

Meeting date: 3rd December 2020

Report to: Full Cabinet



Subject/report title: Shirley Economic Plan

Report from: Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health

Report author/lead contact officer: Clare Rudge, Business Investment Officer

Wards affected:

All Wards | Bickenhill | Blythe | Castle Bromwich | Chelmsley Wood |
 Dorridge/Hockley Heath | Elmdon | Kingshurst/Fordbridge | Knowle |
 Lyndon | Meriden | Olton | Shirley East | Shirley South |
 Shirley West | Silhill | Smith's Wood | St Alphege

Public/private report: Public

Exempt by virtue of paragraph:

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To update Cabinet and ask for approval to proceed with the Shirley Economic Growth Plan and identified Action Plan.

2. Decision(s) recommended

- 2.1 a) Agree the principles and adoption of the refreshed Shirley Economic Growth Plan
- b) Agree the priorities identified within the associated Action Plan, including the short term 'Pre Recovery' and 'Recovery' activities and projects to support the area.
- c) Agree for the drawdown of the next stage of funding from the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) of £25,000 to support the delivery of the Action Plan, alongside the use of allocated Council reserves and additional sources of external funding appropriate to the activities.

3. Matters for Consideration

3.1 In October 2019, Cabinet agreed to support the development of a refreshed Economic Growth Plan for Shirley town centre, supported by £25,000 from the GBSLEP's Enabling Fund for Towns and Local Centres and recognising the change in economic

environment from 2017 when the first Economic Plan was produced.

- 3.2 Consultants were appointed to lead the development of the refreshed plan, through a detailed methodology, including:
- (a) A survey of 400 consumers, from field researchers who asked visitors over different time periods within a week, at different locations along the high street;
 - (b) Survey of circa 100 business operators within the centre;
 - (c) Stakeholder, landlord, community group and ward member engagement sessions;
 - (d) Catchment definition and visitor profile analysis;
 - (e) Review of consumer and retail trends and;
 - (f) Benchmark location review against similar centres
- 3.3 This led to the development of a draft Economic Plan, just before the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact became apparent. As a response, a review of the document and its associated Action Plan and priorities was undertaken, with a further round of consultation with key businesses, stakeholders and ward members.
- 3.4 The full Economic Growth Plan and associated summary Action Plan can be found in Appendix 1 and 2.
- 3.5 Seven strategic themes have been identified as areas of focus, including:
- (a) **Creating a clear identity and enhanced sense of place for Shirley Town Centre** – this has already commenced through the ‘dressing’ of the centre with lamppost banners, flagpoles, retail posters and floor stickers reflecting the new ‘poppy’ branding within the town. This supports a distinct offer joining up both sides of the A34 and the linear nature of the town, creating a clear identifier for Shirley town centre. It is also identified as essential for local centres to recover in light of COVID-19, differentiating the offer to local consumers and unifying the businesses to work together to support returning footfall.
 - (b) **Improve visibility, access and impact of the existing assets** – through consultation several assets were identified, such as Shirley Park, and the need to maximise linkages between the high street and the natural assets that make Shirley distinctive. There is also a need to promote the variety and diversity of the offer to those passing through as a key transport corridor.
 - (c) **Make it easier to use and shop the whole offer** - facilitation of business networking and collaboration and cross promotion of local offers, making it easier for customers to way find through digital information, maps and signage.
 - (d) **Improve the experience, environment and public realm** – ensuring customers feel safe and secure in a well maintained environment. This is especially important as high streets ‘re-open’ and welcome footfall back and

also supports the Council's Climate Change activities in improving air quality and the natural environment.

- (e) **Build on and nurture existing assets and add layers of attraction** – promoting the offer of Shirley and pro-actively seeking to attract operators and diversification where there are gaps, working collaboratively with landlords, inward investors and existing local businesses.
- (f) **Introduce markets, events and meanwhile uses** – Working with key stakeholders to collaborate on a joint events calendar and attracting new activities, markets and festivals, in collaboration with local businesses.
- (g) **Improved management and marketing** – building upon the work of the Shirley Marketing Group – a voluntary group of local businesses and community stakeholders, to oversee the activities recommended within the Economic Plan and identify further sources of funding to support activities.

3.6 The Action Plan (Appendix 2) has then been refined to reflect priorities that are most applicable within the next 12 months during the high street's 'Pre-Recovery and Recovery' phase in response to COVID-19, and those that are longer term and fall within a 'Transformation' phase. Actions are also classified in terms of 'Recovery Priority Action' and by cost, in order to further prioritise spend and activity.

3.7 Some actions have already been put in progress or achieved through the activities of the Council's Business Investment team, including:

- (a) Creating a distinct brand identity – in collaboration with the Shirley Marketing Group
- (b) Develop strong arrival statements – through the lamppost banners and flagpoles at key locations at arrival points along the A34 and to emphasise the entrance to Shirley Park
- (c) Provide information on COVID safe shopping in Shirley – utilising the Re-opening High Streets Safely fund to procure lamppost boards to wear face coverings and 'keep a distance', promoting stores opening through a 'Shirley Store Tracker' on the business support Solihull for Success website and social media and producing a video of the measures the Council and local businesses have put in place to stay safe on the high street.
- (d) Supporting social distancing – through Emergency Active Travel measures to temporarily re-purpose parking and service bays to support pedestrian and cycling space for times of increased footfall to the high street area.
- (e) Collaborative promotion of the Shirley 'offer' – through the ongoing Council's #SupportLocal campaign – highlighting the offer from independent retailers, cafes and restaurants through social media and a regular PR campaign featured in the Solihull Observer, in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce and Federation of Small Businesses. This has been further developed during the recent lockdown measures to support online retail sales and promotion for local

businesses and to consider 'local spend' in the run up to Christmas and Small Business Saturday (5th December).

- (f) Support for cafes and restaurants to apply for a Pavement Licence when local COVID restrictions allow, subject to highway and licensing approval, supporting trade for businesses and active frontages for further promotion of the high street.
- (g) Individual engagement and business support – through dedicated officer support, linking to Council initiatives for towns and local centres and public health and regulatory guidance. This has also included signposting to relevant programmes available through partners including GBSLEP and the 'Your Step Forward' campaign for retail recovery and digital skills. This programme has also assisted with identifying potential 'Ambassadors' to be involved in the Shirley Marketing Group and to champion areas of activities identified in the Action Plan.
- (h) Working in partnership with local landlords –identifying support for tenants and supporting future plans and activities, including the potential for markets and events.
- (i) Identifying alternative sources of funding – such as through the next call for projects under the GBSLEP Towns and Local Centres Enabling Fund, as well as projects planned as part of the agreed Council Towns and Local Centres additional support, as approved by Full Cabinet in September.

3.8 Highlighted in the summary Action Plan document (Appendix 2), activities within the 'Pre Recovery and Recovery' area that will be implemented within the next 6 months, include:

- (a) Further 'street dressing' creative ideas to promote the Shirley brand identity and to further highlight assets such as Shirley park.
- (b) New signage and information points, to assist customer experience.
- (c) New literature/maps/digital information to promote the businesses and facilities available.
- (d) Public realm improvements, including removal of litter and graffiti and enhanced cleaning.
- (e) Further targeted business support, including digital skills and online trading support.
- (f) Support for local events and markets, as per when COVID restrictions permit, working with local community groups and landlords.
- (g) Implementation of a new marketing and communications plan, including social media campaigns to strengthen the #ShopLocal awareness and momentum.

3.9 In terms of longer term 'Transformation' actions, this will be determined through the impact and changing needs with businesses and key stakeholders post COVID-19,

the availability of external funding and the developing plans for projects such as the UK Central A34 Transport Corridor Improvement scheme. This scheme includes proposals and options to encourage more people to travel to Shirley by bike, bus or on foot including the public realm option referred to in the action plan. The proposals in the transport work will support the success of this Economic Plan and vice versa bringing about wider benefits for Shirley and the surrounding area.

- 3.10 To take the Action Plan forward, the ring fenced £25,000 from GBSLEP will be utilised to support additional areas identified in the 'Pre Recovery and Recovery' phase, as well as the £30,910 budget identified through Council reserves to support the delivery of the Action Plan, as agreed at Cabinet in October 2019.
- 3.11 Activity will be delivered through review with the Shirley Marketing Group and ward member engagement, to ensure that local business and stakeholder priorities are reflected and to also identify 'Ambassadors' for each area to oversee the projects and provide input.

4. What options have been considered and what is the evidence telling us about them?

- 4.1 Option to only utilise the GBSLEP allocated funding to support activities in the Action Plan – this would result in some activities being funded from the 'Pre Recovery and Recovery' phase, but would only go part way to the full set of recommended measures suggested and could possibly result in loss of momentum and impact built through the activities of the Business Investment team so far.

5. Reasons for recommending preferred option

- 5.1 Utilise GBSLEP allocated funding, alongside Council reserves and alternative sources of funding applicable to the activity, to maximise impact, co-ordinate activities with business and stakeholder to ensure buy in and input and ensure that Shirley town centre recovers to its best ability from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 5.2 Alongside national measures of business support, towns and local centres have been shown to require a set of co-ordinated inputs, through the nationally recognised High Streets Taskforce Recovery Framework which the Council has adopted to support its Towns and Local Centres and the Solihull Economic Recovery Plan.
- 5.3 For the activities within the Action Plan identified to have maximum impact, it needs careful co-ordination and input from all business and community stakeholders, to also build momentum and perhaps lead to a longer legacy in the form of a management body or town team. If areas identified are delivered, it demonstrates the viability of further investment through external funding sources to support the future of Shirley town centre.

6. Implications and Considerations

6.1 State how the proposals in this report contribute to the priorities in the [Council Plan](#):

Priority:	Contribution:
<p>Economy:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Revitalising our towns and local centres. 2. UK Central (UKC) and maximising the opportunities of HS2. 3. Increase the supply of housing, especially affordable and social housing. 	<p>Directly relating to supporting our towns and local centres.</p> <p>Supporting the benefits of HS2 and UK Central development plans through ensuring that our towns and local centres maintain their appeal to live and work, supporting the quality of life offer and further inward investment.</p>
<p>Environment:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Enhance Solihull's natural environment. 5. Improve Solihull's air quality. 6. Reduce Solihull's net carbon emissions. 	<p>Ensuring our towns and local centres maintain their quality environment, introducing natural assets within the high street where possible and maximising linkages to our local parks and recreation land.</p> <p>Supporting air quality and reducing carbon emissions through encouraging residents and visitors to shop locally and access through walking and cycling.</p>
<p>People and Communities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Take action to improve life chances in our most disadvantaged communities. 8. Enable communities to thrive. 9. Sustainable, quality, affordable provision for adults & children with complex needs. 	<p>Thriving towns and local centres support their local communities through offering a range of accessible employment opportunities and also offering a community benefit through local services.</p> <p>Supporting local communities to engage in their local towns and centres and access local facilities.</p>

6.2 Consultation and Scrutiny:

6.2.1 Support for the Borough's towns and local centres was a key consideration within the 11 June Economic Recovery Plan report to Economic Development & Managed Growth Scrutiny Board.

6.2.2 The Economic Recovery Plan and Action Plan has been developed through engagement with key stakeholders including Shirley Marketing Group (key local businesses, voluntary groups and stakeholders), Ward Members and GBSLEP. The plan has also been informed through a comprehensive business and consumer survey.

6.3 Financial implications:

- 6.3.1 GBSLEP has approved a ring fenced £25,000 on completion of the refreshed Economic Plan to undertake some of the early stage priorities identified within the Action Plan.
- 6.3.2 A further budget of up to £50,000 was approved from the Council's SSCF reserves, to compliment the GBSLEP funding and support early stage activities. To date £19,090 has been spent, allowing for up to £30,910 to be spent supporting delivery of the Action Plan.
- 6.3.3 Future external funding will be sought to deliver longer term activities identified within the Action Plan, including GBSLEP, West Midlands Combined Authority and other appropriate sources.
- 6.3.4 The activities proposed will also compliment the activities of the additional financial support of up to £200,000 approved by Cabinet in September 2020 for our towns and local centres, supporting the Council's Economic Recovery Plan in response to COVID-19.

6.4 Legal implications:

- 6.4.1 None directly arising from this report. Where procurement is agreed for activities arising from the Action Plan, suppliers will be bound by the Council's standard terms and conditions.

6.5 Risk implications:

- 6.5.1 No significant risks directly arising from this report. Financial and procurement regulations will be followed to minimise any contractual risk.

6.6 Equality implications:

All activities proposed will be assessed regarding equality implications to ensure fair distribution of activity and impact on local communities.

7. List of appendices referred to

- 7.1 Appendix 1 – Shirley Economic Growth Plan
- 7.2 Appendix 2 – Shirley Summary Action Plan

8. Background papers used to compile this report

- 8.1 None

9. List of other relevant documents

None