

Wiltshire Council

Trowbridge Area Board

1 October 2020

**Future High Streets Fund
Trowbridge Submission**

Background work

1. The 2014 Trowbridge Masterplan identified the opportunity to develop a diverse offer in Trowbridge, based around celebrating and enhancing the town's unique heritage as well as pinpointing key sites.
2. The work funded through the Future High Streets Fund has built on this work and highlighted the continued need to rebalance the town's offer, ensuring Trowbridge secures a vibrant future with a balance of retail, leisure, cultural, commercial, residential and social provision. The town is well placed to play a key regional role, whilst meeting the day to day needs of local people who live and work within a short distance from the town centre.
3. The Future High Streets Fund submission was developed to support this vision, while addressing the Council's ambitious commitment to become carbon neutral by 2030, as well as the emerging impact of Covid-19. In line with towns across the country, there will be a renewed focus on encouraging sustainable travel, making buildings more energy efficient and increasing the quality of the experience in high streets.

Public and stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement to date:

- Several meetings with key stakeholders such as Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, Town Hall Trust, Invest in Trowbridge / Chamber of Commerce.
- Two meetings with Council Officers as well as 1:1 conversations.

Public engagement:

- Two engagement workshop sessions were organised for Thursday 18th June, to take place via Zoom. Invitations were sent out through virtual channels, including various community organisations' social media and individual e-mails.
- In total, 43 people signed up to the sessions. 33 attended one of the two sessions and a further 6 provided their feedback via e-mail or telephone.
- Their background was mixed, with local landowners or shop owners, residents, people who visit Trowbridge for family or business reasons, Council staff and representatives from the business community and culture sector.

FHSF submission

4. In consultation with stakeholders and the public, a range of FHSF-aligned interventions have been developed to promote and ensure the long-term sustainability of the high street's unique historic assets, drive footfall from the town centre gateways and into the high street and improve the overall experience of moving through the town centre.
5. By embracing its uniqueness, Trowbridge can function as part of a balanced economic ecosystem with other towns, where local people work in local and nearby high-quality jobs and enjoy a vibrant and well-connected town with a thriving town centre.
6. The submission contained a package of measures that help the town move towards that vision as set out below:

Themes	MHCLG intervention (Preferred option)
01 Better movement and legibility at the town centre gateways	(1.1) Transport improvements to turn the northern gyratory into a two-way traffic system, enabling the pedestrianisation of the high street from the northern gateway. (1.2) Physical enhancements to enable a safer pedestrian access to the River Biss around the town bridge area. (1.3) Delivery of environmental enhancements and planting to improve accessibility, connectivity and legibility of the town centre.
02 Transform heritage to a culture and leisure offer	(2.1) The refurbishment and extension of the Grade 2 listed Town Hall and (2.2) adjacent market hall, 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. This project is crucial to help develop the unique cultural offer and increase footfall in the core of the town, helping to revive Trowbridge's poor evening economy.
03 A resilient and diverse high street	(3.2) Vacant units fund to enable change of use and associated structural changes to vacant units on the high street. Grants up to £15,000 (Fifteen Thousand Pounds) will be given to successful applicants. 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. The lack of diversity in the high street has been stressed out by stakeholders as one of the main reasons of lower demand and reduced footfall, it also enhances the detrimental vision of not enough experiential offer in Trowbridge. Vacant upper floors could be converted to residential homes for young people. Existing retail units in Castle Place could relocate to vacant shops along the high street.
04	(4.3) The redevelopment of Castle Place has the potential to act as a catalyst for transformational change in Trowbridge's town centre. This

Unlocking good growth	new development could include a state-of-the-art leisure facility, with an associated wellness/health space, co-working spaces adjacent to high-quality residential and an evening service economy offer. Together with improved connectivity to the High Street and across to St. Stephens Place and improved frontages on to the park. This proposal would significantly help to diversify the high street, increase its vibrancy and resilience.
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7. Successful delivery will depend on funding allocated and further public consultation as scheme detail is developed.

Alignment with FHSF Core Objectives

8. The options have been designed to respond to local challenges and the wider strategic objectives of the FHSF programme. These will renew and reshape Trowbridge as follows:
- **‘ensure future sustainability’** – the refurbishment of the town hall and market hall would fundamentally transform the operational viability for these important historic assets. Through diversifying the offer in the town centre, it will no longer be fully dependent on the retail sector, and it will have greater resilience to future change.
 - **‘improving experience’** – The new and improved offer at the town hall and transformed vacant units would attract new visitors to high street and reinvigorate the city’s night-time economy. Improvements at the town centre gateways and the high street would make visits to enjoy culture, leisure and shopping a much safer, legible and enjoyable experience.
 - **‘drives growth’** – the proposed changes would tackle long-standing constraints preventing residential and leisure growth at Castle place. The vacant units fund would also incentivise the network of local landowners to bring vacant units back into use to diversify the offer in the town centre, driving greater footfall and improving dwell time.

Next Steps

- Funding announcement expected in October/November 2020
- Develop and implement legal and commercial agreements, development mechanisms, etc.
- Undertake due diligence and full financial appraisal of each scheme
- Undertake detailed and contextual studies and gather supporting information
- Develop the proposals in consultation with a range of stakeholders, the public and statutory bodies
- Seek necessary authorisations and permits

Rory Bowen (Interim Head of Service - Economic Development)