or transfer)	<b>Risk Rating</b> (combination of severity and likelihood)
Fragmented ownerships makes land assembly and delivery difficult	Slow progress, ransom strips and possible inability to do comprehensive schemes	Engage landowners early, investigate use of Compulsory Purchase Orders, preparation of an Area Action Plan to give more legal powers	Treat	9
Viability of schemes	Inability to deliver and achieve objectives	Financial feasibility to be carried out	Treat	6
Lack of funding for other initiatives e.g. public realm improvements	Inability to achieve wider objectives including placemaking, greenspaces, play areas for children, public art	Actively seek external funding, channel CIL funding, use Section 106 monies, seek funding through LTP bids with the County Council	Treat	4
Reconfiguring change road layouts	Pedestrian and cycle movements will still be constrained, road dominated layouts continue	Further modelling and viability testing of solutions to inform business case and funding	Tolerate	12

		bids to support delivery		
Maintaining existing businesses while redeveloping areas	Could cause some businesses to close, or customers to change allegiance	Seek solutions through discussions with local businesses and investigate temporary locations for them if needed	Treat	6
Developers may proceed with individual planning applications	Loss of control and fragmented development with no long term vision underpinning it	Set out policy controls in the new Local Plan to restrain them and ensure they align with the WBC vision and work	Treat	9

2.2 There are three high level risks associated with this project. Fragmented ownerships make land assembly difficult, which is common to many complex regeneration projects. There are ways to tackle this but it may create delays to the programme.

2.3 Developers may proceed with individual planning applications. This is a challenge where a development company has acquired a parcel of land and is unwilling to wait on the requirements of the Masterplan. There is currently no up to date planning framework for the Town Centre and the sooner the Council has one in place supported by an up to date Local Plan the sooner the risk can be reduced. The Council can also use its CPO powers as a matter of last resort to help deliver the regeneration objectives.

2.4 Reconfiguring road layouts contains the highest risk because of the complexities of changing the established road pattern, the associated costs and potential opposition from road users. Securing County Council support and Government funding will be key to delivery. This will be challenging, hence the current high risk score. Failure here would not fundamentally undermine the delivery of the rest of the Masterplan.

### 3.0 Recommendations

Cabinet is asked to:-

3.1 Note the interim results of the consultation and engagement on the draft Watford High Street (North) and Cultural Hub Masterplan;

- 3.2 Delegate to the Managing Director in consultation with the Mayor and the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Development the authority to make required minor changes to the Masterplan document in line with the findings from the consultation;
- 3.3 Agree that the proposal to remove the underpass on Rickmansworth Road be taken out from the final Masterplan and that the Council should work with the County Council to look at the wider town centre transport network as a separate project;
- 3.4 Note the proposed governance structure to take forward implementation of the masterplan area (Para 8.4);
- 3.5 Note that a detailed budget for taking forward the Masterplan will be presented in the forthcoming 2020/21 budget process once a fuller cost assessment has been undertaken;
- 3.6 Approve the next steps on implementing delivery of the masterplan (Para 8);
- 3.7 Approve in principle that the council offices should be re-provided within the Phase 1 masterplan area;
- 3.8 Agree to take forward a detailed feasibility for the new Museum to relocate into the Phase 1 masterplan area and note that other cultural development will also be pursued in line with the Council's Cultural Strategy;
- 3.9 Note that the proposed changes to the Avenue Car Park gyratory are to remain, subject to further work with the County Council.

**Further information:**

Gaurav Choksi

[gaurav.choksi@watford.gov.uk](mailto:gaurav.choksi@watford.gov.uk)

Tel: 01923278261

**Report approved by:** Managing Director

#### 4.0 Introduction

- 4.1 At its meeting on 4 July 2019, the Cabinet gave approval to consult on the draft Watford High Street (North) and Cultural Hub Masterplan. This report presents the initial findings from the eight week consultation and engagement which started on 19 July and ran until 13 September 2019. Consultants Dallas-Pierce-Quintero (DPQ) were appointed to help with the engagement work.
- 4.2 Officers have reviewed the initial feedback, a summary of which is presented below in Section 6.

## **5.0 Consultations**

5.1 The draft Masterplan was consulted on with key stakeholders including Members, Ward Councillors, WBC staff, key landowners, town centre businesses, local organisations and the wider community.

5.2 There were three consultation events held in the town centre:

- First public consultation event on 29 July 2019, with a marquee in The Parade
- Business Consultation on 04 September 2019 in an empty shop on The Parade
- Second public consultation event on 10 September in an empty shop on The Parade

5.3 Exhibition panels were produced showing the 3 phases and samples of the indicative illustrations from the Masterplan and used at these events. During the remaining time of the consultation period they were on display in the Customer Service Centre and Watford Museum.

5.4 Around 160 people attended the exhibitions, the web site received 919 hits, and 458 responses were received to the online questionnaire (which contained 17 questions relating to the Masterplan) with 15 postcards sent in and 22 emails.

5.5 A number of individual meetings were held with the following organisations:

- 4th July Friends of Watford Museum
- 9th July Cultural Leaders Group
- 16 July Cycle Forum
- 30 July WBC Staff
- 1 August Members Briefing
- 2 August Watford Museum Team
- 8 August Watford BID
- 21 August NHS
- 28 August Disability Watford
- 4 Sept West Herts College
- 6 Sept WBC Staff Forum
- 10 Sept Hertfordshire County Council

5.6 The Council will continue dialogue with stakeholders and affected organisations as the plans move forward.

## **6.0 Summary of public comments received on the key elements of the draft Masterplan**

## **Vision and objectives of the draft Masterplan**

- 6.1 Protecting the future of the Town Hall and Watford Museum was the most supported objective, with 71% in favour, followed by providing a future for the market with 64% support, and creating an economically successful hub with 58% in favour. Out of 458 responses, over half the respondents agreed there is a need to revitalise the northern end of the town centre.
- 6.2 Many respondents cite the Library as a valued asset and together with the Watford Colosseum and the new Museum they can create a vibrant Cultural Hub which is currently lacking in Watford, encouraging more visitors during the day in this part of the town.
- 6.3 Some respondents highlighted the site's location as the gateway to Watford from the north and that it provides an opportunity to positively reinforce a welcoming first impression of the town as bold, innovative and people friendly. Other respondents agreed with the need to better link the northern end to the rest of the High Street.
- 6.4 In contrast, reducing the impact of cars was the least supported objective with 47% of respondents in support. Over a quarter of respondents cited traffic congestion as the main reason that they would object to the proposals.

### **Phase 1 – The area around the Town Hall**

- 6.5 36% of respondents supported the relocation of the council offices and the museum with 35% opposed to the move, while a sizeable number were undecided at 28%. Many of the written comments showed they supported only one of the two relocations, hence choosing 'undecided' within the questionnaire.
- 6.6 A number of ideas were suggested for the new museum, the most popular options were learning/education space and community space for talks/events, closely followed by a café, then a permanent display space.
- 6.7 Whilst 45% of respondents did not agree with the proposal to pedestrianise the Cultural Hub area, their concerns were mainly related to the removal of the underpass on Rickmansworth Road.

### **Phase 2 – The area from the top of The Parade to the Exchange Road flyover**

- 6.8 Respondents recognise that there is a need to improve this part of the town. It was seen as a necessary continuation of the work that has now been completed lower down the High Street.

- 6.9 The proposal to develop new plans for the market received strong support from the respondents.
- 6.10 The proposal to provide new homes in the town centre was not supported by 55% of respondents. Only 27% were in favour of new homes in this area. This reflects concerns also raised about traffic congestion and need for more schools, GP's, etc during the Issues and Options stage of the Local Plan.

### **Phase 3 - The Rickmansworth Road underpass removal with a new cycle and pedestrian crossing**

- 6.11 Phase 3 was the least supported of all phases, due to perceived increase of traffic congestion with the removal of the vehicle and pedestrian underpasses and provision of a new pedestrian crossing on Rickmansworth Road. It is this proposal which has attracted most negative comments.

### **Hertfordshire County Council response**

- 6.12 The County Council has a key role in any changes proposed for the town centre and made constructive comments and suggestions. The County Council supports:-
- Our aims to make the town more sustainable, but expressed concerns about increase in car parking
  - The aim to extend the shared walking and cycling public realm and other cycle infrastructure improvements, and a wish to see improved walking and cycling routes beyond the Masterplan areas
  - The new Museum proposal and wish to see synergies with Watford Central Library
  - The need to ensure buses can be accommodated in the revised gyratory scheme
  - The possible need for new school place provision
  - Concerns about the Phase 3 proposals for Rickmansworth Road, while understanding the severance issues caused there

## **7.0 Conclusions for the Masterplan**

- 7.1 On balance, it is considered that the overall vision should be maintained and that sustainability should be a stronger theme throughout the Masterplan.
- 7.2 The broad approach to the Phase 1 Town Hall area and Phase 2 High Street sites has generally been supported and will be retained in the final Masterplan.

- 7.3 Further work to be undertaken on the proposed changes to the Avenue Car Park gyratory, working closely with the County Council.
- 7.4 The Phase 3 proposal to remove the pedestrian and vehicular underpasses on Rickmansworth Road received negative feedback from the local community through the consultation process. Concerns were raised about traffic congestion on Rickmansworth Road and the surrounding area. For this reason, it is recommended that the Phase 3 proposals are taken out of the Masterplan.
- 7.5 Outside of the scope of this Masterplan, a comprehensive study to understand the impacts of any changes to traffic flows on the town centre movement network is needed. The impact on buses in particular would also need to be given serious consideration. The Council will work with the County Council to pursue this larger piece of work.

## **8.0 Next Steps**

- 8.1 A final version of the Masterplan will be drafted incorporating comments from the consultation. The final Masterplan will then be presented to Cabinet along with the final Stakeholder Consultation Report for adoption early next year.
- 8.2 The Council also proposes to begin work on the implementation plan. This will involve assessing in more detail the delivery of the concepts set out in the Masterplan, assessing the financial business case and holding further discussions in more detail with stakeholders, landowners and the County Council.
- 8.3 The implementation work will include the commissioning of specialist consultancy support to provide financial modelling and options appraisal, a land acquisition strategy, a soft marketing exercise with potential partners, a utility capacity study and a feasibility study of the Museum relocation and other cultural developments. Co-location options will also be explored with the NHS, Police and others before finally making a decision on the new location for the Council staff. The preferred option would be within the new Cultural & Civic Hub.
- 8.4 Further stakeholder management is crucial and the Council proposes setting up three separate stakeholder groups;
- A Member-led steering group
  - A Landowners Group comprising the current and potential site occupiers/landowners who all have individual requirements that the Council needs to accommodate in this project
  - A stakeholder group - this would be those with an interest in the Cultural Hub area, particularly around its historic and creative / cultural role

Programme governance and project management will be through the Council's Programme Management Board with regular reporting to Portfolio holders, Cabinet and the Major Projects Forum.

8.5 Below is a high level timeline to progress delivery of Phase 1.

Delivery strategy and further budget approvals	January 2020
Procurement process	June 2020
Appoint Development Partner	January 2021

## 9.0 Implications

### 10.0 Financial

The Shared Director of Finance comments that there is budget provision to commence preparatory activity within the existing capital programme allocation for the Town Hall and Colosseum. The total costs associated with delivery of the project will be brought forward as part of the consideration of the 2020/2021 Budget process. The costs of the scheme are not yet known, but will become clear once the financial business case has been developed. This will form part of next steps process and the scheme will progress subject to financial approval.

### 11.0 Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)

The Head of Legal Services comments that any final adopted Masterplan will be a supplementary planning document and have weight for Development Management purposes.

### 12.0 Equalities, Human Rights and Data Protection

Having regard to the council's obligations under s149 of the Equality Act 2010, an Equalities Impact Assessment will be undertaken as part of the report to the Cabinet for adoption.

#### Data protection

Responses to the consultation and personal details will be managed in accordance with Watford Borough Council's retention policy.

### 13.0 Staffing

13.1 There are no additional requirements with the Masterplan work. A management and governance structure for the Masterplan delivery with clearly identified roles and responsibilities is being put in place.

## 14.0 **Accommodation**

14.1 The Masterplan will involve re-provision of council offices on site in the Phase 1 masterplan area (which is the preferred option). Staff will be engaged and kept informed as part of any proposals moving forward.

## 15.0 **Community Safety/Crime and Disorder**

15.1 All aspects of crime and disorder along with community safety in the design of buildings, car parking and wider environment will be taken into account during further design development

## 16.0 **Sustainability**

16.1 Re-use of brownfield land, with newer buildings built to higher environmental standards and new greenspaces that act as 'carbon sinks', as well as new facilities for walking and cycling will create a more sustainable town.

## **Appendices**

**Appendix 1:** Watford High Street (North) and Cultural Hub Interim Stakeholder Consultation Report

## **Background papers**

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report. If you wish to inspect or take copies of the background papers, please contact the officer named on the front page of the report.

Draft Watford High Street (North) and Cultural Hub Masterplan by WBC  
Interim Stakeholder Consultation Report by DPQ