

Cabinet
23rd September 2021

Title: Royal Leamington Spa Town Centre Transformation

Lead Officers: Chris Elliott – Chief Executive, Philip Clarke – Policy & Projects Manager, Martin O’Neill – Projects & Economic Development Business Manager, Mark Brightburn – Project Officer

Portfolio Holders: Cllr. Cooke

Public/Confidential report: Public

Wards of the District directly affected: Leamington Clarendon, Leamington Brunswick, Leamington Willes, Leamington Milverton

Contrary to the policy framework: No

Contrary to the budgetary framework: No

Key Decision: Yes

Included within the Forward Plan: Yes 1241

Equality Impact Assessment Undertaken: No

Consultation & Community Engagement: Proposed by this report

Final Decision: Yes

Accessibility Checked: Yes

Officer/Councillor Approval

Officer Approval	Date	Name
Chief Executive	30/08/21	Chris Elliott
Head of Service	30/08/21	John Careford
CMT	30/08/21	Chris Elliott, Andrew Jones, Tony Perks, Dave Barber
Section 151 Officer	30/08/21	Mike Snow
Monitoring Officer	30/08/21	Phil Grafton
Finance	30/08/21	Mike Snow
Portfolio Holder(s)	02/09/21	Cllr. Cooke

1. Summary

- 1.1. Given the challenges facing the town centre accelerated as they have been via the pandemic and following the debate at the Council meeting 28th July 2021 in response to a petition regarding the pedestrianisation of the Parade in Royal Leamington Spa, this report seeks approval to:
- * note the current extent of investment being planned or carried out;
 - * agree that the existing Town Centre Vision be reviewed and updated;
 - * note other funding bids and that a bid be made to the Levelling Up fund; and,
 - * progress the formation of a Royal Leamington Spa (RLS) Transformation Board and associated governance structure to lead and oversee production of a Transformation Framework for the town centre and funding bids including the Levelling Up Fund.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet note the significant number of projects underway across Leamington's town centre that need co-ordinating as set out in para. 3.1 below.
- 2.2 That Cabinet agree to review and update the town centre vision using a Transformation Framework approach as set out in paragraphs 3.4 to 3.9.
- 2.3 That Cabinet note the bids/expressions of interest for various funding streams made recently and agree that a Levelling-Up Fund bid by February/March 2022 be prepared to help to deliver the Framework.
- 2.4 That Cabinet approves the formation of a Transformation Board to oversee the preparation of the Transformation Framework and the associated governance structure as set out in para 3.14 to 3.17 below and appendix 1 and asks Warwickshire County Council and Royal Leamington Spa Town Council to join as partners on the Board.
- 2.5 That Cabinet, subject to agreeing 2.3 and 2.4 above, determine the Composition of Councillors who will serve on the Transformation Board as set out in para 3.15 in consultation with WCC and LTC.
- 2.6 That, subject to agreeing 2.3 and 2.4 above, that the remit of the Transformation Board is as set out in para 3.16 and 3.17 (subject to discussions with WCC and LTC) and that delegated authority be granted to a designated Cabinet member.
- 2.7 That, subject to agreeing 2.3 and 2.4 above, Cabinet agree to the principle of engagement with key town centre stakeholders via the Transformation Advisory Group as agreed by the Transformation Board set out in para 3.19.

- 2.8 That, subject to agreeing 2.3 and 2.4 above, Cabinet agrees that funds of £50,000 are made available from the Welcome Back Fund to commission external support from consultants and for public consultation.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations

Recommendation 2.1

- 3.1 There are currently a significant number of projects and development activities taking place concurrently in and around Royal Leamington Spa (RLS) town centre. This includes:
- * the various elements of the Creative Quarter (Spencer Yard, Court Street);
 - * the Future High Streets Fund (Town Hall, Old Post Office, Sustainable Movement Network);
 - * the Kenilworth to Leamington cycle way;
 - * the Emscote Road/Warwick Road cycle scheme;
 - * the Development Brief for Riverside House consultation;
 - * the Bath Street Area Improvements (led by WCC Highways funded by WDC Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL);
 - * evaluation of the potential of creating a highline scheme on the old railway line from Leamington Station and a bus/rail exchange in Bath Place;
 - * the electric bus scheme to extend services out from Coventry to Leamington Town Centre;
 - * the park and ride scheme at Greys Mallory delivering (electric) bus services into Leamington Town Centre (and Warwick);
 - * the Commonwealth Games work which includes the Improvements to Victoria Park (WDC led) and the Rail Station Forecourt Improvements (WCC led) as well as the Wayfinding Improvements (WDC led);
 - * the CIL scheme for the Commonwealth Park to relocate the athletics track and create a new open space westward toward Warwick;
 - * the agreed masterplan for Newbold Comyn and the cycle scheme recently approved and funding won for it.
 - * redevelopment of the Kwik fit site on Warwick Road for affordable housing by WDC;
 - * survey of car park structure and evaluation of Covent Garden car park site;
 - * painting/improvement of the rusty rail bridge over Princess Drive; and,
 - * improvements to the roundabout to the junction of Old Warwick Road and Princess Drive.
- 3.2 In addition, there are also an extensive number of private sector interests on sites in the town centre which are at various stages of maturity. For example, The Hide on Oxford Row which is almost at the point of completion. There are also various planning permissions which have not yet been implemented and the Local Plan call for sites has also generated other sites to be identified by landowners/developers. There are in addition other public sector owned sites which deserve further consideration of their opportunity value.
- 3.3 The proceeding paragraphs illustrate a significant picture of real and potential capital investment in the town centre. It raises the challenge though of how best to co-ordinate that investment to maximise the potential

benefit for the wider business and resident community and to ensure that the investment contributes toward the vitality and viability of the town centre and helps to achieve the previously agreed vision.

Recommendation 2.2

- 3.4 Royal Leamington Spa Town Centre last went through a Visioning process culminating in the publication of [A Vision for Leamington Town Centre](#) (Appendix 2) in March 2018. This involved a Leamington Town Centre Forum formed of key organisations involved in the management of the town centre. (members shown on page 4). The Vision set out six “big ideas” to drive change in the town centre. Much has moved on in the town centre since 2018 and the Vision is now in need of reconsideration and refreshing in light of the accelerated changes to the retail sector, other lifestyle changes occurring because of Covid as well as other major considerations such as economic recovery, the ongoing impact of air pollution and the Climate Emergency. There has already been the start of a significant public debate about the future shape of the town centre where a petition was received by the Council from members of the public requesting the permanent pedestrianisation of the Parade. This was considered at the Council meeting on 28th July 2021 which unanimously voted to refer to WCC with wording defined via the Leaders Co-ordinating Group.
- 3.5 It is suggested that a ‘Framework’ process is needed to co-ordinate all this activity across the town centre. A Framework is a strategic level plan which collates all the activity to enable joined up decisions to be taken on town centre aspects. It is crucially not a masterplan and is therefore not fixed in the same way but is able to flex and respond as the conditions and opportunities in the town centre also flex and evolve over time. The on-going process is as important as the plan itself.
- 3.6 WDC officers have researched current best practice via the High Streets Task Force which collates activity across all town centres who are also grappling with similar change and transformation. Oxford Street in London, as ‘the nation’s High Street’, recently in February 2021 produced a Framework for the [Oxford Street District](#). This sets out a Vision for that district based on a greener, smarter, future, together and summarises what they will do. A Framework Plan sets out an approach based on three centres to focus investment and activity within a partnership arrangement. A Delivery Plan then sets out the high level aspects that will be addressed by 2030. Such a ‘Framework’ is seen as a live document, to bring together stakeholders and inform the direction of travel of the area, informs bids/funding, and guides/attracts external investors.
- 3.7 The area proposed to be covered by the Transformation Framework is envisaged to include the town centre area including Christchurch Gardens in the north and the Grand Union Canal in the south, the new proposed Commonwealth Park in the east and Jephson Gardens in the west. It should encompass all the town centre as identified in the current Local Plan but also additional land to the west along the river for which proposals are emerging including those related to the Commonwealth Games and east to Newbold Comyn.

- 3.8 Initial scoping plans and an indicative draft structure for a Transformation Framework document have been prepared to inform this process and will be shared with the Board once established. These show that from this collation of activity across the town centre, strategic plans and concept approaches can be developed to bring aspects together, such as the north/south spine 'High Street' formed by the Parade, Bath Street and Clemens Street which complements the east/west ribs of 'Parks and Gardens' and along the Grand Union Canal, together, these combine to form the main components of the 'Place' in Leamington Spa's town centre.
- 3.9 This conceptual approach enables activities along these spines to be conceived and co-ordinated to deliver a holistic vision of how these areas can be used and developed as the town transforms in the future. Development sites in the town centre can then be influenced to seek to secure support from aspects such as Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to make funds available to support the public realm transformation. Key concerns such as accessibility for the elderly and restricted mobility, location of bus stops, reduction of pollution and noise, movement over the river and the role of markets, will be addressed in a place-led process. Highways works will enable this but not lead it. It is within this context that the "debate" about the Parade needs to be considered and not in a binary and narrow argument to pedestrianise or not.

Recommendation 2.3

- 3.10 Funding is a key aspect of the implementation of the intended Framework for RLS town centre would address but it is also significant that a Framework will help funds to be made and supported. Central Government have various funds relating to town centre aspects which appear at various times. In addition to the Future High Street Fund Bid, this Council has also supported bids by WCC for cycleways along Harbury Lane and Radford Road and for an Expression of Interest in a "Mini Holland" scheme around the town centre.
- 3.11 The town centre would therefore benefit from there being a plan in place to enable the thinking and collaborative working to be in place to be ready to respond to these funding opportunities as they arise and ensure that each funding bid is contributing to delivery of the whole and that the right priorities are taken forward by each funding pot. The Levelling Up Fund for example is anticipated to be launching a Round 2 to be submitted in spring 2022 and ideally Leamington would have a plan in place as context from which then to draw agreed projects from as part of that bid.
- 3.12 The Levelling Up Fund seeks bids of up to £20m and which can be implemented reasonably quickly, which is where having the Transformation Framework in place would help as possible projects and their priority would have been already identified and would have support. It is suggested that a bid to this Fund be progressed for Spring 2022 in tandem with the review of the Vision and the development of the Transformation Framework.
- 3.13 The Council has already proposed the deployment of CIL funds over several years to assist several the projects listed in paragraph 3.1. This may also be matching funds for some funding bids to be made including the Levelling Up

Fund. There will also be opportunity to use Section 106 funds as they arise and looking forward if significant town centre residential schemes are anticipated then this will generate additional CIL above and beyond that already forecast, this could be ring fenced to assist town centre infrastructure improvements and to act as a substantial source of match funding. Of course, the significant private sector interest will also lead to other investment that can in some cases also act as match funding.

Recommendations 2.4, 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7

- 3.14 To oversee the preparation of the Transformation Framework and to seek funding for its delivery it is proposed that a Transformation Board is established as part of a governance structure led by the three tiers of local government working closely together on these inter-related town centre aspects and involving local stakeholders in the process to inform decision making by elected members. Appendix 1 – Governance Structure sets out the proposal for Cabinet approval.
- 3.15 It is suggested that Cabinet determine the composition of who will serve on the Transformation Board. This will be in accordance with the following principles: -
- There would be representatives from on the Board from Warwick District Council, Warwickshire County Council and from Leamington Town Council.
 - The representatives from the District and County Councils will include at least one relevant portfolio holder who will have delegated authority.
 - The representatives also reflect the political balance of the Council.
 - An independent chair is selected and this could be the Chair of the Advisory Group.
- 3.16 Given that it is recognised that the Transformation Board will need to work at pace, it is proposed that certain delegations are agreed to enable it to do so. This would need to be delegated to the appointed Cabinet member and the other participants would in formal terms advise them but in practice make a consensus decision. Insofar as these relate to matters which would need to be otherwise reported back to the Council formally for approval these include:
- Allocation of Welcome Back Fund monies;
 - Commissioning of any consultants and advisers for specialist work (provided the funding of these does not require additional Council support);
 - Approval of a draft Framework for public consultation;
 - Agreeing how public consultation will be undertaken (provided this is accordance with, where appropriate, the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement);

- Approval of the Transformation Framework for recommendation to parent bodies;
- Agree funding bids in relation to the Transformation Framework, especially a Levelling Up Fund bid;
- Monitoring, review, and updates to the Transformation Framework and of successful funding bids (including the FHSF); and
- Reporting on progress of the Transformation Framework to parent bodies and the wider community.

3.17 The Council will seek to agree similar or other delegations with the County Council and Town Council to expedite any decision making of the Board. It could well be that the Board's constitution evolves over time and what is set out here is a first stage given the timescales for the formation and progression of this transformation process are driven in the short term by the need to be ready for the next anticipated funding bid (Levelling Up Fund in spring 2022). The governance remit and arrangements will require discussion and sign off with WCC and LTC and so the recommendations are subject to that process. Both organisations have been engaged and the response, albeit informal is positive.

3.18 It is however noted that this is a longer-term process to get the right framework in place for the town centre. In the medium and longer term, an on-going process is envisaged whereby the Transformation process is kept live and reviewed and updated regularly on a 6 month or annual basis as proposed by the Transformation Board in due course. This will enable the Transformation Framework to be up to date and ready to inform each subsequent funding opportunity that arises. An indicative programme from October 2021 to the end of March 2022 is in Appendix 3.

3.19 The programme sets out actions over the 6-month period to establish the transformation process and enable a Transformation Framework to have been progressed sufficiently to inform the anticipated Levelling Up Fund as a priority action in the short term. This involves establishing the approval to proceed via this report to Cabinet 23rd Sept 2021. It is envisaged that the Transformation Board will be established in October and meet monthly initially as the process is scoped out and set up. The Transformation Advisory Group membership will be approved by the Board as an early action in October enabling the Group to meet in November and have an inception/scoping session. The Group could meet every 2 months or as needed to inform the Transformation Framework in the short term. The Transformation Technical Group will be formed in parallel with the Transformation Board in October and meet fortnightly initially to collate and progress the various technical aspects at a pace.

3.20 It will be necessary to enable sufficient officer time to enable this transformation process to occur. It is envisaged that a member of the Place & Economy Projects Team will dedicate a significant portion of time to being the lead technical officer to coordinate and drive forward the necessary administration of the process, under guidance of the Projects & Economic Development Manager, Policy & Projects Manager and Head of Place &

Economy. Other WDC and WCC officers will support the various technical aspects as needed.

- 3.21 Public Consultation on the Transformation Framework will be extremely important given the high level of interest in the Parade and the town centres future. It is envisaged that public involvement in the Transformation Framework will be undertaken as an ongoing process at regular intervals in the medium to long term. This could be annually or bi-annually dependent on the rate of change or as new large changes are forthcoming. In the short term, consultation to inform the initial shape of the Framework is needed and to support any Levelling Up Funding bid. This could take place early in 2022 subject to Board consideration and approval and would set out a range of options to glean views. Specific consultation on options for the Parade could follow in due course.

Recommendation 2.8

- 3.22 Support from external consultants is likely to be needed as the Framework process is progressed. This is likely to be on aspects such as baseline research to underpin some of the approaches (e.g. a movement study) and support in visualising the change to public realm areas such as the Parade or new squares at the Town Hall for example. Some technical town centre studies are being prepared as part of the new Local Plan and the Local Transport Plan and will feed in as they are completed. It is recommended that a budget of £50K is initially set aside from the Welcome Back Fund to support these elements and should this need changing then a process will be taken through the Board.
- 3.23 The Welcome Back Fund (WBF) is the new name for the old Re-opening the High Streets Safely Fund (RHSSF) which is funded from Central Government via Europe and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).
- 3.24 Warwick District was awarded £127,085 through the RHSSF and then the same again when it became WBF, so total £254,170. The rules have been quite tight on what it can be spent on, so we have only spent around £54.5K to date. Further allocations are working through the process. Leamington has a budget remaining of around £80K total so £50K could be put towards the Transformation Framework leaving £30K for other items. Kenilworth are also yet to deploy their remaining share of the allocation (around £50K). The fund runs until the end of March 2022 currently but could be extended further if the Covid response continues.
- 3.25 The status of the funding is that WDC pays for items within the WBF guidance (in agreement with the allocated Government Contract Manager), WDC then make a claim to Government who check and approve payment, then Government in turn then claim it back from Europe (ERDF).
- 3.26 The fund is to support the safe re-opening of the high streets in relation to Covid. The fund can be used for things like town centre information banners, bollard sleeves, flags, floor stickers and now for 'beautification' so things like planting, trees, benches (like in recently Warwick). It can also be used to support preparation of medium to long terms plans for how the high streets

are going to adapt, post-covid which is where the fund for Leamington can come in to play.

4. Policy Framework

4.1. Fit for the Future (FFF)

4.1.1. The Council's FFF Strategy is designed to deliver the Vision for the District of making it a Great Place to Live, Work and Visit. To that end amongst other things the FFF Strategy contains several Key projects. This report shows the way forward for implementing a significant part of one of the Council's Key projects.

4.1.2. The FFF Strategy has 3 strands, People, Services and Money, and each has an external and internal element to it, the details of which can be found on the Council's website. The table below illustrates the impact of this proposal if any in relation to the Council's FFF Strategy.

4.2. FFF Strands

4.2.1 External impacts of proposal(s)

People - Health, Homes, Communities – Approval of the proposals in this report would enhance the ability of the Council to deliver integrated benefits across the town centre including in relation to the Climate Emergency.

Services - Green, Clean, Safe – The town centre transformation strategy should put climate change at its heart including encouraging low carbon new developments and active travel/low carbon transport.

Money- Infrastructure, Enterprise, Employment – An integrated approach to the town centre will tie together people, place and prosperity to support the changes needed for the town centre's long term vitality.

4.2.2. Internal impacts of the proposal(s)

People - Effective Staff – The development of the proposals will provide development opportunities for staff.

Services - Maintain or Improve Services - The proposals will allow the Council to approach the town centre in an integrated way.

Money - Firm Financial Footing over the Longer Term - The proposals will allow the Council to tie together funding opportunities and revenue from development to enhance the whole town centre.

4.3. Supporting Strategies

4.3.1. The changes town centres are currently facing are a once in a lifetime opportunity to radically alter the way we use our town centres in order to ensure their long term future viability and prosperity. The town centres are at the heart of life across the District for many and the approaches will inform the new Local Plan in planning terms, new Local Transport Plan in

movement terms, the new South Warwickshire Economic Development Strategy and the Climate Emergency Action Plan which will all also address the future of the town centres.

- 4.3.2. Each strand of the FFF Strategy has several supporting strategies. The impact of the recommendations within this report will have a substantial impact on the Council's ability to deliver its desired outcomes for the underpinning economic (Prosperity) strategy. This strand includes a commitment to the "promotion of tourism activities to attract visitors to spend within the district" and a report elsewhere on this agenda makes recommendations in relation to the continuation of Council funding for the sub-regional Destination Management Organisation, Shakespeare's England.
- 4.3.3. The development of the Creative Quarter will provide additional opportunities for the promotion of the district as a destination for visitors and for their spending power to be harnessed to the benefit of the local economy. Cultural tourism in the region is expected to grow following the City of Culture year in 2021 and the Commonwealth Games in 2022. To maximise the economic impact of this upon Warwick District the Council must intervene and use its thriving creative sector to ensure that there is a competitive offer to bring visitors to the town and the development of the Creative Quarter and the preparations for the Commonwealth Games will significantly assist the achievement of that goal.
- 4.3.4. The Transformation Framework is a key initiative to support the local economy to provide high quality jobs and increase the prosperity of the town in line with the Business Strategy 2020-23.
- 4.3.5. The Council's Climate Emergency Action Programme is evidence of its commitment to become a net zero carbon organisation by 2025 and to facilitate reducing the District's carbon emissions as close to zero by 2030. The design of the projects will include as many energy efficiency features as possible to help the Council to achieve their aim whilst allowing the projects to be financially viable.

4.4. **Changes to Existing Policies**

- 4.4.1. Not applicable.

4.5. **Impact Assessments**

- 4.5.1. Not applicable at this stage.

5. **Budgetary Framework**

- 5.1 The costs of conducting the consultations and reviewing the responses are covered within paragraphs 3.22 to 3.26. The cost of appointing consultants will be covered through allocation of Welcome Back Fund monies available to Leamington (£80,000) so is within budget.

6. Risks

- 6.1. There are no specific risks related to taking the proposed Transformation Framework out to public consultation, although it is anticipated that the consultation will be subject to a range of responses, including varied views on key components such as the future of the Parade. All comments will be fully considered and if necessary, the Transformation Framework will be amended.
- 6.2. In terms of a Levelling Up Fund bid, the most obvious risk is whether it can be worked up in time given a period at most of 6 months. This will require pace of work and decision making hence the governance proposals advanced in this report. The other risk is that a bid is not successful and so the effort may be perceived as wasted. However, the mitigation to this risk is not to treat the work as wasted but to accept it is ready to go perhaps in an amended form for another funding opportunity.
- 6.3. A risk register will be developed for the Transformation Framework when completed and its risks can be monitored in that context as a programme.

7. Alternative Option(s) considered

- 7.1. The Council could choose not to pursue the Transformation process, and this would lead to continuation of projects being undertaken without a strategic context in place and lacking the overall cross-coordination needed.