

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

Tuesday 14th July

Subject: Trowbridge Future High Street Submission

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

Key Decision: Key

Executive Summary

Trowbridge has progressed through the Expression of Interest stage for funding under the Government's Future High Street Fund (FHSF) and officers are preparing to submit a business case by the end of July 2020. This report provides an overview of the strategy and the FHSF projects that have been developed to support the town centre of Trowbridge.

This business case represents a new approach to place-shaping in the county with a specific targeted approach to deliver a step change within the town as part of long-term regeneration in Trowbridge.

To address the challenges identified, five objectives that are interlinked with FHSF objectives and the Trowbridge Masterplan have been set to guide the development of the interventions. These relate to the identified market failures, and are as follows:

- 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

Covid 19 will have a significant impact on the vitality of Trowbridge town centre. Footfall is likely to decline further. National chains are closing and entering into administration. A significant FHSF allocation will enable Wiltshire Council to work with partners to make necessary investments, support the diversification of the high street, and attract private sector funding to enable Trowbridge to regenerate for the benefit of residents, businesses and visitors.

Proposal(s)

That Cabinet :

- Notes the contents of this report
- Delegates authority to agree to the submission of the Trowbridge Future High Street Fund business case application and delegate to the Chief Executive Officer in consultation with the Director for 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 Street Fund business case, application and to finalise the submission including the funding request to MHCLG
- Delegates authority to develop individual workstreams within the business case application to the Chief Executive Officer, in consultation with 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 carparks.

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 Officer

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

Tuesday 14th July

Subject: Future High Streets Fund - Trowbridge

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

Key Decision: Key

Purpose of Report

1. To update Members on the strategy that Wiltshire Council and its partners has developed to reshape Trowbridge's town centre offer.
2. To seek Cabinet approval for Trowbridge's submission to the Government's Future High Street Fund.
3. To agree the proposed delegated authority provisions to enable the Council to submit a business case on behalf of Trowbridge.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

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

Background

5. The Council is taking a new approach to place-shaping within the main market towns across Wiltshire: For Trowbridge this will be a specific targeted approach to delivering packages of work which will deliver transformational change within a holistic vision for the town.

6. This approach has become even more relevant, and urgent, in a post-Covid landscape as both private and public sector partners will need to think imaginatively and work collaboratively to ensure communities and businesses thrive in our towns. The Future High Streets Fund represents an exciting opportunity to take forward specific projects as part of the holistic long-term regeneration aspirations.
7. 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. 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 submission is the next step in the process.
8. The proposals draw on Trowbridge's opportunities around the 2020 Masterplan refresh. It proposes a strategy focused on the historic centre: channelling investment into the heart of the town and celebrating the history of Trowbridge. The existing fabric and assets will be nurtured and enhanced to create an attractive environment for local people and investors.

Future High Street Fund

9. The government recognises that consumer patterns are changing, with spending increasingly online and expectations of high streets are changing. In December 2018 it launched the FHSF to support transformative, structural changes to overcome challenges in high streets and town centres. The objective of the Fund is to renew and reshape town centres and high streets in a way that improves experience, drives growth and ensures future sustainability. Funding bids can be made up to £25m, however, MHCLG makes clear that funding is limited, and most places will receive lower amounts.
10. Funding allocations are assessed through two phases. Both Trowbridge and Salisbury passed the Phase 1 Expression of Interest stage, which looked at the need for funding, nature of the challenge and the vision for the future of the town centres. Phase 2 of the application process is the development of projects that meet the identified needs of the individual high streets and are transformative in nature. A summary of the projects developed for Trowbridge is described in this report.
11. FHSF investment can be within these categories: Investment in physical infrastructure, acquisition and assembly of land including making improvements to the public realm, Improvements to transport access, traffic flow and circulation in the area, supporting change of use including (where appropriate) housing delivery and densification and supporting adaptation of the high street in response to changing technology
12. This report seeks support for the proposals and endorsement of the Phase 2 submission to the Future High Streets Fund.

Economic Context

13. Trowbridge began as a small agricultural settlement, well known for its wool industry from the 14th century which continued to dominate the town before its decline in the 19th century. Trowbridge was known as the “Manchester of the South West” and was previously a vibrant town, which benefitted from the wealth and prosperity generated by the wool industry. The town has retained a rich industrial heritage and character within the Town Centre Conservation Area, with 249 listed buildings and landmark buildings including the Town Hall, mill buildings and the old Ushers Brewery site. A large number of the former industrial buildings are vacant since many of the town’s largest businesses, such as Ushers Brewery and Bowyers, closed due to the national decline of manufacturing. This has weakened the role and identity of Trowbridge in the region.
14. Today, Trowbridge is the County Town of Wiltshire and has a strategically significant role as a principal settlement. It is situated just 20 minutes from Bath and is well connected with rail links to London, Bristol and the south (via Westbury and Southampton). There are also good road connections to the A36 and A350 which links Trowbridge with the M4 and the south coast. With its strong commuter links to nearby settlements, the town has retained an important role as an employment, administration and service centre for the area, with a catchment of c147,000 residents.
15. Trowbridge is a key contributor to Wiltshire’s strong entrepreneurial ecosystem which accounted for 36% of all the new business created in the South West in 2016. Still, 60% of Trowbridge residents, commute to work outside the town contributing to the market failures.

Market Failures

16. Over the previous two decades, high streets across the country have needed to respond to macroeconomic factors, such as widespread changes in technology which allowed a meteoric rise of e-commerce, changes to consumer behaviours and shopping habits, and reduced availability of funding for Council-owned assets. Throughout this period, Trowbridge has suffered the loss of major employers within the town centre and a lagging development sector, resulting in further decline of the offer and perception of the town centre (see figure 1). For a detailed explanation of key challenges please see Annex 1: Key challenges.

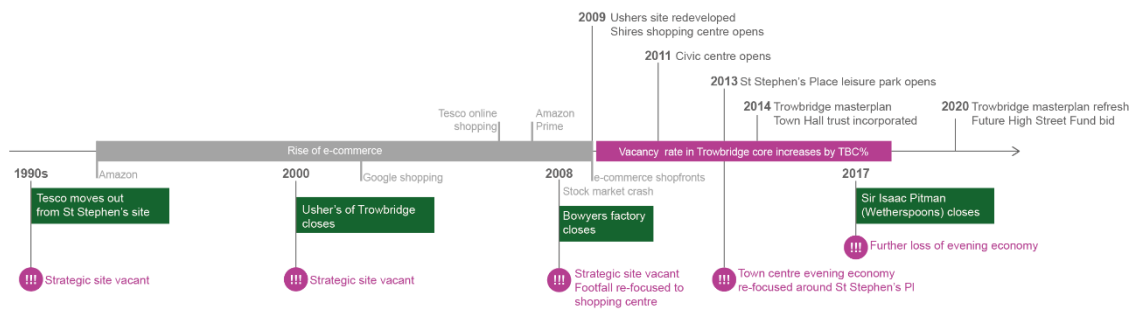


Figure 1 – Challenges timeline for Trowbridge High Street

17. The combined impact of these external and local challenges has resulted in the following market failures, which the private sector has been unable to overturn:
 - a significant lack of activity in the town centre core, particularly during the evening hours;
 - 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;
 - development over the past 20 years has been on the periphery of the centre and aimed mostly at visitors arriving by car, resulting in a disjointed experience with poor linkages between the retail core and new developments, the railway station, major employment sites and carparks.

18. In 2014 the Council commissioned a Masterplan, which set out an ambitious vision for Trowbridge and enabled some of its most recent development. However, the persisting challenges above contributed to the evident decline of the town centre and continues to severely threaten its long-term viability. As part of the Future High Streets business case development, a high-level review and sense-check on the 2014 Masterplan has been undertaken to ensure the continued relevance of the Masterplan and that projects being developed align with the Masterplan. In turn, the Future High Streets projects may inform development of other planning policy such as the Local Plan Review and Trowbridge Neighbourhood Plan.

19. The opportunity presented by the FHSF allows Trowbridge to consider how other emerging challenges and opportunities could be addressed, including the rise of an ageing population, technological changes and innovations, and carbon reduction.

Stakeholder engagement

20. A range of stakeholders from both the public sector and private sectors have been engaged to develop our FHSF bid, including Invest in Trowbridge and the Town Hall Trust. Two public consultation workshops

also took place in June. All stakeholders are eager to support the transformation of Trowbridge into a better local town. Stakeholder engagement will remain a key priority in delivering the Council's ambitious vision. With a comprehensive Engagement Plan for the bid (Annex 2: Stakeholder Engagement Plan), the Council aims to undertake meaningful community engagement in the master planning and business case development process.

21. 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 has been undertaken via regular updates, online meetings, online workshops and, depending on social distancing measures, a pop-up event. A Community Stakeholder Group will be established to continue the engagement work post-submission. This will provide a clear channel for stakeholder ideas and concerns to be presented to decision-makers going forward.

Approach to interventions

22. The projects within this proposal and the Trowbridge Masterplan will mutually improve the connectivity and legibility of the town centre, reinforcing interventions by reactivating historic assets. By bridging the disjointed development and creating a central Historic Quarter, Trowbridge town centre will become a unique destination with a distinctive and attractive offer. Trowbridge has an enthusiastic community of landowners and residents who are passionate about making Trowbridge a better place to live, work and visit. To enable the town to grow sustainably, it is crucial to bring all groups together under a singular vision and deliverable plan. FHSF Funding is a timely intervention to help address the challenges the town faces, support the Trowbridge Masterplan and ensure sustainable growth and future inward investment by improving the attractiveness of the town.
23. Without MHCLG intervention, Trowbridge will not be able to realise its vision of the town and its Masterplan will not be implemented effectively. Trowbridge town centre will continue to struggle, buildings will remain derelict, vacancy rates will remain high, footfall will continue to decline, the public realm will remain unwelcoming and unattractive. The town will remain disconnected, sprawling and disjointed and the future sustainability of Trowbridge will be at risk.

Objectives

24. The vision is to transform Trowbridge into a place where people want to return time and time again – a place to invest in, live, work and play. This aligns with the Council's broader vision of having "stronger, more resilient communities based on a sustainable pattern of development, focused principally on Trowbridge, Chippenham and Salisbury".¹ It is also supported

¹ Wiltshire Core Strategy

by the Trowbridge Masterplan, The Wiltshire Community Plan 2011 – 2026, Swindon and Wiltshire LEP Strategic Economic Plan 2016, as well as the emerging Local Industrial Strategy and other regional policies.

25. To address the challenges identified, five objectives that are interlinked with FHSF objectives and the Trowbridge Masterplan have been set to guide the development of the interventions. These relate to the identified market failures, and are as follows:
- Improving connections and legibility into the town centre
 - Transforming the gateway experience
 - Bringing more leisure 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.

Project Outcomes

26. The funding seeks to create a connected Trowbridge which presents with a range of high-quality and vibrant uses, such as leisure, compact and vibrant retail, schools, workplaces and green spaces within 15min walking or cycling distance from its residents and visitors. Projects detail remains in draft form and are subject to refinement as projects develop. The broad outline of projects is as follows:
27. **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.
28. Current and new visitors will enjoy a safer, more pleasant and accessible journey from the town centre gateways through to the high street, with new pedestrianised links, areas of new activity along an improved river corridor, green infrastructure and functional street furniture and wayfinding. Improvements will be made at the town centre gateway to maximise activity and set the scene for future development, as well as improving movement and connectivity into the town centre to bring residents and visitors to the heart of the town. Several options are being considered and will be put forward for consideration by MHCLG. (Refer to Annex 3: Project Location)
29. **Unique culture-and-leisure-led offer.** The aim will be to refurbish the Grade 2 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.

30. **A resilient and diverse high street.** We will aim to 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.

31. The fund will support change of use and light-touch structural changes to vacant units on the high street. The units will function as pilots to encourage independent businesses and start-ups to set up their businesses in Trowbridge and create a more diverse offer within the town centre and demonstrate demand for an independent and leisure-focused economy. Vacant upper floors will be converted to residential homes for young people. This workstream will align well with announced changes to increase flexibility in town centre retail and commercial uses.

32. **Unlocking good growth.** This project builds on the success of a well-connected and attractive town with a unique offer. We will take steps to deliver currently unviable development through proactively working with landowners to assemble land and to achieve the strategic development of the town centre's key sites in line with the Council's vision. This will ensure that the right mix of uses is delivered to best support the high street's longer-term future. This workstream will also align well with recent announced changes to increase flexibility in town centre regarding underused retail and commercial space.

33. A number of sites are currently being considered, with great potential to use money from the Future High Street Fund to leverage significant private investment to deliver high-quality housing, leisure and workspace within the town centre core. These will be defined in detail in the final bid, including the specific evidence-based funding ask.

Main Considerations for the Council

34. Wiltshire Council officer time has been undertaken to shape the projects and engage with residents and stakeholders through the Masterplan Refresh process. Future officer time to project manage the projects and lead interventions on a resilient and diverse high street and unlocking good growth will need further allocation of resources.

35. There is the risk that if the FHSF submission is unsuccessful and alternative sources of funding do not become available then the Council would need to find revenue monies for some portion of this funding as part of the funding agreement.

36. MHCLG has indicated that the vast majority of towns will not receive £25M, although a strong strategic case has been established for Trowbridge. However, with Covid19, many town centres now find themselves in economic shock, and the government will receive many calls for further support. If Trowbridge is not awarded the full amount, individual projects may be supported by the Government.
37. The projects proposed must be delivered by 2023/24. Match funding may support delivery in later years, but all FHSF funding must be spent by 2023/24. In bidding, the Council is committing to supporting a programme of monitoring and evidence that will last beyond the bid period.

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

38. 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.
39. The project's progress has been presented to Senior Officers and the Trowbridge Area Board on a quarterly basis.

Safeguarding Implications

40. None

Public Health Implications

41. 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

42. There will be procurement implications if funding is allocated in line with these proposals. Procurement strategies will be included as part of the Future High Street 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

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

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

44. 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

45. If this application for FHSF monies 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

46. 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.
47. 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.
48. 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.
49. As a general mitigation action due to the COVID19 situation, which may impact on the three risks above mentioned, the Government has requested additional details for the projects. The project team is currently developing the addendum to ensure risks are managed diligently in case of changing market conditions.

Financial Implications

50. The Future High Street 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.
51. The total request for grant funding is still being confirmed but is likely to be in the region of £23.85m.

Legal Implications

52. 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

53. 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

54. 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 with an action plan to follow.
55. Apply for funding – The Council has received £150,000 of Future High Street funding to develop and submit a detailed business case. This work is being led by Inner Circle, is well underway with a submission on track for late July 2020.

Conclusions

56. The conclusions reached having taken all of the above into account.

Sam Fox (Director - Economic Development and Planning)

Report Author: Rory Bowen, rory.bowen@wiltshire.gov.uk, 01225 713433

Annex 1 Key challenges

Annex 2 Stakeholder Engagement Plan

Annex 3 Project Location