



CABINET: 9 MARCH 2021

Report of: Corporate Director of Place and Community

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor Ian Moran

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SUBJECT: A REGENERATION PLAN FOR SKELMERSDALE TOWN CENTRE

Wards affected: Skelmersdale North and Birch Green Wards

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To provide an update on the development of a 'Place Shaping' Hub and the preparation of a specific Regeneration Plan for Skelmersdale Town Centre, and to establish a 'Place Shaping Hub' and Cabinet Working Group to steer this work.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That a Place-Shaping Hub made up of the partners outlined in paragraph 3.5 of this report be established.

2.2 That the Terms of Reference of the Place Shaping Hub be agreed as follows:

"To create and develop a Regeneration Plan for Skelmersdale Town Centre, that meets the aspirations and key priorities for the Council and its partners, initially concentrating on the area outlined at Appendix A and consider other specific, but connected, pieces or work around other key regeneration projects in the wider Skelmersdale and Up Holland area, including Estates Regeneration and Green Infrastructure proposals, including consideration of available funding."

2.3 That a Skelmersdale Town Centre Regeneration Plan Cabinet Working Group be established consisting of 4 Labour Members, 2 Conservative Members and 1 Our West Lancashire Member, with a Chairman and Vice-Chairman to be nominated by the Leader of the Council with the following Terms of Reference:

- (a) To receive presentations and reports in relation to the progress of the Skelmersdale Town Centre Regeneration Plan.
- (b) To consider proposals arising from the Skelmersdale Town Centre Regeneration Plan.
- (c) To make recommendations to Cabinet and/or Council as appropriate."

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Since the original Skelmersdale Town Centre Masterplan SPD¹ was adopted, there have been many changes to the plans for Skelmersdale Town Centre. However, as Phase 1 of the most recent proposals gets under construction and the Council's Development Agreement with St Modwen's comes to an end, there is a need to begin to consider what to plan for on the land, referred to as Town Centre Phase 2 as outlined in Appendix A and understand what wider opportunities exist within the Skelmersdale and Up Holland 'neighbourhood'.
- 3.2 Alongside this, two key housing sites in the east of the town centre (Findon and Delf Clough) are under construction, the proposals for the new Skelmersdale Wellbeing & Leisure Hub are developing, and the proposals for a new Rail Station on the former Westbank / Glenburn site in the south of the town centre are very much still moving forward. Furthermore, in connection with the latter, LCC now own the whole of the former Glenburn School site (including the playing fields) and the adjacent former Skelmersdale College site at Westbank, and so not only have control of the land needed for the new rail station, but a large area of land to the west of this which they wish to bring forward for development.
- 3.3 In addition, the original masterplan and subsequent update to this through Policy SP2 of the adopted Local Plan 2012-2027 earmarked the Council's own land to the north of Yewdale (and south-west of the Tawd Valley) for potential housing development. The Council has not been in a position to bring this land forward as yet, and so, alongside considering the former Glenburn School site with LCC, it is now timely to reconsider what this Council wants to utilise its land at Yewdale for, as part of the wider regeneration of Skelmersdale and in light of the Tawd Valley Park Masterplan².
- 3.4 In relation to the land at Glenburn / Yewdale, a key aspect of any proposals for this area (with a significant delivery cost, but no income from a subsequent land sale/development) would be planning for an accessible route across the Tawd Valley to directly link the rail station and its accompanying new developments into the core of the town centre (i.e. the Concourse, the St Modwen development and the West Lancashire College campus). This link (indicated with a blue dashed line on the plan at Appendix A) would virtually all go across WLBC land, but is vital to delivering the Rail Station in a sustainable manner and to connecting the two parts of the town centre together, so is very much a joint WLBC/LCC aspiration and needs to be planned for through the Regeneration Plan, and for proposals to be affordable and deliverable.
- 3.5 There are now a number of potential partners involved in proposals within Skelmersdale Town Centre and there is a real opportunity for the Council to lead the collaboration of these partners and radically re-think the over-arching strategy to create a Regeneration Plan for the Town Centre that meets the aspirations and key priorities for the Council and its partners. To take this forward it is proposed

¹ <https://www.westlancs.gov.uk/media/98025/skem-masterplan.pdf>

² <https://www.westlancs.gov.uk/leisure-recreation/parks-and-countryside/tawd-valley-park-project.aspx> and <https://www.westlancs.gov.uk/media/543721/masterplan-tawd-valley-park.pdf>

that a Place Shaping Hub be established, initially made up of the following partners:

- Lancashire County Council
- Chair of Skelmersdale Place Board
- Chief Operating Officer
- Leader of Council
- Corporate Director of Place and Community

Once proposals are being considered the following partners will be engaged as appropriate:

- London & Cambridge Properties (owners of the Concourse Centre)
- Homes England
- West Lancashire College
- Lancashire Local Economic Partnership
- Tawd Valley Developments
- Business Representative of Skelmersdale Place Board

4.0 PROPOSALS

- 4.1 As a result of all of the above, it is recommended that it is the right time to re-visit the original Town Centre Masterplan and, with a range of partner organisations, prepare a new Regeneration Plan for Skelmersdale Town Centre Phase 2, focussing on the area identified in Appendix A. This will be a step on the path for the Council and their partners developing a series of 'oven ready' projects that can be submitted for grant funding through monies that may become available through the 'levelling-up agenda' and through grant monies that will replace European Funding. In this way, the Town Centre Regeneration Plan will allow the Council to review its priorities and ambitions in Skelmersdale Town Centre in the context of the wider aspirations and priorities of the community.
- 4.2 If such a proposal for a new Skelmersdale Town Centre Regeneration Plan is supported, the Place-Shaping Hub, will meet regularly to develop it, along with terms of reference for the group. It is proposed that the Place Shaping Hub sets the strategic direction and progresses development through a number of task groups to take forward the development of a masterplan and source any available funding. The Place Board will be consulted on proposals and help shape the vision. Once agreed proposals would be reported to each Partner organisation as required for any approvals / decisions. In the case of this Council, it would be reported to the Skelmersdale Town Centre Regeneration Plan Cabinet Working Group and to Cabinet or Council as appropriate for decisions related to WLBC land or resources and to adopt it as a formal Council Plan.
- 4.3 Furthermore, as part of the development of the Regeneration Plan, work will be undertaken to develop more detail and certainty of what different partners will be wanting to deliver in each part of the Town Centre in consultation with communities, and ensure that the proposals are feasible (e.g. in light of ground conditions or drainage) and affordable/economically viable for the partners, as well as aligning with the overall priorities and aspirations agreed by the Place-Shaping Hub.

- 4.4 Such detailed plans for certain parts of the town centre could also include detailed design guidance to act as a replacement for the original Masterplan SPD, which performs a planning policy function to guide new developments as they come forward with planning applications. This would fit with the proposals in the Government's recent *Planning for the Future* White Paper, which seeks to have site-specific design guidance alongside growth areas such as Skelmersdale Town Centre.
- 4.5 To take advantage of funding opportunities that arise, a small task group will be established to undertake this task. Initially this group will seek to secure funding from the LCC Economic Recovery & Growth Fund to potentially fund any additional support required.

5.0 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Health and wellbeing will be a central pillar of any development proposals in the wider Skelmersdale area, with walking and cycling particularly needing to be promoted through the Regeneration Plan and a range of leisure uses enhanced in the Tawd Valley. Any final development, which should bring new high standard development and improved transport links, should have significant health and wellbeing benefits for both the residents/users of the new development and existing residents within the town, as well as visitors and users of the town centre and Tawd Valley Park.

6.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The delivery of a sustainable development in Skelmersdale Town Centre will bring various positive benefits for sustainability and the community, from redeveloping the vacant school sites (which are currently an eye-sore and a potential danger where anti-social or criminal behaviour takes place within them) to developing much needed housing and commercial / leisure development to create a more balanced town centre. It will also ensure that access across the Tawd Valley is fit for purpose and connects the rail station to the core of the town centre.
- 6.2 Any new development will also need to be balanced with the potential loss or replacement of some open space, and so the relationship with the Tawd Valley Park project and with Green Infrastructure and Playing Pitch Strategies for Skelmersdale will be crucial in off-setting the loss of open space in terms of quantity by improving the quality of open space and playing pitches on offer in the rest of Skelmersdale.
- 6.3 The development of a wider Community Plan and future pipeline projects will enable further economic, social and environmental benefits through the town.

7.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Place-shaping Hub and preparation of the Town Centre Regeneration Plan will involve input from various teams from across the Council and various partners to ensure a sustainable and deliverable Plan that respects all aspects of the neighbourhood and surrounding areas. To assist the staff resource required to manage this project going forward, the current Fixed Term Regeneration Development Project Manager post will be extended until March 2022, funded

through the town centre project. There will also be a need to resource the new Cabinet Working Group through Member Services.

- 7.2 The Council have submitted a bid to LCC's Economic Recovery & Growth Programme to fund initial consultancy and additional support to develop a Town Centre Regeneration Plan, and it is anticipated that the council will know whether it has been successful in this bid before the end of March 2021.

8.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 The preparation of a Regeneration Plan for Skelmersdale Town Centre carries very little risk in and of itself. There may be risks in the implementation and delivery of those proposals in the future, should the Council have a role in that, and these will need to be carefully managed and appropriately communicated to ensure that public expectation is managed, however, that should not preclude from preparing a Plan to guide the development of this area for the benefit of Skelmersdale and West Lancashire in general.
- 8.2 There is a risk that the Council will not be successful in securing funding from LCC's Economic Recovery & Growth Programme to fund initially consultancy work or additional supported required to establish a Place Plan. In that event, officers will seek to identify alternative sources of funding, and potentially create a fund through the budget setting process to investigate the feasibility of schemes generally in West Lancashire, some of which could be used on Skelmersdale Town Centre projects.
- 8.3 There is also always the risk that not all partners will engage with the project or that some partners may want to see different ideas to others. To minimise this risk, the Council will work collaboratively with all partners from the very start of the project, seeking to bring in all ideas early on and take all partners on the journey through the assessment of ideas and proposals to reach a Regeneration Plan that all have inputted on and bought into.

Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

There is no direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders in the preparation of a Place Plan or establishment of a Place-Shaping Hub. Therefore, an Equality Impact Assessment is not required.

Appendices

Appendix A – Map of Skelmersdale Town Centre Regeneration Plan area