

Salisbury Central Area Framework

Purpose of Report

1. To:
 - Note the contents and recommendations of the Salisbury Central Area Framework (CAF) (appendix A);
 - Recognise the CAF as an evidence-based document to inform the Local Plan Review, emerging Salisbury Neighbourhood Plan and future planning guidance; and
 - Endorse the CAF as a material consideration in the making of planning decisions.

Background

2. Salisbury is an historic, characterful and successful place. However, in recent years, a combination of the economic downturn, the changing role of small cities, and the nerve agent incident in 2018 have threatened its vibrancy.
3. As part of the ongoing recovery work in the city centre, the Salisbury Central Area Framework was launched to guide future developments and initiatives in the city centre with the aim of bringing positive change to the city and making it a more vibrant, attractive and sustainable place.

COVID-19 Impact

4. The COVID-19 pandemic now presents additional challenges and may accelerate the high street decline that the CAF seeks to address. Whilst the pandemic has delayed the work on the CAF, the shutdown and economic fallout has made the need to plan proactively for the city centre and its economic recovery even more important than before. The plans and projects within the CAF are intended to provide a platform from which the city can bounce back from these events.

What is the Salisbury Central Area Framework?

5. The CAF provides a strategy for the way forward for Salisbury city centre that is:
 - Based on commercial reality
 - Sets out a way towards delivery
 - Promotes better design quality
 - Helps attract inward investment
6. The CAF sets out 5 key themes:

Creating people friendly streets - To make the central area a better place for people to move around safely, comfortably and in a more pleasant environment with reduced noise and air pollution and reduced greenhouse gas emissions; prioritising cycling, walking and public transport.

Improving open space and the environment - The delivery of a connected River Park through the city centre and improving connections between the existing green spaces to enhance nature, leisure and enjoyment.

Creating vibrancy - Enabling spaces and premises in the city to adapt to uses which provide entertainment and experiences to residents and visitors in addition to the day-to-day retail, leisure and service offer.

Bringing out Salisbury's qualities - To enhance buildings and spaces to best showcase the unique and beautiful heritage of Salisbury.

Identifying character areas and their role in the city - Defining identity and purpose to the various parts of the central area to enhance their character and roles.

7. Each theme provides an umbrella for various projects and initiatives, ranging from temporary events to public realm improvements to major development opportunities. The CAF is required in order to bring together the existing visions, objectives and baseline assessments that have already been carried out for Salisbury and develop a workable framework for implementation to deliver desired outcomes for the city.
8. The five themes of the CAF are underpinned by the golden thread of responding to and mitigating against the impacts of climate change; responding to climate change is an overarching consideration within the CAF. The CAF provides an ambitious set of recommendations which seek to protect the environment, reduce the likelihood of flooding, and reduce motor vehicle movements through the city while ensuring the city remains accessible to all.
9. Jointly, Wiltshire Council and its partners, including Salisbury City Council, Salisbury's Business Improvement District, Salisbury Cathedral, Wiltshire College and University centre and Swindon & Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership, have established a Salisbury Place Board that will deliver the recommendations set out in the Framework in a coordinated way.

Summer 2019 Consultation

10. The council undertook an initial period of consultation on a series of objectives, outline themes and proposals for the CAF between 27 June and 9 August 2019 and invited comments from the public during that period.
11. A public exhibition was also held on 2 July 2019 in the Salisbury Guildhall Square. Wiltshire Council officers and members of the consultant team were available during this time to answer questions about the CAF.
12. The consultation was comprehensive and followed the prescription outlined for the preparation of Supplementary Planning Documents in Wiltshire Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).
13. Further detail of the consultation undertaken, and the schedule of responses received during this consultation can be found in the Report on the Summer 2019 Consultation (Appendix B). This report summarises the issues that arose and provides details of comments received along with a response from officers where appropriate (section 4). This report also includes copies of the consultation boards and consultation questionnaire.

14. The common themes arising from the consultation responses can be summarised as follows:

Main issues and problems facing Salisbury City Centre

- Levels of traffic in the city centre.
- Concerns over air pollution and the quality of walking/cycling routes and the pedestrian environment.
- A lack of affordable housing in the city centre.
- The number of empty premises.
- A general perceived lack of cleanliness/tidiness in the city centre.

Accessing the city

- Walking and traveling by private car are the most common ways to access the city centre.
- Improvements to walking and cycling routes in the central area are needed.
- There are perceived barriers to using more sustainable ways of accessing the city centre, such as limited bus services and unsafe cycling conditions.
- There was broad agreement with all the ways suggested for encouraging cycling, such as reducing traffic, better signage to raise safety awareness, having a more coherent cycle network.
- Bus and Park & Ride services should be extended.
- Specific parts of the city should be pedestrianised.

Focused consolidation of car parks and better direction finding

- General support of the potential for consolidation of car parking within the central area, although some concern about the implication this could have on the less mobile and those accessing Salisbury for its evening economy.
- Support for improvement to associated wayfinding and introducing measures to reduce through traffic.

River Park

- General support for the River Park and improving connections to parks and meadows.
- The River Park will help mitigate the effects of climate change and flooding; will provide areas for education and relaxation; will add to the overall character; will provide pedestrian and cycle routes and connect the parks; and will help flora and fauna.

Barriers for younger people

- Lack of affordable housing and employment opportunities are key barriers.
- The lack of a university was named by a significant number of people as a contributory factor to the lack of retention of young people.
- The lack of entertainment/leisure and events venues.

Commercial/retail development

- Support for pop-up / temporary uses.
- Market Place should be kept as the city's centre and should cater for a diversity of uses.

Leisure/recreation

- More leisure activities and facilities for different age groups but particularly for the young.
- Improved leisure/entertainment/culture offer needed.
- More museums, art galleries, open-air concerts, street art & performance spaces are needed.

Rail transport/Salisbury railway station

- Public realm improvements, including better signage, are needed to the railway station area.
- Open the north entrance to the station.

City centre development and design

- Provide iconic, inspirational, original buildings to draw visitors.
- Reduce signage clutter.
- Shopfronts in the city are of poor quality.

Historic environment

- Improve facades of deteriorating buildings e.g. Crane Street, Catherine Street.
- Make more of heritage assets in the city e.g. buildings, heritage, surrounding water meadows, rivers, proximity to Stonehenge, Old Sarum cultural offering.

Tourism:

- Competing views on whether the city has enough hotels or needs more hotel accommodation.
- Small B&Bs and family hostels, budget hotels, youth hostels are needed.

Housing

- Affordable live/work units should be built to encourage city centre vibrancy.
- Housing should be delivered to enable older people to downsize into smaller homes.

Employment

- Create employment opportunities to encourage young people to stay in the area.
- Salisbury does not have enough larger employers, leading to out-commuting.

January – February 2020 Consultation

15. Following analysis of the comments received to the summer 2019 consultation, the objectives, outline themes and proposals of the CAF were refined further. This led to the production of the next iteration of the CAF as well as a summary document that crystallised the main themes and recommendations of the CAF.
16. Between 16 January and 28 February 2020, the council then embarked on a further round of consultation on the “Salisbury Central Area Framework”; and the “Our Place in the Future: A Summary of the Salisbury Central Area Framework” <http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/salisbury-future>. Two extensive full day public exhibitions were held on 21 January and 29 January. Approximately 40 exhibition boards were on display and Wiltshire Council officers, various consultant colleagues and officers from the Environment Agency were available to answer questions from members of the public.

17. As well as consulting on the revised CAF, members of the public were also invited to provide feedback on a number of specific projects that the council are working towards. These include:

Fisherton Street City Gateway Enhancements - This forms part of the Future High Street Fund bid and, if successful, could provide a new welcoming entrance to the city. Various interventions are proposed including signage and building frontages to help change visitors' first impression of the area.

Station Quarter - The project will transform the arrival experience at Salisbury's railway station. Various proposed interventions include an enhanced travel interchange, improved wayfinding and car parking facilities.

Transport accessibility - This project is aiming to improve the routes for walking and cycling into the city including the subways, and improved bus accessibility within the city centre through a programme of highways and structural improvements, subject to funding.

River Park- This joint scheme with the Environment Agency will help reduce the flood risk to various areas in the city and improve leisure and recreational uses as well as ecology and biodiversity enhancements.

Illuminating Salisbury - This was due to form part of a funding bid which has been placed on hold due to COVID-19. If successful in the future, this will provide a fantastic outdoor visitor light attraction that will illuminate the stories of Salisbury's rich heritage.

Public art projects and Wayfinding - A public arts consultant has been appointed to help commission a number of public art and lighting artists to create high quality public realm interventions in Fisherton Street, if funding is successful. A consultant has also been appointed to deliver a Wayfinding Strategy that will significantly improve the public realm and visitor experience of moving through the city and key arrival points to Salisbury.

Heritage Trail app - A Salisbury Heritage Trail app for a smart phone is being developed. It will be targeted towards tourists as well as local residents and those in outlying areas giving them more reasons to explore Salisbury's heritage, histories and mysteries.

18. Further detail of the consultation undertaken, and the schedule of responses received during this consultation can be found in the Public Consultation Report (Jan – Feb 2020) (Appendix C). In summary, responses to the 2020 consultation were as follows:

- **Street Hierarchy**

A significant majority of respondents (84%) were in support of the development of a street hierarchy to prioritise streets and spaces for pedestrians and cyclists over cars. Additional comments included that the needs of disabled people must be considered from an early stage of developing proposals; and that pedestrianisation will make the city more attractive, safe, and clean.

- **Consolidating car parking**

The majority of respondents (63%) were in support of the principle of consolidating car parking within the city centre. Issues raised included that neither Salt Lane or Brown Street car parks should be developed until it is clear what is happening with parking on the central car park / railway station.

- **Park & Ride**

Many commented that the Park and Ride services would be better used if they provided a more extensive service starting earlier and running until later to serve the evening economy, and also provide an improved weekend service.

- **Improvements to urban environment of Fisherton Street**

There was overall support (84%) to bring about improvements to the urban environment of Fisherton Street by widening pavements and introducing public art and improving lighting. Comments included that major improvements would be particularly welcome toward the railway station to welcome visitors to the city.

- **Delivery of a River Park**

There was overall support (91%) for the delivery of a 'River Park' through central Salisbury to incorporate improved green space for recreational use, habitat creation, enhanced routes for pedestrians and cyclists, and flood risk reduction to a wider area. Comments include that the Council has a strong duty to deliver this with the declaration of a climate emergency, and that the reduction of flood risk is a priority.

- **Enhancements to Salisbury's rivers and water meadows**

Enhancements to Salisbury's rivers and water meadows to improve the environment and opportunities for their enjoyment were overall supported (91%). Comments included that tourists and locals should be made more aware of the water meadows.

- **Temporary / Pop up uses**

There was overall support (90%) for supporting temporary / pop up uses in vacant buildings to create interest and vibrancy. Comments included that more space should be provided for local artists to display/sell their work in pop-up shops and galleries and that the city centre needs to shift its focus to events, activities and creativity.

- **Railway Station**

Enhancing the Railway Station area with the creation of a new people-friendly orientated plaza, a business hub to the north of the station and improved interchange facilities for buses, cyclists and pedestrians was supported (88%). Many respondents referred to the fact that the station is an important gateway to the city that needs to be improved.

- **Repurposing of empty or underused buildings to support local businesses**

There was overall support (91%) for the repurposing of empty or underused buildings to support local businesses with the creation of affordable workspaces/shop frontages and provision of 'heritage' living for young people. Comments included that workspaces must be affordable; and that this proposal would support new/start up creative businesses.

- **Illuminating Salisbury**

The Illuminating Salisbury project was by and large supported, however there were some objections to aspects of the proposals. Comments included that this project will attract visitors and contribute towards a vibrant evening economy, but there were also some concerns about the compatibility of it with the council's declaration of a climate emergency and the potential for light pollution/habitat disturbance and its energy consumption.

- **Improving the appearance and quality of Salisbury's historic shop frontages**

The majority of respondents (85%) supported the production and enforcement of planning policy guidance relating to shop fronts in order to improve the appearance and quality of Salisbury's shop frontages. Comments included that Wiltshire Council's current shopfront policies need review; and that undue burden must not be placed on businesses.

- **Improved pedestrian and cycling wayfinding infrastructure**

There was overall support (86%) for the improvement of pedestrian and cycling wayfinding infrastructure (e.g. directional and map signs) and technology (e.g. smartphone apps and digital displays) to help people find their way around the city. Comments included that any physical/digital infrastructure must be maintained and updated on a regular basis; and that a wayfinding system should be accessible to and tested by people with all disabilities.

- **Public Art**

There was general support (70%) for the delivery of new public art in the city. Some objected to money being spent on public art, and that public money should instead be prioritised on essential infrastructure. Other comments included that public art should represent Salisbury's history, local themes and people; and that there should be a mix of modern and traditional art

- **Character Areas**

Most respondents (63%) supported the approach taken in defining character areas in Salisbury's central area. However, some felt that the character areas were too prescriptive, and need to be flexible/diverse/should be allowed to develop their own character organically.

Overview of proposed main changes to the CAF and summary CAF

19. In response to the comments received, the CAF (Appendix A) and the 'Our Place in the Future' summary document (Appendix D) have been further refined. In summary the main changes are as follows:

- General wording improvements and corrections
- To make clear that the CAF is also imperative in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the novichok poisonings
- To make greater emphasis on threading the climate emergency throughout the document and how the CAF will respond to it
- To further emphasise that any redevelopment of Salt Lane and/or Brown Street car parks will first require a detailed assessment of parking needs in the city.
- Map corrections and map legibility improvements

- Making reference to partners who are or who will be involved in projects, for example, Wiltshire Creative and Natural England.
- Removing reference to creating new links to the water meadows from Cathedral Close and allowing public access to the river.
- Wording amendments to clarify that the long-term future of Churchfields Industrial Estate will be determined through the review of the Local Plan.
- Reduction and refinement of the content of the Our Place in the Future summary document for each of reading.

Conclusion

20. The Salisbury Central Area Framework project was borne out of the recovery work in the city following the nerve agent attack in March 2018, which had a serious negative impact on the city centre economy. The shutdown and economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic has now made the need to plan proactively for our city centre even more acute.
21. The CAF focuses on raising the city's profile as an investment opportunity and to guide the future development. It offers a strategic urban vision for the city centre area, making recommendations on the form of future development and public sector interventions that can bring forward positive change. The council undertook an initial period of consultation on a series of objectives, outline themes and proposals of an early iteration of the CAF in the summer of 2019 and invited comments from the public during that period.
22. Following analysis of the comments received to the summer 2019 consultation, the objectives, outline themes and proposals of the CAF were refined further. This led to the production of the next iteration of the CAF as well as a summary document that crystallised the main themes and recommendations of the CAF.
23. In response to the comments received, the CAF and the 'Our Place in the Future' summary document have been further refined. The CAF now represents a robust framework upon which future proposals for Salisbury can be based and taken forward to ensure the city's resilience for the future.

Recommendation

24. It is recommended that the Salisbury Central Area Framework, as attached at Appendix A, and subject to any other minor alterations required to improve its clarity, is:
- Recognised as an evidence-based document to inform the Local Plan Review, emerging Salisbury Neighbourhood Plan and future planning guidance; and
 - Endorsed as a material consideration in the making of planning decisions.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Salisbury Central Area Framework (CAF)
 Appendix B - Report on the Summer 2019 Consultation
 Appendix C - Public Consultation Report (Jan – Feb 2020)
 Appendix D - 'Our Place in the Future' summary document