



ST HELENS
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cabinet

20 October 2021

Report Title:	Earlestown Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework Consultation Draft
Cabinet Portfolio	Regeneration and Planning
Cabinet Member	Councillor Richard McCauley
Exempt Report	No
Reason for Exemption	N/A
Key Decision	No
Public Notice issued	N/A
Wards Affected	Earlestown
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Borough priorities	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 Earlestown Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework has been produced to guide and encourage new development in Earlestown town centre. 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 Earlestown 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 Earlestown 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 Earlestown Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework provides an aspirational long-term vision to guide future development and the transformation of the town centre. It identifies the potential development and investment opportunities to sustain and enhance areas and proposes a first phase of investment to improve the much loved and valued Earlestown Market Square.
- 4.4 Earlestown is recognised as the second town centre in the Borough's hierarchy of centres as set out in Policy LPC04 of the submission draft Local Plan. It is an accessible town centre from the surrounding residential areas and from other parts of Newton-le-Willows. Earlestown town centre contains a rail station and bus station, which provide access to local and regional destinations. The town centre provides a local community focus.
- 4.5 Policy LPB02 of the submission draft Local Plan sets out the Council's intentions to safeguard and enhance the function and role of Earlestown town centre, and to provide a Council-led framework for the future regeneration and development of the town centre. The Policy sets out the intention for the framework and states that it should:
- enhance the town centre as a shopping destination.
 - increase the vibrancy of the town's market.
 - protect and enhance the town's-built heritage.
 - promote Earlestown as a commuter settlement given its direct rail connectivity to Liverpool, Manchester, and Chester
 - increase the number and variety of residential units by encouraging mixed use development that makes a positive contribution to the economic role of the town centre; and
 - link the town centre with the new homes provided in residential redevelopments in the surrounding areas.
- 4.6 The draft Earlestown Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework takes Policy LPB02 intention forward to the next stage, guiding future development to ensure it is high quality, has regard to the uniqueness of Earlestown, its heritage assets and spaces including the historic market square.
- 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 Earlestown will be revitalised, to re-create a thriving historic market town returned to its former glory. The aim of the draft masterplan is to embrace the town's important heritage assets through:
- repurposing the Town Hall.
 - creating spaces and places that people enjoy spending time in; and
 - provide an attractive town centre which is accessible for everyone and sustainable for the future
- 4.9 The Earlestown 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. The draft Earlestown Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework has also been developed and influenced by the Earlestown Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan (2016).

- 4.10 Whilst the outcome of the Earlestown 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 Earlestown Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework will be accompanied by an Implementation Plan to ensure that the vision and objectives for Earlestown town centre are achieved through the delivery of several projects and schemes

5. Earlestown Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework

- 5.1 The draft Earlestown 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 Earlestown 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 Earlestown Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework it has been recognised that much engagement has already taken place, whether this has been to inform the proposed use for a repurposed Earlestown Town Hall 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' Earlestown 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 Earlestown Masterplan Development Framework is a detailed document that reviews the evolution of Earlestown, looking backward to determine how we want the town to move forward. The document 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 opportunities within the town including the quality of the built environment.
- 5.6 The ECF Partnership have used this information together with feedback from previous engagements to develop a vision for Earlestown town centre, which is as follows:

***“A TRADITIONAL MARKET TOWN
WITH A THRIVING AND VIBRANT HIGH STREET AND MARKET PLACE”***

5.7 The strategic objectives for the draft Masterplan Development Framework are to:

- **DELIVER A DIVERSE, VIBRANT AND ANIMATED TOWN CENTRE** offering spaces to attract local and independent traders that complement the historic market.
- **PROMOTING HIGH-QUALITY TOWN CENTRE LIVING** that meets housing need and diversifies the town centre housing stock.
- **CREATING A SUSTAINABLE, ACCESIBLE AND CONNECTED TOWN CENTRE** to make it easier for people to enjoy the services, spaces, and amenities the town has to offer.
- **ENCOURAGING CREATIVES AND INDEPENDENTS** building on the success of the historic market, encouraging more creatives and independents to become established.
- **POSITIVELY CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF THE TOWN** through promoting the unique heritage of Earlestown, including the historic Town Hall and Market Place,
- **TO PROVIDE A HEALTHY AND COMMUNITY-FOCUSED TOWN CENTRE** Creating high-quality spaces for people to thrive, dwell and socialise with each other.

5.8 The town centre area has been divided into three broad action zones based upon key characteristics. Each zone has a significant role to play in the wider transformation of Earlestown town centre, and collectively, will support the delivery of the overarching vision.

- **ACTION ZONE AREA 1 ARRIVAL HUB** this area encompasses the train station and land immediately south of the station, the opportunity is to improve wayfinding, integrate all public transport options providing a truly multi modal interchange, and redevelop under-utilized land for residential use.
- **ACTION ZONE AREA 2: QUEEN STREET JUNCTION AND MARKET STREET** to enhance the town's rich heritage and improve the quality and appearance of the listed buildings, buildings of merit and the overall Conservation Area. The aim is to re-activate the street and change the environment towards a more balanced, pedestrian and mobility friendly area.
- **ACTION ZONE 3: MARKET SQUARE** this is the jewel in the crown of Earlestown. The key focus is to improve the quality of the historic market square, encouraging active frontages and bringing key heritage assets back to life, making the Market Square a more vibrant place to be for more of the time

6. Implementation Plan

6.1 The draft Earlestown 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 Earlestown Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework is supported, will bring the plan to life.

6.2 The scope of the proposed Phase 1 works in Earlestown will help the town centre to re-establish itself as a thriving market town to attract more residents, businesses, and visitors. It will focus on:

- Enhancing market square to create a covered market area, flexible event space and landscape improvements; and
- Improving the public realm and key highway junctions to make the town centre more welcoming and pedestrian friendly

6.3 After the consultation responses have been analysed and the Earlestown 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 Earlestown 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 Earlestown (and the wider Borough) and attracting future inward investment into the town.

8. Consideration of Alternatives

8.1 When considering 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 Earlestown 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 Earlestown 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 sustain and enhance Earlestown town centre so that it can adapt to the changes and challenges of the retail and leisure markets and return to its former glory.

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 in 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 carbona tall stages 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 Earlestown town centre and physical assets in the Council's current ownership within the town centre boundary are likely to be affected. The Area Action Zone 3: Market Square focusses on the rejuvenation of this council owned asset, there are covenants held on the land which will restrict the use of the site albeit proposed uses are likely to be aligned to the covenant.
- 10.4.2 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. The draft Masterplan Development Framework also recognises that the Earlestown Town Hall is an important and attractive building and as such is an important asset to retain and bring back into use.
- 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 this 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 projects may require external funding for them to be delivered. This will be sourced 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 Earlestown town centre, and engagement with the private sector would be coordinated through the Earlestown 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.

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 will protect the aims and objectives of the Earlestown Conservation Management Plan. 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 Earlestown 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 Earlestown Conservation Area Management Plan

12. **Appendices**

12.1 Appendix A – draft Earlestown Town Centre Masterplan Development Framework.

12.2 Appendix B – Communication and Engagement Plan.