



Housing & Land Delivery Board

Date	30 September 2019
Report title	Town Centre Interventions and Town Centres Toolkit
Portfolio Lead	Councillor Mike Bird, Leader, Walsall MBC
Accountable Employees	Gareth Bradford, Director of Housing & Regeneration Patricia Willoughby, Head of Policy (Housing & Regeneration) (report author)
Report has been considered by	Housing & Land Delivery Steering Group (11.09.2019)

Recommendation(s):

The Housing & Land Delivery Board is asked to:

- a) Note the commitment in February 2019 by WMCA's Investment Board to earmark £20m of WMCA's devolved housing and land funds to support the Regional Town Centres Programme - with detailed funding and delivery agreements of up to £5m to be agreed by WMCA Directors of Housing & Regeneration, Finance and Governance.
- b) Note that some of the projects initially identified in February 2019 by local authorities for WMCA investment under this programme have now been funded and supported through other means.
- c) Endorse the view of Housing & Land Delivery Steering Group that up to £5m of the £20m earmarked for this programme is used to support delivery of 'early impact' town centre interventions, subject to funding and delivery agreements being put in place between WMCA and each relevant local authority.
- d) Note the types of interventions recommended by the Regional Town Centres Task Force (as described in the draft Town Centres Toolkit) and endorsed by the Housing &

Land Delivery Steering Group at its meeting in September 2019 on which the interventions submitted by each council have been determined.

Further note: The Housing & Land Delivery Board should also refer to the separate confidential report on the agenda which identifies the proposed interventions for the five 'first wave' town centres; the information in this report is commercially sensitive at this stage and should not be referred to in the discussion.

1.0 Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this paper is to provide an update on:

- the packages of interventions which are being developed jointly with the local authorities in the five 'first wave' town centres and are designed to demonstrate active progress and momentum within each of the centres – these complement the major capital projects agreed by Investment Board in February 2019 and are in line with the purpose and intent of the £20m agreed by that Investment Board
- the emerging 'Town Centres Toolkit'.

2.0 Background

2.1 The Town Centres Programme was launched in October 2018 and since that time has established five 'first wave' town centres (Bilston in Wolverhampton, Bordesley Green in Birmingham City, St Matthew's Quarter in Walsall, St Thomas' Quarter in Dudley and West Bromwich East in Sandwell). Within each of these centres, a number of interventions were identified by Local Authorities on the basis of their emerging and adopted plans. In February 2019, WMCA's Housing & Land Delivery Board and Investment Board agreed an investment package of nearly £20m to support these interventions (e.g. land acquisitions).

2.2 The draft Town Centres Toolkit has been prepared to provide some context to the WMCA Town Centre Programme, summarise a range of possible interventions, identify how local authorities can prepare Delivery & Investment Plans to help unlock funding, and attract private investment. The Toolkit also links through to the Single Commissioning Framework by indicating the types of project on which WMCA might wish to focus its funding. The document is not intended to repeat the various existing toolkits and town centre guides but to provide a WMCA approach to town centre regeneration activities.

3.0 Progress and current activity

Interventions

3.1 By their very nature, 'hard interventions' have relatively long and, to a certain degree, unpredictable lead in times. As a result, and with the support of the Town Centres Task Force, the Housing & Land Delivery Steering Group, the Portfolio Holder and the Regional Town Centres Working Group of local authorities, WMCA has worked with the five local authorities to produce a list of 'early impact/soft interventions' – projects which could be implemented in the short term (say within 6 months) and which would also demonstrate confidence and activity in each town centre, drive footfall in each centre and show visible progress on the road to transformation of the town centre. This would also demonstrate the level of commitment to the town centre by WMCA and each of the local authorities.

- 3.2 A number of projects in each centre have been identified and prioritised by the local authorities and have the potential to be delivered within the next six months. Funding for those projects which are capable of early delivery will be investigated by WMCA as a priority (and supported by other sources of funding where available) but it is recognised that some projects might have longer lead-in times for which funding is needed at this stage if delivery is to be secured later in 2020.
- 3.3 A funding envelope of £20m from devolved housing and land funds was agreed by Investment Board in February 2019 to support town centre regeneration projects. Through effective deployment of WMCA's role as a 'broker', collaborating and negotiating with existing land owners, it is clear that significantly less funds will be needed on two projects. Notably, both of these projects will still progress but they will do so using private sector funds and will not need WMCA to acquire the sites beforehand.
- 3.4 As a result, a sum of up to £5m is now available to deploy on the early priority projects identified in each centre. These projects are designed to drive footfall, support GVA and have a tangible impact on town centres that will bring real benefits to local people, traders and businesses.
- 3.5 The specific projects are commercially sensitive and are therefore listed in the separate confidential report also on this agenda. Although some of the projects include a revenue ask, most of these can be capitalised (e.g. professional fees relating to scheme design); in other cases, revenue funding directly supports and/or acts as an essential precursor to the capital works.
- 3.6 In line with normal requirements for projects such as this, each town centre package will be subject to a funding and delivery agreement with each Council to ensure that the funds are spent on the agreed projects, projects are delivered on time and budget and that the Section 151 officers have satisfied themselves that the project represents value for money. We will continue to work with each local authority to explore all other opportunities for funding the various interventions and accelerating their delivery.

Town Centres Toolkit

- 3.5 WMCA has taken the lead in preparing a draft of the town centres toolkit, using examples produced by other organisations and local authorities. An early draft of the document has been considered by the Town Centres Working Group (July 2019) with a request for comments. It has also been circulated to the Regional Town Centres Task Force whose views are currently being sought and will be reported at its next meeting. The latest draft of this document is attached and comments are invited.
- 3.6 The toolkit supports the work on hard and soft interventions by providing a 'checklist' of potential interventions and, in its final form, will provide examples from around the country of projects which have worked elsewhere.

5.0 Financial Implications

- 5.1 There is sufficient headroom in the current BLPDF funding pot to provide a single sum award to a Local Authority and flexibility exists to make a capital and / or revenue grant.

- 5.2 Each of the initiatives detailed will be subject to progression both through the internal gateway process and the SCF in the normal way as for any investment opportunity.
- 5.3 The funding, monitoring and evaluation will need to be considered as part of the grant award and will be reviewed on a case by case basis.

6.0 Legal Implications

- 6.1 Section 113A(1)(a) of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 gives the CA a power of competence appropriate for the purposes of carrying-out any of its functions. Part 4 of The West Midlands Combined Authority Order 2016 (2016 No 653) confers that the functions relating to any Economic development and regeneration in the constituent councils are exercisable by the CA. Part 3 of The West Midlands Combined Authority (Functions and Amendment) Order 2017 confers functions corresponding to the functions of the Homes and Communities Agency has in relation to the combined area.
- 6.2 The funding agreements for the funding elements of the projects will be dealt with on a case by case basis in accordance with the single commissioning framework process.

7.0 Equalities Implications

- 7.1 The proposed 'soft interventions' will provide a wide range of benefits, many of which can be accessed without charge, and will be available to a wide cross-section of communities.

8.0 Inclusive Growth Implications

- 8.1 The proposed 'soft interventions' are designed to support the regeneration and re-purposing of the five 'first wave' town centres and the types of interventions proposed have been agreed by the Town Centres Task Force. The interventions will help to make the town centres more attractive places for local residents, businesses and visitors providing a wider range of facilities and attractions than is currently the case. They will also significantly improve the range and types of public spaces and events taking place.

9.0 Geographical Area of Report's Implications

- 9.1 The proposed interventions would be delivered in the five 'first wave' town centres as part of the regional town centres programme. The learning from this programme, however, can be shared across all town centres within the WMCA area including the 3 LEPs and non-constituent Member authorities.

10.0 Other implications

- 10.1 None.

11.0. Schedule of Background Papers

- 11.1 None.