

Appendix 4: Covent Garden Feasibility Brief

Objectives

This brief sets out the Council's need for a feasibility study, to understand the options and potential designs for a Community and Wellbeing Hub at Covent Garden, Leamington Spa.

The Council wishes to understand what, and how, different community and wellbeing features may fit within the area of the site, and to understand whether these options enable the scheme to be financially viable for the Council.

The feasibility study will, in the future, be used as a basis for a development brief for this site, if financially viable.

The Feasibility Study

The aim of this brief is to guide the preparation of a feasibility study on the future use of the site, incorporating an engagement approach with local community, businesses, and partner organisations.

The feasibility study needs to assist the Council in:

- Understanding the potential form, content, and a design for a Community Wellbeing Hub at Covent Garden, considering the work to date, and any other options, setting out the physical feasibility for the site
- Analyse, test, and conclude whether these design options are financially viable for the Council to proceed, along with an assessment of risk to the Council
- Test whether the opportunities set out above will realise the potential benefits
- Provide an engagement strategy for the Council to engage with the local business community; partner agencies; and residents to help shape proposals coming forward from an early stage.

Background

Warwick District Council owns the land at Covent Garden, Leamington Spa. It is used as a multi-storey car park, and a short stay surface car park. The land is at the northern end of the town centre, adjacent to the Parade. The immediately surrounding area is retail, with some residential areas, providing excellent opportunities for development on the site.

The site area is around 1.36 acres, in the heart of Leamington Spa. It is located one block to the west of the Parade, with frontage to both Tavistock Street and to Russell Street. The area is known for its independent shops and cafes, and any development must be mindful of the area it is in. The current structure is a nine level multi storey car park, built c.1960. It currently has 355 regular bays and 36 parent/child bays available for use. The original capacity was 516 bays in total, but 125 bays are unavailable due to the closure of levels 7 and 8 of the car park. The adjacent surface car park currently has 72 regular bays, 8 mobility bays and 2 EV charge point bays.

Over time, the car park is subject to Alkali Silica Reaction (ASR), and more recent structural investigation work has indicated that the multi storey car park has a number of structural issues and is in decline. In summary, the findings of the structural work around the cracking in the beams is that the car park is significantly under designed, and cracking has appeared in the beams supporting the structure. Larger SUV's and heavier electric cars are also likely to increase the cracking issue. Ongoing repairs to the structure are expensive and whilst the car park is unlikely to collapse imminently, it will continue to deteriorate if no action is taken soon.

The Vision for Covent Garden

The Council's aspirations for the future of the Covent Garden site are to focus on a theme of health and wellbeing in the community. This concept brings both services and the community together, through provision of a broad range of services in one location.

This vision focuses on improving health and well-being in the widest sense and supporting town centre health provision and the positive influence this may have on both individuals and the health of the town centre itself. It also provides a practical way of delivering a strategy of making the town centre the heart of the local community with a diversity of uses.

It is recognised that health and wellbeing have a key role to play in the town centre, in supporting both social and economic recovery on the high street, particularly in response to the pandemic. In making these services accessible within the district, it could help to regenerate the northern end of the Parade and to drive footfall, providing economic benefits for other businesses nearby. The Council has a key role in helping to shape the town centre as we look beyond the pandemic, and in bringing community and services together. The Covid-19 emergency has impacted the way in which residents and visitors use the town centre, and the flexibility of this space for the community is key in developing the future of the town.

Principles and Context for Development

Group Leaders identified the following key principles to guide and underpin any potential regeneration scheme on the Covent Garden site:

- **Climate Action** and delivery of our carbon goals for 2025 as a Council; and Warwick District by 2030. The Council is committed to promoting the principles of sustainability in the re-development of the Covent Garden site.
- **High quality, agile services** that meet the changing needs of our residents and support a modal shift in the way our teams operate, enabling flexible working with enhanced connectivity and digital resources.
- **Income generation**, to strengthen our financial resilience, diversify income risk and provide sustainable flows to strengthen the General Fund.

- **Community value**, delivering maximum benefits around place shaping for the local community, increasing footfall, and positively contributing to and promoting the well-being and future needs of the town centre, and responding to community needs.

The relevant planning policies that apply are set out at Appendix A and this includes other planning policy information.

Other issues that the feasibility study will need to address are:

- The development will need to be net zero carbon in operation, certified and demonstrated when constructed and should incorporate renewable energy sources
- Determine options for future car parking provision
- Electric charging points in line with the relevant standards, with a need to be future ready
- The use of exemplar design and build techniques to provide an excellent quality scheme
- Maximising the amenities and benefits of the site for residents and for the local community
- Encouraging connectivity between the site and the wider town centre and improving linkages to the Parade and park areas
- Consideration of scale, massing, and accessibility to the site, respecting the setting of other buildings
- Consideration of public realm opportunities
- Preservation of views to and around the site
- That any housing development is inclusive through the provision of affordable housing is critical; We expect 40% affordable housing in line with current Council policies set out in the Warwick District Local Plan

Potential Occupiers

The Project Team have been in discussion with both health providers and community-focussed businesses to understand both current and future needs in Leamington and within Warwick District. The pandemic has demonstrated a change in how the community use the town centre and services, and the Council needs to consider how to support both services and the town centre in the future. The view is that by bringing services together in the town centre to form a "Community Wellbeing Hub," it can make these services more accessible for the whole community, positively promoting wellbeing, and it also helps to drive footfall for businesses nearby improving income generation.

A local GP practice has expressed interest in expanding, in line with the increasing population in the area, and these services sit well with other community and health-based services. Other health bodies have expressed interest in co-locating, and there is also scope for community focussed, but non-NHS activity e.g., Post Office; Job Centre. There is evidence of a willingness for these partners to come together, collaborate, and to re-develop the site with a community focus, in a scheme that is vastly different to the previous scheme for the site.

An exercise to understand high-level potential requirements from interested parties was completed and requirements have been collated as a first step to understand the potential space required, and other needs, and whether the concept of a Community Wellbeing Hub will fit such needs into a workable design on the site; and if so the types of considerations that need to be prioritised.

Parties that have expressed an interest in space at the site, alongside good parking on site include:

- GP services: There is potential for expanding a local GP surgery into a new, purpose-built town centre surgery.
- Associated health services: Other services that sit alongside GP services, including options around mental health support. This would provide accessible health services in the community, in one place.
- South Warwickshire Citizens Advice: There is potential for co-locating this advice service on the site.
- Job Centre: There is potential for the Job Centre to re-locate to the site.
- Post Office: The Post Office have a strong interest in space on the site, for an additional offering in the town centre. It would need to include space for deliveries, and there is also potential for them to include a retail offering.
- Warwick District Council: There is potential for a Hub for front line services, dependent upon the outcomes of the separate future accommodation needs report for WDC.
- Warwickshire County Council: There is potential for the provision of certain services to be in the town centre location.

There are opportunities associated with locating a Community Wellbeing Hub in the town centre, such as being an opportunity to lead the way with an exemplar, sustainable building, and surrounding areas and to enhance and update the image of the site. Some opportunities that need to be tested include whether there is an opportunity to promote connectivity to green spaces at Christchurch Gardens at the North of the Parade; whether this is an opportunity to provide a modern, fit for purpose car park with a smaller footprint, with EV and cycle features, and whether the scheme may generate and drive further footfall in this part of Leamington Spa.

Engagement strategy

The development of the feasibility study needs to make provision for proactively engaging with local community, businesses and partner organisations in order to capture early views of different groups of people and businesses to better shape this scheme. The proposed approach sought is to provide a platform for constructive, interactive dialogue that reaches interested parties and town centre groups.

Appendix A: Planning Policy

Appendix B: Site history