



Please ask for: Wendy Rowe
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11 March 2025

Dear Councillor,

Economic Prosperity Scrutiny Committee
6:00pm, Wednesday 19 March 2025
Esperance Room, Civic Centre, Cannock

You are invited to attend this meeting for consideration of the matters itemised in the following Agenda.

Yours sincerely,

T. Clegg
Chief Executive

To: Councillors:

Todd, D. (Chair)
Hill, J.O. (Vice-Chair)
Bishop, L. Lyons, O.
Bullock, L. Mawle, D.
Haden, P. Prestwood, F.
Hill, J. Thornley, S.
Lyons, N.

Agenda

Part 1

1. Apologies

2. Declarations of Interests of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restriction on Voting by Members

- (i) To declare any interests in accordance with the Code of Conduct and any possible contraventions under Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
- (ii) To receive any Party Whip declarations.

3. Minutes

To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2024 (enclosed).

4. Quarter 3 2024-25 performance update

To receive the Quarter 3 2024-25 PDP Progress Report - Economic Prosperity (Item 4.1 - 4.6)

5. Scrutiny Reviews

(a) Town Centre Regeneration

Briefing Note of the Head of Economic Development and Planning (Item 5.1- 5.5 plus appendices)

(b) Staffordshire Local Visitor Economy and Partnership

A verbal update will be provided.

6. Cannock Town Centre Regeneration (LUF) Update

To receive an update and/or presentation from the Head of Economic Development and Planning

7. Update on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund/Thriving Communities project

To receive an update from the Head of Economic Development and Planning

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Economic Prosperity Scrutiny Committee
Held on Tuesday 10 December 2024 at 6:00pm
in the Esperance Room, Civic Centre, Cannock**

Part 1

Present:

Councillors:

Todd, D. (Chair)
Hill, J.O. (Vice-Chair)
Haden, P. Mawle, D.
Hill, J. Prestwood, F.
Lyons, N. Thornley, S.
Lyons, O.

13. Apologies

An apology for absence was submitted by Councillor L. Bullock.

Councillor M. Freeman, Regeneration & High Streets Portfolio Leader had been invited to the meeting by the Chair. However, she was unable to attend due to illness.

14. Declarations of Interests of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restrictions on Voting by Members and Party Whip Declarations

No declarations of interests in addition to those already confirmed by Members in the Register of Members Interests were made and no party whip declarations were received.

15. Minutes

Arising from consideration of the minutes the following was raised:

Minute no. 11 - Update on the Town Centre Regeneration Scrutiny Review - a member asked for an update on the Rugeley Town Centre Area Action Plan (AAP). The Head of Economic Development and Planning confirmed that the Area Action Plan still existed but was now ten years old and would need to be reviewed and refreshed. The Development & Policy Manager added that town centres were changing a lot, and the AAP was old and restrictive. It would therefore be picked up in the emerging Local Plan.

Minute no. 10 - Update on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund - a member asked whether the credit card issue raised by Bridgtown Parish Council had been resolved. The Economic Growth and Strategic Projects Manager confirmed that there had been no delays with credit card orders, and nothing had been refused.

Minute no. 10 - Update on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund - Clarification was sought regarding Bridgtown Parish Council being unable to open emails from the Council. The Economic Growth and Strategic Projects Manager advised that the Team were not aware of any issues and there was email communication between the Council and the Parish Council as orders were being placed. The Head of Economic Development and Planning suggested that members should advise officers of any specific examples.

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 23 October 2024 be approved.

16. Local Transport Plan

The Chair welcomed Nicola Swinnerton and Annabel Chell, representatives from Staffordshire County Council Local Transport Team to the meeting. They provided members with a presentation explaining that the County Council was developing a new Local Transport Plan (LTP) for Staffordshire. The plan would enable the County Council to shape the future of transport, including walking, cycling, public transport, rail, cars and freight. It was a shared vision for the future of transport in the Staffordshire area including practical steps on how to get there, and how working with others would make it happen.

The Committee noted that the Team had been engaging with other local authorities, residents, businesses and key partners since April with a target for this to be completed in January 2025. The draft Local Transport Plan would be finalised in March 2025 and consultation on the final draft document would be undertaken during May and June 2025. The draft LTP would be revised in response to public consultation and taken to Staffordshire County Council's Cabinet for approval in July 2025 and published on their website.

As part of the presentation, references were made to central Government's Transport Policies, the various District/Borough Transport data reports and supporting documents. The Committee noted the vision of the LTP was for "an efficient, net-zero transport network that supports sustainable economic prosperity, healthy, safe and inclusive communities, and excellent quality of life".

The LTP strategic objectives were outlined, as follows:

- Facilitate **economic growth** by providing sustainable access to jobs, goods and services for residents, and sustainable access to customers and markets for businesses.
- Create **safe, well maintained local roads and footways** which encourage active travel and use the public realm, generating a sense of place and healthy communities.
- **Remove carbon emissions** from local road traffic and protect the natural environment.
- Improve **physical and virtual connectivity**, whilst addressing inequalities.

The Local Transport team representatives commented that there would be a need for behavioural change to deter motorised travel, switch to a more sustainable mode of travel and improve the efficiency of transport modes & maintenance and management of the highway network. They then outlined the following LTP chapters and themes:-

1. Creating Prosperous, Healthy and Sustainable Places
2. Active and Inclusive Communities
3. Public Transport
4. The Highway Network
5. Zero Emission Vehicles
6. Digital Connectivity

Members then noted the capability to achieve sustainable travel in Cannock Chase and were shown a map that outlined Cannock Chase District's settlements in three categories. 42% were settlements with all travel options available in close proximity to facilities. 7% were settlements adjacent to those with all travel options. 51% were settlements with very limited transport infrastructure and remote from facilities.

The Committee noted the list of organisations and groups who had been part of the engagement process and were referred to the County Council's "Let's Talk Transport" engagement page on their website. This would be the main place to get involved with shaping the LTP.

Members were then afforded the opportunity to ask questions in relation to the presentation.

A member considered that the current bus services were unreliable and inefficient, and it would therefore be difficult to increase use of public transport. The Local Transport team representatives advised that the Bus Service Improvement plan was a supporting document to the LTP. Heavy investment in public transport was required to ensure the public made better use of it. In Staffordshire the car was the dominant form of transport, and the bus network was fragile. It was noted that support from Government would be required to assist local authorities to deliver the objectives in the LTP and help reach carbon neutrality. This had a massive cost implication.

It was noted that Cannock Railway station had made the highest bounce back in the area since Covid. The increased use was possibly linked to the public using trains to visit the McArthur Glen Designer Outlet or using Cannock station to travel to Birmingham City Centre for work purposes or to get to Birmingham airport.

The Chair referred to the lack of EV charging points which may deter the public from buying an electric car. The representatives from the Local Transport team considered that the public needed to be more confident that there were sufficient charging points available and to be reassured as to the distance electric cars could travel before they required charging.

In response to a question from a member the Local Transport team representatives explained that there was no requirement for Local Authorities to have a Local Transport Plan. Therefore, it was considered that Staffordshire was ahead of the curve and were delivering it at the right time. The representatives explained that the LTP would encourage the public to make behavioural changes and provide good quality alternative travel solutions. Everyone had a part to play in reducing travel and it was about encouraging the public to make the right choices for specific journeys. It was noted that the commute was not the biggest issue and leisure journeys were the main reasons for travel - this including visiting shops or meeting up with family and friends.

The Development and Policy Manager was also in attendance for this item. He outlined how the Local Plan was aligned with the Local Transport Plan. He commented that the Local Plan had been submitted to the Planning Inspectorate and it included proposals for the development of big strategic sites. These would require the correct infrastructure, including EV charging points and good connectivity so it was important for this to be aligned with the LTP.

The Head of Economic Development and Planning agreed that the LTP was an important piece of work and alignment with the Local Plan was essential. There was a long-term plan, and small steps were being taken to assist by providing EV charging points and cycle lanes for example. It was important to change the way things were done to help the next generation and to get a transport plan that reflected the districts' needs.

The Chair thanked the representatives from the Local Transport team for attending and providing an informative presentation.

17. Quarter 2 2024-25 performance update

Consideration was given to the Quarter 2 performance update for 2024-25 (Item 5.1-5.6). The Head of Economic Development and Planning outlined the progress against actions/targets, explaining that more detailed updates would be provided in quarters 3 and 4. Updates on the Cannock Town Centre Regeneration (LUF) project and the UKSPF projects, would be provided later in the meeting.

In terms of the KPI's for Planning and Building Control a member asked why the customer satisfaction had fell to 80% in this quarter. The Head of Regulatory Services advised that there had not been many returns during this quarter and having one negative response had affected the overall score. It was hoped the percentage would be higher in the next quarter.

A member referred to the Planning Obligations Working Group and asked who would be involved. The Head of Economic Development and Planning confirmed that this would be an internal officer group which he would be involved with, alongside the Development and Policy Manager, officers from Legal and Finance and other colleagues who were involved in planning obligations. The Terms of Reference for the Group was being drafted and he anticipated it would be up and running after Christmas. In terms of member input, it was confirmed that it was an officer group but there would be some member oversight. Further information on this would be provided in the next quarter.

Reference was made to staff shortages within the Building Control team which had slightly delayed the processing of applications during this quarter. The Head of Regulatory Services advised that additional funding had been allocated to provide short term cover as the Council was finding it difficult to recruit to the vacant position. There was a need to become more attractive and apply market forces. The Deputy Chief Executive-Place advised that there was difficulty in recruiting to various positions within the Council and it may be necessary to pay increments or add market supplements.

The performance in Quarter 2 was noted.

(Councillors P. Haden and O. Lyons left the meeting at this point).

18. Update on the Scrutiny Reviews - Town Centre Regeneration Review and Staffordshire Local Visitor Economy Partnership Review

The Head of Economic Development and Planning advised that the Town Centre Regeneration Review had met recently. The Group had been advised on the issues arising from the Autumn Budget, which included:

- Devolution White Paper – potential re-organisation of councils.
- 12-month extension of UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
- the Long-Term Plan for Towns to be retained and reformed into a new regeneration programme.
- End of bidding rounds / competitive funding pots.

It had been agreed that representatives from the Parish/Town Council's would be invited to the next meeting to seek their views on what was happening in their areas. This meeting was scheduled for next week. There would be a final meeting in January and the Group would develop some recommendations for consideration by the Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

Members were advised that two meetings of the Staffordshire Local Visitor Economy Partnership Review had been set up. The first meeting would be held on 7 January 2025. Representatives from the County Council and the Local Visitor Economy

Partnership would be invited to attend the meetings.

19. Cannock Town Centre Regeneration (LUF) Update

Members received a presentation from the Head of Economic Development and Planning which outlined that the Levelling Up Fund bid had been submitted in June 2021 and funding was awarded in October 2021. The Memorandum of Understanding was signed and approved by Cabinet in February 2022. A £20m grant was awarded with the monies to be committed by 31 March 2025.

Members noted that the original scope of the LUF scheme was to pay for land acquisition and enabling demolitions to unlock land, a Cultural hub and the Northern Gateway. The LUF funding was capital and therefore it could only be used for capital investment not day to day running costs. LUF funding was designed to attract complementary funding from CCDC and the private sector.

The issues and challenges were outlined, as follows:

- LUF scheme delivery has not progressed as originally anticipated largely due to difficulties in acquiring land, the need for CPO and escalation of costs.
- Full review of projects deliverables, outputs and costs.
- The Council has proceeded with a phased approach to delivery following advice from MHCLG with the focus on achieving contractual commitment by 31 March 2025.
- Cultural hub - significant increase in costs from bid level estimates - future of theatre currently being considered as part of wider review of leisure, culture and heritage offer.
- Many local authorities that have been awarded LUF funding have experienced delays and are having to re-scope their projects.

The revised scope, as at December 2024, was then outlined for members information:

Phase 1

- Multi-storey car park demolition.
- Northern Gateway delivery; new public realm, improved connectivity and café building.
- Beecroft Road car park refurbishment.
- Highway works – new pedestrian crossing / subway infill.
- **£9m permission to spend agreed by Cabinet on 28 March 2024**

Phase 2

- Acquisition and demolition of the Forum.
- Acquisition and partial demolition of Cabot buildings.
- Public realm improvements.
- Development platforms ready for private sector investment.
- **£8.75m permission to spend agreed by Cabinet on 12 June 2024 subject to DLUHC approval**
- Any further phases dependent on achieving contractual commitment by 31 March

2025 and any further changes will need to be agreed with MHCLG.

The Committee was then provided with the following progress update:-

Phase 1

- Demolition contractor (Connell Brothers) appointed.
- Demolition works to start on site – January 2025.
- Phase1b Northern Gateway – contractor should be appointed by March 2025.
- Reserve matters application for Northern Gateway currently being processed.
- Highway works; major works agreement / AMEY to finalise design and tender package.

Phase 2

- Forum / Cabot purchase – subject to due diligence.
- Written confirmation from MHCLG re: approval for phase 2.
- Cannock town centre prospectus to be commissioned and presented to developers in time for UKREiif 2025.

Arising from the presentation Members were afforded the opportunity to ask questions. In response to a question from a Member, it was confirmed that the UKREiif would be held on 21 & 22 May 2025. Officers would be attending to promote the Cannock town centre prospectus and outline potential development opportunities in Cannock to prospective developers.

A Member referred to the CPO process and asked what costs had been involved. The Head of Economic Development and Planning advised that a relatively small amount of money had been used for the CPO process, but he did not have the figures available. These could be provided to the Councillor outside of the meeting. It was noted that the costs would have become significantly higher had the Council decided not to withdraw from the CPO process.

In response to a question about the UKREiif, the Deputy Chief Executive-Place explained that Officers had attended this event in May this year and had received interest from developers. However, at next year's event Officers would be able to present real schemes and opportunities for prospective developers to consider. Developers wanted certainty over land ownership and planning and the opportunities in the town centre would offer this.

Following a question from a Member Officers confirmed that discussions continued to be ongoing with the owners of the units that would be remaining during the Phase 1 demolition process.

A Member referred to the proposal to potentially close the Prince of Wales Theatre and Museum of Cannock Chase which had been discussed at Cabinet on 28 November. He commented that there was opposition to the proposal and asked if there was any possibility of providing a cultural hub as part of Phase 2.

The Head of Economic Development and Planning advised that Cabinet had agreed to undertake a consultation process regarding the future cultural and heritage offer in the district. This consultation was separate to the task to deliver the LUF regeneration scheme by the 31 March 2025 deadline. He added that Cabinet in January 2025 and Council in February 2025 would have to make a decision with regard to the future of the Prince of Wales Theatre and Museum of Cannock Chase following the consultation

period. The Team's priority was to commit the LUF money by 31 March 2025 and get the site ready for potential developers to deliver a regeneration scheme.

The Deputy Chief Executive-Place confirmed that, following the outcome of the consultation process, any further phases would be dependent on achieving contractual commitment by 31 March 2025. Additionally, any further changes would need to be agreed with MHCLG.

20. Update on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund/Thriving Communities Project

The Economic Growth and Strategic Projects Manager advised that members had received an update on the UKSPF at the previous meeting. It was important the money was spent, and that no-one missed out on receiving funding. The following two projects had been flagged as a concern:

Business grants to small/medium companies (SME's) - an experienced business advisor had joined the team, and she was contacting SMEs to advise them that funding was available to help them. A view would be taken on whether the money could be spent in time.

Thriving Communities Project - the current financial year's allocation was larger than previously and each of the 7 areas had been asked to provide a spending plan. The team would be contacting all areas in January to review what could realistically be spent before the deadline of 31 March 2025.

The Committee noted that, arising from the Autumn budget, there was a 12-month extension of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Further details were awaited on how it would be allocated.

The Chair referred to the request for a noticeboard outside of Heath Hayes Library and the Heath Hayes & Wimblebury advising that there was no money available to purchase one. The Economic Growth and Strategic Projects Manager would raise this with the Economic Development team tomorrow and advise the Chair accordingly.

The Head of Economic Development and Planning confirmed that a further update on the UKSPF would be provided at the next meeting in March.





The meeting finished at 8:10pm.

Chair

Priority Delivery Plan for 2024-25

Priority 1 - Economic Prosperity

Summary of Progress as at end of Quarter 3

Quarter					Total Number of Projects
	Action completed	Work on target	Work < 3 months behind schedule	Work > 3 months behind schedule	
1&2	2		2		4
3	4		3		7
4					2
TOTAL	6 (55%)		5 (45%)		11 to Q3

Summary of Successes as at Quarter 3





- Cannock town centre regeneration - Phase 1 demolition contractors set up on site during Q3 ahead of starting physical works January 2025.
- Local Plan submitted for examination.



Summary of Slippage as at Quarter 3

- Land assembly within the town centre regeneration scheme was paused pending clarification of the funding position which was received in January 2025. Land assembly will now complete during Q4.





Priority 1 - Economic Prosperity







Project	Actions and Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Progress Update	Symbol
Delivery of major economic growth regeneration projects	Cannock Town Centre Regeneration - Phase One (Levelling up Fund)						
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acquire commercial interests to facilitate the development of the Northern Gateway 		X			Surrender of lease linked to Units 1 to 3 Cannock Shopping Centre was completed in July 2024.	★
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure planning consents for demolition for phase 1 and Northern Gateway (reserve matters) 			X		Planning application reported to Committee 15 January 2025 and permission was granted.	★
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commence demolition works to facilitate phase one of Town Centre regeneration scheme 			X		Contractors Connell Brothers started on site week commencing 6 January 2025 with removal of the glass canopy in Cannock Shopping Centre	★
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commence highway works as part of the Northern Gateway scheme 				X		
	Cannock Town Centre Regeneration - Phase Two (Levelling up Fund)						
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decision on whether to proceed with phase two of scheme, subject to approval of the Project Adjustment Request from MHCLG 			X		Clarification from MHCLG was received 17 January 2025.	★
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linked to above, conclude negotiations to acquire commercial interests to create regeneration opportunity for the town centre 			X		This will conclude in Q4 following clarification from MHCLG regarding the funding.	▲

Project	Actions and Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Progress Update	Symbol
	UK Shared Prosperity Fund						
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement and deliver the UKSPF projects in year 3 of the Council's approved Investment Plan, working towards full allocation of spend by 31 March 2025 and delivery of outputs - CCDC and SBC 				X		
Local Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submit Local Plan to Examination Complete Local Plan Evidence Base <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Air Quality Viability Update Heritage Impacts Assessments 			X		Local Plan submitted to PINS 29 th November 2024. Air Quality update complete. Viability update complete. Heritage Impact Assessments being finalised.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revised Local Development Scheme 		X			Approved at Cabinet 26 September and Full Council 9th October	
Planning Obligations - Review of Policy and Allocations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charging schedules for Section 106 and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) monitoring fees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cabinet approval Implementation 		X			BNG monitoring fees approved at Cabinet. Draft S106 charging schedule produced; currently finalising report with input from Finance.	
				X		Implementation put back to April 2025	

Project	Actions and Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Progress Update	Symbol
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning obligations Working Group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Establish group and terms of reference ○ Agree governance and schedule of meetings 		X			<p>Report to return to Leadership Team; awaiting comments from Finance.</p> <p>Governance and meeting schedule to follow once report signed off.</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business case for Exacom system 			X		<p>Internal meeting to be arranged from February 2025 to discuss Outline Business Case (OBC) and next steps. OBC will need to be presented to Technology Board for consideration/approval</p>	

KPIs for Priority 1 - Economic Prosperity

Symbol	Description	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	End of Year
	Performance exceeds target	5	3		
	Performance on target		1		
	Performance < 5% below target		1		
	Performance > 5% below target	2	1		
N/A	Reported Annually / Not Applicable		1		
	TOTAL	7	7		

Indicator	Year End 23/24	Target 24/25	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Year End 24/25	Rating Symbol	Comments
Planning									
Major Planning Applications determined within time	100%	60%	None determined	100%	100%				
Non-major Planning Applications determined within time	94.8%	70%	95%	97.7%	98.3%				
Major Planning Applications overturned at appeals as percentage of no. applications determined	N/a	< 10%	0%	0%	0%			N/A	None determined in q3.
Non-major Planning Applications overturned at appeals as percentage of no. applications determined	N/a	< 10%	0%	0%	0%				3 determined in q3.
Building Control									
Applications registered and acknowledged within 3 days of valid receipt	98%	95%	93%	89%	93%				
Full plans applications with initial full assessment within 15 days of valid receipt	90%	80%	64%	88%	71%				The performance is due to staff shortages. Statutory deadlines were achieved.
Customers satisfied or very satisfied with the service	85%	90%	100%	80%	100%				

Town Centre Regeneration Review - Recommendations to Committee

Committee:	Economic Prosperity Scrutiny
Date of Meeting:	19 March 2025
Report of:	Head of Economic Development & Planning
Portfolio:	Regeneration & High Street

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update the Scrutiny Committee on the outcome of the Task and Finish review and to make recommendations to Cabinet to support future activity in this workstream.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That members note the report.
- 2.2 That the recommendations proposed by the Task & Finish Group are noted and if agreed by the Committee presented to Cabinet for consideration.

3 Key Issues

- 3.1 Members will be aware that a key Council priority is town centre regeneration. The Council is currently delivering a multi-million pound investment in Cannock town centre, with £20m of funding from the Government's Levelling Up fund. The Council has also in the past invested in the regeneration of other town centres and this in turn has attracted private sector investment in new retail, residential and commercial opportunities.
- 3.2 During the course of the Task and Finish members have found out more about past and present interventions from the Council and received information relating to potential future opportunities. Future regeneration projects also need to be viewed in the context of the Government's agenda around house building, economic development and devolution.

4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 Delivery of town centre regeneration projects supports delivery of the Economic Prosperity priority within the Council's Corporate Plan 2022-2026.

5 Report Detail

Scope of the Review

- 5.1 A working group of seven members chaired by Cllr Steve Thornley was established to carry out a review of town centre regeneration.
- 5.2 The scope of the Task and Finish review was agreed to assess the following:
- 1) Current projects / activities relating to town centre regeneration delivered by the Council.
 - 2) Future opportunities including potential locations and sites for regeneration, funding, role for the Council.
 - 3) Government priorities around regeneration and future funding streams.
- 5.3 In the course of the review additional work areas were also considered as follows:
- 4) Working with Town and Parish Councils

Information Gathering

- 5.4 As part of the information gathering phase of the review the following stakeholders were engaged:
- Economic Development and Planning officers
 - Town and Parish Council representatives from Norton Canes and Hednesford (others were invited to attend a meeting)
- 5.5 Similarly a range of information provided by officers was reviewed to understand the current activity, roles and considerations under the umbrella of town centre regeneration.
- 5.6 The Task and Finish Group met on four separate occasions. Minutes of the meetings are included as appendices to this briefing note.

Findings of the Review

- 5.7 At the Task and Finish Group meeting on 2 October 2024, members received a presentation from the Head of Economic Development & Planning. The group was advised that the role of town centres had changed over the last 15 to 20

years with a decline in retail and a move toward on-line shopping. The Group noted that the Council had developed a Cannock Town Centre Development Prospectus in 2019 which identified nine Council owned sites potentially available for re-development. Three sites within the Prospectus had moved forward, with the Council securing £20m of Levelling Up Fund (LUF) money to demolish and re-develop the former multi-storey car park site in Church Street.

- 5.8 Members received an update on the LUF project and had the opportunity to ask questions. The Head of Economic Development & Planning explained that the LUF project had been challenging to deliver and placed significant pressure on internal capacity and resources. The scheme would deliver regeneration benefits for the town centre, but these were having to be balanced against risks.
- 5.9 Members also received an overview of the Rugeley Town Centre Area Action Plan (AAP) which formed part of the adopted Local Plan. The AAP included a number of opportunity sites, some of which had come forward for delivery, but others would be carried forward to the new Local Plan (2018-2040).
- 5.10 Members discussed issues relating to the provision of bus services within the District and linking to town centres. Members considered that the three main town centres could be better linked with public transport and noted that bus services had declined in recent years, with most bus services run by private operators. It was noted that Staffordshire County Council was developing a new Local Transport Plan, and the County Council was seeking engagement with local Councils and communities in relation to the plan and future proposals. Members noted that it was important to engage in this project.
- 5.11 The group noted that beyond the current LUF project there was a need to review and identify future regeneration opportunities for our town centres. It was likely that future funding would be available to support projects, although the detail of this was not known at this stage. It was important to have a project pipeline and community engagement / input was critical in shaping future priorities. Members enquired about the capacity of the Council to deliver major regeneration projects and were advised that this was a challenge, and external resources were having to be brought in to support existing officers. Capacity was limited not just in Economic Development, but other service areas such as legal, finance, procurement and corporate assets.
- 5.12 At its second meeting on 12 November 2024, the Head of Economic Development & Planning advised the group of the outcome of the autumn budget which had taken place on 30 October. Members were advised that the Council would receive a 12-month extension to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) programme and that the Cannock Town Centre LUF project was likely to be extended for a further 12 months up to 31 March 2026. Some discussion took place in relation to the UKSPF Thriving Communities project which had

provided funding to town and district centres to support local projects i.e. events, enhancements to community infrastructure. Funding had been distributed to Town and Parish Councils (where they were in place), and it was agreed to write to Parish Clerks to ask them to attend to enable them to share their views and outline any issues in their areas.

- 5.13 At the third meeting on 18 December 2024, representatives from Hednesford Town Council and Norton Canes Parish Council were in attendance. Norton Canes Parish Council indicated that the UKSPF funding had been of great help to promote village events and to improve the area. The Parish Council had many other ideas for projects should more funding become available.
- 5.14 Hednesford Town Council representatives indicated that they had some challenges in allocating and spending the money and communication could have been improved with the District Council. The Town Council gave some examples and indicated that the Parish and Town Councils used to hold regular meetings with the Chief Executive, but these hadn't taken place for some time. Regular meetings would help to facilitate exchange of information and improve relationships. Council officers explained that the Council had to work within complicated guidelines to allocate the funding and had written to each area to confirm funding availability and guidance at the start of the financial year. Economic Development officers were available to talk to each area about potential projects and it was important that local areas to keep in regular contact with the team.
- 5.15 Members met on 14 January 2025 to review and agree the recommendations for the review.

Recommendations

- 5.16 On the basis of the findings set out above the Task and Finish group propose the following recommendations be referred to Cabinet:
- 1) Propose a strategic dialogue with Staffordshire County Council in terms of public transport
 - 2) Propose a dialogue with local bus providers regarding the potential for service improvements.
 - 3) Propose that regular meetings between the Council and town and parish councils are reinstated.
 - 3) Propose a town centre wide consultation and engagement strategy.
 - 4) Consideration of how the town centre regeneration priority projects can be resourced from development to completion.

Implications

6.1 Financial

None as a direct result of these recommendations.

6.2 Legal

None

6.3 Human Resources

None

6.4 Risk Management

None

6.5 Equalities and Diversity

None

6.6 Health

None

6.7 Climate Change

None

5 Appendices

Notes of the Task and Finish Group's meetings

6 Background Papers

Contact Officer: Dean Piper / Michelle Smith

Telephone Number: 01785 619 335

Ward Interest: All

Report Track: Economic Prosperity Scrutiny Committee - 19 March 2025

Key Decision: N/A

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL

NOTES OF THE

SCRUTINY REVIEW WORKING GROUP - TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION

WEDNESDAY 2 OCTOBER 2024 AT 4.30 P.M.

REMOTE MEETING VIA MS TEAMS

Present:

Councillor S. Thornley (Chair)
Councillor L. Bullock
Councillor P. Haden
Councillor D. Mawle
Councillor O. Lyons (joined later)
Councillor F. Prestwood

Officers: D. Piper (Head of Economic Development and Planning)
W. Rowe (Senior Committee Officer)

1. **Appointment of Chair**

Councillor S. Thornley was appointed Chair of the Working Group.

2. **Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Hill and D. Todd.

3. **Declarations of Interests from Members**

Nothing declared.

4. **Town Centre Regeneration Scrutiny Review**

Dean Piper, Head of Economic Development and Planning advised that the Group would be provided with a presentation outlining the points to consider in terms of Town Centre Regeneration. The Group would meet 3 or 4 times to identify topics/issues and invite speakers, if required. The final meeting would enable Members to sum up their findings and formulate any recommendations to the Economic Prosperity Scrutiny Committee. Town Centre regeneration was of interest to Members and the community and with the LUF scheme being delivered in Cannock town centre it was a good time to undertake the review. The Group then received a presentation that covered the following:-

- Context
- Current town centre regeneration activities /projects
- Future opportunities

- Sites
- Funding
- Role for the Council
- Possible lines of enquiry

CONTEXT

The Group was advised that nationally, the role of town centres had changed over the last 15 to 20 years with a decline of retail and a move towards other uses such as leisure, recreation, residential and commercial. Many of the big brands like M&S and Next had disappeared from the high street and relocated to out of town retail parks and consumers had moved to shopping more online. The focus of the previous Government had been to support ailing town centres with competitive funding streams / High Street Task Force / Panels / Town Teams. As the retail element was becoming less popular within town centres, it was important that new uses be identified.

The Officer commented that supporting town centre regeneration had been identified as a key activity in the Council's Corporate Plan and Economic strategy. The Council had played an active role in supporting town centre regeneration over many years backed by external funding i.e. SRB, EU funding, Levelling Up Fund. Hednesford town centre was involved in a major programme of regeneration in the early 2010's with the construction of Tesco and the retail park along with the improvements to Hednesford Park. There had been a focus on Cannock town centre in the last few years with the Council having secured £20m Levelling Up funding in 2021. In terms of Rugeley, the Town Centre Area Action Plan was adopted in 2014.

CANNOCK TOWN CENTRE

The Group noted that the Town Centre Development Prospectus had been approved by Cabinet in 2019. This identified 9 Council owned town centre sites potentially available for re-development. The following 3 sites have moved forward:

- Avon Road car park; the site was disposed of and a new care home facility was currently under construction
- Church Street: the former multi storey car park site (MSCP) has been identified within LUF project boundary
- Beecroft Road car park; to be retained as a car park and will be refurbished as part of the LUF project

There had been no serious interest in the remaining 6 sites, and these remained as car parks.

CANNOCK TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION PROJECT

The £20m Levelling Up Fund town centre regeneration project currently being delivered by the Council included: -

- Demolition of MSCP
- New Northern Gateway with improved public realm, connectivity and gateway café
- Refurbishment of Beecroft Road car park
- Acquisition of redundant retail space
- Creation of wider re-development opportunity

The demolition works should start by end of October 2024 and funding must be committed by 31 March 2025. The scheme would deliver regeneration benefits for the town centre, but these were balanced against risks. Delivery of the scheme placed a significant pressure on Council capacity & resource.

A Member asked for confirmation on when the MSCP would be demolished. The Head of Economic Development and Planning confirmed that demolition of the MSCP would begin in the new year. There would be some activity on site by the end of this month.

The Group noted that the key deadline to meet was 31 March 2025 by which time all the £20m would need to be committed. Members acknowledged the pressure on capacity and resources to deliver the project within the timeframe.

A Member asked whether the Government had indicated when the final funding would be released. The Officer advised that the £20m of funding received in the 1st round was secure and a Memorandum of Understanding was in place. The MHCLG had given an assurance that there would be a process to follow to enable the Council to draw on the remaining money next year.

Another Member asked whether the scheme would be delivered within the £20m budget. The Officer advised that project reviews had been undertaken due to inflation and rising costs and he confirmed that the Council could contain the costs within the £20m. Costs were being reviewed regularly as tender prices come in.

In response to a question from a Member about whether the scheme included improvements to the Prince of Wales Theatre, the Officer advised that the Theatre had been included as part of the original scheme. However, in view of rising costs, a review was undertaken of what could be delivered within the timeframe and funding available and it was being reviewed as to whether the Theatre could be included within phase two of the scheme. The scheme would enable the creation of a wider re-development opportunity and engagement with potential developers.

RUGELEY TOWN CENTRE

The Group was advised that Rugeley Town Centre Area Action Plan (AAP) had been developed in 2014 by the Council. This formed part of the adopted Local Plan and it defined the primary shopping area and uses that are acceptable in that area. It also identified key development sites, opportunities to enhance public realm and protection of conservation areas. The Officer confirmed that a new Local Plan was being prepared but this did not include an AAP. The Council

acquired the Aelfgar site in 2019 and this would deliver a new market along with social housing and enhancements to the town centre.

RUGELEY TOWN CENTRE AREA ACTION PLAN

Key sites were identified on a plan which was shown to Members. This included the following areas :-

- * Former Aelfgar centre/ former Squash courts, Taylors Lane
- * Market Street garages
- * Market Hall, Bus station and adjacent land
- * Land at Wellington Drive
Leathermill Lane/ Trent & Mersey canal
Public realm enhancements
Transport
- * Site allocation policies to be carried forward to new Local Plan (2018-2040)

OTHER CENTRES

- Hednesford – town centre improvements identified in Neighbourhood plan; site allocations in new Local Plan
- Other town / village centres – smaller scale improvements/enhancements using CIL / UKSPF funds

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

The Group noted the Local Plan (2018-2040) Objective 6: Creating Attractive Town and Local Centres; policies to support town centres. Beyond the current LUF project there was a need to review and identify opportunities for regeneration in the District's town centres. In terms of future funding streams, the Council was awaiting detail from the new Government. The Group acknowledged there was a need for community engagement and input and to listen to the views of residents about future development opportunities.

POSSIBLE LINES OF ENQUIRY

The Head of Economic Development and Planning then outlined the following possible lines of enquiry:-

- (1) What are the challenges and opportunities in our town centres?
- (2) Future funding and Government policy?
- (3) What are other areas doing, what does good look like?
- (4) Council role: planning, regulatory, direct intervention?
- (5) How effective are current / past Council interventions?
- (6) How do we encourage local people and communities to engage and drive change?

Members were given the opportunity to ask any questions arising from the presentation and the following issues were raised: -

A Member referred to public transport and commented that buses were often dirty and did not arrive on time, there was no Sunday service, and routes were limited. He considered that the 3 main town centres could be better linked with good public transport. The Officer commented that the bus companies ran the buses and there had been a reduction in services in recent years. The Council was able to work with the County Council and developers (via planning agreements) to put the infrastructure in place, but it was the bus companies who ran the services.

A Member advised the Group that Staffordshire County Council was currently looking at the Local Transport Plan. The County Council was seeking engagement with local Councils and would like to do a presentation to Members. She would forward the information to the Head of Economic Development and Planning.

The Member added that she considered that engagement with the public on any future proposals was important to enable the Council to understand what residents would like from a town centre.

The Head of Economic Development and Planning commented that in future, when the Council was considering any development plans, it was important to engage and consult with the public. Engagement with young people through schools was also important and to ascertain whether their aspirations were achievable.

A Member referred to the Cannock town centre LUF project and how it had changed from what was originally being proposed. He questioned whether the public would understand/accept why the scheme had changed. The Officer advised that Cabinet had made a decision on Phases 1 and 2 and confirmed what could be delivered. There had been changes made to the scheme and these had been driven by deadlines. Other Councils were in a similar position. He agreed however, that communication was important and there was a need to explain the changes to the public. The Council would learn from this going forwards and would engage better on any future proposals for the town centres. He added that the new Government was moving away from bidding rounds and Council's having to compete for money. Councils would hopefully be able to prepare well developed plans for future developments and the public would understand what was being delivered.

The Officer confirmed that within the next few months there would be some engagement with the public on the scheme that was now being delivered for Cannock town centre.

A Member referred to the capacity issue within the Economic Development team and asked if anything was being done to ease the pressure. He added that this was a big issue as capacity was a concern in other teams within the Council too. The Head of Economic Development and Planning confirmed that capacity was an issue within the team and consultants had been brought in to assist the team in delivering the LUF scheme within the timeframe. However, the Council would ideally like to have the capacity within the team rather than use consultants. A case would need to be prepared for additional resources, and this would be

considered through the budget setting process and balanced against other priorities. He confirmed that currently there were 3 staff in the CCDC Economic Development team. Sharing with SBC was an option; however, their team was also small and the bringing together of the two teams would mean the sharing of their projects/schemes. A plan would be developed to ensure resources were available to deliver the LUF project before the March deadline.

Councillor Lyons joined the meeting at this point and was invited to share her thoughts and views. She commented that the Council had been focussed on delivering the Cannock LUF scheme. However, she considered that investment in the other town centres was important along with the need to tap into upcoming funding opportunities. The Officer commented that the delivery of the LUF project was a priority and there was time/money pressure to consider. However, further funding opportunities would become available, and the Council would have to think about developing a pipeline of projects. Development opportunities for Rugeley town centre could be considered as the AAP was coming to an end and there was not an up-to-date master plan/vision for Rugeley. Consideration could be given to how to connect the town centre to the new housing development at the former Power Station site given that there would be a significant number of houses/people. Similarly, in Hednesford, although the town had benefited from regeneration there was always an opportunity for improvement.

It was suggested that a district wide vision could be developed in order to maximise opportunities moving forwards. The Officer added that it was important to have ambitions set out and opportunities identified so these could be progressed when any funding became available. The need to build a case for capacity within the team was also acknowledged. Furthermore, it was noted that a strong relationship with the Parish/Town Councils would be important and to develop a shared ambition. The Parish/Town Councils were aware of the needs of the town centres and what residents wanted.

The Chair asked Members to think about a list of important issues they wished to discuss at the next meeting. He then outlined the following issues that he considered important and would like to focus on or to discuss further at the next meeting: -

- Strengthening relationship with Parish/Town Councils
- Pipeline of projects/Forward planning
- Concern around capacity issues
- Transport
- Engagement

The Chair was hopeful that the review would help to develop forward planning and highlight the capacity issues within the Council. It was noted that there were two further Economic Prosperity Scrutiny Committees this year, on 23 October and 10 December. It was agreed that two further meetings of the Working Group should be held at the beginning and end of November. The Chair would provide a verbal update to the Scrutiny Committee on 23 October to advise Members on the work of the review. Members were asked to pass any comments to him in advance of the meeting.

It was AGREED : -

- (A) That the issues raised by the Chair as detailed above would be discussed further at the next meeting.
- (B) All Members should develop a list of important issues to be discussed at the next meeting. These could be emailed to the Head of Economic Development and Planning ahead of the next meeting.
- (C) That two further Working Group meetings be arranged at the beginning and end of November.
- (D) That the Chair of the Working Group would provide a verbal update at the Economic Prosperity Scrutiny Committee on 23 October 2024 outlining the work of the review.
- (E) That the presentation slides be emailed to all Members on the Working Group.

The meeting ended at 5:45pm.

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL

NOTES OF THE

SCRUTINY REVIEW WORKING GROUP - TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION

TUESDAY 12 NOVEMBER 2024 AT 5.00P.M.

REMOTE MEETING VIA MS TEAMS

Present:

Councillor D. Todd (in the Chair)
Councillor L. Bullock
Councillor P. Haden
Councillor D. Mawle

Officers: D. Piper (Head of Economic Development and Planning)
M. Smith (Economic Growth and Strategic Projects Manager)
W. Rowe (Senior Committee Officer)

1. **Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor S. Thornley, Chair of the Group and Councillor O. Lyons. In the absence of the Chair, Councillor D. Todd chaired the meeting.

2. **Notes of previous meeting**

The notes of the previous meeting held on 2 October 2024 were agreed.

3. **Town Centre Regeneration Scrutiny Review**

The Head of Economic Development and Planning advised the Group that at the first meeting he had provided an overview of the work of the Council in relation to town centre regeneration over the last 10-15 years. He reminded the Group of the following potential lines of enquiry: -

1. What are the challenges and opportunities in our town centres?
2. Future funding and Government policy?
3. What are other areas doing, what does good look like?
4. Council role; planning, regulatory, direct intervention?
5. How effective are current/ past Council interventions?
6. How do we encourage local people and communities to engage and drive change?

The Officer then outlined the following issues that had been identified by the Group at the previous meeting:-

- Strengthening relationship with Parish/Town Councils
- Pipeline of projects/Forward planning
- Concern around capacity issues
- Transport
- Engagement

The Group was advised of the following issues arising from the Autumn Budget on 30 October:-

- 12-month extension of UK Shared Prosperity Fund at a reduced level, providing £900 million. This transitional arrangement will allow local authorities to invest in local growth, in advance of wider funding reforms;
- The Long-Term Plan for Towns will be retained and reformed into a new regeneration programme;
- Confirmed funding for 2025/26 for MHCLG Levelling Up Fund projects to revitalise high streets / town centres. Further details regarding the Cannock Town Centre LUF scheme were awaited, but an extension was optimistic
- End of bidding rounds / competitive funding pots;
- Local government – move towards multi-year settlements;
- Devolution White Paper – potential re-organisation of Councils

The Officer confirmed that, in terms of the LUF for Cannock town centre, further details were awaited, but an extension was optimistic. He added that the Staffordshire Leaders Board were supportive of a devolution deal and looked forward to further details that would be provided in the White Paper.

A member asked whether there was a date for the Devolution White Paper. The Officer advised that this would be published soon and there was an indication it may be towards the end of the year/early next year.

Another member asked whether there was any indication on how funds would be allocated in the future given that there was to be an end of bidding rounds. The Officer advised that no details had been provided yet. However, the Government had indicated that there was to be a reform in terms of funding with a move towards multi-year settlements. This could mean that areas were allocated a pot of funding to be spent over multiple years and Local Authorities would be able to decide how the money was spent. He added that the UKSPF was to be extended along with the Levelling Up Funding and therefore, a lot more detail would follow.

The Head of Economic Development and Planning then referred to the five issues that Members had identified at the previous meeting. He asked the Group to consider what other information/data was needed to progress the review and whether there were any other officers, stakeholders or individuals' members would like to invite to a meeting. For example: CCDC Planning/County Council/Parish or Town Councils. The aim of the Group was to identify issues and determine findings and recommendations for the Economic Prosperity Scrutiny Committee to consider.

A member suggested that representatives from the Parish/Town Councils could be invited to the next meeting to obtain their thoughts and ideas. The Group supported this suggestion.

Another member referred to the County Council being keen to engage with Local Councils regarding the Local Transport Plan. She asked whether there had been any contact with the County in this regard. The Officer confirmed that representatives from the Staffordshire County Council Local Transport Team had been contacted and would be attending the next Economic Prosperity Scrutiny Committee in December to provide a presentation and engagement session to members.

The member also suggested that the Group could consider engaging with Sustrans Active Travel. However, she added that it may be best to wait to see if this was mentioned by the representatives from Staffordshire County Council Local Transport Team when they provided the presentation to members in December.

The member commented that it would be difficult to develop a pipeline of projects if there was no capacity within the team. The Head of Economic Development and Planning confirmed that there was a need to identify capacity within the team and to consider the resource issue across the Council. The development of a pipeline of projects was essential to attract funding and a plan to build capacity would need to be developed.

A member referred to the five issues identified by the Group at the previous meeting. He commented that there was a lot of information to consider, and it may be useful to slim these down slightly as there was a risk of not developing any recommendations. The Head of Economic Development and Planning added that the Group had identified a massive area to review, and it would be difficult to go into detail in 3 or 4 working group meetings. It may be useful for members to determine what aspect they wished to focus on, and he suggested that the Parish/Town Council representatives be invited to the next meeting to share their views and ideas, and for the Group to determine some recommendations. A further meeting could also be arranged to discuss the pipeline of projects alongside capacity issues, as these issues were interlinked. The Group noted that the transport issue would be picked up by the Economic Prosperity Scrutiny Committee in December.

The suggestion proposed by the Head of Economic Development and Planning was supported by the Group. A member then asked whether the Chair had advised of any further issues he wanted raising in his absence. The Officer confirmed he had received nothing from the Chair in this respect. Additionally, at the previous meeting members had been asked to email any issues they wished to discuss further, and he confirmed that no further suggestions had been received.

The Officer sought suggestions of any specific individuals who members wished to invite to the next meeting. Members suggested the Norton Canes Parish

Clerk, Ginetta Adams and the Hednesford Town Council Clerk, Lindsey Smith. In addition, it was also suggested that the Hednesford Town Council Projects Support Officer, John Manning be invited. The Chair asked members to advise Officers of any further individuals who they considered should be invited to the meeting.

The Head of Economic Development and Planning advised that contact would be made with the Parish Clerks to invite the suggested representatives to the next meeting. He would liaise with the Senior Committee Officer to determine a date for the next two meetings and work with the Chair of the Group to pull together some recommendations to take to the Economic Prosperity Scrutiny Committee.

It was AGREED:

- (A) That a date for the next meeting be agreed and the representatives from the Parish/Town Councils, as detailed above, be invited to share their thoughts and ideas.
- (B) That a date for an additional meeting be agreed for the Group to discuss the pipeline of projects alongside the capacity issues.

The meeting ended at 5.40pm.

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL

NOTES OF THE

SCRUTINY REVIEW WORKING GROUP - TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION

WEDNESDAY 18 DECEMBER 2024 AT 4.30P.M.

REMOTE MEETING VIA MS TEAMS

Present:

Councillor S. Thornley (Chair)
Councillor P. Haden
Councillor D. Mawle
Councillor F. Prestwood
Councillor D. Todd

Officers:

D. Piper (Head of Economic Development and Planning)
M. Smith (Economic Growth & Strategic Projects Manager)
W. Rowe (Senior Committee Officer)

Parish/Town Council representatives:

Ginetta Adams (Norton Canes Parish Council)
Linsley Smith (Hednesford Town Council)
John Manning (Hednesford Town Council)

1. **Apologies**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor L. Bullock. It was noted that Councillor O. Lyons may join the meeting later.

2. **Notes of previous meeting**

A member referred to page 2 of the notes and asked for an update on the possibility of an extension in respect of the LUF for Cannock. The Head of Economic Development and Planning confirmed that written confirmation had been received from the Minister that the LUF monies were secure, and the Council should continue with the project at pace. Formal notification was expected in the new year to confirm that an extension had been agreed until March 2026.

The notes of the previous meeting held on 12 November 2024 were then agreed.

3. **Town Centre Regeneration Scrutiny Review**

The Head of Economic Development and Planning explained that at the last meeting the Group had received an update on the LUF scheme and talked about the Rugeley Area Action Plan which would need to be refreshed in order to maximise the development at the former Power Station site. Members had

suggested that representatives from the Parish and Town Councils be invited to the next meeting to share their views and outline any issues in their local areas. He confirmed that the review would be concluded at the next meeting when the Group would formulate some recommendations to refer to the Economic Prosperity Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

Ginetta Adams, Lindsey Smith and John Manning, the representatives from the Parish and Town Councils were then welcomed to the meeting and invited to speak to the Group.

Ginetta Adams, Norton Canes Parish Council referred to the UKSPF fund and advised that their allocation had been a great help to the Parish Council. The money had been used to help to promote village events and to improve the area. She had many more ideas for improving the village if further funding was available.

Lindsey Smith and John Manning, Hednesford Town Council explained that they considered there was a lack of communication as they had found it difficult getting access to information and contacting the relevant people when trying to identify and progress any projects. For example, establishing land ownership in relation to one area of land had taken a long time. In relation to their UKSPF allocation they had difficulties in spending the money as it took time to get the necessary approvals in place for the projects they had identified. They had now been advised that the money may be lost if it wasn't spent by the deadline.

Ginetta Adams advised that she had support from the Chair of Norton Canes Parish Council to identify projects and suggested that the representatives from Hednesford Town Council should speak to their Chair or the District/Parish Councillors who should guide them in the right direction. Lindsey Smith commented that she had very little support from her Councillors.

The Head of Economic Development and Planning asked the representatives from Hednesford Town Council to let him have specific examples of where communication had not been effective so this could be investigated. He added that the Economic Development Team had worked hard in terms of allocating the UKSPF monies to the areas, working within the Government guidelines and regulations to ensure the funding was allocated and spent. The District Council had to keep within these set guidelines and did all they could to assist the Parish and Town Councils in spending their allocation. Confirmation had been received from the Government that there would be no role forward of the funding and so the allocated monies for each area had to be spent this year. It was confirmed that a further allocation of UKSPF funding would be available in 2025/26. Once the Team are clear on the amount of funds available, they will work with the Parish and Town Councils to identify and develop suitable projects.

The Officer referred to the previous Chief Executive of the District Council holding regular meetings with the Parish and Town Councils. On occasions he had attended these meetings to provide updates on any regeneration projects. He suggested that consideration could be given to the possibility of reinstating these meetings if capacity allowed. The Parish and Town Council representatives

supported this proposal, and the Chair agreed to speak to the Chief Executive to ask for these meetings to be reinstated. The Head of Economic Development and Planning commented that this suggestion could form part of the outcome of the review along with the comments about the relationship between the District and Parish Councils.

The representatives from Hednesford Town Council considered that any meetings would help improve the relationship between the District and Town Council. In terms of the UKSPF funding allocation they asked to be made aware of how to access the funding and for the rules and timeframes to be made clear. They were advised that Angela Haynes and Ann Oldnall at the District Council would be able to explain the guidelines and provide the necessary help and support.

The Economic Growth and Strategic Projects Manager responded to the comments and explained that her team worked within complicated guidelines to allocate the funding, which this year had amounted to £32k for each area. The same rules applied to all, and it was important for the representatives to talk to the team so they could check any proposed projects and tweak these as required. She asked Lindsey Smith to email her with any specific issues that had arisen so she could address them accordingly. She added that a FAQ document could be prepared and sent to the Town and Parish Councils so they would be aware of who to contact/where to go. The representatives were advised that information in respect of land ownership could be obtained from the Land Registry website for a cost of approximately £3. In terms of the next round of UKSPF funding for 2025/26 she suggested that the Town and Parish Councils should be realistic about the projects they wished to deliver as the timescales were tight.

A member was interested in hearing about the outcomes of the projects delivered so far by the Town and Parish Councils. Ginetta Adams confirmed that Norton Canes Parish had used their allocation to deliver community events in the village (Party in the Park) along with improving the look of the village (solar benches, flowerbeds and stag statues). She was pleased to hear that further UKSPF funding was being made available as she had lots of ideas of where the money could be spent.

Lindsey Smith commented that Hednesford Town Council had been made aware of the funding in June and had been advised to look at providing legacy projects rather than spending it on events. They had therefore provided flagpoles and cleaned up the neighbourhood. They were a little confused as to why other areas had been able to use the funding for events. They had also asked to be provided with information on where other areas had spent their allocation, but this had not been received.

It was suggested that the representatives should email the Clerk with the information about the outcomes of the projects delivered so far so this could then be shared with the Group.

In response to the confusion over what projects the money could be spent on the

Economic Growth and Strategic Manager confirmed that everyone was subject to the same rules, and she was sorry if the Hednesford Town Council representatives considered they had been treated differently. Unfortunately, the Team did not have the capacity to provide updates on where other areas were spending their allocation. All areas had been advised of the allocated amounts at the outset and were asked to develop a good mix of projects to ensure they met the requirements of the funding. The representatives were encouraged to contact the team for any advice and assistance as they would be happy to help them.

The Head of Development and Planning thanked the representatives for their contribution and would refer the comments made in relation to communication back to the team. He confirmed that the focus had initially been on providing legacy projects but as the year progressed conversations were had, and some areas had spent some of their money on events. Each area had different priorities.

He asked the representatives to email any examples of issues that had arisen so these could be fixed in time for next year when further UKSPF funding was allocated. He encouraged the representatives to identify early on what they could spend their allocation on. He considered a lot of good things that had been delivered with the funding this year but acknowledged that some things could have been done better and the Team would take this on board. It was only a small team, and they had worked hard; however, capacity was an issue.

John Manning referred to s106 monies and offered to provide feedback on how he had found the process of working through the agreements. The Head of Economic Development and Planning advised that there was a priority to look at reviewing s106/CIL monies and confirmed that there were rules on how s106 monies could be allocated. He was happy to have discussions with the representative in this respect.

The representatives from the Parish and Town Councils were thanked for their attendance and the Group noted that the next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday 14 January 2025 at 5pm on MS Teams.

The meeting ended at 5.25pm.

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL
NOTES OF THE
SCRUTINY REVIEW WORKING GROUP - TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION
TUESDAY 14 JANUARY 2025 AT 5.00PM
REMOTE MEETING VIA MS TEAMS

Present:

Councillor S. Thornley (Chair)
Councillor L. Bullock
Councillor P. Haden
Councillor D. Mawle
Councillor F. Prestwood
Councillor D. Todd

Officers:

M. Smith (Economic Growth & Strategic Projects Manager)
W. Rowe (Senior Committee Officer)

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Dean Piper, Head of Economic Development and Planning and Councillor O. Lyons.

2. Notes of previous meeting

The notes of the previous meeting held on 18 December 2024 were agreed.

Arising from the notes the Chair informed the Group that he had contacted the Chief Executive to request that consideration be given to reinstating the regular meetings with the Parish/Town Councils. The Chief Executive advised that these meetings had been poorly attended when previously held; however, the Chief Executive confirmed that he would approach the Parish/Town Councils again and request that they be reinstated.

3. Town Centre Regeneration Scrutiny Review

Discussion item - Pipeline of projects

The Economic Growth & Strategic Projects Manager updated the Group on the current position with regards to the main project for the district, which was the Levelling Up Fund for Cannock Town Centre. She commented that Cabinet in March and June 2024 had agreed a phased approach so that, should there be any issues with any aspect of the scheme, another part of the scheme could continue. She advised that Phase 1 was underway, and this would deliver:

- demolition of the multi-storey car park and indoor market hall

- demolition of units 1-3 Cannock Shopping Centre and the removal of the red canopy
- creation of the Northern Gateway (including the filling in of the subway and providing a level crossing and construction of the café)
- refurbishment of Beecroft Road car park and providing improved accessibility to the town centre

As each element of the scheme required different specialities a procurement process was necessary to appoint contractors for each element. Tetra Tech had been appointed to deal with the technical elements of the scheme design and Connell Bros Ltd had been appointed to undertake the demolition works. In terms of the highways works, Amey would be working on the pedestrian crossing and infilling the subway. The officer was pleased to report that contractors were on site for the demolition of part of the multi storey car park and the empty units.

She advised that the CPO process had impacted on the delivery of the programme. However, the CPO had now been withdrawn and the Council had identified the land that was required to progress the scheme (this was different to what had been originally proposed). The report to Cabinet in June 2024 confirmed the land that was required to facilitate delivery of phase 2 of the scheme. Phase 2 would deliver:

- acquisition and demolition of the Forum Shopping Centre
- acquisition and partial demolition of retail units along Church Street and Market Street and acquisition of units on Market Hall Street
- Public realm works

Members noted that this phase was subject to MHCLG (previously DLUHC) agreeing a Project Adjustment Request (PAR) and an extension to the timeframe for spending the grant (which ends 31 March 2025). The Group was advised that other Local Authorities were in the same position as the timescale to deliver the LUF schemes was very tight. She confirmed that the PAR had been submitted to MHCLG and the outcome was awaited along with confirmation of the time extension. It was noted that these had been verbally agreed and once they had been formally confirmed in writing, the land acquisitions could complete.

The Chair queried the position in respect of Home Bargains and Peacocks and asked whether the car park and ramp above and behind Home Bargains would remain as he considered this to be very unsightly. The Officer confirmed that both Home Bargains and Peacocks were not included in this phase and would remain in place. It would be difficult to demolish the car park referred to with operational businesses directly underneath. However, it had been acknowledged that this issue would remain on a list of issues that needed to be considered in the future.

Discussion Item - Capacity Issues

The Economic Growth and Strategic Projects Manager provided information to the Group to outline the size of her team and the remit of their work. Members noted that projects like the LUF scheme were reliant on support from other

departments in the Council including Legal, Finance, Communications, Building Control, and Corporate Assets, as well as external support - principally from the SCC procurement team.

She confirmed that her role was split half and half between Cannock Chase DC and Stafford BC. The capital projects for both Councils totalled around £70m. The Cannock team consisted of 1 Economic Development Officer, 2 Economic Development Support Officers plus 15 hours of an Agency Worker (acquired via UKSPF funding) and an additional temporary Economic Development Officer funded until the end of March 2025. She added that to ensure the delivery of the LUF project the team were reliant upon the support of an external consultancy (Continuum).

With regards to Stafford BC she advised that the team consisted of 2 Project Officers, 1 Programme Manager and 2 Business Growth Officers. She was also responsible for supporting the Staffordshire Local Visitor Economy Partnership and for writing all the bids for funding. There was a broad amount of work, and where external support was required, this could only be sourced if it was eligible spend within the grant awards. As with Cannock, Stafford was also being supported by Continuum.

Additionally, the teams at both SBC and CCDC were required to draw on resources from other departments. This included Communications for publicising, consulting and communicating what the team do; Finance provided support with monitoring returns to MHCLG; Legal provided support with procurement and contracts. The Legal team had a significant workload and had to draw support from a Locum. The Corporate Assets team were also involved where Council assets form part of a project. She confirmed that as there was no in-house procurement team she accessed this service via the County Council.

She hoped that this gave members an insight into the wide area of capacity issues across both Council's.

The Chair commented that the capacity issue was rather worrying, and he asked whether the use of external organisations impacted significantly on costs. The Officer advised that, where grant conditions allow, the budgets in the grant awards were used to pay for the external support.

A member asked whether the team would be able to write up bids for future funding projects given the current capacity issues. The Officer commented that bidding for funding had been ongoing since 2018 and there were previously two officers writing the bids. Since the CCDC officer left the authority, no additional resource was available to support bid writing, and this was very time consuming. However, with the proposed changes to the way funding was applied for she was hopeful this may lessen the pressure in this respect.

The Chair referred to the Government White Paper on Devolution and commented that this could cause recruitment difficulties as there was no guarantee Local Council's would exist in the future. The Officer advised that the

timescale for devolution was unknown, but it wasn't an overnight change. All Local Authorities would continue to do their best for their local communities beforehand.

Recommendations to refer to the Economic Prosperity Scrutiny Committee

The Economic Growth and Strategic Projects Manager shared some slides with the Group to outline the potential lines of enquiry that had been proposed and the topics that had been considered by the Group. She had also prepared some suggestions for potential recommendations for members to consider.

Members were reminded of the possible lines of enquiry, as follows:

- (1) What are the challenges and opportunities in our town centres?
- (2) Future funding and Government policy?
- (3) What are other areas doing, what does good look like?
- (4) Council role: planning, regulatory, direct intervention?
- (5) How effective are current / past Council interventions?
- (6) How do we encourage local people and communities to engage and drive change?

Members had agreed that this was a very wide area and there was a lot of information to consider. The Group decided it would be best to slim these down a little and determine what aspect they wished to focus on. She confirmed that the following topics had therefore been considered by the Group: -

Transport Related

- Bus service provision - frequency/quality
- Staffordshire County Council's Local Transport Plan

Consultation and Engagement Related

- Relationships with Town and Parish Council's and community groups
- Scope and frequency of regeneration related community consultation and engagement

Resources Related

- Complexities of administering grant funded programmes
- Officer capacity to deliver

Members were advised that, in relation to Staffordshire County Council's Local Transport Plan, the Economic Prosperity Scrutiny Committee had received a presentation on this at their meeting on 10 December 2024.

In terms of some potential recommendations, she suggested the following: -

1. Propose a dialogue with Staffordshire County Council and local bus provider re potential for service improvements

2. Propose reinstating regular meetings between the Council and Town and Parish Councils
3. Propose a town centre wide consultation and engagement strategy
4. Consideration of how the town centre regeneration priority projects can be resourced to completion

With regard to the suggestion to reinstate the regular meetings between the Council and the Town and Parish Councils, it was considered that it may be useful for officers to liaise with the Town and Parish Councils to establish the reasons why the meetings had not been well attended when they had been held previously. The discussion of relevant issues at these meetings would encourage better attendance by the Town and Parish Council representatives.

The Group supported the suggested recommendations that had been proposed. The Economic Growth and Strategic Projects Manager confirmed that a report would be prepared for consideration at the Economic Prosperity Scrutiny Committee on 19 March 2025. This report would contain the details and rationale behind the recommendations. Should members wish to make any additional comments they were asked to email the officer as soon as possible so that these could be included within the report. The Chair indicated that he would have some comments to make in respect of local transport.

A member referred to the recommendation to approach Staffordshire County Council and local bus provider regarding potential for service improvements. She commented that the County Council did not run the local bus services, and the recommendation may therefore need to be tweaked. The Economic Growth and Strategic Projects Manager agreed that it would be appropriate to amend this recommendation and split it into two separate actions.

The Group asked that the slides be emailed to them following the meeting.

It was then AGREED:

(A) That following the Working Group meetings and discussions by Members, a report be prepared which would recommend the following to the Economic Prosperity Scrutiny Committee on 19 March 2025 for consideration:

- Propose a strategic dialogue with Staffordshire County Council in terms of public transport
- Propose a dialogue with local bus providers re potential for service improvements
- Propose reinstating regular meetings between the Council and Town and Parish Councils
- Propose a town centre wide consultation and engagement strategy
- Consideration of how the town centre regeneration priority projects can be resourced to completion

(B) That members email any additional comments to the Economic Growth and Strategic Projects Officer as soon as possible so that these could be

included within the report.

(C) That the slides be emailed to members of the Group following the meeting.

The meeting ended at 5.50pm.