

SCRUTINY REPORT



MEETING: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 1st November 2022

SUBJECT: Ramsbottom Town Centre Plan

REPORT FROM:

Councillor Eamonn O'Brien (Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Strategic Growth and Skills)

CONTACT OFFICER:

Sarah Porru (Assistant Director Regeneration Delivery [Economy & Business])

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. In March 2021, the Council commissioned Layer Ltd to produce a town centre plan for Ramsbottom which would identify a series of potential proposals to improve the town for residents, businesses and visitors.
- 1.2. The Ramsbottom Town Centre Plan (hereafter known as the plan) sets out a series of high-level proposals and concepts that look to enhance the town centre for local residents, the business community and visitors. Proposals include creating quality workspace in the heart of the town, as well as identifying opportunities for improvements to the built environment, public realm and active travel routes.
- 1.3. The plan also looks at proposals to boost the visitor economy by providing some of the necessary infrastructure to facilitate the continuation and growth of the town's successful events programme. Likewise, the plan proposes to embrace the East Lancashire Railway as an important tourist asset, linking with the wider heritage and architectural character of the town.
- 1.4. The plan is an informal, non-statutory document that will help to shape and direct future investment into the town centre. It will also be a material consideration to which regard may be had in development control decisions relevant to the future regeneration of the town centre.
- 1.5. Following a period of public consultation, the final draft plan was approved by Cabinet in March 2022.

2. THE RAMSBOTTOM PLAN PROPOSALS

- 2.1. The plan includes the following vision for the Town Centre:

'Over the next ten years, Ramsbottom town centre will have built on its reputation as one of the best places in the region to live, visit and work. It will be an attractive

and vibrant destination for its residents, visitors and workers, supported by the East Lancashire Railway, a high-quality restaurant scene, a good range of independent retailers, a popular annual events programme and high-quality workspace for those wishing to base their businesses locally.

To support this, the town centre environment and experience of its users will be improved with new and enhanced areas of public realm and event space, improved linkages and better car parking arrangements that will encourage active travel and improve movement and circulation throughout the town.'

To help deliver the vision and further to public consultation, the plan identifies a number of proposals and opportunities for intervention to meet the aim of the vision:

- **New Public Square**

The addition of a new public square and events space in the core town centre to provide the infrastructure to enable the continuation and improvement of a successful events programme.

- **Improved Public Realm**

Establish a network of better-connected streets and spaces by improving existing infrastructure and creating new focal spaces and pedestrianised areas.

- **Active Travel**

Encourage active travel by improving strategic pedestrian and cycle links, connecting valuable green assets and amenities to the town centre such as Nuttall Park and new links to the river frontage.

- **Enterprise Centre**

A new enterprise centre is proposed for Market Chambers and the vacant upper floors of the Civic Hall. This will provide accommodation for a range of self-employed, freelance businesses and business start-ups, along with those residents seeking flexible and agile business space.

- **Car Parking Strategy**

The car parking strategy will aim to find a better balance for all users, including existing businesses and residents, and regular and occasional visitors. The plan proposes to introduce short stay car parking in the heart of the town, along with a residents' permit scheme and an edge of centre long stay provision which can accommodate longer stay and event parking.

3. CURRENT POSITION

3.1 Over the next 10 years, the plan will be used to guide interventions and support funding bids and opportunities to enhance the town centre. The proposals will be brought forward as these opportunities arise, with each being subject to wider stakeholder engagement.

3.2 A number of proposals have already been identified as priority projects. The information below explains progress to date.

- **Active Travel**

Greater Manchester has secured £1.07 billion of funding from the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) for transport and active travel proposals and work is currently ongoing to identify where this funding will be targeted. In the region of £2.3 million will be available to help deliver the active travel proposals and connectivity elements.

Pell Frischman (a firm of consultants) have been appointed to undertake the initial surveying work which will further support the early development stage of the schemes as per the plan. It is expected that their initial findings and indicative scheme designs will be available over the coming weeks.

The CRSTS funding will not be able to deliver the full spectrum of the projects identified for Ramsbottom and therefore priority projects will need to be agreed. In Bury, the CRSTS programme is overseen by the Council's Strategic Transport section who will consider the proposals in the strategic context of the emerging Borough-Wide Transport Plan and the Ramsbottom Town Centre Plan itself. Further funding will be identified and secured as the plans are developed in more detail.

- **Ramsbottom Enterprise Centre**

The Council has successfully secured £50,000 Evergreen funding from GMCA which could be used to help bring forward the proposed Enterprise Centre in the town.

Evergreen funding has been secured to support the redevelopment of Market Chambers and the unused, upper floor of the Civic Hall as an Enterprise Centre. A brief is currently being put together which will be used to procure a firm of consultants to undertake feasibility work to determine the buildings' capability, as well as potential design work and soft market testing to understand the local commercial market in terms of need and an exact end use. This could be in the form of flexible office space and meeting facilities (including education and training facilities), with the potential to also provide incubator space for growing new local businesses and makerspace for local entrepreneurs. This is partly in response to an increase in home/local working that has been accelerated by Covid 19.

- **Parking Strategy**

A draft high-level parking proposal is included in the plan, and this proposes to accommodate an events space in the core, establish a longer stay car park on the edge of the town centre, introduce shorter stay car park spaces in some locations and considers residents parking permits.

Post Covid restrictions, a full parking strategy is now being developed further to a town centre parking survey undertaken in September 2022. Work is now underway to analyse the findings.

Included in the parking strategy and schemes via the CRSTS, a traffic modelling system is being developed for Ramsbottom. This work is nearly complete, and once set up, the Council will be able to analysis various scenarios in the town centre to support further development of both the strategy and active travel proposals as per the plan.

- **Improved Public Realm / UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)**

A funding proposal for public space enhancement has been included in Bury Council's UKSPF submission under the Communities and Place intervention priority. Once approved by GMCA, this funding will be used to procure a firm of consultants to undertake feasibility, design work and consultation to establish project briefs for two of the public realm proposals included in the plan. This includes the following proposals:

- *Square Street pedestrianisation* which is currently closed via a temporary licence under the Business & Planning Act (Regulations 2022).
- *Town Centre Events/Flexi-Space* (Saturday Market Site)

The two project briefs will allow the proposals to move to the implementation phase. Both projects link with other key council strategies and programmes – Active Travel and a borough-wide parking strategy. The funding for the feasibility will run from April 2023 to March 2024 but it is anticipated that work on the brief will commence as soon as possible.

3.3 The Economic Development & Projects service is in the process of establishing a high-level programme that will be used to monitor progress and implementation of each project within the plan, as well as identify further funding opportunities, interdependencies, track and report expenditure and assess and address any risks.

4. CONSULTATION/STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

4.1 The Council will continue to identify further opportunities to progress the high-level proposals set out in the plan to support and implement the vision for Ramsbottom Town Centre. The Council will work with key stakeholders in taking forward these proposals, ensuring that community consultation and engagement will be at the forefront of this process.

5. GOVERNANCE

5.1 The Council is in the process of determining appropriate governance for the likely programme of interventions that will meet the vision as set out in the plan. This is likely to be in the form of regular engagement with ward councillors and senior officers supported by reporting to the Council's Regeneration Board and Cabinet.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Through the successful implementation of the plan and over the next ten years, Ramsbottom Town Centre will further build upon its already success and will continue to be seen as a thriving centre for all that live, work and visit.

List of Background Papers: The Ramsbottom Plan

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Executive Director sign off Date: _____

JET Meeting Date: _____