

Report to:	EXECUTIVE CABINET
Date:	27 September 2023
Executive Member:	Councillor Vimal Choksi, Executive Member (Town Centres, Communities)
Reporting Officer:	Julian Jackson, Director of Place
Subject:	ASHTON PUBLIC REALM STRATEGY – PHASE 2 (UNFUNDED)
Report Summary:	The report incorporates the principles of the approved Phase 1 Public Realm Strategy in sets out the vision, design principles and key themes for the wider town centre in ensuring a robust and cohesive town centre wide strategy is in place to attract further investment into Ashton Town Centre.
Recommendations:	<p>That Executive Cabinet APPROVES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) The proposed Phase 2 Public Realm Strategy for the wider Town Centre (ii) The Director of Place proactively apply to have additional external funding to support the proposed cohesive approach to Ashton’s regeneration in the Phase 2 Public Realm Strategy. <p>That Executive Cabinet NOTES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (iii) Progress made to date in delivering the Phase 1 Market Square proposals. (iv) There is no funding currently available to deliver any of the schemes and initiatives identified in this Phase 2 strategy.
Corporate Plan:	Key aims of the Corporate Plan are to provide opportunities for people to fulfil their potential through work, skills, and enterprise and to ensure modern infrastructure and a sustainable environment that works for all generations and future generations. The interventions that will be supported by the Ashton Public Realm Strategy will deliver against these aims in the areas of job creation, modern infrastructure, and a sustainable environment.
Policy Implications:	The proposed interventions will support the policy aims of the Council’s Inclusive Growth Strategy 2021, Tameside Climate Change & Environment Strategy, the Council’s growth priorities agreed at Council February 2020 and the draft Greater Manchester Places for Everyone joint development strategy.
Financial Implications: (Authorised by the statutory Section 151 Officer & Chief Finance Officer)	<p>The Council does not have specific General Fund project budgets in place to support day-to-day expenditure in relation to delivering this Strategy.</p> <p>Costs associated with the delivery of the Strategy are highly likely to meet the definition of capital expenditure and can be considered as such once they are defined in a suitable programme of works and are approved by Executive Cabinet.</p> <p>The Council has defined phase 1 works in Section 2 of this report, and prior reporting to Executive Cabinet.</p> <p>The phase 1 works (outlined in Section 2) will be financed via Levelling</p>

Up Fund capital grant funding awarded to the Council of £19.870m (total grant award). Within this sum, £11.200m is allocated to finance public realm improvements in the town centre.

In addition to this sum the approved capital programme has a Council funded budget allocation of £4.251m for public realm works across the Borough. Any decision in future taken by Executive Cabinet on use of this in support of the Ashton Public Realm Strategy should be considered in the round against the needs in the Borough so as not to make a decision that, upon review, is recognised as being sub-optimal in terms of the Council's Best Value duty.

Table 1 below provides a summary of the capital schemes in Ashton town centre that will be financed by the Levelling Up Fund grant and Council funding within the approved capital programme.

Table 1: Capital Funding Available for Public Realm and Ashton

Scheme component	Levelling Up Fund Grant (£m)	Council Funding (£m)	Total (£m)
Public Realm Improvements	11.200	4.251	15.451
Ashton Town Hall Restoration	3.400	-	3.400
Former Ashton Interchange Site	5.270	-	5.270
Total	19.870	4.251	24.121

As noted in the recommendations, there is no funding identified for delivery of Phase 2. In the current high interest environment around borrowing from the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB), it is not recommended that the Council finances Phase 2 from external borrowing currently. A full His Majesty's Treasury (HMT) Green Book business case will be required to support future programmes to deliver Phase 2 to assure Executive Cabinet that any decision taken protects the General Fund and delivers value-for-money across Tameside as a place.

The content of this report, and the recommendations and decisions do not place pressure on the General Fund, nor do they increase the budget gap across the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). Should there be any adverse impacts from these decisions they must be constrained within existing resources.

Legal Implications:
(Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)

There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report. Legal services continue to provide support to the project as it progresses particularly in relation to any future bids for external funding.

Risk Management:

Set out in the main body of the report

Background Information:

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Mike Reed – Head of Major Programmes



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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 On 27 October 2021 it was announced that the £19.870m Levelling Up Fund (LUF) bid for Ashton Town Centre had been successful. The specific interventions proposed in the LUF bid were prepared in accordance with the requirements of the LUF and are critical to unlocking the comprehensive redevelopment of the Town Centre, supporting a coherent vision, and completing of the final phase of Vision Tameside.
- 1.2 A multidisciplinary team led by Planit IE were procured via STaR, the Council's shared Procurement service, in January 2022 to prepare a strategy for public realm works across Ashton Town Centre both within the LUF programme and for future works, subject to additional funding. The team include architects, cost specialists, engineers, and market operations.
- 1.3 Phase 1 of the strategy is now being implemented and focuses on delivering Levelling Up Funding proposals for the redevelopment of Market Square and the outdoor market which have been submitted to the local planning authority for approval. A budget of £11.200m is identified for public realm works in the Town Centre for delivery by 31 March 2025, as previously approved by Executive Cabinet. Progress on delivery of the Ashton Town Centre LUF programme and public realm works is reported quarterly to the Council's Strategic Planning and Capital Monitoring Panel.
- 1.4 This Phase 2 Public Realm Strategy incorporates high level design principles for the wider town centre and includes the more detailed proposals for Market Square included in the first phase strategy. The focus for this Phase 2 Strategy is on improving the connectivity of key town centre destinations such as St Petersfield, Stamford Street and Old Street with the redevelopment of the Market Square area and core town centre uses.
- 1.5 The Executive Cabinet report from 29 March 2023 ([Item 9](#)), sets out the approvals for the detailed design to be undertaken on the agreed scheme for Market Square and surrounding sites including Fletcher Square, Market Avenue, Warrington Street and land between Ashton Town Hall and Tameside One. Whilst the planning submission includes all this area within the planning application boundary, the Levelling Up Funding will be used for the redevelopment of Market Square and future funding will be identified to deliver the remaining areas.
- 1.6 Whilst new projects are identified in the strategy for delivery, the Council has no funding available at the present time and will be seeking opportunities to attract further funding streams. This second phase of the strategy is important in ensuring Ashton Town Centre has a clear vision and plan in place to respond positively to future funding initiatives, as and when they emerge, to deliver these later phases of works.

2. ASHTON PUBLIC REALM STRATEGY – PHASE 1, MARKET SQUARE

- 2.1 The final phase one strategy can be viewed in **Appendix 1** and is centred on a vision where *'Ashton Market is the beating heart of the town. A modern market for everyone, a destination attracting locals and visitors, hosting a range of entertaining events.'* The detailed design work and consultation findings are included within the Executive Cabinet report referenced in Section 1 of this report.
- 2.2 The proposal will result in the complete redevelopment of Market Square including the removal of all existing structures, market stalls, and street furniture. A new modern and flexible market square will be created using high quality materials, a level surface created across the square to improve accessibility and movement as well as the capability to deliver events of varying scales, new seating areas, tree planting, and greening including the installation of Sustainable

Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) to reduce surface run off, play, infrastructure to enable access to power.

- 2.3 The most significant proposal is the installation of a large canopy structure for Market Square. From discussions with market traders and kiosk operators, the view is that Ashton should retain an outdoor market and that the kiosks increased footfall to Market Square. To build on the vision of a modern market square that future-proofs Ashton's traditional market offer, the large canopy installed will incorporate new kiosk facilities and market stalls to futureproof Ashton's outdoor market for future generations. In addition, the canopy will include a more diverse offer that includes a food and drink offer, events, and leisure to encourage activity in the evening, all of which will be protected from the weather and so can be used all year round. Waste bins from traders and other storage areas are included into the final design.
- 2.4 The redeveloped Market Square will act as a catalyst to regenerating other areas in the town centre – some of which are identified in the Phase 2 Strategy – attracting a broader demographic of visitors, improving the local offer, and instil a sense of pride in the town centre. The detailed design work is being progressed and all being well, a decision at the Council's Speakers Panel will enable to Council to progress with the appointment of a contractor to deliver the scheme.
- 2.5 Extensive consultation has been carried out with the local community, key stakeholders, Ashton Town Team, and Ashton market traders and with the local community at the Love Ashton event held in Ashton Market Hall on 12 March 2022. A consultation strategy (**Appendix 1**) includes a summary of comments received at the Love Ashton event, all of which have led into the emerging proposals and concepts of the next stage consultation brochure (Executive Summary) (**Appendix 2**). It was clear from feedback at the Love Ashton event that residents and visitors to Ashton want to see change and an improved offer of the Market Square with many people favouring the idea of a canopied structure in the square. Anti-social behaviour associated with the existing market stalls was also high on the number of comments that people made with many references to feeling unsafe in the area.

3. ASHTON PUBLIC REALM STRATEGY – PHASE 2, ASHTON TOWN CENTRE WIDE

- 3.1 The second phase of the public realm strategy for Ashton includes longer term proposals to regenerate the wider town centre and includes Stamford Street Central, Old Street, and St. Michael's Square. The strategy incorporates the existing approved scheme for Wellington Road and extend to Katherine Street, Penny Meadows, and Oldham Road. The strategy integrates the public realm strategy for the Future St Petersfield masterplan area demonstrating a cohesive approach to all this work.
- 3.2 The Phase 2 Public Realm Strategy (**Appendix 3**) will enhance Ashton's unique character to become a truly memorable destination. This requires a holistic approach, considering a variety of factors to create a comprehensive solution for Ashton town centre. Proposals are sustainable, encourage a sense of community and seek to improve health and well-being of the local community.
- 3.3 Consultation has been undertaken including discussions with Council officers, key stakeholders, Ashton Town Team, Ashton market traders and with the local community at the Love Ashton event held in Ashton Market Hall on 12 March 2022. A consultation strategy (**Appendix 1**) illustrates the types of responses that were received at the Love Ashton event.
- 3.4 The vision builds on the proposals for Market Square where *'Ashton Town Centre will be known for celebrating its unique heritage and distinctive identity. A compact, well-connected, and sustainable place. A friendly and welcoming place for future generations to enjoy. A destination where people can socialise and relax. The Market Square will be the beating heart of the town; a modern market and public space enlivened by events, cafe culture and a vibrant*

evening economy'. In response to this vision, and inclusive of the proposals identified in the Phase 1 Strategy, there are several themes covered in this Phase 2 Strategy including:

- Inclusive and accessible
- Townscape context
- Responding to heritage
- Connectivity and accessibility
- Sustainability
- Safer streets and spaces
- Culture and events
- Health and well-being
- Wayfinding, lighting, and signage
- Brand identity and public art

3.5 The vision is centred on several themes for Ashton that include:

- Supporting the evening/night-time offer,
- A welcoming and high quality market offer,
- Attractive green spaces,
- Facilities for walking and cycling,
- A legible and connected town centre,
- Celebrating Ashton's assets.

3.6 A series of design principles respond to the context of the Town Centre and underpin the public realm strategy. The design principles are specific strategies and spatial proposals that will help to shape the future of Ashton Town Centre and the delivery of the vision. These include:

- Connecting St Petersfield to the heart of the town,
- Creating a series of spaces to create destination in the town,
- Redefine the market as the heart of the town,
- Enhance the arrival to the town centre to encourage footfall into the town e.g., Ikea and Ashton Interchange,
- Define connections across the town to improve people movement in and around Ashton town centre.

3.7 As a result of the vision, design principle and themes outlined above, some key projects are identified for:

- Ashton Market Hall – the Council has recently secured funding through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to repurpose vacant and underused space inside the market hall to include space for culture, leisure, and events.
- Old Street - options to re-imagine this historic route, improve the environment for pedestrians and cyclists, whilst balancing the access needs of servicing, taxis, and emergency vehicles.
- Stamford Street Central - to highlight the street's historic lively character while creating a walkable, pleasant, and attractive zone with tree-planting and flexible spaces that will support resident's everyday life routine, as well as the area's daytime and nighttime economy. Stamford Street Central will become an east-west one way thoroughfare with pedestrian priority and cyclist traffic.
- Oldham Road - proposal to reduce the carriageway width and improve pedestrian crossings and street trees will create an attractive environment for walking and cycling.
- Katherine Street - proposal to improve the public realm in Katherine Street will future proof the route into the town heart and promote residential growth to the west of Ashton.
- St Michaels Square – proposals to reanimate the space. To introduce a green barrier to the busy interchange and encourage a space for outdoor seating and a place to celebrate the heritage of the town.

3.8 The strategy also includes reference to the Mayors Challenge Fund (MCF) scheme known as Albion Way and Wellington Road. Work is ongoing to finalise the draft business case following feedback. The proposals will complement the wider town centre plans and public realm improvements and will be subject to further modelling work being carried out by the Council's Highways team.

4. CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

4.1 The Council has carried out extensive consultation on the public realm proposals for both the Market Square and wider town centre. The Love Ashton event was very popular and generated a lot of interest in the town centre proposals. The Council has also engaged several stakeholders including Ashton Town Team, Tameside College, Ashton Sixth Form, Ashton Delivery Group, local businesses, residents, landowners including the shopping centre owners, and ward members. The findings of this consultation are included in **Appendix 1** of this report.

4.2 The local community in Ashton have made it clear that they want to see improvements across the town centre. Issues with anti-social behaviour, lack of offer, poor quality environment and issues accessing the town centre were all popular responses throughout the consultation.

4.3 Feedback from the consultation events, surveys and key stakeholder workshops has been fed into this final strategy.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT

5.1 The main risks associated with the delivery of the Public Realm Strategy are identified in the table below.

Risk Area	Detail	RAG Rating	Mitigation	RAG Rating
Programme	Lack of a town centre wide strategy could impact delivery of projects across the town.	Yellow	Strategy provides a cohesive approach to town centre regeneration.	Green
Programme	Lack of capacity within the Council and partners to undertake workstreams in line with expectations.	Yellow	If further funding secured, additional resource would be required to deliver outcomes.	Yellow
Financial	No approved strategy for wider town centre compromises the authority in successfully bidding for further external funding.	Yellow	Once the strategy is approved, the likelihood of future funding bids being successful increases.	Green
Financial	No funding identified to deliver projects in the Phase 2 Strategy	Red	Once approved, the Council will continue to seek opportunities for external funding to deliver schemes	Yellow

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 As outlined in the Phase 1 Public Realm Strategy for Market Square, the redevelopment of this significant civic outdoor space provides an opportunity to kickstart the regeneration of Ashton Town Centre. Building on several of the design principles within the Phase 1 strategy, this Phase 2 strategy provides the wider context for regenerating the town centre. Proposals focus on destinations and place making and seek to ensure that these are well connected to the core of the town centre, Market Square and surrounding businesses and assets.
- 6.2 The strategy provides a cohesive approach to regeneration in the town centre, building on some of the towns existing assets such as St Petersfield, Ikea, the shopping centres and landmark heritage features along Stamford Street and Old Street. Whilst the proposals (aside from the Phase 1 Market Square planning application) sit outside of the existing Levelling Up Funding, the strategy will enable the Council to seek additional funding to help to deliver on the vision for Ashton Town Centre outlined in this strategy.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 As set out at the front of the report.