

Meeting date: 11 March 2021

Report to: Full Cabinet



Subject/report title: Placemaking Fund – proposed allocations

Report from: Leader of the Council

Report author/lead contact officer: Perry Wardle, Assistant Director – Growth and Development

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 seek approval to the proposed allocation of the Council's Placemaking Fund.

2. Decision(s) recommended

2.1 Cabinet is recommended to:

2.2 Approve the allocation of the Placemaking Fund, as set out in Appendix 1;

2.3 Approve the establishment of new reserves in the relevant portfolios to hold funds for the allocations set out in Appendix 1.

3. Matters for Consideration

3.1 A £2 million Placemaking Fund was created from the business rates windfall income in 2019/20, with the aim to support the promotion, sustainability and resilience of Solihull as an attractive place to live and do business.

3.2 In September 2020, a sum of £200,000 was allocated to support towns and local centres as part of the ongoing covid related 'high street' recovery activity. This allocation is being used to bring forward place marketing and street dressing, public

realm and visible enhancement, marketing campaigns/activities, and support for events, when COVID guidelines allow.

- 3.3 In the recently approved budget, a one-off contribution of £300,000 from the Placemaking Fund was agreed to increase the availability of staff resources in the Economy and Infrastructure Directorate, in response to two growing requirements. The first is a need to increase Climate Change resourcing to deliver the activity flowing from the Council's Climate Change Declaration, the commissioning of a Net Zero Action Plan to deliver carbon neutrality and the launch of the Climate Change Commission. The second is a response to the increasing demand from economic recovery activity, the increasing scale of UKC Hub opportunities and a commitment to significant interventions across the borough's towns and local centres. After year one, the additional cost is incorporated within the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- 3.4 The proposed allocations set out in this report are intended to improve the experience and perception of Solihull for residents, visitors and investors. The beneficial effects of this investment will help the borough make the most of high profile events, such as the Commonwealth Games, where there is an opportunity to present the borough positively to an international audience. This is particularly the case given that a number of events will take place at the NEC.
- 3.5 This report also presents proposals for the remaining unallocated sum within the Placemaking Fund. The proposed indicative financial allocations are set out in Appendix 1 and the activity summarised below.

Planting our Future

- 3.6 This allocation funds the c.13,000 trees planted across the borough since April 2020 and a further 20,000 in 2021/22. An additional 5,000 trees are expected to be planted in 2020/21 through other funding sources/projects, which will meet the annual target of 25,000 trees next year. The funding proposed includes ongoing maintenance costs. The benefits from this initiative include habitat improvement, which supports a range of wildlife, improved accessibility and attractiveness of open spaces and improved air quality. The tree planting will contribute to the Council's commitment to plant 250,000 trees over the next decade. Partnerships with commercial and charitable organisations have already been developed and will help broaden the positive social impact of this scheme.

Healing Woodland

- 3.7 This allocation will deliver phase 1 of the 'healing woodland' in Shirley South Ward, on the site previously proposed in the draft Local Plan as Site 13. The initial phase will include boardwalk and pathway creation, public furniture, improving access points, gates and boundary fencing. Woodland design and tree planting will also be delivered in phase 2.

Enhanced cleansing

- 3.8 A specialist jet washing and steam cleaning service is proposed over a period of 2 years to allow deep cleaning of public realm paving, street furniture, signs and other infrastructure. This will complement the already successful Grime Busters team and allows for a dedicated response to graffiti, paving staining and spillages. As the Council will be investing in new public realm through a number of growth and regeneration projects, this enhanced cleaning service will help ensure the investment

is maintained to a high standard.

- 3.9 The service will require a vehicle, hot wash jet washer and drivers/operators. Key pedestrian shopping areas and areas of concern raised identified through engagement with ward members, community groups and parish councils will be the main focus for the service.
- 3.10 It is expected that this investment in cleansing will also assist with the COVID recovery, with high-profile additional activity helping to reassure the public about the cleanliness and safety of Solihull, when current restrictions are relaxed.

Electric Vehicle Charging and strategy rollout

- 3.11 Following the adoption of the Council's Electric Vehicle Strategy, this proposed use of funds will increase the number of charge points, with additional points initially installed at the Council House, alongside completion of a detailed implementation plan to guide accelerated rollout out across the borough.
- 3.12 In addition, the investment will allow implementation of a number of demonstrator projects to help accelerate EV take-up, particularly amongst businesses. This will include an initiative through which local businesses can get free access to a suitable EV to help them 'try before they buy', and assess whether they are a practical option for their operation. Linked to this is a 'telematics' project where black-boxes are installed into existing business / private / taxi vehicles for a 30 day period to help businesses assess the commercial case for switching to electric vehicles.
- 3.13 The proposed investment would also be directed to establishing EV car clubs and e-mobility for residents.

3.14 Culture and community events

- 3.15 This element proposes investment in cultural and arts activity to support communities coming out of lockdown. This would involve a number of town and local centre festivals and activity from this summer, until late 2022. This injection of activity will provide a platform to build up and strengthen the borough's culture and arts offer and will build on other Council plans, such as expanding public events in the Shirley Economic Plan.
- 3.16 Aligned to the above is investment in volunteering. This will be linked to opportunities arising from the Queens Baton Relay and the Commonwealth Games. These volunteering opportunities will be targeted at those furthest from employment, helping individuals on a pathway to employment.

CCTV – enhancing flytipping enforcement

- 3.17 In line with the core aims of the Placemaking Fund, investment to support enhanced fly tipping enforcement through the use of CCTV is proposed. This will provide extra capacity for mobile CCTV camera enforcement to tackle environmental crimes across the borough.

Towns and local centres – round 2

- 3.18 This is a proposed extension of the original allocation, outlined in para 3.2 above. Whilst the original allocation is focussed more on street dressing, marketing and promotion, it is proposed that this additional allocation will focus more on physical improvements to public realm in some of the borough's smaller centres.

Borough promotion and tourism

- 3.19 This funding will support a significant increase in the Council's capacity to develop Solihull's tourism offer and build visitor numbers, as a direct response to the impact of COVID on the tourism and hospitality sectors, but also to underpin the fundamentals of this strategically important industry. It has strong links with, and builds upon, the investment in towns and local centres and the extra investment in ensuring the borough is clean and green.
- 3.20 It is an important time to invest given the direct economic impact the investment can stimulate alongside the need to make sure the borough can be seen at its best when the Commonwealth Games is shown to a global audience of c1.5 billion. This will include, for example, street dressing on major routes within the borough to promote the Solihull offer. The Solihull Tourism Forum and other partners, such as Solihull BID, Shirley Marketing Group and Visit Knowle, will continue to be engaged through this process in order to align plans and maximise impact.

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

- 4.1 As this is non-statutory activity there is an option to not allocate any resources for the proposals set out in this report. There is an option to allocate different amounts of funding to the range of proposed activity.

5. Reasons for recommending preferred option

- 5.1 The proposed allocations fall within the scope of the Placemaking Fund as identified when it was established. They present a mix of physical interventions (such as tree planting and public realm enhancement) alongside marketing and resources to accelerate scheme development and delivery.
- 5.2 The proposed set of activities are mutually reinforcing and it is anticipated that the combined effect of delivering and communicating these improvement will have a larger overall impact than if they were progressed individually.

6. Implications and Considerations

- 6.1 State how the proposals in this report contribute to the priorities in the <https://www.solihull.gov.uk/About-Solihull/Solihull-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>The proposals will directly support the revitalisation of towns and local centres across the borough.</p> <p>The proposals support the delivery of benefits from HS2 and UK Central by ensuring by borough is attractive to investors and occupiers.</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>The proposals will directly address all three of these priorities, in particular through the investment in tree planting, habitat enhancement and supporting the transition to electric vehicles.</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>Access to enhanced public open space will be delivered through these proposals, which has benefits for local communities.</p>

6.2 Consultation and Scrutiny:

6.2.1 Consultation will be undertaken as appropriate on relevant projects with the proposed allocations.

6.3 Financial implications:

6.3.1 The proposed allocations can be met within the £2 million already earmarked for the Placemaking Fund.

6.4 Legal implications:

6.4.1 None directly arising from this report. Where procurement is agreed, 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. Individual project risks will be assessed and managed on a project level. Financial and procurement regulations will be followed to minimise any contractual risk.

6.6 Equality implications:

6.6.1 All major activities proposed in this report will be assessed to understand any equality implications and proposals amended accordingly.

7. List of appendices referred to

7.1 Appendix 1 – Proposed allocation of Placemaking Fund

8. Background papers used to compile this report

8.1 None

9. List of other relevant documents

9.1 None