

REPORT FOR DECISION



DECISION OF:	CABINET
DATE:	2 September 2020
SUBJECT:	BURY TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN
REPORT FROM:	Cllr. Eamonn O'Brien (Leader) – Cabinet Member for Finance and Growth
CONTACT OFFICER:	Paul Lakin, Director of Economic Regeneration and Capital Growth
TYPE OF DECISION:	CABINET (KEY DECISION)
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION/STATUS:	This paper is within the public domain.
SUMMARY:	This report seeks Member approval to appoint a multi-disciplinary consultancy to prepare a comprehensive, aspirational and deliverable masterplan to guide the role, function and physical development and regeneration of Bury town centre and its peripheral areas over the next 10 to 15 years.
OPTIONS & RECOMMENDED OPTION	<p>It is recommended that Members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve the use of consultants to prepare a new masterplan for Bury town centre. • Note that the draft masterplan will be presented to Cabinet for approval for consultation purposes and that, following consultation, a final version will be subject to further Cabinet approval.
IMPLICATIONS:	
Corporate Aims/Policy Framework:	<p>Do the proposals accord with the Policy Framework?</p> <p>Yes</p>
Statement by the S151 Officer: Financial Implications and Risk Considerations:	The request is for an allocation of £100,000 to cover the costs of consultants to prepare a masterplan for Bury Town Centre. The cost of the works can be met from the Council's capital programme within which there is currently an approved scheme for this

	project. A budget of £1.9 million has been earmarked for works in connection with Bury town centre.
Equality/Diversity implications:	The development of a new masterplan for Bury town centre will be key to helping the town centre to adapt to changing economic conditions and to help it maintain its role as one of the Borough's key economic drivers and service providers.
Considered by Monitoring Officer:	A new masterplan for Bury town centre will provide the context for future development. It is important that any future capital expenditure position is regularly monitored to ensure that the priorities of the Council are being delivered and ongoing legal input will be required.
Wards Affected:	All
Scrutiny Interest:	

TRACKING/PROCESS

DIRECTOR:

Joint Executive Team	Cabinet Member/Chair Briefed	Ward Members (if necessary)	Partners
	27 July 2020		
Scrutiny Committee	Other Committee	Council	Comms

1 Background

- 1.1 Bury is the principal town centre in the Borough and is the focal point for retail, leisure, administration, services, tourism and culture. The town centre has fared comparatively well in recent years. It has seen significant investment and regeneration and is one of the highest ranking retail destinations in Greater Manchester.
- 1.2 The Rock development, in particular, has brought a major addition of retail, leisure and residential floorspace to the town centre. It includes a range of multiple and key anchor retailers as well as a multi-screen cinema, bowling alley and a number of restaurants. Footfall at the Rock, for example, achieved

levels significantly above those seen nationally and it maintained an occupancy rate of around 96%.

- 1.3 The success of Bury town centre has been helped by the Council's longstanding commitment to having a clear vision and robust strategy in place. In particular, the 'Bury but Better' Town Centre Vision and Development Strategy (2003 and 2009) have provided a framework to shape and manage the successful growth and development of the town centre and surrounding areas.
- 1.4 Whilst Bury has performed well as a retail-led centre it is apparent that the seismic changes occurring in the physical retailing world will have a major impact on every town and city in the country. The centres that survive the fall-out from the relentless shrinkage of physical retail are those that have a diverse range of visitor and leisure attractions, modern workplaces and a reconfigured and varied retail experiences all of which is bound by public transport accessibility and a high quality pedestrian experience.
- 1.5 If town centres adapt appropriately, they can continue to be key economic drivers for the Borough and they can play a key role in the delivery of economic aspirations set out in the emerging Bury 2030 Strategy.
- 1.6 At the sub-regional level, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority has introduced initiatives, such as the Mayor's Town Centre Challenge, to support town centres across Greater Manchester and to help them to adapt to a rapidly changing economic climate.

2 Issues, challenges and opportunities

- 2.1 There are some parts of Bury Town Centre which work well and as a whole it has an attractive townscape which some good architecture and an interesting mix of shops, bars and cafes with a strong cultural and visitor offer. However, there are some parts which require radical intervention. The wider Markets area is run down and the neighbouring retail parades are tired. The pedestrianised section of the former Rock high street up to the new Rock is run-down with weak ground floor uses and wastes an opportunity to create a high quality central square in the middle of the town. The Interchange is looking tired and is dominated by rows of bus infrastructure which provides a poor customer experience and wastes land in the heart of the town.
- 2.2 These areas present the strongest case for intervention and, if fixed, would help transform the Bury town centre offer. These areas should provide the major focus of the masterplan and are effectively 'change zones' where major transformative regeneration could occur. The job of the masterplan is to identify what this change might look like and create development ideas and concepts that link consistently to other uses in the town centre. This document will be critical in securing confidence in the future of the centre, and in winning the confidence of private sector investors that Bury town centre is a highly investable proposition.

- 2.3** In addition, since the latest 'Bury but Better' Strategy was produced in 2009, town centres across the country have been facing significant challenges that have eroded high street retailing and its role in underpinning the vitality and economic strength of town centres. These challenges have included:
- Continued and rapid growth in the use of mobile devices and online retailing;
 - Increasing wages, rents and business rates;
 - A shift in consumer spending away from products towards experiences and lifestyle; and
 - Wider economic conditions in general.
- 2.4 The masterplan will have a strong commercial focus, recognising the potential for new development in Bury notwithstanding some of the shorter term challenges associated with Covid recovery.
- 2.5 A commercially focussed masterplan will consider potential opportunities to:
- increase the potential for Bury Town Centre as an employment centre and the size and type of office facilities that could be accommodated;
 - accommodate further hotel investment in the town centre (currently there is only one property) and the location(s) of such facilities;
 - create linkages between proposals for a new Flexi-Hall at Bury Market to the wider town centre offer, and to consider other 'creative' uses of spaces perhaps to establish a stronger creative industry base to build on;
 - incorporate high quality urban housing into the centre of the town or on some of the key peripheral sites (such as Angouleme Way and the Castle sites);
 - create a more defined educational zone in the town centre linking the College campuses and potentially a University presence;
 - attract niche or other distinctive forms of development (such as cultural, visitor or leisure uses) into the town centre; and
 - improve the town centre's current attractions and functions, including its role in providing a major transport interchange for the Borough and to promote active travel (linkages and integration to surrounding neighbourhoods).
- 2.6 The Council has a fundamentally important role to play as the body with the responsibility of providing a long-term vision for the future of the centre. Whilst there are many stakeholders, including investors, landowners and key cultural institutions it is only the Council which can effectively bring all these interested parties together to get them behind a coherent plan.
- 2.7 In particular the Council must work closely with the owners of the major retail malls (the Millgate and the Rock) to ensure the proposals and plans we conceive support them in maintaining key anchor retailers (such as M&S and Debenhams) and to ensure we can demonstrate to retail and leisure investors that we have credible and deliverable plans to increase the levels of footfall into

the town centre. We should also work with these partners to consider how we can encourage new types of retailers, potentially local independent traders, to take up spaces in some of the smaller voided space in the town centre.

- 2.8 An underlying objective of the masterplan is to attract investors who can see the potential to make returns from investment projects in Bury Town Centre. The biggest risk to the future of the centre is that key assets fall into the hands of 'income' investors, who buy assets because they have a reasonable income stream which allows strong returns over the short to medium term, but almost always leads to the assets being underinvested and left to decline over time.
- 2.9 The masterplan must also consider how we make the town centre an attractive, clean and safe place for people to gather. Whilst the plan will have a clear objective of targeting those locations in need of investment (including those identified in section 2.1) it must also consider some other key interventions. The identification of a standard design for public realm, improved signage and wayfinding (in particular considering the poor links between the Interchange and the Rock) and the creation of green spaces. There are a number of smaller squares and ginnels in the town centre that are in a fairly tired condition, these should form a part of the masterplanning exercise.
- 2.10 A new town centre masterplan will play a key role in delivering a response that will help to support economic recovery in the short-term as well as provide the foundations for Bury town centre to maintain its vibrancy and its status as one of the strongest centres in Greater Manchester for years to come.
- 2.11 Importantly, the masterplan would firm up end uses for some of the key sites in and around the town centre to enable their delivery in the short to medium term. It will also have an important role to play in promoting the town centre in general and in attracting development and inward investment by highlighting the major opportunities that exist. At the same time, it will be an important tool in demonstrating that the Council has a cohesive and up-to-date strategy in place to support bids for external funding.
- 2.12 As such, it is proposed to appoint a multi-disciplinary consultancy to prepare a comprehensive, aspirational and deliverable masterplan to guide the role, function and physical development and regeneration of Bury town centre and its peripheral areas over the next 10 to 15 years. It is expected given the strong commercial focus of this assignment that the lead consultancy will have strong in-house capabilities in the agency, investor and property markets disciplines.
- 2.13 The intention is that a brief for the commission is developed and a consultancy would be procured in accordance with Council requirements and procurement rules. It is requested that a budget of £100,000 be allocated to cover the costs of commissioning the work.
- 2.14 The draft masterplan will be presented to Cabinet to approve for consultation purposes and, following this consultation, a final version will be brought back to

Cabinet for formal approval. In doing so, it is intended that the new masterplan will be adopted as a material planning consideration in the determination of relevant planning applications and, in the longer-term, it will be used to inform statutory policies and proposals in the emerging Bury Local Plan.

3 Timescales

- 3.1 The commission to prepare the Bury town centre masterplan is likely to take around six months to complete (October 2020 – March 2021) and it will be important to complete this work in a timely manner so that the Council is able to quickly respond to any funding opportunities that the Government may introduce that would support the implementation of elements of the masterplan.

4 Conclusion

- 4.1 The recommendations are contained in the front of this report.

Contact Details: Paul Lakin, Director of Economic Regeneration and Capital Growth