

SOLIHULL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to:	Cabinet
Meeting date:	11 August 2016
Subject/Report Title:	SOLIHULL TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN CONSULTATION
Report from:	Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Managed Growth
Report Author/Lead Contact Officer:	Amrik Manku
Wards affected:	<div style="display: flex; flex-wrap: wrap;"> <div style="width: 50%;"> <input type="checkbox"/> All Wards <input type="checkbox"/> Bickenhill <input type="checkbox"/> Castle Bromwich <input type="checkbox"/> Dorridge/Hockley Heath <input type="checkbox"/> Kingshurst/Fordbridge <input type="checkbox"/> Lyndon <input type="checkbox"/> Olton <input type="checkbox"/> Shirley South <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Silhill <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> St Alphege </div> <div style="width: 50%;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Blythe <input type="checkbox"/> Chelmsley Wood <input type="checkbox"/> Elmdon <input type="checkbox"/> Knowle <input type="checkbox"/> Meriden <input type="checkbox"/> Shirley East <input type="checkbox"/> Shirley West <input type="checkbox"/> Smith's Wood </div> </div>
Public/Private report:	Public
Exempt by virtue of Paragraph:	N/A

1.	Purpose of Report
1.1	This report seeks approval to consult on the draft Solihull Town Centre Masterplan as shown in Appendix A with the Consultation Plan as shown in Appendix B.
2.	Decision(s) Recommended
2.1	Cabinet is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. approve consultation on the draft Solihull Town Centre Masterplan as shown in Appendix A with the Consultation Plan as shown in Appendix B.

3. Background

3.1 Strategic and Local Planning Context

- 3.2 Solihull town centre is an important sub-regional economic centre and transport hub in the West Midlands and the heart of the borough's civic, cultural, business and retail activity. It is part of the ambitious UKC Programme which is a Solihull Council Plan priority. Its central location, with good national and international connectivity, and strong links with Birmingham and Coventry make it an attractive place to live, work and invest. A home to many national brands and companies and recent investment announcements by Touchwood, Waitrose and Carluccio's are a testament to Solihull's ongoing appeal.
- 3.3 It is a very aspirational place with a relatively diverse demographic offer and often voted as one of the best places to live and work in the UK. It is also actively supported by civic and business communities passionate about its distinctive character, past and future.
- 3.4 However, there are present issues and challenges for the town centre for it to remain fresh and competitive but also exciting opportunities to consolidate and enhance the town centre towards a modern 21st century future. Competing centres are updating their offer and investing in their public realm and transport access. Town centre stakeholders are conscious of the recent Birmingham city centre renaissance and distinctive 'independents' and restaurants offer of places like Leamington Spa. Importantly, Solihull is identified within the Local Plan as a key growth centre with planning aspirations over the next 20 years to expand its residential living, office and retail offer for jobs and homes and also to enhance its urban form and transport system.
- 3.5 The town centre currently employs 15,000 people and Local Plan growth could add 7,000 more jobs (by 2040). The Local Plan also identifies the potential for 950 homes in the town, which would at least double the number of people living in the town centre area, and retail and office capacity increases of up to 60,000 sqm and 35,000 sqm respectively. This gives some scale to the current aspirations identified by previous studies which will be further informed by the final masterplan.
- 3.6 With some quarters beginning to look tired and dated, its traditional zonal land use development and transport system dominated by road access then some areas can appear unwelcoming, disconnected and impermeable. Especially when progressing from its surrounding neighbourhoods to its centre and across town, with many missed opportunities for a better place and town centre experience. The location of Solihull train station is often mentioned as a case in point. At present transport access to the centre is 79% by car yet 42% of commuters live within 5km. The number of trips generated by borough residents over the next 20 years could increase by 18% and Solihull train station passenger growth could increase by 50% over the next 10 years. It is essential that there is interaction between land use and transport planning.
- 3.7 An overview of Solihull's residential, retail and office market indicated good viability of Local Plan growth aspirations and the timing of the masterplan is opportune in terms of positioning and consolidating the town centre in respect of Birmingham and the UKC Hub area. It found that there is a residential market for older households looking to downsize, a premium achievable for apartments close to town centre amenities and demand for suburban family living. In terms of retail it identified a number of retailers currently absent from the town centre which can be found in comparable towns and a discreet market for food and beverage expansion. There is significant pent up demand for office space in the town centre with relatively low

levels of churn due to a lack of new development. It is a good location in terms of proximity to a large pool of skilled labour but also the amenable working environment the town centre presents.

3.8 Finally, a changing funding landscape with the West Midlands Combined Authority Devolution Deal and the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership has meant devolved powers and funding. To access funding credible plans for growth, jobs and homes need to be in place and Solihull is keen to invest in developing such plans which include the masterplan.

3.9 This all inevitably raises questions about what development should happen and where and how could great place interventions and a modern transport system enable this to happen to best serve Solihull's future needs, maintaining and enhancing its distinctive character. To address these questions we require a masterplan to provide a visionary but deliverable framework for future development balancing growth, infrastructure investment and the quality of place. It will also inform the Local Plan Review in the late autumn 2016 and Solihull Connected transport priorities.

3.10 Draft Masterplan Development and Programme

3.11 In early 2016 we appointed AECOM consultants to develop a masterplan supported by WPS and Mott MacDonald transport consultants. The programme of development is set out in the table below.

Stages	Timeline
Inception Review and Report	February 2016
Masterplan Launch Event	March
Property Market Review	March
Physical Review	March
Development Potential and Mix	March
Stakeholder Engagement	April
Draft Masterplan	June
Coordination with Highway Studies	June
Consultation	August - September
Preferred Spatial Masterplan	September
Final Development Appraisal and Direction	September
Delivery and Implementation Strategy	September
Final Masterplan	September
Submission as evidence base to Local Plan Review	September
Local Plan Review Consultation	Late 2016 – Early 2017
Final Masterplan revisions following Local Plan Review	Early Spring 2017

3.12 To date the draft masterplan has been developed through engagement with internal and external stakeholders examining research on key opportunities and influences including spatial, market and transport considerations and debating future aspirations, priorities and ambitions for the town centre. Stakeholders mainly sought (not exclusive):

- balancing Solihull's heritage with the new,
- a distinctive independent retail market,
- providing public spaces/iconic attraction to host crowds,
- improving wayfinding and connections with parks,
- a new evening economy offer to include food and beverages,
- improving perceptions of safety,
- responding to competition of Birmingham and similar centres,
- introducing apartment style town centre living,
- opportunities for large scale mixed use development,
- a greater broad demographic town centre appeal,
- a train station that best serves as a gateway, better connected and accommodates future rail travel growth,
- improving public transport, walking and cycling access reducing reliance on the car and improving cross town centre permeability and
- a car parking strategy for better distribution of traffic and utilisation of under-used car parks both short and long stay.

3.13 This research and stakeholder engagement has led to defining the draft masterplan as shown in Appendix A (a copy is available in the Members Area and on the Councils Website at <http://eservices.solihull.gov.uk/mgInternet/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=130&MId=5728&Ver=4>). It presents a spatial audit which tells the story of the town centre and sets out the current context. It provides a summary of the market overview, transport considerations, the engagement process to date and three emerging Concepts which describe the town centre in better 'connections', 'living and working' and 'experience' terms. These Concepts have been conceived as overarching principles to guide interventions in Areas of Change identified as of particular challenge and opportunity and essential to achieving Local Plan growth aspirations and a vision of a 21st century modern town.

3.14 Members' attention is drawn in particular to the emerging Concepts and Areas of Change, as summarised below, as they will be of significant focus during the consultation.

Concepts

Connections – this concept is about re-connecting disjointed areas of the town centre, helping people to move easily between well connected areas by various modes of transport. It recognises the need to reduce congestion by focusing vehicle movement in areas with greater capacity, break up frontages and improve public realm to improve permeability and reduce road barriers stopping pedestrians and cyclists accessing green spaces.

Living and working – this concept is about diversifying the town centre by promoting residential development to create a mixed use commercial and residential town centre supported by a strong evening time offer.

Experience – this concept is about ensuring the town centre has a diverse offer that appeals to a wide audience, keeping existing users and visitors and attracting new ones.

Areas of Change



- Railway Line
- Potential for landmark building
- Potential frontage
- Connections**
Improved connections
- Living & Working**
Potential living and working
- Experience**
Improved urban experience and placemaking

Challenges

Western arrival into the town is currently dominated by roads and fragmented building forms.

Train station physically and psychologically disconnected from the town centre.

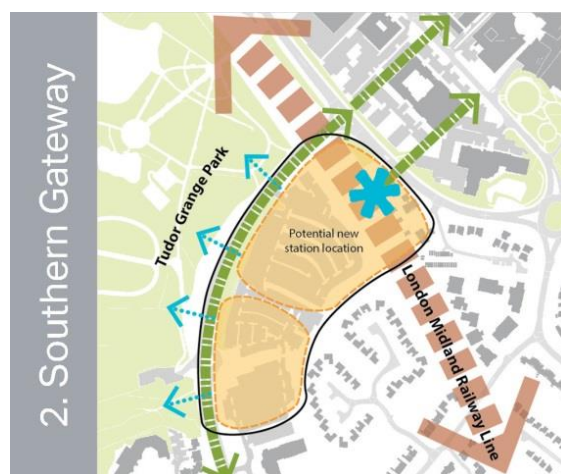
Opportunities

Reconfiguration of key junctions here would provide opportunities to enhance key pedestrian and cycle connections from Solihull Train Station into the town centre, and also potentially improve journey times for buses by reprioritising and supporting sustainable travel.

Supported by new land mark development fronting onto the street and an improved public realm, the Lode Lane/ Blossomfield Road roundabout could be transformed into a key visual gateway; which represents an important arrival point into Solihull Town Centre for those arriving by public transport and from the west.

In the short term, upgrades to Solihull Train Station could look to improve the look and feel of the station, providing new facilities which promote its use and a more fitting representation of Solihull's future aspirations.

Longer term, should the station be relocated, there is opportunity to introduce new residential uses within easy walking distance of the town centre.



- Railway Line
- Potential for landmark building
- Potential frontage
- Connections**
Improved connections
- Living & Working**
Potential living and working
- Experience**
Improved urban experience and placemaking

Challenges

Cut off from the town by busy roads and the rail line embankment, the south of the town centre feels disconnected to its surroundings, in

Opportunities

In the short term, new residential development could provide sustainable new housing within close walking distance of the town centre and

particular Tudor Grange Park.

Large swathes of surface car parking leave large voids in the urban structure at a key arrival point into the town.

also provide a positive edge to Tudor Grange Park.

In the long term a relocated Solihull Train Station could be positioned to bridge the rail line and improve accessibility into the town centre, encouraging sustainable travel.

The development of a new landmark station could create an attractive new gateway into the town centre which befits Solihull's aspirational vision; which could be further supported by improved public realm and wayfinding.



Challenges

Poor quality of existing north-south connections.

Inadequate cycle provision.

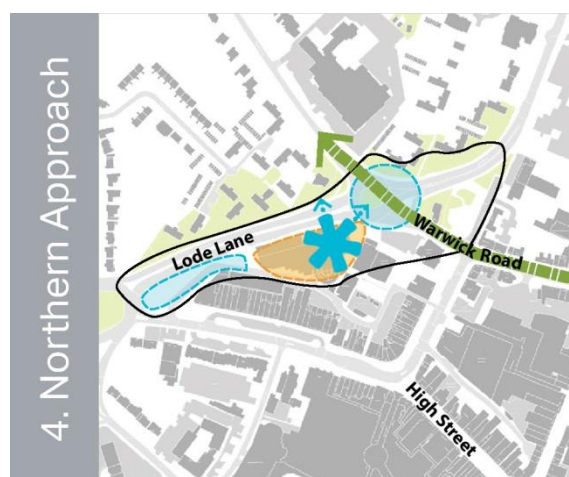
Weak urban form and the lack of frontage along Princes Road.

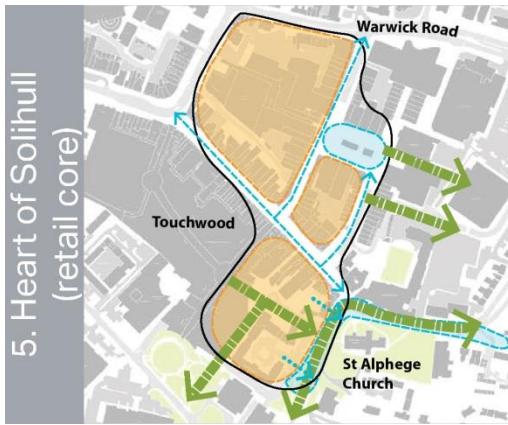

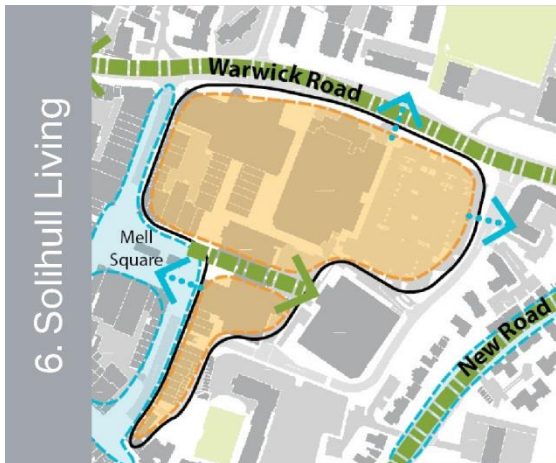

Opportunities

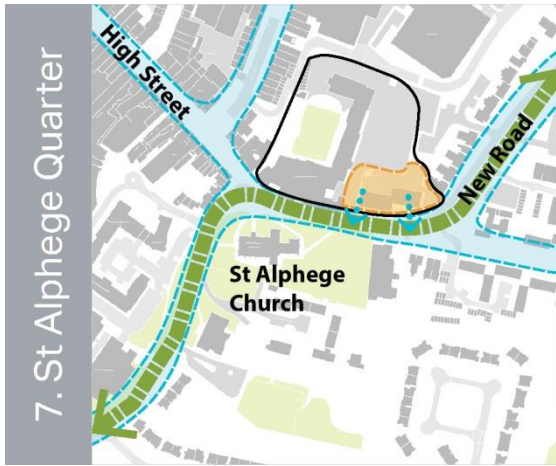






Through expansion of the current commercial offer and the potential integration of new urban living, there are opportunities to promote Solihull as a place to do business, whilst addressing some of the key urban design issues facing the town.

Potential enhancement of Homer Road and north-south connections could provide opportunities to promote walking and cycling, and also introduce green infrastructure into the town linking with Tudor Grange Park.

The introduction of landmark buildings could improve the southern aspect of the town and support the addition of a relocated new train station in the longer term.



<p>Challenges</p> <p>Heavily dominated by traffic and large scale highways infrastructure, the Lode Lane / Warwick Road roundabout acts as a barrier to pedestrian and cycle movement.</p> <p>The distinct lack of direct frontage onto the street and relatively poor quality of surrounding buildings mean that this key arrival point into the town fails to match the attractiveness of the inner town centre.</p>	<p>Opportunities</p> <p>Improvements to the environment of Warwick Road have the potential to enhance connectivity along the northern edge of the town with opportunities to create improved crossing facilities and greater provision for cyclists.</p> <p>A new landmark development fronting onto the roundabout could improve the attractiveness of this important arrival point and deliver attractive new urban living and/or car parking facilities.</p>
<p>5. Heart of Solihull (retail core)</p> 	
<p>Challenges</p> <p>Distinct lack of quality evening offer.</p> <p>Some of the existing public realm is tired and fails to reflect the ambitions of the town.</p>	<p>Opportunities</p> <p>Solihull's evening economy will be boosted by mixed use development at Touchwood and Mell Sq, which could be further supported through the development of new higher density residential uses.</p> <p>There are also opportunities to enhance pedestrian and cycle connections through the town, using new development to reinforce and positively reflect main routes, particularly around St Alphege's Church.</p> <p>Upgraded public realm along the High Street and at Mell Square will more appropriately reflect the historic character and quality of the town centre, and provide the opportunity to create a high quality destination space for residents, visitors and workers.</p>
<p>6. Solihull Living</p> 	
<p>Challenges</p>	<p>Opportunities</p>

<p>Elements within the north east of the town centre are underutilised and fail to provide an attractive frontage along Warwick Road.</p> <p>The existing building formats hinder permeability and there is a lack of positive frontage onto many pedestrian routes.</p>	<p>The Touchwood and Mell Sq. developments present an opportunity to diversify the town and support the envisaged new evening uses through the creation of a new residential quarter. This would provide new opportunities to consolidate and reconfigure existing car parking provision, and enable increased permeability from Mell Square through to the eastern edge of the town.</p> <p>New development would also provide opportunities to improve frontage onto Warwick Road, enhancing the edge of the town and adding further vibrancy and variety into the town centre.</p> <p>Enhanced crossings across Warwick Road could improve pedestrian connectivity with the north of the town, whilst an upgraded public realm will assist in creating an attractive, outward facing Solihull.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Railway Line  Potential for landmark building  Potential frontage  Connections Improved connections  Living & Working Potential living and working  Experience Improved urban experience and placemaking
<p>Challenges</p> <p>The quality of the surrounding historic buildings is representative of Solihull's attractive heritage character, however the relatively tired public realm, and heavy traffic disappoint.</p> <p>Malvern and Brueton Park is located just a short distance to the east; however the park is not promoted and would be difficult to find for visitors</p>	<p>Opportunities</p> <p>Attractive and sensitive new residential development here could improve frontages onto New Road and further diversify the town centre.</p> <p>Improvements in the public realm could prioritise pedestrians and cyclists, whilst also supporting the areas historic character.</p> <p>Improved wayfinding and the introduction of new green infrastructure could actively link the town centre with Malvern and Brueton Park</p>

3.15 Public Consultation

- 3.16 The draft masterplan consultation is about stimulating a debate as to what the masterplan should include to ensure strong support for the masterplan and its future direction and implementation. Its focus will be on a Vision for the town centre, the Concepts and Areas of Change. This will involve testing the draft masterplan concepts, building consensus and responding to any concerns and priorities. The Consultation Plan is shown in Appendix B. The consultation will run from Monday 15 August for 4 weeks with exhibition events held in the town centre including The Core and Touchwood venues. This will allow the public to meet the team to explain concepts and answer questions. An online survey will receive feedback from the public and stakeholders and awareness of the consultation will be supported by a

3.17	<p>social media campaign but also the use of partner networks. Paper copies of the survey will be made available for those without internet access or skills.</p> <p>The next steps will involve using the consultation feedback to shape the final masterplan. Importantly, the final masterplan will include an action plan identifying deliverable opportunities, funding sources, early stage projects and necessary interventions. The final masterplan will then be used to inform the Local Plan Review in the autumn. As part of the Local Plan Review the public and stakeholders will be given a further opportunity to engage during its consultation provisionally planned late 2016 to early 2017.</p>
4. Evaluation of Alternative Option(s)	
4.1	<p>Cabinet could consider not proceeding with the Solihull Town Centre Masterplan, however, it would be more difficult to secure Solihull's future as an attractive place to live, work and enjoy, in an ever competitive market place, and also deliver the Local Plan aspirations for growth, jobs and homes without a clear strategy that the masterplan would provide for future development planning and investment.</p>
5. Reasons for Recommending Preferred Option	
5.1	<p>Solihull is an important sub-regional centre and the main focus of the borough's civic, cultural, business and retail activity. It is part of the ambitious UKC masterplan and its delivery is a Solihull Council Plan priority. The Local Plan has planning aspirations to expand its living, retail and office offer over the next 20 years. Market conditions appear to support an expanded offer. The masterplan will set out a robust, current and visionary framework for the future planning and development of Solihull in the areas of living, offices and retail and urban form, acting as a focus for inward investment. It will also inform the Local Plan Review in the late autumn 2016 and Solihull Connected transport priorities.</p>
5.2	<p>It is important to see the development of the masterplan as a process with ideas developed in consultation with the local community, businesses and key stakeholders. This will ensure strong support for the masterplan and its future direction and implementation.</p>
6. Scrutiny	
6.1	<p>Although not previously subject to scrutiny boards the Town Centre Advisory Group has received two briefings on the emerging Masterplan and will continue to oversee the next steps.</p>
7. Implications	
<p>7.1 Delivery of the Council's Priorities</p> <p>The options/proposals in this report will contribute to the delivery of the following Council Priority(ies):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managed Growth (Delivering UKC, Delivering the HS2 Growth Strategy, Delivering the Borough Transport Strategy Solihull Connected and the Local Plan delivery and review) • Build Stronger Communities (Develop community capacity, enhance engagement and co-production to identify and meet local needs and Improve life chances for all by enabling customers and businesses to be included in the digital economy and society) 	

7.2	Policy/Strategy Implications The final masterplan will form an evidence base for the Local Plan Review and its emerging policies for consultation.
7.3	Meeting the duty to involve The draft masterplan is being consulted on in August and September 2016 (see Appendix B).
7.4	Financial Implications None as a consequence of this report.
7.5	Legal implications None as a consequence of this report.
7.6	Risk Implications The Corporate Risks Management Approach has been compiled with to identify and asses the significant risks associated with this decision. This includes but is not limited to political, legislation and reputation risks.
7.7	Statutory Equality Duty A Fair Treatment Assessments is underway for the Local Plan Review and covers Solihull Town Centre.
7.8	Carbon Management/Environmental The final masterplan will promote sustainable development and transport policies and the reduction of CO ₂ and environmental impact.
7.9	Partner Organisations The draft masterplan is being developed closely with internal and external stakeholders including key town centre partners.
7.10	Safeguarding/Corporate Parenting Implications None as a consequence of this report.
7.11	Customer Impact None as a consequence of this report.
7.12	Other implications No other implications as a consequence of this report.
8. List of Appendices Referred to	
8.1	Appendix A – Draft Solihull Town Centre Masterplan (a copy of this document is available in the Members Area and on the Councils Website at http://eservices.solihull.gov.uk/mgInternet/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=130&MId=5728&Ver=4)
8.2	Appendix B – Consultation Plan
9. Background Papers Used to Compile this Report	
9.1	Previous GVA town centre studies 2009, Local Plan December 2013 and current Solihull Connected Transport Strategy June 2016.

10. List of Other Relevant Documents
10.1 None