

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

2 February 2021

Subject: Trowbridge Future High Streets Fund: in-principle offer

Cabinet Member: Philip Whitehead, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Military-Civilian Integration and Communications

Key Decision: Non Key

Executive Summary

Following the submission of the Future High Streets Fund Trowbridge business case in August 2020, MHCLG has made Wiltshire Council an in-principle offer of up to 69% of the original ask, amounting to £16,347,056.

This funding offer is subject to Wiltshire Council providing a technical update to MHCLG, reflecting the available funding envelope and submitting a response by 26th February 2021.

This report provides an overview of (a.) the proposed response and (b.) the consultation which has taken place to inform the proposals to date. The report also seeks authorisation to submit a response to the in-principle offer and accept the grant.

The proposed response seeks to secure the maximum funding available and shows that the projects developed to date remain deliverable, albeit with some adjustments.

The technical update on individual projects is currently being examined and where needed, adjusted, by the consultant team and the Council's Regeneration team:

Project 1: Proposals for better movement and legibility at the town centre gateways will be supported.

Project 2: Proposals for a unique culture-and-leisure-led offer (Town Hall and Market Hall) will be supported and further co-funding will be sought to allow it to be realised to its full potential.

Project 3: Proposals for a resilient and diverse high street will be supported.

Project 4: Unlocking good growth will be supported, focusing on enabling activities to support potential future development.

Proposal(s)

That Cabinet:

- Notes the contents of this report
- Delegates authority to the Chief Executive Officer - in consultation with the Director for Economic Development and Planning, and Legal, Electoral and Registration Services and the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Military-Civilian Integration and Communications to approve and submit the Trowbridge Future High Streets Fund response to the in-principle offer to MHCLG as well as accepting the grant.
- Delegates authority to develop individual workstreams within the business case and the response to the in-principle offer to the Chief Executive Officer, in consultation with the Director for Economic Development and Planning, the Director for Legal, Electoral and Registration Services and the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Military-Civilian Integration and Communications.

Reason for Proposal(s)

Trowbridge Town Centre has been negatively affected by a number of factors over a long period of time, resulting in a significant decline of the vitality, attractiveness and perception of the town centre. This has manifested in the following market failures:

- a significant lack of activity and diversity of offer in the town centre core;
- many of the town's most unique assets are in need of urgent repair, resulting in these being vacant or significantly underused for c10 years;
- a lack of development within the town centre core, particularly of key sites adjacent to the town's unique natural assets like the River Biss;
- a disjointed experience with poor linkages between the retail core and new developments, the railway station, major employment sites and car parks.

This has contributed to the evident decline of the town centre and continues to severely threaten its long-term viability.

Trowbridge has the chance through this funding to significantly reposition itself. Key outcomes following securing funding could include:

- Improving connections and legibility into the town centre
- Transforming the gateway experience
- Bringing more leisure, residential and culture activity into the town centre
- Making better use of vacant units to enable a diverse and sustainable mix of uses within Trowbridge Town Centre
- Accelerating future development by facilitating the strategic development of key sites within the town centre core

- A successful allocation of FHSF will enable Wiltshire Council to work with partners to initiate that process and attract in other public and private sector funding to rejuvenate the town.

Terence Herbert
Chief Executive

Wiltshire Council

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Cabinet Member: Philip Whitehead, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Military-Civilian Integration and Communications

Key Decision: Non Key

Purpose of Report

1. To update Members on the in-principle offer received from MHCLG in relation to the Trowbridge Future High Streets Fund business case.
2. To seek Cabinet approval for Trowbridge's response to the Government's Future High Streets Fund in-principle offer.
3. To agree the proposed delegated authority provisions to enable the Council to submit a response on behalf of Trowbridge and accept the grant.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

4. Attracting funding into Trowbridge from the Future High Streets Fund Improvements helps meet the priorities of the Council's Business Plan 2017-2027, including:
 - Growing the Economy:
 - o High Skilled Jobs (Employment)
 - o Housing and Infrastructure (Sustainable Development)
 - o Transport and Infrastructure (Access)
 - Strong Communities
 - o Safe Communities (Protection)
 - o Personal Wellbeing (Prevention)
 - Working with Our Partners:
 - o Community Involvement
 - o Delivering Together

Background

5. In December 2018 the Government launched the Future High Streets Fund (FHSF), to renew and reshape town centres and high streets in a way that improves experience, drives growth and ensures future sustainability.
6. Trowbridge submitted an expression of interest (EOI) to the fund, outlining the challenges in Trowbridge and highlighting the projects which would transform the high street. The EOI successfully made it through that round and a full business case was submitted in August 2020.

7. In December 2020 MHCLG made Wiltshire Council an in-principle offer of up to 69% of the original ask (circa £23.7M), amounting to £16,347,056. This funding offer is subject to Wiltshire Council updating the proposal to reflect the funding envelope and submitting a response by 26th February 2021.

Main Considerations for the Council

8. Guidance on the process for updating the proposals makes clear that the Council must maintain the minimum BCR, ensure the proposals are deliverable and retain co-funded elements where possible, with some measure of co-funding a gateway criterion to accessing the fund.

9. The financial gap may be addressed by:

- Additional co-funding. This is considered unlikely as partners have already committed significant co-funding to the scheme.
- Scalability – it may be possible to adjust the projects within the cost envelope.
- Non-delivery – a project may need to be removed to achieve the cost envelope.

10. Trowbridge's proposal has considered all the above options. The proposed response to the in-principle offer received seeks to maximise the funding received, secure additional co-funding and ensures the projects initially submitted are supported whilst remaining deliverable.

11. A technical update on the original submission is being shaped in consultation with key partners. This proposal, which the consultant team is still appraising, has been outlined below:

Project 1: Better movement and legibility at the town centre gateways.

The principal aim of this project is to create an improved environment for businesses and improve the experience of visitors to Trowbridge's high street, enabling the high street to become a 'sticky street' with higher dwell times which local businesses can capitalise on.

Response: This project will be supported.

Project 2: Unique culture-and-leisure-led offer (Town Hall and Market Hall).

The aim will be to refurbish the Grade2 listed Town Hall and adjacent and surrounding sites, safeguarding its long term sustainability and maximising the capacity for the building to host an exciting and vibrant full programme of community-led leisure, culture and social activities within the heart of Trowbridge Town Centre whilst maximising links with other existing facilities such as the Civic Centre. This project could provide a unique cultural offer, improve the night-time economy and increase footfall in the core of the town, helping to revive Trowbridge's poor evening economy.

Response: This project will be supported and further co-funding will be sought to allow it to be realised to its full potential.

Project 3: A resilient and diverse high street.

Establish a programme of small grants for businesses to leverage collaborative working with landowners of vacant high street properties. This will proactively encourage and, where appropriate, enable a more diverse offer and a stronger evening economy whilst also relocating businesses to achieve a more compact and vibrant high street.

Response: This project will be supported.

Project 4: Unlocking good growth.

This project builds on the success of a well-connected and attractive town with a unique offer, ensuring the right mix of uses is delivered to best support the high street's longer-term future. Recent investment to the Clarendon pool has secured its future for the next five years. Wiltshire Council intends to use this time and funding available to develop a deliverable town centre solution for leisure provision including enabling activities at Castle Place.

Response: This project will focus on unlocking the site's constraints and de-risking the site for future development.

Stakeholder and public engagement

12. A range of stakeholders from both the public sector and private sectors have been engaged to develop the FHSF bid, including Invest in Trowbridge and the Town Hall Trust. Two public consultation workshops also took place in June 2020.

13. From March to July 2020, engagement with key stakeholders including the Town Council, the Town Hall Trust, Invest in Trowbridge, Wiltshire Council's Sustainable Transport Service and others identified through the Engagement Plan was undertaken via regular updates, online meetings, online workshops and, one socially distanced pop-up event.

14. Since the bid was submitted regular updates have been provided to the Area Board and Town Council. The response to the in-principle offer has been informed by discussions with the Town Council, which has provided a letter of support. Regular updates are given to the Area Board and other delivery partners such as the Town Hall Trust. Discussions with the co-funding bodies in conjunction with the Town Hall Trust are ongoing.

15. Stakeholder engagement will remain a key priority in delivering the Town's ambitious vision. A clear engagement plan will be established to continue the engagement work once funds have been secured. This will provide a clear channel for stakeholder ideas and concerns to be presented to decisionmakers going forward.

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

16. The Environment Select Committee received a presentation in November 2019 where the committee learnt that the Council's bid to the Future High Streets Fund for Salisbury and Trowbridge had been shortlisted.

The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Select Committee were briefed on the report on 29 January 2021.

17. The project's progress has been presented to Senior Officers and the Trowbridge Area Board on a quarterly basis.

Safeguarding Implications

18. None

Public Health Implications

19. The proposals will improve the walking and cycling in Trowbridge which will promote people's health and wellbeing. A more diverse high street and resilient town centre will contribute to a sense of wellbeing and help support the most vulnerable in our community.

Procurement Implications

20. There will be procurement implications if funding is allocated in line with these proposals. Procurement strategies were discussed with the Council's legal team and included as part of the Future High Streets Fund submission. The project team will update the Board and seek approval of procurement processes once and if MCHLG funds are granted.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

21. Each of the projects as they are shaped will undertake an equalities impact assessments as they progress.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

22. Proposals will encourage sustainable transport choices and will improve walking and cycling environments. Building retrofits will be undertaken to an optimised standard which will minimise carbon emissions and energy spend.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

23. If this response to the in-principle offer for Trowbridge is not submitted, the opportunity for external Government funding will be missed. Consequently, Wiltshire Council will be unable to deliver the projects developed as part of the recovery with resultant reputational impact with MHCLG and further economic decline in Trowbridge.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

24. Economic uncertainty: changes in cost and price inflation rates might

affect expected generating income, resulting in higher financing costs, lower values and risks to financial viability of projects. As a mitigation action, the project is reviewing the financial assumptions in line with the Government guidance.

25. Delivery model: the selection of the delivery vehicle and governance arrangements are not proven effective. To mitigate this risk the project team is conducting additional meetings with officers to strengthen the commercial case and demonstrate plans and processes are in place and the Council has a track record of delivery.

26. Development funding: the projects can't proceed due to the failure to secure development funding. To mitigate this risk, the Council is reviewing a range of funding options, including use of Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) and other possible private sector investors.

27. As a general mitigation action due to the COVID-19 situation, which may impact on the three risks above mentioned, the Government has requested additional details for the projects. The project team has already submitted an addendum to ensure risks are managed diligently in case of changing market conditions.

Financial Implications

28. The Future High Streets Fund seeks to add value to projects by securing co-funding from both private and public sector partners. The project team has identified potential co-finance sources such as lottery and arts grants as well as private sector contributions. No additional funding beyond normal staff costs to help manage the projects is being committed by Wiltshire Council. No capital or revenue allocations are being sought or committed at this time.

Legal Implications

29. The submission of a funding request to MHCLG carries no legal implications. The work programmes that are brought forward as a result of a successful submission are likely to require adherence to Procurement Regulations as noted above. It may be that, depending on the size and commercial structure of the projects brought forward, there will be State Aid regulations to stay within. This will have to be considered at the time with schemes being designed to be compliant.

Workforce Implications

30. The funding includes provision for funding of officer time for monitoring and evaluation of the projects. Officers time will be required for management of projects and market engagement activities and the necessary external professional support to deliver the projects outlined in this report. A successful allocation of funding may

require external recruitment on time limited contracts or secondment(s) to meet this requirement, depending on officer availability.

Options Considered

31. Do nothing – following the do-nothing approach would intensify the market failures and would not solve the challenges faced by Trowbridge which are identified in the bid. It would not provide an action plan to follow.

32. Submit the response to the in-principle offer – the Council has received £5,000 of Future High Streets funding to develop the response. This work is being led by Inner Circle, is well underway with a submission on track for February the 26th.

Conclusions

33. In conclusion, Trowbridge has been negatively affected by a number of factors over a long period of time, resulting in a significant decline of the vitality, attractiveness and perception of the town centre. Only significant interventions will help reverse their decline. The FHSF offers an opportunity for Wiltshire Council to receive external Government funding to take forward a number of transformational projects which have the support of our partners and stakeholders in Trowbridge.

Sam Fox (Interim Corporate Director - Place and Environment)

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Background Papers

The following documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report:

Trowbridge Future High Street Submission Cabinet Report Tuesday 14th July 2021