

Report to: Executive Cabinet Member -
Regeneration and Resources

Bolton Council

Date: 19th January 2015

Report of: Director Development & Regeneration

Report No:

Contact Officer: Kathryn Carr

Tel.No: 336236

Report Title: **BOLTON TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY – NEWPORT ST
GATEWAY**

**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:

To report progress on Bolton's Town Centre Strategy and provide
an updated 2015-16 delivery plan and budget.

Recommendations:

1. To note progress in delivering the Town Centre Strategy.
2. To endorse the reallocation of the Town Centre Strategy
budget as set out in this report.
3. To delegate authority to the Director of Development and
Regeneration, in consultation with the Executive Cabinet
Member, to finalise detailed design of the Newport St
Gateway Schemes and to oversee delivery.

Decision:

Signed:

Leader / Executive Cabinet
Member

Monitoring Officer

Date:

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Town Centre Strategy approved by the Cabinet in June 2013 is predicated on the recognition that fundamental changes in the economy generally and the retail environment in particular require a new approach to Bolton town centre. Creating a social hub, a place people visit, meet family and friends and spend time in, means there is a need to focus/re-focus a broader range of uses and activities into the core of the town centre to create the more resilient base that will underpin long-term economic and social sustainability.
- 1.2 The Strategy is focused upon six strategic interventions to stimulate, drive and support delivery of the refreshed vision:
- Creating a stronger town centre office market;
 - Facilitating and encouraging town centre living;
 - Expanding and diversifying the leisure and cultural offer;
 - Developing the town centre campaign.
 - Managing retail units and minimising vacancies;
 - Further improving the public realm
- 1.3 The Council approved a budget of £8.9m with indicative allocations, including for strategic acquisitions to enable the Council to directly facilitate and support the interventions set out above. This report summarises progress to date and next steps, with a particular focus on the Newport St Gateway, and proposes some reallocation of the budget to reflect the revised programme.

2. Progress

- 2.1 The Strategy recognises that creating attractive office stock in Bolton town centre is a key mechanism to increase footfall and sustain retail and leisure activity. Good progress has been made in **creating a stronger town centre office market**. The Council's accommodation strategy to consolidate its office based workforce in the town centre is now being realised with the refurbishment of the Town Hall nearing completion. Marketing of the office accommodation released for other occupiers as a result is underway. Planning consent has been granted for a new, flagship office development to accommodate expanding local legal company Ason's. In addition, following the decision to take the commercial development at the Interchange forward via the PSP, the planning application for a 30,000 sq ft office building was submitted in December.
- 2.2 Notwithstanding an upturn in 2013, the housing market in Bolton remains challenging. In terms of **facilitating and encouraging town centre living** a borough wide exercise has been undertaken to identify all housing sites that could be brought forward in the short, medium and long term. An initial list of 35 sites has been drawn up with detailed information on lack of development to date. This has resulted in six priority sites being earmarked for further investigation to identify potential interventions to bring the sites forward. Two of these sites are in the town centre. The interventions being considered include PSP, one of Council funding and/or HCA funding streams such as Build to rent, Rent to Buy and continuous market engagement through the Affordable Housing Programme 2015-18. Alongside this, the PSP is exploring potential residential opportunities in Merchants Quarter and Bluemantle are looking to bring forward a revised, residential-led masterplan for the Church Wharf/Bank St area.
- 2.3 Providing good quality accommodation for students is an important element of the University of Bolton's growth strategy and they recognise the benefits of a central location for both students and the town centre economy. To this end, a new Academic Village in the heart of the town centre will replace the University's peripheral and outdated Halls of Residence. The Village will comprise 750 units and a Memorandum of Understanding has recently been drawn up by the PSP with the University.

- 2.4 The acquisition of the Market Place Shopping Centre by Moorgarth at the end of 2013 has been instrumental in ensuring significant progress has been made in **expanding and diversifying the leisure and cultural offer**. The transformation of the centre to create a state of the art nine screen cinema and a new restaurant quarter alongside an improved retail offer will simultaneously deliver on longstanding Council objectives in one of the town centre's finest buildings. Works are well advanced, with the opening up of the historic vaults expected to be completed in the Spring and the cinema to be completed this Autumn. This new, family oriented provision will make a substantial impact in terms of diversifying the town centre offer.
- 2.5 Two key developments will further expand and enhance the town centre's leisure and cultural offer. Firstly, the recent decision to extend the Town Hall refurbishment to upgrade the Albert Halls facilities will enable a broader range of uses and create new restaurants on the Square. The Council has also submitted a bid for Heritage Lottery Funding to enable the Museum to showcase its outstanding Egyptology collection which, if successful, will provide a significant new visitor attraction for the town centre.
- 2.6 In addition, the Octagon has recently announced plans to expand and improve the theatre. A detailed feasibility study is currently underway to determine the optimum investment solution.
- 2.7 The Council's free parking initiative has been a key factor in the growing success of the **town centre campaign**. Following a 91% increase in volume into the three NCP multi storey car parks the initiative has been extended for at least another 12 months. Market Place has also introduced free parking resulting in increased volumes and footfall.
- 2.8 The town centre is well placed to host a range of visitor-generating activities and the Council's expanding Major Events Programme is going from strength to strength. 2014 saw increased attendance at, and/or participation in, Skyride, Ironkids and Ironman; Bolton's first (and the most successful ever) Transplant Games and record visitor numbers (over 150,000) at the Food and Drink Festival. The family oriented Christmas Winter Wonderland was also the biggest yet and feedback to date has been very positive from retailers and customers. The public realm schemes outlined below have been designed to optimise space specifically to support a proactive approach to the continued growth of the events programme.
- 2.9 The Council's very limited ability to influence property owners' and occupiers' behaviour, compounded by the well-documented 'absent landlords' issue makes **managing retail units and minimising vacancies** one of the more challenging objectives within the Strategy. Following research on approaches that have attempted to tackle the empty shops problem around the country, a Business Support Scheme was agreed in October 2013. The scheme offered up to £20k grant funding to attract target retailers (based on identified gaps in the current offer) to take vacant properties in the core retail area, along with a focus on diversifying the evening economy by attracting restaurants within the Bradshawgate quarter. In offering 100% grant funding and a relatively light touch process the scheme was felt to offer the optimum approach to attracting desired end users.
- 2.10 The scheme has been widely promoted and generated around 200 telephone or email enquiries, of which 86 people followed up by submitting the one page Expression of Interest (Eols). Very few applicants were able to demonstrate any kind of previous business experience. The Council worked closely with partners such as the Business Growth Hub on this initiative and facilitated free sessions with their business advisors to enable all eligible applicants to develop their ideas with the support of a dedicated expert. This process identified that the vast majority of Eols were unable to translate into a sustainable business proposition such that five grants have been approved, with a limited number of promising applications in the pipeline.

- 2.11 The Strategy acknowledges the economic and social value that good public space can bring to town centres. Getting the public realm right is key, both to achieving a sense of place and to attracting the private sector investment necessary for successful urban regeneration. To this end good progress has been made in **further improving the public realm** over the last eighteen months, as set out in the table:-

Scheme	Funding	Cost Estimate
Hotel St and Mealhouse Lane	D & R Capital Programme	£235k
Great Moor/ Blackhorse St	D & R Capital Programme	£140k
Repair, clean and protect Vic. Sq.	D & R Capital Programme	£60k
Newport Street	Corporate	£1 million
Total		£1.435 million

- 2.12 The next phase of the improvement plan is a significant public realm scheme as part of the Newport St Gateway programme which is summarised in section 3 below.

3. Newport St Gateway

- 3.1 The Newport St Gateway will become one of the most significant and important routes into the town centre upon the development of the Transport Interchange. In addition, the proposed office development at the entrance to the Interchange will further increase the anticipated footfall and profile of this part of the town centre. The following paragraphs provide further detail on the public realm and shop front improvement schemes.

Public Realm

- 3.2 Newport St is currently a poor quality, cluttered/confusing environment. The one-off Town Centre Strategy funding made available in 2013 provides an opportunity to regenerate this area to complement and add value to the £48m public investment in the Interchange. It is critical that the visitor journey experience from this new key gateway to the civic and retail core is pleasant and attractive, both physically and visually. To this end, the principle of transforming Newport St into a modern, European style 'boulevard' with clean, minimalist lines was agreed in June 2013 together with initial concepts.

- 3.3 The concepts have now been developed to produce a scheme that:

- Provides a seamless public realm experience from the Interchange/new offices to the heart of the town centre
- Offers a fresh approach on the Council's preferred materials/palette for the town centre
- Complements and enhances the shop front upgrade

Indicative designs, including materials and colour palette are appended to this report.

- 3.4 The scheme requires significant enabling works, which commenced with the dismantling of the charity canopy in November last year. Following the removal of the Winter Wonderland installations the works are now due to re-commence. These include drainage improvements, surface levelling and the strip out of furniture, trees, advertising signs and all other items from the street. £1m has been allocated for the scheme.

Shop Front Scheme

- 3.5 To complement and add value to the £1m public realm investment, funding was also identified in the Strategy for upgrading the shop fronts on Newport St. In delivering a significantly upgraded look and feel to the whole area, this investment is expected to play an important role in attracting a broader range of occupiers, positively diversifying the offer on Newport St, as leases come up for renewal. To this end, officers have begun a constructive dialogue with the managing agents for the new owners of Newport St Precinct.
- 3.6 Architects were appointed in July 2014 to design and cost options for delivering a shop front improvement scheme on Newport Street with a brief to create an affordable and consistent style to uplift the area. An extensive piece of work has been completed, including a visual condition survey resulting in a schedule of works for each property.
- 3.7 The proposed scheme is based on a non-intrusive approach via the addition of a new, custom-made 'bolt on' shop front that can incorporate signage, lighting and policy compliant roller shutter (where they currently exist). This approach will provide a quality, modern, consistent look and feel to the street frontage, creating a sense of place. The schedule also allows for non-intrusive minor repair works to bring frontages up to standard, including providing level access for the small number of properties that are not currently DDA compliant.
- 3.8 The distinctiveness of Bolton town centre will be further emphasised via the proposed re-painting of the upper floor frontages. One option suggested by the architects is to treat one side of the street in a palette of neutral colours with the other side showcasing Bolton's DNA branding. Indicative illustrations are appended to this report. This idea has some merit in that it maintains an identity strongly associated with Bolton and would offer an element of uniqueness.
- 3.9 The scheme has been costed at £1.7 – 2.0m and will be phased to coincide with the Interchange and commercial development timetable. The first package of works will focus on the Victoria Square to Great Moor St section of the street and be undertaken in tandem with the public realm works.
- 3.10 Next steps with an indication of timescales for the public realm and shop front schemes is set out below:

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| • Continue strip-out | Jan onwards |
| • Pre-planning engagement owners/tenants | Jan - Apr |
| • Secure planning consent for shop fronts | Jan - June |
| • Commence phase 1 public realm works | June |
| • Commence phase 1 shop front works | June |
| • Phase 1 works completed | Sept 2016 |

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 As the implementation of the Town Centre Strategy has progressed expenditure and commitments have been made against the £8.9m one off resource approved by the Cabinet in June 2013. However, as previously indicated in this report, it is now appropriate to reallocate the remaining funding to take account of the programme going forward. This is set out below.

	<u>Original Allocation</u> £m	<u>Revised Allocation</u> £m
Strengthening the office market in the town centre Interchange Office Scheme now being funded by PSP	1.5	0.5
Support for cinema development Committed to support Market Place Scheme	1.0	1.7
Town Centre free parking initiative Two years committed – 2 further years required	0.5	1.0
Funding and support to attract targeted occupiers Business Support Scheme	1.5	0.2
Public Realm schemes and Gateways Commitment against schemes including Newport Street facades	2.0	3.0
Strategic acquisitions	1.5	1.5
Unallocated	0.9	0
Albert Halls Scheme	0	1.0
	<u>8.9</u>	<u>8.9</u>

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

- 5.1 Good progress has been made to date and in line with the flexible approach proposed, the budget has refocused to reflect the revised programme. Work will continue as set out in this report, with the significant Newport St Gateway programme imminent.
- 5.2 The Executive Cabinet Member will note through this report that the development programme in the town centre over the next 18 months will be significant. Robust programme management arrangements will be necessary to minimise the potential disruption in the town centre during this period.
- 5.3 The Executive Cabinet Member is asked to:
- Note progress in delivering the Town Centre Strategy
 - Endorse the reallocation of the Town Centre Strategy budget as set out in this report
 - Delegate authority to the Director of Development and Regeneration, in consultation with the Executive Cabinet Member, to finalise detailed design of the Newport St Gateway Schemes and to oversee delivery.