

# Bolton Council

**Report to:** Cabinet

**Date:** 8<sup>th</sup> July 2019

**Report of:** Director of Place

**Report No:** CAB/548

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**Report Title:** **Farnworth Town Centre Strategy**

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**Non Confidential:** *(Non-Confidential)* This report does **not** contain information which warrants its consideration in the absence of the press or members of the public

**Purpose:** This report sets out proposals for the implementation of a refreshed masterplan and strategy to guide the long-term regeneration of Farnworth town centre and seeks approval for a series of development proposals and key actions following a period of public consultation.

**Background Doc(s):** Farnworth town centre Engagement & Consultation Project (June-Nov 2018)

**Appendices / Attachments**

- Appendix 1: Farnworth tomorrow (Masterplan)
- Appendix 2: Delivery & Implementation Strategy
- Appendix 3: Economic Baseline
- Appendix 4: Consultation Report
- Appendix 5: Indicative Action Plan for Delivery
- Appendix 6: EIA

**Recommendations:** The Executive Cabinet Member/Cabinet is requested to:

- approve the revised Farnworth town centre masterplan and strategy to guide the long-term regeneration of the town centre as outlined in this report;
- approve the proposed approach to deliver the masterplan and delegate decisions regarding the allocation of funding to the Director of Place in consultation with the relevant Executive Cabinet Member;
- authorise the Borough Solicitor to carry out all necessary legal formalities.

**Decision:**

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**Signed:**

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Leader / Executive  
Member

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Monitoring Officer

**Date:**

**Summary:**

In October 2017, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) agreed the Greater Manchester Mayor's Town Centre Challenge programme. Each district within Greater Manchester was given the opportunity to submit a town centre that they felt would benefit from the programme. As a result, the Council took the decision to submit Farnworth.

The Greater Manchester Mayor's Town Centre Challenge has provided a catalyst to unlock Farnworth's potential, both in terms of community and economic value. The Council committed to developing a new masterplan for Farnworth.

In order to support the regeneration of the Borough's town centres, the Council has recently approved a £12m allocation of funding from the £100m Town Centre Strategy Fund. This will be used for targeted intervention in Farnworth, Horwich, Westhoughton and Little Lever town centres. An additional £4m of funding has been allocated from the 2019/20 Capital Programme for further investment in district centres, primarily in Farnworth town centre.

An expression of interest for funding from the Future High Streets Fund has also recently been submitted to try and secure further investment to support the delivery of the masterplan.

The strategy for Farnworth town centre is outlined within this report with full details including development proposals, masterplan and economic benefits set out within the proposed "Farnworth Tomorrow" ("Masterplan") and delivery and implementation strategy attached at Appendices 1 & 2. Collectively this report and the Masterplan and delivery plan comprise the strategy for Farnworth town centre ("Farnworth town centre Strategy").

## 1. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In February 2016, the Council adopted the new Economic Strategy “The Bolton Economy: Our Strategy for Growth 2016-2030” (“Economic Strategy”), endorsed by Bolton Vision, updating the strategic policy context for a refreshed town centre strategy and masterplan framework. This utilised the established ‘town centre first’ planning framework provided in the Council’s Local Plan and subsequently supported in the revised Community Strategy and Vision for Bolton 2030.
- 1.2 Across the UK, town centres are facing challenges to their future vitality and viability. Many town centres are suffering from falling retail sales, reduced footfall, rising vacancies and high maintenance costs. Town centres need to become places that offer more diverse attractions, providing a range of different activities and uses such as shops, housing, leisure, vibrant food and drink offers, social and community hubs and commercial and cultural enterprises, all of which should be designed to function as intergenerational spaces.
- 1.3 Over the last decade Bolton has evidenced just how important the Council’s role is in facilitating regeneration with both policy and direct intervention; and the success this can bring even during periods of economic downturn. Ensuring the vitality and sustainability of Farnworth town centre is a priority for the Council, it’s partners and residents. Despite significant investment in the town centre over the last two years by the Council and its partners, Transport for Greater Manchester (TFGM) and Bolton at Home, of around £3.5m, the town centre is still not performing well. The main reasons are the high levels of vacant retail units, low values and a lack of a diverse offer. In particular, the masterplan highlights a lack of leisure and food and drink offer, poorly maintained commercial properties and a fragmented townscape and public realm as contributing to the town’s poor performance.
- 1.4 Farnworth was included in the Greater Manchester Mayor’s Town Centre Challenge programme, which was introduced in 2018 and reinforces the trend to support town centres through the process of regeneration. The programme is a response to changes in the retail property market leading to the decline of town centres, and the need for planning positively for town centres with more new homes and non-retail offers. The initiative aims to regenerate smaller town centres across the conurbation, to be cost-effective locations of businesses, housing and leisure. However, this programme was unfunded. As part of this work, the Council committed to developing a new Masterplan for Farnworth that reflects the Bolton Vision 2030 of “creating a vibrant place, built on strong cohesive communities, successful business and healthy residents ensuring it is a welcoming place where people choose to study, work and put down roots.”
- 1.5 The emerging strategic commissioning approach for health and social care in Bolton also focuses on commissioning outcomes for people and place and is based on the specific needs and assets of local populations with a focus on reducing inequalities. The new approach will also support and enable integrated neighbourhood delivery by making best use of all resources across localities. Although the Masterplan has a significant focus on the physical aspects of the place, the Council has been keen to ensure that the development of the new Masterplan for Farnworth is about the people of Farnworth and that any investment has a wider socio-economic impact, to assist in the delivery of the Council’s Economic Strategy focussing on inclusive growth. The Masterplan therefore considers the needs of the local community and how the town centre can promote healthier lifestyles.
- 1.6 Following a competitive tender, the Council appointed BDP, a major international practice of architects, designers, engineers and urbanists, together with commercial property specialist BE Group to refresh the Masterplan. In consultation with key stakeholders and extensive community engagement, work on the new Farnworth Masterplan has concluded. The Masterplan has identified six key development proposals to support the transformation of Farnworth town centre. The cost of implementing these proposals is estimated to be £27m. The Council has created a £16m fund to support the regeneration of four smaller town

centres in the Borough. On the 21st January 2019 Cabinet approved a £12m allocation of funding from the £100m Town Centre Strategy Fund and on the 20<sup>th</sup> February 2019 Full Council approved an additional £4m of funding from the 2019/20 Capital Programme for further investment in district centres. A significant portion of this funding is likely to be required for Farnworth to support the delivery of the Masterplan with the aim of leveraging further funding and investment to regenerate the town centre and sustain its immediate future to the benefit of its residents.

- 1.7 It is proposed that the funding allocated to Farnworth is targeted to key interventions within the town centre which will have the greatest impact, together with cross-cutting interventions such as infrastructure investment that will benefit the town centre as a whole. Interventions will include strategic site assembly; getting sites 'development ready'; and the delivery of some key developments; public realm and infrastructure. It is proposed that external advisors and services will be procured, as required, to support delivery of the Farnworth town centre Strategy and secure the necessary private sector investment. A range of potential development delivery options will be utilised.
- 1.8 The refreshed strategy for Farnworth town centre is outlined within this report with full details including target interventions, masterplan framework and economic benefits set out within the proposed "Farnworth Tomorrow" ("Masterplan") attached at Appendix 1. Collectively this report and the Masterplan comprise the refreshed strategy for Farnworth town centre.
- 1.9 It is considered vital that the Council leads and facilitates the adaptation and evolution of Farnworth town centre through a strategy that will significantly strengthen the diversity of uses across the town centre and will enhance the town centre's townscape through upgrading and redevelopment of the buildings and spaces. This requires the development and regeneration of key sites for housing, employment, community, health and leisure uses, complemented by investment in transport, public realm, environment and digital infrastructure. To ensure a sustainable future for Farnworth town centre, there is a need to ensure that footfall generating uses are retained and new attractions introduced in the town centre, together with the right social infrastructure to support the existing and future community.
- 1.10 Without the Council's direct intervention, the risk is the delivery of the development proposals/target interventions will not be achieved. The private sector will not deliver economic objectives on its own as Farnworth experiences lower values and higher risks than other town centres in the Borough. The Council will need to assist in leading, facilitating and enabling the conditions for economic growth through direct intervention in economic development in partnership with business and communities. An indicative action plan for the delivery of six development proposals/key interventions is detailed in this report.

## **2 ISSUES**

- 2.1 Across the UK, town centres are facing challenges to their future vitality and viability. Many town centres are suffering from falling retail sales, reduced footfall, rising vacancies and high maintenance costs. Town centres need to become places that offer more diverse attractions, providing a range of different activities and uses such as shops, housing, leisure, vibrant food and drink offers, social and community hubs and commercial and cultural enterprises, all of which should be designed to function as intergenerational spaces.
- 2.2 'The Portas Review: An Independent Review into the Future of our High Streets' (2011) confirms this requirement, reimagining town centres as 'destinations for socialising, culture, health, wellbeing, creativity and learning' as well as 'places that will develop and sustain new and existing markets and businesses'. The Public Health England's report 'Healthy High Streets: Good Place-making in an urban Setting' (2018) recognises that healthy streets are assets that promote and improve the health of local residents and users and the

wider local community. To achieve such improvements, high streets need to feature good quality design and furniture and provide accessible, safe communal spaces that can be used to create healthier, safer and more cohesive local communities.

- 2.3 Whilst the population of Farnworth is expected to grow, the town centre continues to experience the impacts of a lack of investment in non-food retail and leisure uses, which impacts the liveliness of the town centre and decreases footfall. This is not unique to Farnworth as it is prevalent in many other town centres. The main issues for Farnworth highlighted in the Masterplan are the high levels of vacant retail units, low values and a lack of a diverse offer. In particular, a lack of leisure and food and drink offer, poorly maintained commercial properties and a fragmented townscape and public realm as contributing to the town's poor performance.
- 2.4 The Farnworth Masterplan 2019 (appendix 1) and Economic Baseline Report 2019 (appendix 3) identified 23 vacant retail units in Farnworth in September 2018, totalling approximately 5,248sqm. Most are located in Farnworth town centre and within the precinct area. Savills estimated the National vacancy rate to be 11.2% at the end of 2017. Farnworth's is 13.4% and therefore above the National average. Existing office supply is generally limited to a small number of offices above shops plus some B1(a) space within industrial locations, particularly on Queen Street in the town centre.
- 2.5 The quality of the retail units in Farnworth is poor and likely to be contributing to a diminishing demand and footfall in the town centre. Supply tends to be towards the smaller end of the scale however there are some larger units available. These are generally second-hand retail units, some over multiple floors and of poor to moderate quality. Farnworth has been tested for unmet demand with 18 national retailers that do not already have a presence in the town in order to understand the opportunities; no interest was identified.
- 2.6 Current occupiers of the town centre are mostly independent retailers, however there is an element of representation from larger national chain stores, such as Heron Foods, Home Bargains and Asda. Food and drink are provided at a range of pubs, focused along Higher Market Street with takeaways and bakeries being the main alternative. Although strong in terms of quality, these currently offer limited evening opportunities for families and younger people. These provide the main evening economy offer and only appeal to particular client groups and do little to attract visitors from outside of the town or encourage dwell time. The takeaways tend to be shuttered during the day, giving the appearance that the town is closed for business with Market Street being a key gateway. It has proved difficult to attract a new food and drink offer to the town.
- 2.7 The leisure centre is extremely well used however facilities are limited. The swimming pool is small and there is a lack of space for holding fitness classes etc. There is little else in terms of the leisure offer. Farnworth currently has no facilities for young people and families such as a cinema, trampoline centre or bowling alley, which means young people travel outside of the town to access such facilities, again drawing footfall away from the local town centre.
- 2.8 Farnworth experiences high levels of deprivation and therefore the challenges needing to be addressed do not only require physical interventions but also social. There is a perception from businesses and residents that the town centre is unsafe at night due to poor lighting, lack of police presence, large groups of young people, drugs and alcohol abuse and there being so few businesses open or other people around. There were 1223 crimes reported in Farnworth town centre between 1<sup>st</sup> January 2018 and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018.
- 2.9 House prices in Farnworth are below most GM averages, significantly so for detached properties, where the GM average is £294,079 against a Farnworth norm of £149,865.

Farnworth house prices fall at least £42,000 below the North West average for all property types. There is high demand for social and affordable rented properties in Farnworth, as would be expected with high levels of deprivation in the town. There are currently 1934 applicants on the Housing Register from Farnworth with only 190 properties advertised through the Council's Choice Based Lettings scheme in the last 12 months.

### **3 MAIN BODY OF THE REPORT**

#### **3.1 Policy Context**

3.1.1 The need for the regeneration of Farnworth town centre is well founded in planning policy both at national, regional and local level. The Masterplan is set within this context.

#### *3.2 National Policy Context*

3.2.1 The revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published on 24 July 2018 and sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. This revised Framework replaces the previous NPPF published in March 2012. The development proposals/target interventions are consistent with NPPF Chapter 2 Achieving Sustainable Development, Chapter 5 Delivering a sufficient supply of homes, Chapter 7 Ensuring the vitality of town centres and Chapter 8 Promoting healthy and safe communities

#### *3.3 Regional Policy Context*

3.3.1 The emerging Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (GMSF) will shape the strategic planning policy across the conurbation, through an increased focus on residential and employment development within existing town centres and urban areas, in line with the Greater Manchester Mayor's commitment to minimising the loss of greenbelt land and prioritising the re-use of previously developed land. With around 200,000 new homes required by the conurbation by the GSF by 2037, the existing towns and shopping centres will have a key role to play in meeting the target.

3.3.2 The emerging GMSF seeks to boost competitiveness of the north of the conurbation with strong focus on regeneration and enhancing the role of town centres, including Farnworth. Opportunities to further increase the population catchments of these centres will be promoted. In doing so development will be carefully managed to ensure that the local distinctiveness of each main town centre is retained and enhanced.

#### *3.4 Local Policy Context*

3.4.1 The Core Strategy, adopted in March 2011, is Bolton's key Local Plan document. It describes what the Council, its formal partners and others with an interest in the future development of the Borough including members of the Community want Bolton to look like in the future up to 2026, and the planning policies that will be used to make it a reality, it reflects the spatial aspects of the work of the Council and its partners. The subsequent Allocations Plan (2014) sets out how this will be implemented on a Proposals Map for Farnworth and the Borough as a whole.

3.4.2 The Core Strategy states that Farnworth town centre, the boundary as identified in the Allocations Plan, will remain the main focus for retail, education, health, leisure and community facilities to serve Farnworth and opportunities will be maximised to improve its range of retailers and services, together with improvements in the quality of gateways, corridors and public realm. Policy RA2 states the Council and its partners will:

- Continue to regenerate Farnworth town centre with a mix of retailing, leisure, employment, public services and housing uses;

- Support the renewal, development and expansion of the retail precinct.
- Support the improvement of gateways, transport corridors, pedestrian routes and pedestrian permeability in and around Farnworth town centre.
- Develop a new health centre close to Farnworth town centre
- Develop new housing throughout the area on a combination of brownfield sites and on a limited number of greenfield sites in existing housing areas.
- Recognise Farnworth as an important public transport hub.
- Protect the significant open recreational area at Farnworth Park from adverse development.
- Require development proposals in Farnworth to enhance the townscape through the use of excellent quality design.
- Conserve and enhance the distinctive character of the existing physical and natural environment, especially the Greenside Conservation Area and the historic registered Farnworth Park.
- Make efficient use of land in Farnworth due to existing higher levels of development density, requiring development to provide adequate privacy and amenity space and conform to the overall spatial approach.

3.4.3 When Farnworth town centre is referred to in the Farnworth town centre Strategy it should be noted that this differs slightly from the adopted boundary in the Local Plan. This has given the flexibility to include a number of key additional sites just outside the boundary.

### **3.5 Market drivers and analysis**

3.5.1 A baseline review of potential market opportunities and town centre uses, undertaken by BDP, has identified the following areas for growth in Farnworth:

- *Residential*

House prices and rents in Farnworth are below average, and prices/rents have seen only a modest recent growth. However, there is a strong local rental market, currently focussed on the existing terraced stock and achieving rents of £450-560/pcm. The apartment market is limited at present although this is felt to be a reflection of the very low-quality stock on offer rather than the lack of demand.

New flats could do much to revitalise the local market but would likely need to focus on private renters and more affordable markets. Interest from housing associations, including Bolton at Home, and developers of older persons housing was noted. Students would also be another potential market and would ideally be accessible to the local train station.

Recent developments of new housing for sale have been focussed away from the town centre, however unmet demand remains for 2-3 bedroom properties. Two volume housebuilders contacted for the study expressed interest in the location.

- *Retail and Leisure Market*

Farnworth has a strong convenience offer but is under represented in most comparison sectors apart from household goods, electrical, DIY/hardware and motor accessories. Such sectors are likely to be vulnerable to e-commerce moving forward as are banks, building societies which are still represented in Farnworth.

The established local independent offer and the overall strong service offer indicates support for retail development brought forward as part of a mixed-use scheme.

Private gyms offer another growth area, with one gym recently opened and interest from another franchise chain.

- *Office*

Miller House on Market Street has been refurbished to provide micro business suites. Initial marketing suggested reasonable demand for two-person office suites from local start-ups, who don't want to travel into Bolton and pay higher rates. However, with 37 suites available at this development there appears little need for further provision to be made in the short term.

- *Public Services*

There is already a range of civic and social infrastructure in the town, including health and library services and the Council also retains office space in the former town hall. However the current health facilities are under significant pressure and patients are often required to travel across the borough to access services. Retaining and expanding public service provision in Farnworth town centre is vitally important to its continued and successful existence.

### **3.6 Vision for Farnworth town centre**

- 3.6.1 A stakeholder event was held in March 2018, with over 40 attendees. The discussions held at the event started a visioning and master planning process for the town. The Farnworth town centre Steering Group was established in June 2018, consisting of community and faith representatives, landowners, businesses, ward councillors and officers. All ward Councillors from Farnworth, Kearsley and Harper Green now attend the Steering Group, which has had an influential role in shaping the vision and masterplan over the months. It has provided clear direction for the master planning process, ensuring the outcomes benefit local communities and deliver the scale of ambition desired.
- 3.6.2 A six-month community engagement programme was carried out in 2018 that has helped inform the development of the Masterplan. Over 500 people contributed. A further consultation exercise was undertaken on the draft masterplan proposals in January 2019 with 250 people responding to the questionnaire and 130 attending drop-in sessions. (Appendix 4, Consultation report).
- 3.6.3 This has resulted in a new vision for Farnworth being developed that focusses on both the place and its people. This is a shared vision between the Council, residents and stakeholders of Farnworth.

“Farnworth town centre will be a vibrant and attractive environment, encouraging healthy lifestyles, offering a diverse range of shopping, leisure and cultural activities. Maximising the benefits of its proximity to neighbouring towns and cities, it will be a place that people want to come to live, work and socialise.”

### **3.7 Physical Development Proposals**

- 3.7.1 The Council is demonstrating its ambition to deliver change to Farnworth through the approach set out above. The Council has led the way by entering into negotiations with land and asset owners to acquire strategically important assets to enable future development. Bringing public sector partners together to invest in improving the town centre when private sector partners failed to, has resulted in significant improvements to public realm, highways and bus station. Being flexible with budgets, using council capital alongside ECO funding to improve the appearance of housing in gateway areas by installing external wall insulation and pooling budgets with Bolton at Home to improve the environment within housing estates are also examples of innovation.

3.7.2 In order to realise the market potential of the town centre and to meet the aspirations of local people, a strategy has been developed to underpin the long-term regeneration of Farnworth town centre which will benefit the current and future residents and businesses in the area:

- Consolidation of the main shopping offer into Brackley Street with strengthened 'gateways' to Market Street and Albert Road;
- Developing an evening economy including more leisure, health & fitness and café and restaurant options;
- Increasing town centre living, with mixed use developments and a ring of residential sites;
- Promoting Farnworth as an attractive place to live, benefitting from excellent town centre services and convenient access across the city region by road and rail; and
- Linking the university campus, park and new residential developments into the town centre with high quality public realm.

### **3.8 Public Consultation**

3.8.1 BDP developed a draft Masterplan that focussed on a number of development proposals and interventions that have the most to offer Farnworth town centre and the wider area, both in the short and long term. The proposals were developed following a process of evidence gathering, market viability, and option testing and have been informed by stakeholder consultations, an extensive community engagement programme (June-Nov 2018) and testing of deliverability of the proposals.

- Proposal One: Redevelopment of the Market Precinct
- Proposal Two: New Community and Civic Hub
- Proposal Three: New Housing Development
- Proposal Four: Extending the Leisure Centre
- Proposal Five: The Library Building
- Proposal Six: Public Realm Upgrades

3.8.2 The Farnworth town centre Steering Group, formed in June 2018, approved the development proposals to go out for a period of public consultation on the 18th December 2018 and on the 19th December 2018 the Executive Cabinet Member and Deputy Leader of the Council authorised the Director of Place to consult with the public on the Farnworth Masterplan proposals.

3.8.3 The period of public consultation ran from Monday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2019 to Friday 1<sup>st</sup> February 2019. A questionnaire was made available online and promoted via the Council's website, via social media and via press releases in the Bolton News. A printed version of the questionnaire was available on request and copies were available from Farnworth Library, Farnworth Leisure Centre, New Bury UCAN Centre, Age UK resource centre (Cross St) and Unit 14 Brackley Street. A presentation summarising the proposals was made available on the website, alongside the full report which went to the Deputy Leader so that respondents had information to permit intelligent consideration and response.

3.8.4 Eight drop-in events were held at a range of different times/days, in the centre of Farnworth (14 Brackley Street) so that residents and businesses could view the proposals on consultation boards and have the opportunity to speak to members of staff if they wished. The drop-in events were promoted on the council's website, on social media and in the local press. Over 130 residents/business representatives visited the drop-in events to give their views during the consultation period and 252 responses were received via the consultation questionnaire. A copy of the full consultation report can be found at Appendix 4.

3.8.5 As a result of the comments received on the draft Masterplan from the period of public consultation the following changes have been made to the development proposals and a summary of the main issues and changes are detailed below.

- *Proposal One: Redevelopment of the Market Precinct*

Positive comments were received from the public consultation about the proposed redevelopment of the market precinct; respondents were in favour of more/better shops, cafes and leisure facilities but there was some disagreement about the residential development.

In response to the comments received the comprehensive redevelopment of the market precinct including the former market and Saddle Pub site will be progressed following the successful acquisition of the Saddle Pub site and St Modwen land and properties.

A scheme will be developed for the site, potentially in partnership with another public organisation or developer partner and will be subject to the planning process and a further period of public consultation.

- *Proposal Two: New Community and Civic Hub*

Some respondents to the public consultation were in favour of a community and civic hub but were strongly against the closure of Home Bargains and the re-location of the library. Improved health facilities were welcomed.

In response to the comments received a new Community Hub on the Market Precinct site rather than the site currently occupied by Home Bargains will be progressed. The services to be located in the Hub will be subject to further discussion.

- *Proposal Three: New Housing Development*

In terms of new housing development around the town centre, respondents to the public consultation favoured family homes and affordable/social housing. There were some concerns around the type of people and anti-social behaviour that the housing might attract.

In response to the comments received new housing developments around the town centre will be progressed, prioritising development on land in the control of the council. Housing type and tenure will be based on the identified need and demand in the area but also to ensure that a new, quality housing offer will be developed to attract people into the area that want to take advantage of Farnworth's transport links.

- *Proposal Four: Extending the Leisure Centre*

The majority of respondents to the public consultation were very positive about extending the leisure centre, they requested more facilities for young people, improved access to the centre and an enhanced swimming offer.

Works to improve the general appearance of the leisure centre will be progressed alongside a potential extension of the facilities.

- *Proposal Five: The Library Building*

There was strong disagreement from the public consultation on the proposal to move the library to a modern facility in the town centre. Respondents were against this proposal due to their love of the historic building and concerns that it would be left to ruin, some felt it was fine in the current location and some disagreed it would generate more footfall in the town centre.

In response to the comments received the library services will be retained in the current building. The library service and building will continue to be subject to the Council's ongoing review of all its assets and service provision. This development proposal has been removed from the Masterplan.

- *Proposal Six: Public Realm Upgrades*

Respondents to the public consultation were generally positive of the proposal to upgrade the public realm on Cross Street and Gas Street but also suggested other areas of the town that would benefit from this.

The Masterplan identifies a number of areas for public realm upgrades in accordance with the feedback from the public consultation. The areas will be prioritised, and schemes worked up for delivery. Potential green and cycle routes to be identified for further discussion.

- *New proposal: Investment in Existing Buildings*

Farnworth's town centre environment lacks the quality of competing centres and analysis has shown how poor gateways and corridors create negative external perceptions that can be a barrier to attracting visitors and investors. Despite targeted interventions such as Brackley Street, the wider public realm is un-inspiring, and the streetscape is dated and in a poor condition.

3.8.6 An additional development proposal has been included in the Masterplan for delivery focussed around making improvements to façade of existing buildings in Farnworth town centre. This could take the form of a grant funding scheme developed to encourage landlords and tenants to improve the look of their buildings. Improvement in the existing buildings in the town centre will complement the new build developments proposed and add to a general uplift to the town centre.

3.8.7 The outcome of the public consultation along with proposed amendments to the Masterplan as detailed above was shared with members of the Farnworth town centre Steering Group, which includes all ward members for Farnworth, Kearsley and Harper Green, at a meeting held on the 20<sup>th</sup> March 2019. The proposed way forward was agreed by all members of the group and the masterplan was amended to reflect these changes. It is intended for proposal one and two to be the priorities for investment and implementation.

#### **4 CROSS CUTTING THEMES/SOCIAL INTERVENTIONS**

4.8 By diversifying the use of town centres, they can become community hubs and meeting places that are vibrant and cater for all age ranges. There are a number of ways to achieve this and the Council have been successful in implementing this approach in Bolton town centre with events such as Food and Drink Festival, Winter Festival and Ironman but also with community facilities such as Bolton One. It is not intended that Farnworth attempts to compete with this approach, however opportunities do exist to tackle the wider social issues that are present in the town through a similar, albeit smaller scale that caters for Farnworth residents.

4.9 Through the stakeholder event and community engagement exercise a number of cross cutting themes were identified and below is a summary of the approach proposed to address them.

##### *4.10 Health*

4.10.7 As stated in paragraph 2.2 Public Health England's report 'Healthy High Streets: Good Place-making in an urban Setting' (2018) states that high streets need to feature good quality design and furniture and provide accessible, safe communal spaces that can be used to create healthier, safer and more cohesive local communities.

4.10.8 Linkages will be made across a number of the development proposals to ensure the Council will

- work with our partners to ensure a co-ordinated approach is taken to reduce crime in Farnworth town centre;
- tackle social isolation, in particular focusing on the older members of the community to ensure that they are engaged and fulfilling their potential within the community;
- take into account new models of health and social care to meet the needs of local people and improve access;
- develop a 'green' environment that makes the best use of the existing Farnworth Park and green corridors that link the north of the borough with Salford/Manchester. This could include cycle and walking routes to promote healthy living; and
- investigate opportunities for increased access to health services in Farnworth town centre.

#### 4.11 *Community Events*

4.11.1 To encourage/support local businesses and communities and attract people to the town, opportunities will be investigated to utilise Brackley St and other areas of the town for hosting events and other activities that promote additional footfall. This could mirror the events that take place in Bolton town centre and include pop up businesses/specialist markets. There is also an opportunity to build momentum for the larger events such as the Food and Drink festival by hosting smaller local events on the lead up to these. This would ensure connectivity between the two town centres. UCAN centres and housing providers as well as other community networks would be able to work with communities to develop proposals.

#### 4.12 *Employment*

4.12.1 To reduce levels of unemployment in Farnworth and the surrounding area opportunities will be explored to increase access to educational and training services in Farnworth town centre working with partner organisations and back to work services.

#### 4.13 *Digital*

4.13.1 Developing digital infrastructure to facilitate changing working patterns i.e. working from home and business incubation.

#### 4.14 *Connectivity*

4.14.1 To reduce reliance on vehicles across the town centre in the future and to increase walking, cycling and the use of public transport consideration to be given to:

- prioritisation of pedestrian and cycle movements across the town centre with the creation of filtered neighbourhoods;
- making linkages to the Beeline network and TfGM's Streets for All programme; and
- improving the frequency of train services from Farnworth train station.

#### 4.15 *Next steps*

4.15.1 Delivery of the development proposals and actions in this report will take place in a phased manner over a number of years. An action plan with appropriate priorities, output

measures and indicators will be developed enabling annual monitoring and review reports overseen by the Director of Place and Assistant Director Economic Development and Regeneration and members of the Farnworth town centre Steering Group.

4.15.2 Governance will be developed in accordance with the Council's Constitution. The Council will utilise internal resources and liaise with partners and relevant groups where required. The intention is to continue with the Farnworth Town Centre Steering Group, whose membership has been drawn from ward members, health, education providers, landowners, businesses, community and faith groups and housing providers. As plans are developed, the community will be consulted through the Steering Group. An example of this will be the proposals for the Community Hub. Consultation will take place on design and services to be provided from it and the Steering Group will be asked to sign off any designs prior to progression.

4.15.3 Please find attached at Appendix 5 an indicative action plan for delivery of the six development proposals as detailed in this report.

## **5 IMPACT AND IMPLICATIONS**

### **5.11 FINANCIAL**

5.11.1 On the 21st January 2019 Cabinet approved a £12m allocation of funding from the £100m Town Centre Strategy Fund to be create strategies and masterplans in consultation with the local community and support targeted intervention in Farnworth, Horwich, Westhoughton and Little Lever town centres where they will ultimately attract private sector investment and secure development proposals.

5.11.2 The level of funding given to any town centre will depend on the overall content and quality of the strategy and masterplan and the level of support needed to initiate development. Decisions regarding the allocation of this funding and bids for other external funding where they would support delivery of such strategies and masterplans, be delegated to the Director of Place and the portfolio holder for Development and Regeneration (Deputy leader's portfolio).

5.11.3 On the 20<sup>th</sup> February 2019 Full Council approved an additional £4m of funding from the 2019/20 Capital Programme for further investment in district centres, primarily in Farnworth town centre. This funding is additional to funding already allocated to projects within the Council's mainstream capital programme, which also funds (and continues to fund) projects in other District and local centres.

5.11.4 The investment required to implement the development proposals outlined above is estimated to be in the region of £27m. A significant portion of the Council's funding would be required in Farnworth to support the delivery of the Masterplan with the aim of leveraging further funding and investment to regenerate the town centre and sustain its immediate future to the benefit of its residents. The Council's funding is also designed to unlock private sector and other public sector investment and to secure capital receipt and income generation to the Council, which would then be reinvested into the Town Centre Strategy Fund to recycle the fund thus enabling further investment where possible. Investment will create significant development value and achieve wider economic benefits including economic spend and gross value added (GVA) summarised above. The breakdown of investment by proposal is outlined below:

Proposal 1: Redevelopment of the Market Precinct (acquisitions)	£2.5m
Proposal 2: New community and civic hub	£9m
Proposal 3: New housing development (enabling fund)	£500k

Proposal 4: Leisure Centre extension and improvements	£1.5m
Proposal 5: Public realm/connectivity	£5m
Proposal 6: Building façade/signage improvements	£5m
Potential acquisitions	£3.5m

5.11.5 An expression of interest for funding from the Future High Streets Fund was submitted for decision on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2019. The Future High Streets Fund was launched in December 2018 by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to help high streets adapt and meet changing consumer expectations; not just to survive but to thrive. Providing co-funding towards capital projects that bring transformative change wanting to see the regeneration of town centres through innovative proposals around transport, housing delivery and public services. The expression of interest included an ask of £300k revenue to support the development of a full business case, feasibility studies, design work and two full time posts to deliver the Masterplan. £25m capital was also requested to support the delivery outlined above. If successful there would be less call on Council resources. Notification of the outcome of the expression of interest is due in Summer.

## 5.12 LEGAL/PROCUREMENT

5.12.1 In order to achieve delivery of the development proposals/target interventions as detailed in this report consideration will be given to delivery options including, but not limited to, the following (within which there are potential variations):

- Land Disposals and Land Acquisitions in accordance with the Council's Constitution;
- Outsourcing the delivery of works, supplies and services in accordance with the Council's Constitution (for example, contractors, developers, professional services, advisors);
- Joint Venture potentially involving ownership and control by a range of stakeholders including (but not limited to) staff, the Council, or independent providers. There are a number of potential structures, including;
  - Partnership based structures
    - General partnerships (including contractual joint ventures)
    - Registered limited partnerships
    - Limited liability partnerships
  - Private limited companies

5.12.2 The Director of Place will work with the Borough Solicitor and Borough Treasurer to identify the most appropriate delivery model and, where so authorised by the Constitution shall negotiate the terms of any arrangements, and carry out the practical formalities required to implement the development proposals. Where those proposals fall outside the scope of the Constitution, authority will be sought from either Cabinet or the relevant Executive Cabinet Member, as appropriate.

5.12.3 Where the Council is making investment decisions, the legal requirements such as State Aid implications will be fully considered by the Director of Place and Borough Solicitor.

5.12.4 The development and regeneration of land not in Council ownership will be encouraged through ongoing engagement with landowners. Within the development proposal areas, where appropriate the Council will also make strategic acquisitions of land as part of its target interventions as outlined above. Where proposals require land to deliver key infrastructure and/or critical mass of comprehensive development, the Council will give due consideration to the use of its Compulsory Purchase powers, if necessary, to acquire

outstanding land interests as required. In doing so the Council will need to be satisfied that there is a compelling case in the public interest as a key part of that consideration.

## **5.13 HR**

5.13.1 The implementation of the Farnworth town centre masterplan will be supported by the Council's town centres and major developments team led by the Economic Development and Regeneration Division.

## **6 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA)**

6.11 Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council must have due regard to:

- Eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- Advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
- Fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

6.12 It is therefore important to consider how the proposals contained within this report may positively or negatively affect this work. To support this analysis, an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) screening form has been completed for the proposals outlined in this report and is appended to this report (Appendix 6).

6.13 The EIA looks at the anticipated (positive and/or negative) impacts of the proposals on people from Bolton's diverse communities, and whether any group (or groups) is likely to be directly or indirectly differentially affected.

6.14 The proposals outlined in this report have been designed to enhance and regenerate Farnworth town centre, which in turn, benefit residents, customers and visitors alike in this area. However, it has been noted that due to the nature of the proposals, it is possible that there could be some adverse impact for people with disabilities but any potential for differential impact will be prevented through the planning control and building control processes. This analysis is set out in more detail in the EIA.

## **7 RECOMMENDATIONS**

7.11 The Executive Cabinet Member/Cabinet is requested to:

- approve the revised Farnworth town centre master plan to guide the long-term regeneration of the town centre;
- approve the proposed approach to deliver the master plan and delegate decisions regarding the allocation of funding to the Director of Place in consultation with the relevant Executive Cabinet Member;
- authorise the Borough Solicitor to carry out all necessary legal formalities.