

Meeting date: 10th February 2022

Report to: Cabinet



Subject/report title: Chelmsley Wood Town Centre Public Consultation

Report from: Assistant Director for Growth and Development

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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 carry out public consultation on proposals for the redevelopment of Chelmsley Wood Town Centre.

2. Decision(s) recommended

- 2.1 The Cabinet Member is asked to
- a) Approve commencement of public consultation on the options for redevelopment of Chelmsley Wood Town Centre, in accordance with the approach set out in paragraphs 3.8 to 3.14 of this report.
 - b) Delegate authority for the Director for Economy and Infrastructure to approve the consultation material to be used in consultation with the Leader of the Council.

3. Matters for Consideration

Introduction

- 3.1 Chelmsley Wood Town Centre (CWTC) is the principal shopping centre in North Solihull. It was constructed in the 1960s in a block that is bounded on three sides by roads and a small brook to the west. In addition to a retail centre, there is an Asda

superstore, library, some Council offices, a large police station, a DWP office (job centre), a BT telephone exchange, two blocks of flats and two drive-through style fast food restaurants. Over the years, the town centre has suffered from a lack of investment; although the construction of an Asda superstore, new library and office space has provided improved facilities. Following the acquisition by Ellandi in 2015 of the main retail development in the town centre, it is trading reasonably well, despite its offer continuing to be limited in scope. The redevelopment of Chelmsley Wood Town Centre is required to address a number of issues, including the following: underutilised space, poor public realm, poor connectivity, over focus on retail, poor provision of leisure use – particularly in the evening, and little civic function.

3.2 Opportunities to improve the town centre offer include the following:

- (a) Improving and broadening the retail offer.
- (b) Maximising commercial opportunities.
- (c) Place-making and public-sector activity.
- (d) Improving access to public transport and connectivity to the centre.
- (e) Enhanced connectivity within the site, including new public realm areas linking the north west quarter of the town centre and the existing shopping centre with the wider community.,
- (f) Improved connectivity to the green areas around the town centre.,
- (g) The redevelopment of vacant sites, such as the former library site within the North West quarter, and the development of under-utilised plots such as the around the police station and DWP office.

3.3 There are also opportunities to diversify the offer at the town centre from its current predominant 9am - 6pm retail focus. These include the opportunity to introduce residential and leisure uses that will help create a night-time economy and support the centre's long-term sustainability.

3.4 The town centre cluster can provide higher density development that complements its commercial and community activities and that will support its linkages to the sub-regional public transport network.

Feasibility and Masterplanning Work

3.5 In September 2021, multi-disciplinary consultants, led by BDP, were appointed to develop detailed and robust proposals for the redevelopment of Northwest Quarter of Chelmsley Wood Town Centre that meets SMBC's objectives and also to determine the need for public sector intervention and support.

3.6 This work builds upon a town centre wide masterplan and regeneration study completed in 2018/19. The Northwest Quarter was identified as a first phase scheme, and is shown outlined red in Plan A attached in Appendix A. This area currently accommodates the police station, job centre building and former library site used as a surface level car park

3.7 Feasibility work and studies to identify technical constraints were carried out between September and December 2021, as well as a market demand review. This work has informed the identification of several masterplan drivers, including the following:

3.7.1 **Business occupier and accommodation requirements**

The baseline research undertaken has identified several firm requirements for new floorspace in the north west quarter of the town centre that are needed to achieve a positive transformational improvement.

- (a) food store - there is a requirement for a discount food retail store of c. 25,000 sq ft in area.
- (b) Ancillary retail including food and beverage (F&B) - subject to the delivery of the food store, there is potential demand for 10-15,000sq ft of ancillary retail space which could include a significant proportion of F&B operations.
- (c) Office based employment space – there is appears to be a requirement for a public sector office hub which could potentially accommodate several public sector organisations that require accommodation in the north of the Borough.
- (d) 100-120 residential units.

3.7.2 **Site availability including phasing**

The second group of key masterplan drivers are related to the possible phasing and availability of sites. They include:

- (a) The immediate availability of the former library site.
- (b) The need to retain Chelmsley Wood Police Station within the town centre, either in its current building or in a new or refurbished building nearby.
- (c) Maintaining the services provided by the DWP Job Centre. Any proposals to redevelop the site would need to first provide replacement accommodation for the Job Centre. This could be as part of a new public sector hub, but continuity of service needs to be considered as part of any masterplan options.

3.7.3 **Infrastructure including access, utilities, and public realm**

The third group of key masterplan drivers are related to physical infrastructure, as follows:

- (a) Access, circulation, building servicing and vehicular access. In particular, the masterplan options need to consider access, parking and servicing issues for the existing precinct, the telephone exchange, and the police station.
- (b) Existing utility and drainage networks. The masterplan options that focus new development on sites that avoid the existing major utility corridors will generally be easier to deliver.

- (c) Public realm. One of the key drivers of the masterplan is to create a town centre environment that will attract people and encourage more daytime and evening activity. A new 'town square' should be accommodated within the proposals, and a new connection to it from the existing retail precinct to the should be established.

Public Consultation

- 3.8 A public survey was carried out in November 2021 - January 2022 and generally supported our understanding of the issues and opportunities for the town centre. The results of this survey indicate that the following are key concerns and aspirations for the local community:
 - (a) A poor selection of shops and a general lack of facilities.
 - (b) A lack of food and beverage offer and leisure/ entertainment facilities.
 - (c) A need for better cycle facilities and more cycle storage.
 - (d) A need for better bus services / links.
 - (e) Improvement to overall safety of the town centre.
 - (f) Desire for a community hub.
 - (g) More greenspaces and improved public realm.
 - (h) Improved pedestrian safety.
- 3.9 The next stage of public engagement is to seek views on the range of new uses, activities and other facilities that it has established could be deliverable, to gauge support but also to get further input on the aspects of more detailed aspects of each element of the proposals for the northwest quarter.
- 3.10 The purpose of the consultation is not to test different spatial masterplan options, but to determine if key masterplan principles, such as a new link to the precinct, and new proposed uses such as a public sector hub, a new food store and a new town square, are supported as appropriate responses to the aspirations and concerns voiced by consultees through the previous engagement survey.
- 3.11 For each of the key masterplan components the consultation will set out examples of similar developments elsewhere and provide more information on content and usage. So for example, for the consideration of new town centre housing, the consultation will include examples of apartment-based town centre schemes as part of mixed-use schemes and set out ideas on the type of accommodation and target occupiers, including affordable rented accommodation. In the case of the proposed new town square, the consultation will gauge opinion on the appropriate scale of the space (with reference to familiar comparators in Solihull town centre and Birmingham city centre) and the range of services around the square that might be offered.
- 3.12 The intention of the consultation is not to seek approval of a specific masterplan solution but to get community feedback and endorsement of the appropriate form and

content of the northwest quarter development scheme. This information will enable us to develop masterplan proposals that firstly, have a reasonable chance of delivery and secondly, will be strongly supported by the local community.

- 3.13 It is proposed to carry out a public consultation from mid-February to the end of March 2022.
- 3.14 Measures will need to be taken to ensure that the consultation process complies with Covid restrictions that are in place at the time. Given that such restrictions may preclude drop-in sessions at which face to face discussion can be held, it is proposed that the following approach to consultation be adopted:
- (a) Online – dedicated webpages/website setting out the proposals using plans, narrative and precedent images and providing a link to a survey where feedback can be given.
 - (b) Display – a physical display permanently erected within the town centre for the public to view. If possible, two socially distanced drop-in sessions will be held where members of the project team will be present with the display to talk about the proposals with members of the public.
 - (c) Up to two virtual webinars where the project team will present the proposals and invite comments and respond to questions.
 - (d) Promotion of the consultation via bulletins, social media, local media and press releases and email circulation lists.

Next Steps

- 3.15 Following the public consultation, the feedback received will be used to help inform up to four masterplan options for the redevelopment of the North West Quarter, showing varying levels of intervention.
- 3.16 Further detailed technical constraints studies will then be carried out to provide an estimated cost of each shortlisted option and inform financial appraisals. The benefits, potential delivery options, and funding gap for each option will also be identified.
- 3.17 This work will inform the identification of a preferred option to be agreed in consultation with members and key stakeholders, and the preparation of an associated outline business case.

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

- 4.1 The proposals being presented for public consultation have been informed by baseline research undertaken between September and December 2021, including:
- (a) Technical feasibility to ensure that all proposals are likely to be deliverable within the physical constraints of the site.

- (b) Feasibility of the establishment of wide steps to connect the new town square with the first floor retail area has been considered at a high level, and early discussions with the shopping centre owner indicate that the organisation is willing to consider options. The evidence shows that linkage via such steps is technically possible and would deliver significant connectivity improvements across the town centre.
- (c) A market demand review has been carried out, and the proposals being presented for public consultation are deliverable and viable in the North West Quarter.

5. Reasons for recommending preferred option

- 5.1 Chelmsley Wood town centre requires investment to ensure it remains strong and vibrant and for it to provide high quality services to residents and visitors and remains an important source of local employment.
- 5.2 The proposals being presented for public consultation try to achieve the delicate balance between development that is transformational and ambitious, but also realistically deliverable.
- 5.3 The proposals being presented are based on a good understanding of the physical constraints of the site, and by considering what is viable and deliverable by the market, based on current and predicted demand.
- 5.4 The proposed options for the redevelopment of the town centre meet the needs of the local community by:
 - (a) Providing public realm to encourage people to visit more and stay longer.
 - (b) Improving connectivity into and around the town centre.
 - (c) Diversifying the offer of the town centre by introducing new food and beverage offer.
 - (d) Delivering new homes.
 - (e) Encouraging residents into the town centre who will use the services and activate spaces outside current active hours.
 - (f) Retaining the police station in the town centre.
 - (g) Encouraging and enabling people to access the town centre by sustainable modes, i.e. walking, cycling and public transport.

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>The redevelopment of the north west quarter of Chelmsley Wood Town centre will have a direct beneficial impact on the vitality of a key local centre for the Borough. Such redevelopment has the potential to deliver new homes and employment.</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>A key feature of the redevelopment proposals for Chelmsley Wood town centre is the provision of high-quality public realm space within the centre and the enhancement of the natural environment around Kingshurst Brook. Development proposals will be carefully considered so they maximise the opportunities for people to walk, cycle and use public transport when visiting the town centre. With the provision of new pedestrian and cycle links to the town centre, the project will encourage active travel and so reduce carbon emissions and improve air quality.</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>The proposals for redevelopment of the town centre are intended to provide improved community facilities and services including health, wellbeing, and employment services. They seek to create safe and attractive spaces where people can meet and socialise.</p>

6.2 Consultation and scrutiny:

6.2.1 A project team has been established which is overseeing the delivery of the feasibility and masterplan work undertaken by the consultant team.

6.2.2 A public engagement exercise was carried out in November and December 2021 to understand current usage and gather public opinion on the strengths and weakness of the existing town centre.

6.2.3 Stakeholder engagement has included engagement with land and property owners, including West Midlands Police, the precinct owners, Ellandi and the NHS. Workshops and 121 meetings have been held with teams from different departments of the Council to feed into the optioneering process.

6.3 Financial implications:

6.3.1 There are no immediate financial implications arising from the consultation exercise, however the further development and delivery of the scheme will require additional resourcing which is yet to be secured.

6.3.2 The feasibility and masterplanning work are being progressed using funding secured from the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) with up to £3.397million having been unlocked to support the development of an outline business case for the scheme.

6.3.3 Work is being undertaken to both: secure further funding to allow for development of the scheme beyond the Outline Business Case stage; and to identify options for funding and financing the delivery of the scheme itself. Any financial implications arising from potential funding sources will be considered and managed throughout

6.4 Legal implications:

6.4.1 There are no legal implications as a direct result of this report.

6.5 Risk implications:

6.5.1 The Corporate Risk Management approach has been applied to identify and assess the significant risks associated with the proposed town centre redevelopment.

6.5.2 A full project risk register has been produced and is monitored regularly. The most significant risks are provided in Appendix B:

6.6 Equality implications:

6.6.1 Accessibility will be a key factor in appraising all masterplan options. A Fair Treatment Assessment of the preferred option will be undertaken as the design progresses further.

7. List of appendices referred to

7.1 Appendix A – Plan A Chelmsley Wood Town Centre and North West Quarter Red Line Boundary

7.2 Appendix B – Risk Register

8. Background papers used to compile this report

8.1 N/A

9. List of other relevant documents

9.1 None