

<b>Report to:</b>	Cabinet	<b>Date:</b> 15 March 2023
<b>Subject:</b>	Whitefield – Appointment of consultants and consultation process to create a vision for investment into the town centre	
<b>Report of:</b>	Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategic Growth & Skills	

## Summary

Whitefield was approved to be the selected town in the borough to receive support (by way of a visit and stakeholder engagement) from the High Streets Task Force by Cabinet on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2022. In advance of the visit scheduled for June 2023, the Council is being supported by Planit-IE to consider how the benefits of the High Street Task Force can be maximised and developed into a broader Whitefield Town Centre Plan. This report provides an update on progress and recommends the appointment of Planit-IE to deliver a phased programme of consultation ahead of the visit.

## Recommendation(s)

That Cabinet:

- Approves the appointment of Planit-IE to undertake stakeholder consultation exercises and the production of a plan identifying short and medium-term investment opportunities and a high-level appraisal of long-term opportunities for Whitefield, prior to the visit from the High Streets Task Force.
- Approves the ability for the Council to retain Planit-IE to undertake work to provide more detail to the long-term investment opportunities.

## Reasons for recommendation(s)

The reasons for this recommendation are set out in the report below.

## Alternative options considered and rejected

No other options were considered/were applicable.

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## 1.0 Background

- 1.1 In early 2022, the High Streets Task Force (HSTF) selected Bury as one of 68 local authorities to receive support. At Cabinet in March 2022, Whitefield was selected and approved as the town/high street in Bury to receive support from the HSTF.
- 1.2 Whitefield was selected as significant work and expertise had already been focused on the planning and regeneration of other key centres on the Borough.

## **2.0 The High Streets Task Force (HSTF)**

- 2.1 The HSTF was set up in 2019 as part of the Government's Plan for the high street. Run by the Institute of Place Management on behalf of government, the HSTF brings together a range of organisations that specialise in repositioning, reinventing, rebranding, and restructuring places.
- 2.2 The HSTF will schedule (during June 2023) an 'Unlocking your Place Potential' visit to Whitefield which will consist of;
  - Review of desk-based research into the performance and perceptions of the area.
  - Three-hour workshop led by a HSTF expert, with key stakeholders to examine Whitefield's plans, challenges and feedback, to identify next steps.
  - 45-minute town centre site tour with the expert who will conduct a snapshot place analysis to complement the insight generated from the workshop.
  - Post-visit report, produced by the HSTF expert, which identifies key strengths and challenges.
- 2.3 Liaison with members of the HSTF and leads from the other local authorities has demonstrated that the most successful HSTF visits come from a clear and focussed vision or project, where a large amount of relevant information has been provided to the HSTF delegates in advance of the visit and local community and voluntary group structures are well established to drive forward the recommendations.
- 2.4 As well as the immediate high street, Bury Council will be working with the HSTF to also consider the wider aspects of the town where possible e.g. housing, land availability etc that can then feed into a town centre plan for Whitefield.

## **3.0 Whitefield Town Centre Plan**

- 3.1 There is a Council ambition to develop a 'Town Centre Plan' for Whitefield, influenced by local stakeholders and residents, which identifies wider issues and opportunities, as well as possible town centre improvement proposals.
- 3.2 Planit-IE have been approached via the Constellia Framework as experts in this area of work. It has been determined that they are very well placed to outline additional wrap around support for the HSTF project to enable the development of a wider Whitefield Town Centre Plan and in advance of the HSTF visit. The plan will be community led and will include proposals relating to public realm, place marketing, place making and community

empowerment. Appointing Planit-IE to lead on the creation and enablement of a stakeholder group will ensure a shared vision, build community cohesion, and maximise the benefits from the HSTF visit.

- 3.3 A second project phase is also being considered which would see Planit-IE continue to support the newly formed group to build on the findings and report from the HSTF to produce a wider 'Town Centre Plan' for Whitefield. Planit-IE would also be retained to build capacity of the group to deliver some of the interventions.
- 3.4 The Whitefield Town Centre Plan will be primarily (but not strictly) focussed on the Bury New Road, from just south of the junction between Bury New Road, Bury Old Road, and Higher Lane and the junction of Radcliffe New Road and Bury New Road. However, the plan could also consider sites outside the immediate centre.
- 3.5 There are several challenges, as well as opportunities that need considering that will help shape the development of a town centre plan:

**Transport related challenges and opportunities:**

- Travel, including domination of the road through the centre of the town that currently does not lend itself to the promotion of active travel, safe cycling etc.
- Public transport, including improvements to the Metrolink tram stop and surrounding area noting that the Park and Ride scheme has been extended.
- Ease of parking in the town centre.

The Council's draft Transport Strategy will help with consideration of the above.

**Land and property related challenges and opportunities:**

- Whitefield Library and Pinfold Day Care Centre sites on Pinfold Lane are listed on the Council's Accelerated Land Disposal Programme.
- The Uplands where the Council is currently supporting health partners bring forward the site for redevelopment.
- The former Town Hall site which is a key privately-owned site in the town that has been a stalled site for several years.
- Future options around the Fire and Police Station sites.
- Identification of other sites in the town with the potential for development

**4.0 Issues**

- 4.1 The HSTF visit does not contribute funding and there is only a limited amount of funding allocated for Whitefield of £51,000: £49,000 UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), matched by £2,000 from the Council. This has

been ringfenced from Bury's allocation under the UKSPF Communities & Place intervention priority.

- 4.2 Due to funding constraints, the Whitefield Town Centre Plan will be a two-stage process. Phase 1 will include analysis of the town centre, along with short-term and medium-term delivery proposals alongside a high-level appraisal of long-term proposals. Phase 2 will be a separate commission, which builds on Phase 1 and will go into more detail on longer-term delivery aims. There is currently no funding secured for a Phase 2.
- 4.3 Bury Council has a low-level of land ownership in Whitefield compared to other parts of the borough, so medium to large-scale opportunities may be limited.

## **5.0 Resources**

- 5.1 Management of Planit-IE, the HSTF visit, and subsequent work (including Phase 2) will have significant resource implications within the Business, Growth & Infrastructure (BGI) department. There is no allocation for staff time within the Council or UKSPF funding adding further pressure to BGI's capacity.
- 5.2 Whilst BGI is committed to the development of the Whitefield Town Centre Plan the plans are at an early stage. Once the key interventions and activities have been identified there will need to be a process of designing and developing potential projects.

## **6.0 Stakeholder Consultation**

- 6.1 Initial engagement sessions are planned for March 2023, including a ward councillor briefing session and an initial engagement session with members of Whitefield's business group, community groups and politicians. In May 2023 second stage of wider consultation will commence after initial options for the town centre have been developed. The HSTF visit will feed into the second stage of engagement.

## **7.0 Conclusion**

- 7.1 The recommendations contained at the beginning of this report will enable the Council to work towards the delivery of the HSTF project and the development of a community shaped and influenced Town Centre Plan.

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### **Links with the Corporate Priorities:**

The Whitefield Plan will deliver a range of short, medium and longer terms interventions that will enhance the town centre for the benefit of all its residents, local businesses and visitors.

The preparation of the town plan is consistent with the 2030 'Let's Do It' Strategy, particularly in terms of driving economic growth and inclusion.

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**Equality Impact and Considerations:**

There are no negative impacts on equality.

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**Environmental Impact and Considerations:**

The proposals for the Whitefield Town Centre Plan are to be decided. All proposals will, however, align with the Council's other strategic documentation, including that pertaining to carbon reduction/neutrality.

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**Assessment and Mitigation of Risk:**

<b>Risk / opportunity</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>
Adequate funding is not available and/or secured to progress to further development and delivery of the Whitefield Town Centre Plan.	The Council is committed to sourcing and securing additional sources of funding where this is identified, including the option of placing the proposals and funding requirements on future pipeline requests that may come from Greater Manchester Combined Authority or other.
Adequate resources are not available within the BGI department to manage the further development of the Whitefield Town Centre Plan.	BGI is committed to looking at options to ensure delivery of the proposals and overall plan.
Local stakeholders do not engage in the work of Planit-IE and/or the HSTF visit.	The Whitefield Community Hub Manager has been approached and is now engaged in the work to ensure local interest is secured and continual engagement.

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**Legal Implications:**

The recommendation to appoint Planit-IE follows a compliant procurement procedure. Planit-IE are an approved supplier under the Constellia neutral vendor Framework. The contract itself will be with Constellia. This arrangement will provide tangible benefits in terms of the quality control and value for money that Constellia offer with their good knowledge of the market and the commercial leverage the Framework Contract with their suppliers gives them.

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**Financial Implications:**

There is funding from the UKSPF of £49,000 with an additional contribution of £2,000 from the Council to support this initial piece of work. However, there is no funding within the Capital Programme for further developments which may be proposed following the consultation process and the visit from the High Streets Task Force. A further report with resource implications will need to be brought forward to Cabinet at a later date detailing any proposals as a consequence of these two pieces of work.

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**Background papers:**

High Streets Task Force Support for Bury Cabinet Report 9<sup>th</sup> March 2022 - <https://councildecisions.bury.gov.uk/documents/s30367/High%20Streets%20Task%20Force%20Support%20for%20Bury.pdf>

**Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.**

<b>Term</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
HSTF	High Street Task Force – provides advice for towns regarding repositioning, reinventing, rebranding, and restructuring places.
UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF)	A key funding source that is supporting the Government’s Levelling Up agenda.