

POLICY SCRUTINY GROUP – 11TH JULY 2017

Report of the Head of Planning and Regeneration

ITEM 8 LOUGHBOROUGH TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN

Purpose of Report

To enable the Group to review progress towards the preparation of a replacement masterplan for Loughborough Town Centre and provide suggestions considered appropriate to shape the consultation draft masterplan.

Policy Context and Justification

The Corporate Plan 2016–2020 commits to the creation of a strong and lasting economy. In support of that overarching strategic commitment the plan introduces proposals to develop a new and revitalised town centre masterplan for Loughborough (the previous masterplan had been adopted in June 2007).

Background

A competitive tendering exercise was held during the summer 2016 for the preparation of a Loughborough Town Centre Masterplan. The successful bidder, Urban Initiatives Studio (UIS), in partnership with commercial property consultants Montague Evans, was awarded the commission to prepare a replacement Loughborough Town Centre Masterplan on 4th November 2016.

The project brief and submitted method statement specifically requires the following outputs:

- **A Framework Masterplan** defining an overall vision for the town centre and overarching objectives derived through consultation with the business community, partners and key stakeholders. The masterplan will also define the extent of the town centre along with primary and secondary frontages informed by a strategic analysis of the centre's assets and opportunities, a SWOT analysis and examination of the capacity of the centre and or adjoining areas to accommodate projected development needs.
- **Site / Area Investment Plans** identifying property envelopes and areas within the public realm where there exist opportunities for regeneration through public and private investment. For each site:
 - the nature and scale of the site will be defined;
 - the existing and proposed land uses and commercial potential will be assessed including its deliverability;
 - the capacity to serve projected requirements of the Charnwood Local Plan Core Strategy will be evaluated, and
 - the site's contribution to the overall Framework Master Plan will be assessed.
- **A Management, Marketing and Promotional Strategy** setting out a menu for potential supporting interventions, infrastructure and public realm

improvements designed to drive up town centre footfall and visitor numbers, illustrated by examples of good practice.

- **An Implementation Strategy** setting out for each individual intervention a prioritized time frame with links to realistic funding streams or established and innovative delivery vehicles supported by clearly allocated responsibility for delivery.

Progress of the Commission

A stakeholder group has been established to provide technical and professional expertise and local knowledge of the Town Centre to assist the consultants. The stakeholders are drawn from:

- The **Loughborough Town Team** originally assembled to assist in the drafting of the 2007 masterplan who have continued over the intervening decade to oversee the largely successful delivery that plan;
- The **Love Loughborough Partnership** assembled by the Loughborough Business Improvement District to act as a forum for the engagement of businesses, community groups, commercial landlords, service providers, public transport operators, academics and supporting agencies to advance the interests of Loughborough as a vital and vibrant town centre;
- The **Local Highway Authority** (Leicestershire County Council) including strategic transport planners, highway design specialists and officers responsible for street management and signage; and
- **Key public service providers** from Charnwood Borough Council with responsibility for the public realm including cleansing service contractors.

The commission has been progressed through a series of stakeholder workshops, each focusing on a separate theme required to inform the requisite masterplan outputs:

Workshop 1 (5th December 2016) Visioning

A series of site visits and an extensive desk top study has been undertaken to develop an understanding of Loughborough and the opportunities that it presents. That evidence base was presented to stakeholders to afford a “reality check;” to ensure that the consultants’ understanding of the town and the project outputs being sought aligned with that of the stakeholders. Key elements of the workshop included:

- Confirmation of the brief;
- Review of the 2007 Masterplan – its achievements and outstanding opportunities;
- The changing strategic context – projected growth, local plan proposals, impact of on-line sales, emergence of Loughborough BID;
- Review of the historic growth of Loughborough, its heritage, constraints, composition and character providing the context for looking forward;
- Definition of character areas:
 - Market Place
 - Baxter Gate / High Street

- Church Gate
- The Rushes / Derby Road
- Market Street
- Queen's Park
- Wards End / Bedford Square
- Wood Gate / Southfield Park
- Understanding national trends in the town centre property market;
- A Dozen Ideas for Loughborough:
 - Enhance the pedestrian experience
 - Improve connectivity
 - Improve the arrival experience
 - Enhance access and quality of public spaces
 - Improve the offer through new development
 - Encourage town centre living
 - Create employment opportunities
 - Celebrate the special character of the town (Art Deco heritage)
 - Animate the town (Events and street activities)
 - Improve access by all modes
 - Create a safer, welcoming and valued centre (management and promotion).

Workshop 2 (6th March 2017) – Options

Following the first workshop session nominations were invited from the participants to form a smaller Core Group of about 20 stakeholders: all of those expressing a wish to remain closely engaged were accommodated.

The outputs from Workshop 1 enabled the Core Group to consider the emerging options for the progression of the project. The Core Group received and submitted comments upon a presentation which covered the following issues:

- Review of previous workshop and response to key stakeholder responses
- Proposed vision for Loughborough.

*“Loughborough Town Centre will be a **successful and vibrant place** with a **strong identity that** stems from its role as a market town and home to Loughborough University. It will be an **attractive destination** with a **diverse retail and leisure** offer, a mix of **housing** and a wide range of **employment opportunities**.*

*The town will be **easy to access** with a **well-connected network** of vehicular and pedestrian routes. Activity in the town will be supported by a **range of events** and innovative **marketing, business and promotional** strategies that will make **Loughborough a great place to be.**”*

- Achieving the vision
 - Movement and arrival (Public realm improvements / enhancement of pedestrian lanes and “jitties” / creation of a public space within Bedford Square)
 - Character, identity, uses and offer (Revised character areas)
- Development options - preparation and testing (Including viability assessment)
 - Baxter Gate / Aumberry Gap - 3 options
 - Devonshire Square / Granby Street - 5 options
 - Southfields Road car park
 - Sainsbury site on Ashby Road

Workshop 3 (Part 1) (14th March 2017) – Implementation and Marketing

The first session of the third workshop sought to build upon the work of the Options workshop with stakeholders being invited to consider the practical implications and viability of the emerging interventions in order to identify the elements of a potential preferred strategy. Specific elements of the session covered the following issues:

- Emerging spatial strategy
 - Public realm improvements and arrival
 - Lanes strategy (connectivity)
 - Vehicle network (Southfield Road / Bedford Square / Granby Street / eastern car park)
 - Bedford Square enhancement
- Development options review
 - Baxter Gate / Aumberry Gap (Retail led – 5,150 sqm) [**Stakeholder preferred**]
 - Baxter Gate / Aumberry Gap (Residential led Phase I)
 - Baxter Gate / Aumberry Gap (Residential led Phase IIA – 2,560 sqm retail)
 - Baxter Gate / Aumberry Gap (Residential led Phase IIB – 2,560 sqm retail + 3,600 office)
 - Granby Street / Devonshire Square (net loss of 93 parking spaces)
 - Granby Street / Devonshire Square (260 space m/s car park)
 - [**Stakeholders preferred option for building above “Home Bargains” unit and improving connectivity via Devonshire Lane to Queen’s Park**]
- Scheme Delivery
 - Planning Delivery tools (Policy, guidance, Action Plans, CPO)
 - Delivery agencies (Council, developer, land owner, businesses.....)
 - Delivery routes (Public, Private, P/P Partnership)
 - Public Private Partnership
 - Traditional Development Agreements
 - Joint Ventures
 - Asset Backed Vehicles
 - Covenant backed deals
 - Public sector acquisition
 - Intervention and influence
 - As Planning Authority

- Land Assembly Facilitator
- Market Site / Select Developer
- As Master Developer
- Undertake Direct Development
-Each option needs to be balanced against Risk?

Workshop 3 (Part 2) – Marketing and Promotion

In constructing the commission it was recognised that the long term vitality and viability of the town centre was dependent on attracting and retaining customers (footfall) to support shops and businesses. That might be achieved through strategic interventions such as those considered through the initial workshops, focused on attracting inward investment to exploit redevelopment opportunities and related improvements to the public realm. Almost by definition such interventions are longer term and dependent upon significant investment utilising various delivery vehicles and partnership strategies.

The commission recognised equally that footfall might be encouraged through more immediate and less expensive interventions based on the utilisation of the spaces within the town to stage events and activities allied to effective marketing and promotional activities. The “Love Loughborough” BID, working in partnership with the Council’s own street management team and others has demonstrated the effectiveness of these initiatives.

The consultants were invited to advise on how the masterplan reasonably might expand and build upon the initiatives undertaken to date with stakeholders engaging in discussions around the following potential interventions:

- The advantages of Local Interventions:
 - Tactical small / low cost
 - Can be delivered ahead of long term investment
 - Inexpensive way to test ideas
 - Can change perception of a place
 - Tap into community activism
 - Provide assistance and support
 - Light touch oversight – remove “red tape.”
- Types of Local Intervention – Building the Brand
 - Events – Sport / Markets / Heritage
 - Animation – Lanes (Art) Strategy / Temporary Public Realm improvements / Temporary Uses
 - Supporting Business – WiFi, Love Loughborough, networking, start up support, town dressing.....

Future Programme

With the conclusion of the workshop stages UIS has been collating the material presented and developing the emerging proposals taking into consideration the views and opinions expressed by stakeholders in order to produce a consolidated “draft masterplan.”

The draft masterplan will be the subject of a full public consultation event extending over six weeks commencing during July 2017 (subject to confirmation).

The detailed communications plan to guide the masterplan consultation has yet to be finalised but it is intended to include an al member briefing ahead of the public launch of the process to ensure that Councillors are informed of the plan and the programme for public engagement.

At the end of the consultation period the consultancy team will respond to comments received and recommend any necessary amendments to the draft before it is made available to the Council for presentation to Cabinet for adoption in the October / November cycle of meetings.

It is anticipated that the core stakeholder group will remain in place as a steering group to ensure a continued forum for partnership engagement and co-operation and to assist the Council in the implementation and delivery of the masterplan.

Background Papers: Workshop presentations prepared by UIS

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