



**ST HELENS**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

## Cabinet

**20 October 2021**

<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>St Helens Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework Consultation Draft</b>
<b>Cabinet Portfolio</b>	Regeneration and Planning
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Councillor Richard McCauley
<b>Exempt Report</b>	No
<b>Reason for Exemption</b>	N/A
<b>Key Decision</b>	No
<b>Public Notice issued</b>	N/A
<b>Wards Affected</b>	Town Centre
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<b>Borough priorities</b>	Ensure children and young people have a positive start in life	
	Promote good health, independence, and care across our communities	
	Create safe and strong communities and neighbourhoods for all	x
	Support a strong, thriving, inclusive and well-connected local economy	x
	Create green and vibrant places that reflect our heritage and culture	x
	Be a responsible Council	

## 1. Summary

- 1.1 The draft St. Helens Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework has been produced to guide and support the positive transformation of the town centre, ensuring that the development coming forward is of high quality, sustainable and has the people of St. Helens at its heart. It sets out an ambitious long-term plan for investment in the town centre, outlining physical changes that are proposed to be delivered through implementation of the masterplan.
- 1.2 To accord with the recently adopted Community Engagement Strategy, it is proposed that the draft document be subject to a six-week period of consultation, ensuring that it benefits from views, opinions and feedback from the public, businesses, and visitors.

## 2. Recommendations for Decision

**Cabinet is recommended to:**

- i) **Approve the draft St. Helens Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework, attached as Appendix A.**
- ii) **Approve a process of period of public consultation for a period of six weeks in accordance with the Communication and Engagement Plan attached as Appendix B.**

## 3. Purpose of this Report

- 3.1 This report seeks approval to undertake a six-week public consultation on the draft St. Helens Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework.

## 4. Background

- 4.1 Nationally, town centres are being affected by changing retail trends arising from an increase in online shopping, the development of out-of-town retail centres, an ageing population, changing lifestyles, and the rise of convenience-led retailing (such as “click and collect”). All these changes have been intensified during and following the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 4.2 For the Borough’s town centres to remain sustainable, they must adapt to these changing trends. To maximise the impact of the “St. Helens Pound” it is important to ensure that the

Borough's town centres complement rather than compete and therefore each town centre and district centre should provide a distinctive and unique offer.

- 4.3 The draft St. Helens Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework provides an aspirational but realistic vision for the future of the town centre, identifying the opportunities and challenges which exist, and illustrating first thoughts and ideas around significant commercial and leisure investment that will completely transform the centre.
- 4.4 St. Helens town centre plays an important sub-regional role as the Borough's principal town centre providing a range of retail and other services for the Borough as set out in Policy LPC04 of the submission draft Local Plan. It contains a good representation of retail, leisure and civic uses that cater for many of the Borough's residents.
- 4.5 Policy LPB01 of the submission draft Local Plan sets out the Council's intentions to promote St. Helens town centre as an accessible and welcoming destination for new development that would help create a high-quality built environment. The Policy sets out developments that align with the delivery and implementation of the Council-led strategy for the future regeneration and development of St. Helens town centre will be supported.
- 4.6 The draft St. Helens Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework takes Policy LPB01 intention to the next stage, ensuring that the development coming forward is of high quality, sustainable and has the people of St. Helens at its heart.
- 4.7 Considering the Council's climate change ambitions and the adoption of the UN sustainable development goals the draft masterplan aims to encourage sustainable development and provides the best for people and local communities, now and in the future.
- 4.8 The St. Helens Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework would not "allocate" land for development, but would provide additional guidance for investors, developers, and decision-makers. It will not form part of the statutory Development Plan; however, it has been prepared having had full regard to relevant legislation including national planning policy contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2021), the 'saved' policies of the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) (1998), the Core Strategy (2012), and the emerging Local Plan.
- 4.9 Whilst the outcome of the St. Helens Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework will be of great interest to the public, the key target audience for this document is potential developers and investors. The document will also support council officers and members of the Planning Committee in assessing and determining planning applications. The St. Helens Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework will be accompanied by an Implementation Plan to ensure that the vision and objectives for St. Helens town centre are achieved through the delivery of several projects and schemes

## **5. St. Helens Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework**

- 5.1 The draft St. Helens Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework, attached at Appendix A, has been prepared by the Council and its strategic partner – the English Cities Fund (ECF). In March 2020, St. Helens Borough Council and ECF agreed a 20-year partnership that would see a variety of sites across the borough benefit from redevelopment, including St. Helens town centre. The aim of this partnership was to push forward regeneration in the borough, with the town centres of St. Helens and Earlestown being a priority.
- 5.2 In the preparation of the draft St. Helens Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework, it has been recognised that much engagement has already taken place, whether this has been to

inform the Town Deal or associated with the #StHelensTogether - Our Borough Strategy. It has been developed with this engagement as its foundation.

- 5.3 In accordance with the recently adopted Borough Consultation and Engagement Strategy and in the spirit of #StHelensTogether, it is the intention to conduct a formal six-week period of public consultation, to allow everyone in the community an opportunity to provide their views on the draft proposals and to shape the final document. Further details of the consultation are set out at Appendix B.
- 5.4 The representations received during this period of consultation will be fully considered by the Council and ECF in the preparation of the 'final' St. Helens Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework and any subsequent planning applications. Formal responses will be presented within a Consultation Statement which will sit alongside the Final Masterplan Development Framework.
- 5.5 The draft Masterplan Development Framework is a detailed document that assesses the current performance of the town centre, its footfall, retail, and housing offer. It analyses the transport and movement across the areas through road, rail, walking and cycling. The document assesses the challenges and the key opportunities within the town that would secure several uses for the town centre and will maximise footfall, dwell-time, and the wider regeneration benefits for the town.
- 5.6 The ECF Partnership have used this information together with feedback from previous engagements to develop a vision for St. Helens town centre, which is as follows:

***'ST HELENS.... A CULTURALLY CENTRED VIBRANT TOWN CENTRE THAT MATCHES THE BOROUGH'S POTENTIAL WITH PEOPLE AT THE HEART'***

- 5.7 The strategic objectives for the Draft Masterplan Development Framework are to:
- **DELIVERING A DIVERSE, VIBRANT AND ANIMATED TOWN CENTRE** consolidating the proportion of retail and concentrating retail provision, encouraging new town centre uses, increasing active frontages and offering spaces that attract the local and independent traders that make St. Helens truly unique.
  - **ESTABLISHING A FOUNDATION FOR FUTURE GROWTH** to attract high-quality employment into the town centre, building on the catalytical impact of Glass Futures and the opportunity to harness innovation and skills for the benefit of the local community.
  - **PROMOTING HIGH-QUALITY TOWN CENTRE LIVING** delivering a unique, high-quality, residential offer within the town centre that meets housing need and aspiration.
  - **CREATING A SUSTAINABLE, ACCESIBLE AND CONNECTED TOWN CENTRE** to ensure the town centre maximises the opportunity for net zero carbon development, with sustainability and climate change at the forefront of its transformation.
  - **POSITIVELY CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF THE TOWN** through promoting St. Helens' heritage, maximising the heritage assets, canal, and cultural offer to provide a distinctive experience for visitors, residents, and businesses.
  - **TO PROVIDE A HEALTHY AND COMMUNITY-FOCUSED TOWN CENTRE** Creating high-quality spaces and places for independent businesses and community functions to thrive, people to dwell and socialise within, providing opportunities for active travel and leisure, and creating a town centre which the people of St. Helens are proud of.
- 5.8 The town centre area has been divided into four broad character zones based upon key characteristics. Each zone has a significant role to play in the wider transformation of St. Helens town centre, and collectively, will support the delivery of the overarching vision.

- **CHARACTER ZONE 1: CENTRAL RETAIL QUARTER** encompasses the heart of the town, occupied by traditional high street uses and centered around the Grade II listed St Helens Parish Church. There are opportunities to improve the built environment, landscaping and reduce the dominance of the insular shopping centres which reduce the permeability within the town centre.
- **CHARACTER ZONE 2: CIVIC AND HERITAGE QUARTER** this area includes the majority of the town centre's heritage assets and development coming forward will preserve and/or enhance the heritage assets.
- **CHARACTER ZONE 3: DISCOVERY QUARTER** includes an arc of opportunity for change and future transformation for the town centre in an area of important buildings and structures that represent the cultural heritage and glass legacy of the borough.
- **CHARACTER ZONE 4: EDUCATION AND ENTERTAINMENT** this part of the town centre includes the St. Helens College Campus and provides the focus for St. Helens' evening economy – in and around Westfield Street.

## 6. Implementation Plan

- 6.1 The draft St. Helens Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework provides a vision and ambition for the future, but this is not a pipe dream. To accompany the final document will be an ambitious Delivery Strategy and Implementation Plan. This Delivery Strategy will set out the Phase 1 proposals which, if the Draft St. Helens Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework is supported, will bring the plan to life.
- 6.2 The scope of the proposed Phase 1 works in St. Helens is significant and will create a hugely positive impact on the town centre, comprising:
- new high quality office space
  - high quality homes
  - an international hotel brand
  - a revitalised market hall
  - an enhanced bus station
- 6.3 Linking all these proposals together will be high quality public realm that will create new pedestrianised streets and public squares, increasing biodiversity through quality landscaping and creating a place that will attract more residents, visitors, and business to St. Helens.
- 6.4 After the consultation responses have been analysed and the St. Helens Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework adopted it is the intention of the Council and ECF to follow shortly after with planning applications and detailed designs before the end of the municipal year.

## 7. Community Impact Assessment

- 7.1 The Community Impact Assessment identified that the draft Masterplan Development Framework provides an opportunity to drive transformational change for St. Helens town centre. This will generate physical regeneration benefits on the ground but also have wider-reaching positive impacts for the local community, businesses, and occupiers in the town over the next 20 years. Such benefits include driving economic growth and job creation, enhanced greenspace and public realm, providing a more sustainable town centre – adapted to climate change, with less reliance on the private car, increasing the visitor economy, celebration of the borough's unique cultural and heritage assets, addressing local housing need, positively changing perceptions of St. Helens (and the wider Borough) and attracting future inward investment into the town.

## **8. Consideration of Alternatives**

- 8.1 When considering the form of the document officers deliberated on the form and status of the document. Consideration was afforded to the production of a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). This formal policy status was not pursued for several reasons; planning officer resources were dedicated to the submission draft Local Plan examination stage and several planning appeals. In addition, the current uncertainty in the economic market and government's intention to pursue significant reform of the planning system made it prudent to pursue a guidance document, that could be delivered quickly whilst still providing robust guidance that would not restrict development.

## **9. Conclusions**

- 9.1 Cabinet approval is sought for the draft St. Helens Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework, following which it is proposed to conduct a 6-week period of public consultation. The findings of the consultation will then be considered before bringing the document back to Cabinet to consider formal adoption. The St. Helens Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework is vital to support and guide investment and development in the area over the next 20 years. The ambition of the document is to help St. Helens be a town that matches the potential of the Borough; it should be appealing to all – a place where people want to live, work, and spend time.

## **10. Implications**

### 10.1.1 Legal Implications

- 10.1.2 The Masterplan Development Framework will not form part of the statutory Development Plan. It will, however, be a material planning consideration in the determination of planning proposals. Land identified in a non-statutory town centre masterplan would be unlikely to meet the definition of blighted land as defined under Schedule 13 to the TCPA 1990 (section 150(1)) but specific legal advice will be sought following consultation with Landowners.

### 10.2 Community Impact Assessment (CIA) Implications

#### 10.2.1 Social Value

- 10.2.1.1 Inclusive growth has social value at its heart and the ECF Partnership Board will oversee the delivery of social value outcomes across all development of the town centre.

#### 10.2.2 Sustainability and Environment

- 10.2.2.1 The Masterplan Development Framework will generate physical regeneration benefits the provision of new greenspaces and public realm will provide a more sustainable town centre, the development should help the town centre adapt to the impact of climate change and the new development will be cognisant of the Borough's declared climate emergency, aiming to minimise and mitigate carbon emissions in the process. The aim of the plan is to encourage more people to use sustainable forms of transport and to enhance the biodiversity of the area.

#### 10.2.3 Health and Wellbeing

- 10.2.3.1 The adoption of an inclusive growth approach will influence a considerable number of wider determinants of health such as employment, skills, and quality of place.

#### 10.2.4 Equality and Human Rights

- 10.2.4.1 There will be no adverse Equality and Human rights issues. There will be an opportunity to tackle barriers for protected groups, considering the development as a dementia friendly town centre that is accessible and welcoming to all.

#### 10.3 Customers and Resident

- 10.3.1 The draft Masterplan Development Framework supports improved two-way communications and engagement with our customers and residents. As noted in paragraph 5.3 of this report, the preparation of the draft Masterplan Development Framework has built on the findings of previous engagement and a further period of public consultation is proposed to take place in November and December 2021. A proposed Consultation and Engagement Plan is attached at Appendix B, this will be managed through the ECF Partnership and a specialist company, Lexington have been engaged to oversee the work.

#### 10.4 Asset and Property

- 10.4.1 The delivery of the proposed Masterplan Development Framework would have a significant impact on St. Helens town centre and physical assets in the Council's current ownership within the town centre boundary would be affected. The Public Realm Strategy within the proposed Masterplan Development Framework will help to guide investment into the roads, footways, and public open spaces within the town centre. Several privately owned assets and properties would also be impacted upon, requiring separate dialogue and reporting as appropriate.

#### 10.5 Staffing and Human Resource

- 10.5.1 There are no direct human resources implications arising from this report. The implementation of the Masterplan Development Framework will require programme and technical support. This is the subject of the Growth Delivering Prosperity Team report which is also on the Cabinet meeting agenda.

#### 10.6 Risks

- 10.6.1 The proposed Masterplan Development Framework is a long-term (20-year) plan to guide private and public sector investment in the area. Individual projects will be considered in detail as proposals are developed by partner agencies and other developers. It should be noted that this is an aspirational document which sets the vision for the area, however given that the Council has secured a delivery partner, with ECF the transition from plan to delivery will be as short a period as possible. In addition to funding from the Council many of the proposals will require external funding for them to be delivered. This will be through both public funding and investment from the private sector, which is in turn dependent on the prevailing national economic conditions.

#### 10.7 Finance

- 10.7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report at this stage. The Masterplan would form the "blueprint" for development in St. Helens town centre, and engagement with the private sector would be coordinated through the St. Helens Regeneration Programme. The Implementation Plan will in time require investment by the Council. Capital financing has been indicatively identified within the Council's Medium Term

Financial Strategy (MTFS) for this purpose, although the proposals are very much at a pre-concept stage.

- 10.7.2 Further financial information and analysis will be required as part of analysing individual business cases and the impact of the overall scheme. When individual projects are identified, the resource requirements would be assessed on a project-by-project basis and with due regard to the overall scheme. This will be subject to further external financial and legal advice, the development of full business cases and further analysis of capital and revenue forecasts, to ensure affordability and sustainability. Projects will follow the Council's revised Contract Procurement Rules and there will be additional financial governance oversight provided by the ECF ODA provisions that include an Executive Board.

## 10.8 Policy Framework Implications

- 10.8.1 The proposals in this report will contribute to the delivery of the Our Borough Strategy, they will support the outcomes identified in the submission draft Local Plan and the initiatives contained within the Town Deal. Consultation and engagement will be conducted in accordance with the Community Engagement Strategy ensuring that the plans are coproduced with our communities. The implementation of the plans will also be supported by the newly created Place Board. The recovery of St. Helens town centre will also help to deliver the outcomes of the emerging Housing Strategy and the Economic Reset and Recovery Plan.

## 11. **Background papers**

- 11.1 St. Helens Borough Local Plan 2020-2035 Submission Draft
- 11.2 St. Helens Town Investment Plan

## 12. **Appendices**

- 12.1 Appendix A – draft St. Helens Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework.
- 12.2 Appendix B – Communication and Engagement Plan