

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

27 September 2022

Subject: Future High Street Fund Updates and delegated decision on delivery

Cabinet Member: Richard Clewer - Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Climate Change, MCI, Economic Development, Heritage, Arts, Tourism and Health & Wellbeing

Key Decision: Key

Executive Summary

Wiltshire Council received funding from the Government's Future High Street Fund (FHSF) in Spring 2021 for programmes of work in Salisbury and Trowbridge. Since then further project development and programme management activities have taken place to ensure the delivery of the necessary investments to support the diversification of the high street and town centres.

This report provides an update of the FHSF projects to support enhancements to the centres of Trowbridge and Salisbury, including progress to date and necessary amendments to ensure delivery. Interventions are in line with the funding criteria as set out by Government through the FHSF Prospectus and guidance documents.

Trowbridge was awarded £16,347,056
Salisbury was awarded £9,355,731

Proposals

That Cabinet:

- Notes the contents of this report
- Delegates authority to spend allocated FHSF grant funding to the Corporate Director of Place, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Climate Change, MCI, Economic Development, Heritage, Arts, Tourism and Health & Wellbeing in line with the FHSF funding criteria as set by DLUHC.
- Delegates authority to appropriate development, procurement and delivery of individual workstreams within the programme to Corporate Director for Place, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Climate Change, MCI, Economic Development, Heritage, Arts, Tourism and Health & Wellbeing in line with programme outcomes.

Reason for Proposals

Town centres have 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. Over the previous two decades, high streets across the country have been affected by widespread change in consumer behaviours and shopping habits largely in the form of out-of-town shopping and more recently online retail.

These changes have contributed to the decline of the town centre as the heart of the community and continues to threaten long-term viability of business operators. Government has sought to address these impacts through the formation of the High Street Task Force and Towns Fund, which includes the Future High Streets Fund.

Through Future High Streets Funding, Trowbridge and Salisbury have the chance to significantly kickstart the strengthening and diversification of the offers and accessibility to their high streets.

This report provides an update of the FHSF projects which are being developed and delivered to support enhancements to the centres of Trowbridge and Salisbury. Interventions are in line with the funding criteria as set out by Government through the FHSF Prospectus and guidance documents

Trowbridge was awarded £16,347,056
Salisbury was awarded £9,355,731

Successful and timely delivery of the Future High Streets Fund Programme will enable Wiltshire Council to work with partners to initiate that process and attract in other public and private sector funding to rejuvenate town centres.

Terence Herbert
Chief Executive

Wiltshire Council

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Key Decision: Key

Purpose of Report

1. To update Members on progress in delivering Future High Streets Fund programmes in Trowbridge and Salisbury.
2. To agree the proposed delegated authority provisions to enable Officers to deliver in line with programme outcomes

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

3. Attracting funding into Trowbridge and Salisbury from the Future High Street Fund Improvements helps meet the priorities of the Council's Business Plan 2022-32 including:

Thriving Economy: We have vibrant, well-connected communities:

- Help create and support vibrant town centres.
- Deliver infrastructure to enable local communities to live, work and play locally, businesses to invest and everyone to take responsibility for the environment.
- Attract investment into Wiltshire's communities.
- Deliver capital investment as part of a strategic approach to placemaking, working with partners in public and private sectors and optimising the use of assets in council and public ownership

We Stay Active

- Keeping physically, socially and mentally active has direct and positive impacts on brain function, weight management, reducing disease, and the ability to enjoy life. Improving all these things for residents will lead to greater happiness, more economic independence, and less service reliance

We take responsibility for the environment

- Maintain and improve the natural and built environment
- Enable everyone to have access to cleaner air
- Improve and protect biodiversity

- Ensure access to the natural environment for as many as possible.

We are the path to carbon neutral (net zero)

- Assist the county to have a smaller carbon footprint.
- Support decarbonisation of existing transport and increased use of public transport options as well as walking and cycling.
- Prepare the county for the impact of climate change.
- Invest in assets to support our lowering carbon output.

Background

4. The Council is taking forward its 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 as part of FHSF delivery. In Salisbury, FHSF funds are delivering outcomes in line with the Salisbury Central Area Framework.
5. This approach has become more pressing and relevant in a post-Covid landscape, as both private and public sector partners 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 this long-term regeneration agenda.
6. 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, delivering transformative, structural changes to overcome challenges in high streets and town centres. Both Trowbridge and Salisbury submitted bids outlining their challenges and secured funding based on those proposals.
7. The interventions in Trowbridge draw on the town's opportunities identified in the 2020 Masterplan refresh. It frames a strategy focused on the historic centre: channelling investment into the heart of the town and celebrating the history of Trowbridge.
8. The approach in Salisbury has similarly been developed over time and looks to deliver elements of the Salisbury Central Area Framework. The Central Area Framework provides an umbrella strategy and serves a number of purposes, including recommending a portfolio of projects for the Council and its partners to take forward as and when funding and resource allocations allow, informing discussions with potential investors and landowners over viable development opportunities, influencing emerging policy and strategies, and providing a platform for partners to work together constructively.
9. The government recognises that consumer patterns are changing, with spending increasingly online and expectations of high streets are changing. Alongside available capital funding, the High Streets Task Force is working to establish best practice in supporting the retail environment. This builds on work from the Institute of Place Management, which has informed both the Future High Streets and Wiltshire Towns Programme approaches.

Summary of Trowbridge projects:

10. The projects being funded by Future High Streets Funding include pedestrian and public space enhancements in the town centre, improvements to the River Biss corridor, vacant commercial unit grant and the renovation of the Town Hall.

10.1 Pedestrian improvements in the town centre

Projects designed to improve the pedestrian arrival points and access to the town centre in order to:

- improve the experience of walking into and around the town centre
- facilitate safer and accessible movement through to the town centre
- improve wayfinding (how people navigate through the town centre)

There are five areas of focus:

10.1.1 Wicker Hill and Hill Street junction, including part of Fore Street

The proposal is to provide improved space for pedestrians. This will be achieved by widening footpaths using similar materials to the previous enhancements, with the aim of providing an improved link for pedestrians to the town centre and railway station. The proposal will also link into the work being developed as part of the River Biss corridor scheme. Whereas the original bid proposal sought to remove traffic from Fore street and Wicker Hill, this proposal retains the route for traffic, but allows the opportunity for this heritage area of the town centre to become a gateway for visitors and a vibrant commercial street.

10.1.2 The junction of Manvers Street and Church Street

This is a well utilised route into the town centre for pedestrians from the Sainsbury's store and the aim is to further improve this connection by opening up the area in front of Manvers House. This could be achieved by the removal of the existing wall and some of the vegetation that currently blocks the view to Manvers house. There is an opportunity to provide a better relationship with the town centre through the use of materials which match those used in previous enhancements.

10.1.3 The junction of Union Street and Church Street

This was once a busy junction prior to the opening of County Way, but the current traffic signals are no longer needed for managing traffic flow as they reached the end of their serviceable life. This presents the opportunity to remove them and undertake improvements for pedestrians in what is a key pedestrian route into the town centre from developments north of the town centre, and the Church Street Car Park. The proposals would provide widened footpaths and new crossing points with Zebra crossings, giving pedestrian greater precedence over vehicles.

10.1.4 Castle Street

Following the building of the St Stephens Place complex with its cinema, restaurants and other attractors, Castle Street now acts as a key pedestrian link from this development into the town centre. Previous enhancement schemes did not extend into Castle Street and it can feel a little detached from the town centre. The intention is to enhance Castle Street and reinforce the connection between the Saint Stephens

place complex and the town centre. It will not be possible to remove traffic from Castle Street given the need to service businesses, but there is the opportunity to provide improvements for pedestrians by reviewing footpath widths and using materials as to define this pedestrian corridor.

10.1.5 Roundstone Street

This provides access into the town centre from the east and links to the Lovemead Car Park. The council's consultants looking at the broader public realm enhancements have identified the opportunity to provide improved access to the car park through alterations to the current ramp arrangements. They have also suggested the benefit of opening up the view when approaching the town centre to show off the local historic buildings. Other proposed improvements in this area would provide enhanced connections to the cycle link on Hilperton Road, which is currently under construction, and encourage sustainable travel methods into the town. There is also the opportunity to provide improvements for pedestrians by reviewing footpath widths and using materials to reinforce the pedestrian route along the length of Roundstone Street.



10.2 Wayfinding and public space enhancements - 'Trowbridge Trail'

Two strategic pieces of work have been undertaken to date:

- Develop a strategy for 'Bringing Out the Best' of Trowbridge that identifies the town's unique points and destinations
- Develop a strategy for 'Connecting the Dots', to include the implementation of a new signage scheme to showcase the town centre's heritage, improve links and encourage movement around the town centre

From this work we will design and implement the 'Trowbridge Trail', focusing on improving the public environment in the town centre, creating safer, easier and accessible movement and encouraging Trowbridge to be a place that people want to visit and spend time in.

Further engagement with the Town Council and stakeholders will take place in autumn 2022

10.3 Improvements to the River Biss

This project will:

- Deliver exemplary environmental improvements along the River Biss corridor between Town Bridge and Castle Street Bridge
- Enhance and expand the existing river corridor and connect Trowbridge to its river
- Make Trowbridge a pleasant place to walk and cycle, increasing visiting time and encouraging football

Working in partnership with Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, we aim to increase the amount of green space, to rejuvenate existing areas of green space by creating pocket parks and to install and improve walk and cycle ways along the River Biss corridor between Cradle Bridge and Town Bridge. The project will also include a suite of tree and understory planting.

The project is in the initial stages of creating RIBA Stage 3 designs. High level concept designs have been drawn and the final surveys needed to inform the stage 3 designs are currently being undertaken (July 2022).

Project costings are expected late summer 2022 at which point project outputs will be reviewed.

10.4 Trowbridge Town Hall renovations

The investment from the Future High Streets Fund will bring the Grade II listed building back into use so it can host a full and vibrant programme of community-led cultural and social activities for the people of Trowbridge, enabling it to fulfil its potential as a landmark asset for the town.

The proposals include:

- Improving the accessibility into and within the building
- Reducing the carbon emissions required to run the building
- Improving the community spaces and amenities in the Town Hall
- Restoring the building to its pre-1970s glory as a destination for events in the heart of Trowbridge

The project is currently at the early stages of Project Stage 2 (First-Stage Contractor Tender, Develop Design for Planning Submission, Gain Listed Building Consent)

Please see linked Cabinet paper (13/9/22) relating to Trowbridge Town Hall and Community Asset Transfer for further details.

10.5 Vacant Commercial Units Fund

FHSF will deliver a discretionary grants programme offering funding to businesses and organisations to bring vacant commercial units back into use. Through this fund Wiltshire Council will support the refurbishment of vacant commercial units to encourage independent businesses and start-ups and encourage the conversion of upper floors of commercial premises, creating additional residential accommodation.

11. Since the original project budgets were submitted some changes have been identified and proposed to Government which allows reallocation of some funds between projects to ensure deliverability within the funding criteria and fixed budget envelope. This process is ongoing with DLUHC and ensures that original value for money and outcomes are still met. This includes:
- A) Project 1.1 - The original ambition was to transform the area around Hill Street into a two-way traffic system, enabling the removal of through traffic on Wicker Hill and Fore street. Given the complexity of delivery within the funding timescales due to unforeseen complexities with landownership and potential negative on businesses along Fore Street, this aspect has been deferred and the council is proposing to focus instead on improving the pedestrian arrival points and access to the town centre as reflected in the above description.
- B) Project 2.2 – The initial bid proposal included the refurbishment of the old market hall to deliver a flexible retail and workspace offer adjacent to the Trowbridge Town Hall. Following further analysis on project options and financial viability, The project funding needs to be amended to reflect changes to delivery timescales and changes to the project scope it has been proposed that the £2.066m funding and proposed outputs for Project 2.2 - Market hall is re-allocated as follows:
- £0.46 to Project 1 – Better movement and legibility at the town centre gateways. The funding will improve the accessibility and amenity at key town centre gateways, steering movement toward the new town centre offer and existing high street
 - £0.733m to Project 2.1 – Town Hall project – The funding will enable the intensification of uses at the town hall and achievement of a sustainable wellness and community offer.
 - £0.833m to Project 3.1 – Vacant units fund. The funding will enable the transformation of vacant heritage spaces within the high street which are currently vacant or under-used (similarly to the Market Hall) to deliver an independent retail offer, as well as spaces for wellness, leisure and culture, in addition to residential units.

Summary of Salisbury projects

12. In 2021 Wiltshire Council was awarded £9,355,731 to develop a range of projects in Salisbury. The Future High Streets Funded projects seek to embrace Salisbury's classically original charm. From a sense of arrival at the proposed newly improved Station Forecourt to a sense of place at Fisherton Street with its diverse range of independent businesses and spirit, these projects are helping to reshape the city.

The funding has been split between three projects:

12.1 Salisbury Station Forecourt (£5.3 million)

Redesigning the station forecourt making it more attractive and accessible for visitors and residents. The proposed improvements aim to enhance the public realm and improve wayfinding to provide a welcoming arrival to visitors to encourage tourists and visitors to the city centre, to stay longer and spend more of their money in our local shops, cafes and restaurants.

The proposed works include enhancing the Station Forecourt area with improved landscaping, street furniture and wayfinding, along with more sustainable travel facilities such as bus stops and bicycle parking. In addition, a combination of wall-mounted and pole mounted lighting is proposed to provide safe levels of lighting for the forecourt users.

This project is currently developing technical design. There has been a minor (4 month) delay to the programme to include additional Network Rail permissions for works. The project is currently within budget, but inflationary pressures mean it will draw on its contingency.

12.2 Fisherton Gateway (£3.2 million)

Delivering improvements to the road network and public spaces along Fisherton Street. The proposed improvements aim to enhance the public realm and improve pedestrian areas making it easier, safer and more convenient to travel by foot into the city centre.

The proposed works include new landscaping, lighting and wayfinding, widened footways, new street furniture and continuous footways at junctions providing a level crossing and giving pedestrians priority.

This project is currently in technical design stage. It is on track to deliver within the programme timescale. Fisherton Gateway is the project most at risk from inflationary pressures as it remains scalable.

12.3 Heritage Living (£800,000)

Redeveloping a vacant listed building and creating apartments in unoccupied spaces above shops

The proposals include redeveloping a vacant listed building and creating apartments in unoccupied spaces above shops encouraging young people to live, work and socialise in the city.

This project is being developed in partnership with Salisbury City Council, and independently of the other two projects. The most recent consultation does not deal with this project but updates will be provided as the scheme develops.

These projects aim to reinvigorate the city centre by ensuring a greater experience on the high street for residents and visitors to encourage them to keep coming back, supporting business growth and enhancing the city's reputation as a destination of choice for tourists.

The heritage living programme saw gap funding being allocated from the Future High Streets fund to create a commercially viable project. Given inflationary pressures further consideration of the scope and funding model is required. This is underway and will report by March 23. Due to match-funding on this project, it is able to deliver beyond the fund deadline.

Stakeholder engagement

13. A range of public and stakeholders from both the public sector and private sectors have been engaged to develop our the FHSF programmes.
14. In Salisbury engagement took place between December 2021 and April 2022 and is described in full detail [here](#).
15. This builds on initial engagement which took place in development of the FHSF bid and development of the CAF, with over 50 engagement sessions reaching over 600 people.
16. In Trowbridge public and stakeholder engagement took place in January and February 2022, presenting the outcomes and stages of project development.
17. A full overview of Trowbridge engagement material can be found [here](#) and a full report on the engagement responses can be found [here](#). Proposals to date have been well received. Further engagement and appropriate consultation will take place as projects develop through their cycles.

Main Considerations for the Council

18. Wiltshire Council officer time is used to develop and deliver projects which includes engaging with residents and stakeholders. While a portion of officer time can be recouped there is not full cost recovery for delivery of these capital projects. In delivering under FHSF, the Council is committed to supporting a programme of monitoring and evidence that will last beyond the bid period.
19. Recent risks in association with abnormal inflation are being managed through usual project management processes as well as with the regular funding body, DLUHC.
20. 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 March 2024. While spent funding is not at risk, as funds are issued under a Section 31 grant, there is pressure to deliver to spending profiles as agreed with the funder.

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

21. The Vice-Chair of the Environment Select Committee was initially briefed on the programme in 2021. Further updates will be given as part of regular feedback on the Wiltshire Towns Programme.
22. Both Salisbury and Trowbridge FHSF programmes development is reported to Senior Officers and relevant Area Boards on a regular basis.

Safeguarding Implications

23. There are no safeguarding implications associated with this proposal.

Public Health Implications

24. There are no direct implications for Public Health. The proposals will improve the environment for walking and cycling in both Salisbury and Trowbridge which will promote people's health and wellbeing. More diverse high street and resilient town centres will contribute to a sense of wellbeing and help support the most vulnerable in our community.

Procurement Implications

25. There are ongoing procurement responsibilities for the Council in delivery of Future High Street Fund projects. Strategic Procurement Hub support is integrated into programme delivery to ensure fairness and value for money.
26. All procurement associated with the project will take place within the Council's procurement and commercial strategy and in conjunction with the Council's Commercial and Procurement team.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

27. There are no direct equalities impacts arising from the proposal, however each of the projects as they develop will continue to assess equalities impacts.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

28. 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

29. If the proposed decision is not taken, delivery of the FHSF schemes would become difficult to do in the timeframes available to spend the grant funding.

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

30. Economic uncertainty: changes in cost and price inflation rates might affect ability to deliver certain outcomes. As a mitigation action, the project leads are regularly reviewing costs in relation to deliverability of outcomes. These pressures are communicated to Government.
31. Regular updates on project progress are given to Place Leadership team, Area Boards and the Corporate Leadership Team. LT on request.

Financial Implications

32. The total capital grant funding is £23.85m.
33. There are no direct financial implications to the council in delivery of the Future High Streets Fund programme. No match funding is being sought at this time and the programme is delivering within a fixed cost envelope.

Legal Implications

34. The work programmes that have been brought forward as a result of successful submissions have regular input from Legal team as appropriate, with regard to land ownership, asset transfer, grant agreements and other areas. Projects of course adhere to Procurement Regulations as noted above.

Workforce Implications

35. 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

36. Do nothing. Following the do-nothing approach would intensify the challenges that Trowbridge and Salisbury High Streets face and would result in a loss of capital grant funding for Wiltshire.

Conclusions

37. Approval of delegated authority to officers in line with funding guidelines and locally agreed outcomes will ensure efficient delivery of the Future High Street Fund programmes. The conclusions reached having taken all of the above into account.

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Background Papers

Link 1 [FHSF Prospectus and guidance documents](#)

Link 2 [Future High Streets Fund Trowbridge Project Overview- Wiltshire Council](#)

Link 3 [Trowbridge High Street Engagement Survey](#)

Link 4 [Future High Streets Fund Salisbury - Wiltshire Council](#)

Link 5 [Salisbury Central Area Framework](#)