

**REPORT TO THE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL
MEETING OF 24 MARCH 2022**

Status: For Discussion
Title: Market Harborough Town Centre Masterplan
Report of: David Wright, Economy & Business Service Manager
Portfolio Holder: Cllr King, Economic Development
Where from: Economy & Business Service
Where to next: Cabinet

Objective: To seek the views of the Scrutiny Panel on the themes and proposals to be contained in the Market Harborough Town Centre Masterplan to enable it to progress through to the Cabinet.

1 Outcome sought from the Panel

- 1.1 The Panel considers the themes and proposals to be contained in the Market Harborough Town Centre Masterplan and any comments will be incorporated into the final Masterplan, which will be presented to Cabinet on 7 June 2022.

2 Background

- 2.1 Harborough District Council has committed to producing Masterplans for its two Market Towns as part of adopting the Economic Development Strategy 2018-2023. This is to ensure that the viability and vitality of the town centres and secure their roles as a local destination for retail, leisure and hosting community networks and events.
- 2.2 The Environment Partnership (TEP) Ltd, Mott MacDonald and BE Group were commissioned by Harborough District Council to prepare a Vision and Masterplan for Market Harborough Town Centre during summer 2019.
- 2.3 The Masterplan will also form part of the evidence base that will inform the implementation of relevant policies for the Harborough Local Plan 2011 – 2031 (adopted April 2019).
- 2.4 The Masterplan aims to provide a 5 to 10-year public realm framework strategy, which has been developed for the town centre through consultative process. This aims to enable greater access to the town centre and redress the balance between people and cars. The Masterplan aims to provide an overall framework to make the town centre more attractive, by strengthening its market town character. The frameworks will include high quality design, street hierarchy and public realm initiatives using a mix of street furniture; signage; soft and hard landscaping and possibly public art in ways that integrate with the historic conservation area. Linking the town centre to its surrounding areas is vital to make this a place that local people will choose to visit.
- 2.5 The Masterplan aims to ensure that Market Harborough Town Centre is an active and vibrant destination. It will consider the means of getting to the town centre, living in the town centre and ensuring accessibility for all ages and abilities. Moreover, in alignment

with the recently Economic Development Strategy (2018 – 2023, revised in 2019), the Masterplan aims to ensure that the town centre is open and accessible for business.

- 2.6 The study area follows the Town Centre boundary as defined in the Harborough Local Plan (2019) and then extends east to include the Railway Station.



Study Area

3 Progress

- 3.1 Detailed work and engagement on the Market Harborough Town Centre Masterplan, including stakeholder interviews; roadshow consultation; visioning workshops and further roadshow consultation events took place between September - November 2019.
- 3.2 The process was initially undertaken through gathering policy, access, place and market intelligence whilst gaining a range of stakeholder views to inform the preparation of the document.
- 3.3 Unfortunately, due to the focus on Covid response and recovery and the change over from an interim to a permanent Service Manager, work on the Masterplan had to be paused between March 2020 and Autumn 2021.
- 3.4 Having completed the Lutterworth Town Centre Masterplan in Spring/ Summer 2021, work on the Market Harborough Town Centre Masterplan recommenced in Autumn 2021. There was a need to review the work previously carried out, it in the light of the experience from the Covid pandemic and the significant financial pressures that the Council faces and turn fairly general objectives and themes into more robust proposals and actions.
- 3.5 The focus has been to ensure that the final plan encourages increased visitor footfall, enhances the visual amenity of the town centre and has clear and deliverable outcomes.

- 3.6 **The Vision** – as part of the public engagement in 2019, local people put forward several vision statements that try to capture the spirit of the Town Centre today and what type of place Market Harborough should aim to be in the future.
- 3.7 **Market Harborough – A Very Special Market Town** was selected as the preferred vision statement and is underpinned by five themes informed by stakeholder consultation, the Council’s Corporate Plan, planning policy, evidence base, and summary analysis.
- 3.8 The five themes seek to address the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges identified, as well as setting out the priorities of the Town Centre over the coming 10 years. The themes are:
- 3.8.1 **Welcoming Market Harborough** - Creating a more pedestrian friendly Town Centre that provides a strong sense of arrival and opportunities for residents and visitors to enjoy the many spaces and activities available.
- 3.8.2 **Healthy Market Harborough** - Prioritising walking and cycling across the Town Centre with the promotion of active travel to reduce car journeys and the impact of vehicle emissions and their effects on people’s health and climate change.
- 3.8.3 **Vibrant Market Harborough** - Diversifying the mix of uses, activities and events in the Town Centre to maximise vibrancy that extends into the evening and over the weekend.
- 3.8.4 **Enterprising Market Harborough** - Encouraging the tradition of enterprise in the Town with more support and space for independents and co-workspace facilities for smaller businesses.
- 3.8.5 **Sustainable Market Harborough** - Planning sustainably for future growth, meeting the need for additional retail, food and drink, leisure and residential in the town centre and the long-term management of the River Welland river corridor
- 3.9 In order to bring the Masterplan to life, and demonstrate how the Vision can be delivered, a detailed pipeline of projects and actions has been developed. These projects vary in scale and impact, but have all been identified to bring benefits to the immediate surroundings, as well as to the overall impression and identity of Market Harborough. Each of the projects contribute to one of the five above themes, and these are set out in in pages 39 – 56 of the draft Masterplan, which is Appendix A to this report.
- 3.10 Whilst the Masterplan is not yet complete, with further refinement and stakeholder engagement still to take place, it was felt that it was an opportune time to present it to the Communities Scrutiny Panel to seek feedback and input whilst it is still a ‘work progress’, albeit nearing completion.
- 3.11 Officers from the Economy and Business Service will be in attendance at the meeting to guide and assist the Scrutiny Panel through the report and the draft Masterplan themes and proposals.

4 Points for discussion

4.1 Points for discussion include:

- Has there been adequate public and stakeholder consultation and engagement in developing the Market Harborough Town Centre Masterplan?
- Are the themes and proposals appropriate for the Market Harborough Town Centre?
- Are the themes and proposals realistic and feasible in the current economic climate and circumstances?
- Is there anything missing, or which should be given greater emphasis, in the Market Harborough Town Centre Masterplan?

5 Next Steps

- 5.1 Officers have already embarked on a programme of consultation and engagement with key stakeholders in relation to these proposals, which will be concluded over the next couple of months, in advance of a report to Cabinet in June 2022.
- 5.2 A positive presentation and workshop was held with representatives of Market Harborough Chamber of Trade and Commerce, Harbs Collective, (retail group) and Market Harborough in Bloom on 8 March 2022, as well as with Service Managers within the Council.
- 5.3 Any comments or suggested amendments from the Scrutiny Panel can be incorporated into the final Masterplan, which will be presented to Cabinet on 7 June 2022.

5 Impact on Communities

- 6.1 A key aim of the Market Harborough Town Centre Masterplan is to ensure that the town centre is inclusive and accessible as a local destination for retail, leisure and for hosting community networks and events.

7 Legal Issues

- 7.1 In order to be able to implement the provisions of the Masterplan, it will be necessary for the District Council to engage with third party property owners as the implementation of the plan proceeds.
- 7.2 Whilst the District Council will clearly lead the implementation of the Masterplan, specific aspects of the work may be subject to collaboration and liaison with partners including Leicestershire County Council, landowners, businesses, as well as obtaining formal approvals from the County Highway Authority, the District Local Planning Authority and Conservation Authority.

8 Resource Issues

- 8.1 The preparation and development of both the Market Harborough and Lutterworth Town Centre Masterplans, including the appointment of consultants, was funded from within the 2019/20 budget for Economic Development, with significant additional support from the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP).
- 8.2 The final document will include preliminary costs for projects that could be undertaken to deliver the Masterplan. Further work will be required to consider firm costs, priorities and funding opportunities to ensure that the projects are deliverable and achievable.

8.3 Whilst resources to implement the Masterplan have not yet been identified, the intention is that it will form the basis for a range of future funding applications aimed at town centre improvements and regeneration, including potentially schemes such as the Government's Levelling Up and UK Shared Prosperity Funds, as well as future Section 106 funding and the Council's own Capital Programme.

8.4 Once firm proposals are developed, detailed reports will be provided to Council for approval to proceed.

9 Equality Analysis Implications/Outcomes

9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment will be prepared to support and consider the equality impacts of the final Masterplan.

10 Risk Management Implications

10.1 An updated Risk Log for the Town Centre Masterplans project is attached as Appendix B to this report.

10.2 In particular, this updated Risk Log refers to the time delays resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, which no-one anticipated when the project started in 2019. However, considerable work has taken place over the last few months to get the project back on track.

Background papers:

- Harborough Economic Development Strategy 2018-2023 (revised 2019)
- Tourism Strategy for Leicester & Leicestershire
- Harborough Local Plan 2011-2031

Appendices:

Appendix A – Draft Market Harborough Town Centre Masterplan

Appendix B – Town Centre Masterplans Risk Log (updated in January 2022)