

<b>Report to:</b>	<b>EXECUTIVE CABINET</b>
<b>Date:</b>	29 March 2023
<b>Executive Member:</b>	Councillor Vimal Choksi, Executive Member (Town Centres, Communities)
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Julian Jackson, Director of Place
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>ASHTON PUBLIC REALM STRATEGY: PHASE ONE, MARKET SQUARE</b>
<b>Report Summary:</b>	The report provides a summary of the findings from the recent public consultation along with the final strategy for the delivery of the redevelopment of the Market Square and outdoor market in Ashton Town Centre utilising Levelling Up Funding.
<b>Recommendations:</b>	That Executive Cabinet be recommended to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Note the work to date in preparing the proposal for Market Square and the outdoor market for Ashton Town Centre, including the key findings of the consultation and engagement to date;</li> <li>(ii) To review and approve the final proposals relating to the redevelopment of Ashton Market Square and outdoor market (Phase One) Public Realm Strategy for Ashton Town Centre;</li> <li>(iii) Approve to progress the detailed design based on the final strategy.</li> </ul>
<b>Corporate Plan:</b>	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 proposed Ashton Mayoral Development Zone will deliver against these aims in the areas of job creation, modern infrastructure and a sustainable environment.
<b>Policy Implications:</b>	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.
<b>Financial Implications: (Authorised by the statutory Section 151 Officer &amp; Chief Finance Officer)</b>	<p>The report requests approval to progress to the final detailed design of the Market square public realm and outdoor market works in Ashton town centre.</p> <p>The related works will be financed via Levelling Up Fund capital grant funding awarded to the Council of £19,870,000 (total grant award). Within this sum, £11,200,000 is allocated to finance public realm improvements in the town centre.</p> <p>In addition to this sum the approved capital programme has a Council funded budget allocation of £4,251,000 for public realm</p>

works across the whole borough. A total budget allocation of £15,451,000.

The table 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.

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Levelling Up Fund Grant</b>	<b>Council Funding</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>£'000</b>	<b>£'000</b>	<b>£'000</b>
Public Realm Improvements	11,200	4,251	15,451
Ashton Town Hall Restoration	3,400	0	3,400
Remediation Of Former Interchange Site	5,270	0	5,270
<b>Total</b>	<b>19,870</b>	<b>4,251</b>	<b>24,121</b>

The total cost of the draft proposals for the public realm works to Market square and outdoor market area are estimated at £10,800,000 (section 3.2 refers). This cost will be updated during the final design of the scheme.

This cost is included within table 1 (section 5.1 of the report) together with existing public realm related commitments of £2,199,000.

The estimated total commitment sum to date of £12,999,000 will be financed via the public realm budget of £15,451,000.

The estimated balance of £2,452,000 will be required to finance any further works to the Market square and outdoor market area together with any related work to Albion Way which is subject to approval of a separate grant funding bid and subsequent report to Members.

The final design of the Market square and outdoor market scheme will also be subject to Member approval via a further report at a later date. The report will need to include details of the proposed capital works and related cost implications together with financing arrangements.

The report will also need to include details of the implications on the revenue budget of the Council. This will include (but is not limited to) the evaluation and impact of rent and service charge income levied on market stall holders and market ground kiosk tenants (including any VAT related implications) together with the financing of the future maintenance of the scheme.

**Legal Implications:  
(Authorised by the Borough  
Solicitor)**

As set out in the main body the report a consultation exercise has been undertaken to assist the council in developing the strategy in relation to the market.

This report provides Members with the feedback on the outcomes of the consultation which has been carefully considered by the project officers when reviewing the draft strategy.

Members as the decision makers must now in order that they can conscientiously take the feedback into account when finalising the strategy.

**Risk Management:**

A risk register for the project is in place and regularly reviewed. The main risks are summarised in Section Eight below.

**Background Information:**

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Damien Cutting – Economic Growth Lead



Telephone: 07989425566



e-mail: [damien.cutting@tameside.gov.uk](mailto:damien.cutting@tameside.gov.uk)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 On 27 October 2021 it was announced that the £19,870,000 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 The Council has now commenced delivery of the Ashton Town Centre LUF programme in the context of an emerging wider strategic vision for Ashton Town Centre following the decision by Executive Cabinet on 24 November 2021. A Memorandum of Understanding with Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) was signed in February 2022, which has enabled the first payments of the grant to be drawn down by the Council. A further update was provided to Executive Cabinet on 9 February 2022. 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.
- 1.3 The interventions supported by the LUF are critical to unlocking the comprehensive redevelopment of the Town Centre and integrating with other as part of a coherent vision, completing of the final phase of Vision Tameside. The enabling works will act as a catalyst for significantly accelerating delivery of the comprehensive transformation of the Town Centre and unlock its full potential.
- 1.4 A multidisciplinary team led by Planit IE were procured via STaR in January 2022 to prepare a strategy for the redevelopment Ashton Town Centre. The team include architects, cost specialists, engineers and market operations. The Public Realm Strategy will cover the whole of the town centre of Ashton however, given the successful Levelling Up Fund monies, Phase One of the strategy focuses on proposals for the redevelopment of Market Square and the outdoor market.
- 1.5 The Council has secured funding of £19,870,000 from LUF, of which £11,200,000 is identified for public realm works in the Town Centre for delivery by 31 March 2025. As the priority area of focus is to deliver works linked to Market Square, the public realm strategy and some of the design principles are primarily focused on this area and its immediate surrounds. However, the Public Realm Strategy includes proposals, strategies and design principles for the whole of the Town Centre. It will be important that Ashton Town Centre has a clear vision and plan in place in order to respond positively to future funding initiatives as and when they emerge in order to deliver these later phases of works.
- 1.6 Approval was granted at Tameside Council's Board meeting 19 October 2022, to consult on a draft proposal (Phase One) for Ashton Market Square and outdoor market for a period of four weeks. Alongside the draft proposals, a survey was issued and a consultation strategy set out the detail of who would be consulted, how people could have their say and included a series of meetings with key stakeholders including market traders in Ashton. A summary of the consultation findings are presented in Section Three of this report.
- 1.7 A wider public realm strategy for Ashton Town Centre will be prepared and will include further design principles for the public realm across the town. This Phase Two public realm strategy will ensure that a strategic approach is taken and will include proposals on how the town centre and its assets can be better connected to ensure visitors are able to access to town safely and efficiently. A further report on the Phase Two strategy will be submitted to the Council's Executive early summer 2023.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Overall, average occupancy of markets across the rest of the country has dropped significantly in the last 10 years. Both the National Association British Market Authorities (NABMA) National Markets Survey (2022) and Mission For Markets Survey (2018) report that occupancy of markets nationally is down by between 40-45%. The age profile of traders remains high. The Survey revealed that currently 47% of traders are in the 41-50 category and 41% of traders are in 51-60 category. Only 8% of traders are under 40. At the time of the last Survey 70% of traders were aged 50 or over.
- 2.2 The partial redevelopment of Market Square and the outdoor market was completed in 2015. The current outdoor market is made up of a total of 104 fixed market stalls and 8 kiosk facilities, some of which are split and have the potential to accommodate up to 14 businesses.
- 2.3 Ashton's outdoor market operates across 7 days through the week. Aligning with the national trend in market activity, Ashton market trader numbers have declined. Monday to Saturday, the general market operates at an average occupancy of 25% across the 6 days. This average occupancy is positively skewed due to the success of Tuesday's established, mixed market offer which tends to have an occupancy of up to 70%. Sunday's 'table-top' market has an average occupancy of around 90% across the year. In actual terms, the average occupancy on the outdoor market through the week (excluding Tuesday and Sunday) tends to be between 10-15%.
- 2.4 It is also worth noting that there is a programme of specialist markets which have the potential to grow and become more established through improvements works to Market Square. Recent youth markets in partnership with Tameside Council have also proved popular and such markets have experienced a growth across the country in developing social enterprise through markets.
- 2.5 The rest of Market Square lacks vibrancy, is an unappealing and unattractive for visitors to the area and the space has remained a poor state for a number of years. There are few opportunities for dwell and a lack of greenery that would encourage people to spend more time in the area. In addition, ground levels are uneven making access for visitors through Market Square, particularly those in wheelchairs and with other mobility problems difficult. Some events are delivered throughout the year including the annual Lantern Parade which attracts thousands of visitors to the area. There are some limitations to the scale and types of events which could be delivered in Market Square due to the existing configuration of the outdoor market and the lack of power and other utilities that attract event providers.
- 2.6 Market Square has experienced a number of anti-social behaviour incidents in recent years. Complaints related to intoxicated individuals consuming alcohol & other substances and causing a nuisance. Vacant market stalls provide weather protection and cover for these individuals making the area less desirable to visit throughout the day and night. Market traders have also experienced problems with anti-social behaviour to the extent that some close their business early. In October 2022, Council approved a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) to prohibit activities linked to ASB. Feedback from speaking to local stakeholders including the Council's own Markets Team and Community Safety Team as well as the general public have noticed an increased police presence and fewer incidents of ASB. However, as the spring and summer months approach, this will require close monitoring.

## **3. PUBLIC CONSULTATION FINDINGS**

- 3.1 Pre-consultation was carried out 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. The report to Board in October 2022 included a Consultation Statement with a summary of comments received at the Love Ashton

event. All of the comments received were fed into the draft proposals and concepts that were subject to the recent formal public consultation.

- 3.2 The draft proposal for the redevelopment of Market Square (including Ashton outdoor market) were the subject of a full public consultation for a period of 4 weeks across November and December 2022. The draft proposals were costed and fall within the identified LUF budget allocated for the public realm in the town centre. The total cost of the draft proposals is £10,800,000 and includes the removal of all of kiosks and market stalls and replacing them with the construction of a large canopy (including a canopy attached to Market Hall) that included flexible market units to meet the needs of modern market traders. Costings for the draft proposal has been based on the Gold Standard of public realm delivery and include an annual 8.4% inflation allowance. The detailed design work will refine the design principles identified in the approved strategy which will also be subject to more detailed costings.
- 3.3 The Consultation Statement is included in **Appendix 2** setting out who would be consulted, how they could have their say, and which key stakeholders would be targeted to ensure a broad depth of responses.
- 3.4 Feedback from the consultation and engagement to date including the Love Ashton event in March 2022, identified the need for the delivery of significant improvements to the outdoor market and Market Square in Ashton is a priority for the local community in order to breathe new life into the town centre to develop a clear local picture and to gain an insight into issues, opportunities, and future aspirations for Ashton Market Square and outdoor market.
- 3.5 An online survey was issued alongside the draft consultation brochure. A total of 551 responses were received. Hard copies of the survey and exhibition boards were displayed and made available for completion at Ashton Library and Ashton Market Hall throughout the duration of the public consultation. In addition, Council officers discussed the draft proposals at meetings and workshops with key stakeholders including market traders, Tameside College students and staff, Tameside Owners and Drivers Association, and other Council services. Some stakeholder groups were contacted but did not reply or were unable to commit to a discussion. These groups will have an opportunity to speak to Council officers going forward responses will be fed into the detailed design work.
- 3.6 A public event was held in Ashton Market Hall on Saturday 26 November 2022 where local businesses, market traders and visitors to the town were able to speak to Council Officers and members of the consultant team about the draft proposals. Approximately 90-100 people were engaged at the event and provided some very useful and constructive comments and ideas that they wished to shape the final strategy proposals.
- 3.7 A full summary of the responses is included in the Consultation Statement. The below sets out some of the feedback received, how the feedback has been reviewed and analysed, and how the findings have fed into the final strategy proposals for Market Square and the outdoor market.
- 3.8 The responses to the consultation confirmed an overall support for the draft proposals. However, there were some concerns relating to the redevelopment of Market Square. The majority of the concerns in the recorded responses fell in the following four areas:
  - Concerns over losing Ashton's traditional outdoor market,
  - Queries as to why the Council were seeking to redevelop the outdoor market when a new market provision was delivered in the last 8 years,
  - Questions relating to the funding and why it wasn't being utilised for other purposes,
  - Concerns that the redevelopment will not improve the ASB issues and overall desirability of Ashton as a place to visit.
- 3.9 Some general objections/observation relating specifically to the premise and design principles for regeneration of Market Square identified in the draft proposals:

- Play area location is not the preferred location given the proximity of the taxi rank, pub spill-out, servicing and attracting antisocial behaviour,
- Proposed fixed structures such as cinema or music stand could quickly look obsolete as tastes change, obstruct eye lines and might lead to vandalism.
- High levels of homelessness,
- Safety and antisocial behaviour in areas with poor visibility - particularly in social spaces and along key strategic movement corridors.
- Proposals being out of step with the culture and economics around shopping and leisure with e-shopping and out-of-town retail,
- General state of neglect across the town, low quality offer, and high vacancy rates,
- Lack of things for children and teens to do, and perceived lack of safety - encourage college students to use the centre and local teens to visit more often,
- Lack of demand for a seven-day market and empty market kiosks
- Bird droppings becoming maintenance burden and deterrence for seating areas.

3.10 A number of sessions and workshops were held specifically with market traders, kiosk operators and Council officers. It is essential that market traders are engaged in the process of preparing the strategy and are identified as a key stakeholder going forward into the detailed design stage for Market Square and the outdoor market. Some traders and kiosk operators requested a need to retain a kiosk facility on Market Square as it was considered that the facilities suited the requirements of their business operation. Some kiosk operators also felt that the facilities were well positioned to attract trade through Market Square. Other concerns noted were linked to accessibility for deliveries and own cars to stalls could be impacted. Traders were concerned over the disruption and any adverse impacts that the redevelopment would have on their ability to trade as normal.

3.11 Despite the concerns of the local community and key stakeholders, there were a significant number of people in favour of the draft proposals and design principles. Many respondents understood that the opportunity to redevelop Market Square could be the catalyst for regeneration of the town centre. In addition, all market traders agreed that ASB is an issue and impacts their business negatively and along with the recent introduction of the Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) for Market Square, proposals for redevelopment could contribute to reducing incidents of crime in the area. Market traders, the local community and other key stakeholders had some valuable ideas and insight as to how they would like to see the improvements implemented into Market Square and the outdoor market that could also address some of the concerns outlined above. These included:

- Play should be more centrally positioned in Market Square,
- Retain a kiosk facility on Market Square,
- On site provision required for trade waste and site cleaning operation
- Buses to be rerouted back onto Wellington Road to improve accessibility for shoppers,
- More trees, planting, and seasonal interest,
- Retain and facilitate the Sunday flea market,
- Reduce market days to concentrate demand and supply over fewer days and increase the buzz of activity in Market Square on those days.
- Improved areas for seating
- More places to eat and drink in the square.

3.12 In respect of the suggestions and input into the strategy from market traders, there were a number of suggestions relating to the future operation of the market:

- Shelter and protection from the elements - especially westerly wind and rain, summer shade, free standing roof rather than awnings,
- Canopy could provide shelter for traders and shoppers,
- Clusters of operators such as food and drink could provide buzz and activity,
- Large van servicing access along Bow Street for market traders at key times of the day

- Storage for market traders,
- Access for people from public transport required from Wellington Road (bus routes along this road),
- Pop-up/temporary/seasonal events/offer in the Market Square.
- Lighting in the evening is critical to encourage a night time economy and more food and drink,
- Signage and wayfinding from key transport hubs
- Need to establish intimate spaces and curate atmospheres of 'hustle and bustle'
- Improve drainage capacity

3.13 If new kiosks are to be incorporated into the scheme, market traders would want to see a number of design features including:

- Kiosks need protection from the weather,
- Kiosks designed to meet the needs of food operators,
- In terms of size, 10ft by 10ft doesn't work for some uses. Different sized kiosks to suit different trader needs,
- Industrial quality of finishes needed for this use,
- Intimate space – overlooked if the kiosks all face inwards, under a canopy,
- Fixed kiosks to operate as a 'shop',
- Outdoor seating related to food stalls,
- Each unit would need own canopy.

3.14 The Consultation Strategy (**Appendix 3**) includes the full details of who Council Officers engaged with throughout the consultation period. The Consultation Statement (**Appendix 2**) includes the key findings of these meetings and workshops. Some of these included:

- Ashton ward member briefings,
- Briefing to Place and External Relations Scrutiny Panel,
- Presentation of draft strategy at all four of Tameside Neighbourhood Forums,
- Interactive workshops with students at Tameside College and Ashton Sixth Form College,
- Tameside Owners and Drivers Association (TODA),
- Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM),
- Major land owners including the two shopping centre owners (Ladysmith and Arcades),
- Greater Manchester Active Travel team,
- Key Council services including senior colleagues from Planning, Markets, Greenspace, Community Safety and Highways.

3.15 A response submitted by the Chair of the working group focused on town centres which is a sub-group of the Council's Place and External Relations Scrutiny Panel which met with senior Council officers on 23 November 2022. The Panel are supportive of the use of Levelling Up Funding in the redevelopment of Market Square and of the consultation process that has been followed. The Panel are keen that *"the project remains as bold as possible in supporting a wider pull factor. To create something that differentiates Ashton Market Square within the region"*. A full list of points raised by the Panel are included in **Appendix 4**.

3.16 As well as quantitative evidence gathering, an online survey was published via the Council's website with assistance from the Council's Policy and Communications teams. The survey was promoted via the Council's social media streams and a press release was issued. Hard copies were made available in Ashton Library and Market Hall. The full summary of the findings of the survey are included in the Consultation Statement (**Appendix 2**). Some of the detail on the demographics of respondents and key findings relating to people's views on the draft proposals are summarised below:

- Slight majority of respondents from Ashton although many were from neighbouring towns in the borough and across Greater Manchester,



- Almost 60% of respondents were residents in Ashton. However, there were a large number of people who were visiting the area (30%) and a number of respondents work in Ashton (15%),
- The majority of people visit during the week (26%), although a similar number of people (25%) said they only visit occasionally,
- A significant number of respondents visit in the daytime (94%) with very few people deciding to visit in the evening time,
- In terms of how people would like to see Ashton improved, 72% of responses want to see a reduction in ASB, 62% want the town cleaner and clutter free. Specialist markets, seating and street furniture and greener spaces also featured high on people's priorities,
- In terms of Ashton Market itself, respondents want to see more sociality shops and stalls, more places to sit and relax, more daytime activities and events, better parking, more places to eat, and evening entertainment,
- In terms of specific activities and events that people want to see on Market Square, 86% of responses were for seasonal markets. Other responses which scored high were food and beverage (58%), festivals (48%), family attractions (46%), concerts and live music events (43%), night/evening markets (40%).
- Respondents were asked which features of the draft strategy they agreed with. Tree planting/greenery, seating areas, street furniture, indoor/outdoor eating places, and improved lighting all scored high. In addition, over a third of respondents liked the idea of a canopy structure and had a similar response to the replacement of the existing stalls with a flexible market stall provision.

#### 4. ASHTON MARKET SQUARE / ASHTON OUTDOOR MARKET - FINAL PROPOSAL

- 4.1 The previous section outlines some of the key findings from the consultation undertaken on the draft proposals. All of the responses have been reviewed and analysed in order to help to shape the final strategy for the redevelopment of Ashton Market Square and the outdoor market. A vision, masterplan and set of design principles have been developed that will inform the next stage of detailed design work before the construction phase of the scheme commences in early 2024.
- 4.2 The final 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 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 delivery 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. An Executive Summary of the final strategy is included in **Appendix 6**.
- 4.3 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. In order 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 could include a more diverse offer that including seating, an increased 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 will be incorporated into the final design. Some precedent examples of similar structures delivered in town centres from other towns are presented in the final strategy document however, the detailed design of

the structure, orientation, massing and materials will be subject to detail designs from a specialist architect appointed as part of a multi-disciplinary team.

- 4.4 A number of consistent themes and important considerations emerged across the various consultation sessions, which must be incorporated into the next stage of proposals, these include:

#### Public Realm

1. Propose informal play area to within the Market Square
2. Propose an arrival space beside the Town Hall
3. Visibility is fundamental to and from Town Hall and Market Hall from key streets
4. Signage with strong branding is required from and to the Town Hall and Market Hall from key streets and Ashton Interchange
5. Consider accessibility for less able persons – consider level changes and lighting
6. Incorporate heritage interpretation within public realm design
7. Create a sustainable urban drainage approach in response to local climatic conditions
8. Retain servicing access along Bow Street for traders
9. Propose cycle parking areas on the periphery of Market Square
10. Design intimate spaces in arrival spaces
11. Planting – current issue with trees and bird droppings by seated areas. Consider greening areas of the Market Square space (avoid grassed areas for maintenance – provide planted areas that are easy to maintain)

#### Kiosks

12. Propose around 6-8 kiosks under the canopy
13. Incorporate design recommendations/requirements from kiosk traders relating to; kiosk design, lighting, storage, waste and servicing (consider VAT requirement)
14. Consider how the kiosks work within the canopy (consider height of structure, key views towards heritage buildings, access to first floor level)

#### Canopy

15. Design into and factor in environmental conditions (south-westerly wind and rain).
16. Design space within canopy for ticketed events and security measures during night-time hours.

- 4.5 A number of precedent examples of similar schemes delivered elsewhere that have been successful have been reviewed and elements of these schemes have been incorporated within the final strategy and will inform the detailed design of the scheme whilst ensuring the delivery of a Market Square unique to Ashton.
- 4.6 Once cleared through a phased approach to construction, Market Square will become a level surface and high quality paving will be installed across the entirety of Market Square. Given the large size of Market Square, it has been vital for the design team to consider what features will be installed to create a vibrant space at all times of the day and week. New tree planting and greening (SUDS), seating areas for people to relax and spend time with others, interactive play features to encourage families, lighting to encourage activity after hours, and places for people to park their bikes in secure spaces. In terms of infrastructure, anchor points to enable flexible stalls to be positioned will be built into the ground, waste bins, power points will enable events and other activities to 'plug in' and operate from without the requirement to bring their own power sources, and other utilities that will encourage market traders and event providers to come to Ashton Market Square will also be considered as part of the detailed design work.

## 5. COSTINGS AND REVENUE IMPACT

- 5.1 Details of the costings related to this final scheme fall within the overall budget envelope for the public realm works to Market Square. As the detailed design of is progressed, the cost of various elements of the scheme may vary however, the final scheme will be delivered within the budget allocation for the scheme.

Table 1 provides a summary of the existing public realm funding and estimated commitments to date. The estimated balance will be required to finance the public realm works to Market Square and outdoor market together with any related works to Albion Way which is subject to approval of a separate grant funding bid and subsequent report to Members.

**Table 1**

	£'000	£'000
<b>Funding</b>		
Levelling Up Fund Grant	11,200	
Council - Capital Programme	4,251	
<b>Total</b>		<b>15,451</b>
<b>Estimated Commitments</b>		
Project Management	208	
Public Realm - Strategy	74	
Public Realm - Detailed Design	1,126	
Public Realm - Wellington Road / Harley Street	700	
Public Realm - Market Area Modifications	91	
Public Realm – Market Square & Outdoor Market Area (Estimate)	10,800	
<b>Total</b>		<b>12,999</b>
<b>Estimated Balance</b>		<b>2,452</b>

- 5.2 As the detail of the final scheme is not yet known, it is not possible to calculate the likely impact on Council revenue from the outdoor market of the scheme in terms of the construction phase of works as well as the potential revenue when the final scheme is complete.
- 5.3 A relocation strategy to decant market traders and kiosk operators will be required when the detail and phasing of the proposal is more refined. Protecting the income of the markets will need to be prioritised throughout the phasing and decant of traders to ensure the market continues to operate throughout the construction of the scheme. A further report to Executive Cabinet will follow later this year and will review the existing operations of markets across the borough.

## 6. PROGRAMME AND NEXT STEPS

- 6.1 A detailed programme of the works is included in **Appendix 5**. Timescales for delivery are very tight in line with the Levelling Up Funding agreement of works being completed in full by March 2025. Some of the key milestones are included below:
- Technical survey work: January 2023 – March 2023
  - Detailed Design: March 2023 – January 2024
  - Planning application process: – May – August 2023
  - Start of early physical works which could include the removal of redundant stalls and/or creation of temporary waste storage facility: May 2023
  - Procurement of contractor: February 2024

- Main construction phase: February 2024 – March 2025

- 6.2 Survey work is underway and will ensure that all the relevant evidence has been gathered to support the detailed design of the final scheme. Once the final strategy for the scheme has been approved, the detailed design will commence. The multi-disciplinary team will work to finalise a scheme that responds to consultation feedback received within the available budget envelope. Progress on this work will be reported to Strategic Planning and Capital Monitoring Panel on a quarterly basis. The detailed design of the project will take approximately 9 to 12 months. Market traders and other key stakeholders will be engaged and consulted during the detailed design of the scheme to ensure their needs are met and those of future market traders.
- 6.3 Draft proposals included a high level approach to the future of Ashton Market Hall as it would not be practical to consider the redevelopment of the outdoor market without considering opportunities for future-proofing the indoor market. However, the Levelling Up Funding will be utilised for Market Square and the outdoor market. Further funding will need to be identified to review the indoor market uses in full.
- 6.4 The recently established Ashton Town Centre Delivery Group will steer and support the preparation, development and implementation of the Phase One works and to deliver the vision of the plan. A Consultation Strategy for the detailed design approach to working with key stakeholders including market traders is included in **Appendix 6**.

## 7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 Market Square and the market stalls continue to attract anti-social behaviour which in turn, deters people from visiting the area, new businesses from setting up in the centre of Ashton and a general overall negative perception of the town centre. Furthermore, the market stall structures detract from the visibility of key heritage assets in Ashton Town Hall and Ashton Market Hall, they are costly to maintain, have problems with drainage, and the ground levels where the market stalls are situated are uneven resulting in difficulties getting around for elderly people or those with mobility issues.
- 7.2 The overall decline in the viability and vitality in areas of Ashton town centre including Market Square are aligned with national trends of decline. The growth in online shopping and out of centre retail locations, the changing behaviour of shoppers, the change in demands of shoppers from their town centres, the evolution of traditional town centres and the global pandemic has resulted in a reduction in footfall, increased number of shop units and market traders and a general negative perception of some town centres, including Ashton. However, there are signs and evidence of a resurgence in some town centres. These centres have evolved and introduced a wide range of uses including food and drink, leisure and culture. It is vital that the regeneration of Ashton learns from what these more successful town centres have done to revive themselves and build on the unique character of Ashton and the local people.
- 7.3 Responses received from the public consultation as well as discussions with market traders demonstrated an overall support for the draft proposals and design principles identified within the draft masterplans. Whilst there are still some concerns with market traders in respect to the future of their business, the Council continues to liaise with market traders to ensure they are involved in the proposals as they become more defined.
- 7.4 Given the nature and multi-functionality of market squares across all towns, there are a number of competing demands, desires, needs and ambitions for different people as to what a modern market town should deliver. Whether it is a modern or traditional market, a diverse offer, events, culture, art, play, greenery or any other feature of a market square, there are competing demands from those who visit and utilise Market Square which must be balanced to ensure the successful delivery of a public square that is unique to Ashton, now and for generations to come.

7.5 Once approved, the detailed design on the final strategy will commence followed by physical construction early 2024.

## 8. RISK MANAGEMENT

8.1 The main risks associated with the delivery of improvements to Market Square and the outdoor market are identified in the table below.

Risk Area	Detail	RAG Rating	Mitigation	RAG Rating
<b>Delivery</b>	Timescales for delivery against the funding agreement are extremely tight. Any delays to the detailed design work will impact on the start of the physical construction which could have an impact on completing the works in the agreed timescales.		The programme in <b>Appendix 5</b> demonstrates that whilst timescales are tight, the detailed design work will be completed towards the end of 2023 to enable construction to commence early 2024. Any slippages on the programme will be outlined by the Project Management Team.	
<b>Financial</b>	The detailed design of the scheme will enable more accurate costings to be calculated. As costs of materials and inflation continues to rise, this will need to be monitored throughout the programme.		There have already been some high level costings in regards to the draft proposals. Whilst some of the costings in regards to the different elements of the scheme may vary, the overall scheme will be delivered within the financial envelope identified for these works.	
<b>Financial</b>	The outdoor market is an income generating service in the Council. A reduction in the number of market traders for any period of time, could result in the loss of income for this service.		Construction of the scheme will be phased to minimise disruption to trading on the outdoor market. A market specialist has been appointed to support this work and will support traders and the Council to ensure any adverse impact to trading is minimised. Once completed, the scheme is likely to generate more interest and enquiries from traders resulting in an increased income for the Council.	
<b>Planning</b>	Whilst the removal of stalls and kiosks will not require planning permission, the large canopy structure will.		Discussions with the Local Planning Authority have been carried out since the start of this work and will continue throughout the programme. The appointed architects will	

			liaise with the Council's Head of Planning in respect of the detailed design of the canopy and overall public realm scheme.	
<b>Programme</b>	Lack of resource capacity to undertake workstreams in line with expectations.		In addition to the appointment of a Project Manager for the scheme, a highly experienced multi-disciplinary team will ensure that the project meets programme timescales and key milestones. Internal resource has been identified to meet expectations.	

## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 As set out at the front of the report.