

Thatcham and Hungerford Town Centre Strategies

Committee considering report:	Executive
Date of Committee:	23 March 2023
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Ross Mackinnon
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	13 February 2023
Report Author:	Sam Robins
Forward Plan Ref:	EX4325

1 Purpose of the Report

1.1 This report provides an overview and context of the two Town Centre Strategies that have been developed for Thatcham and Hungerford by a consultant team led by Hemingway Design, commissioned by the Council in 2022. The Strategies have been developed in collaboration with residents, stakeholders and Thatcham and Hungerford Town Councils. This report also outlines the next steps for delivery of the Strategies and seeks endorsement to take them forward.

2 Recommendation

2.1 The recommendation is that (a) both Town Centre Strategies for Thatcham and Hungerford be endorsed by the Council in order to protect and enhance their economic vitality in order to meet the needs of residents, businesses, workers and visitors. Secondly it is recommended that (b) the Council seeks to take forward the delivery of the Strategies in partnership with key stakeholders.

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	<p>The Council has invested £75,000 in commissioning these Strategies. They will form part of our overall Town Centres Programme – which seeks to deliver outcomes across Newbury, Thatcham and Hungerford in line with these Strategies and the Newbury Masterplan.</p> <p>The Council’s Town Centres Programme has an annual budget across a two-year period of £134,000 in capital funding and £130,000 in revenue funding. However, this funding will need to be prioritised across the three town centres. Further funding for delivery of projects will be sought from a variety of external</p>

	<p>and internal funding sources, including the private sector, Community Infrastructure Levy and S106.</p>
<p>Human Resource:</p>	<p>Delivery of these Strategies will be programme managed under our Town Centres Programme, within the Economy Team. This includes two full time 2 year fixed term posts; Principle Place-Shaping Officer (Town Centres) and Project Support Officer (Town Centres). Any further project management resources required for individual projects will form part of funding applications.</p> <p>There will be a need to bring in expertise from disciplines and teams across the Council at all stages of delivery, from working up projects, submitting funding bids and delivering capital works. This will include at least Legal, Commissioning, Highways, Drainage, Archaeology, Planning and Property.</p> <p>An officer group will meet regularly to support the programme and request further support from specific teams when it is needed.</p>
<p>Legal:</p>	<p>Should they be taken forward, a number of the projects outlined in the Strategies will be subject to statutory public consultation through the appropriate legal process e.g. planning applications and traffic regulation orders.</p> <p>Most of the proposals in the Strategies have legal implications of some kind, and there for advice from the Council’s Legal Team will be sought throughout the delivery programme.</p> <p>These Strategies are high-level frameworks for improvements to the Towns and they are not legally-binding commitments from the Council.</p>
<p>Risk Management:</p>	<p>The risks and their management are set out in the report.</p>
<p>Property:</p>	<p>Not all of the development projects proposed in the Strategies are on land owned or controlled by the Council and none of the projects have been considered against other regeneration priorities. Delivery will be subject to the agreement of the Council and in partnership with key stakeholders.</p> <p>Where proposals are situated on Council owned land there may be property implications which will be explored in more detail as part of feasibility studies and business cases for proposals.</p>

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Policy:	The Town Centre Strategies align with the emerging Local Plan policy relating to town centres; Council Strategy 2019-2023, the adopted Core Strategy 2012 (Area Delivery Plan Policy 2) and the 2020 Economic Development Strategy and 2021 Refresh.			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?	X			The proposals within the Strategies aim to make both town centres more accessible and welcoming for everyone, which will have a positive impact on inequality.
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?	X			The proposals within the Strategies aim to make both town centres more sociable, more accessible and more welcoming, which will have a positive impact on the lives of all residents, visitors and employees, including those with protected characteristics.
Environmental Impact:	X			The Strategies will aim to make an overall positive environmental impact on both towns through the implementation of their proposals. Specifically they promote alternative modes of transport by making the town centres more 'walkable' with improved permeability for pedestrians. The proposals for partial pedestrianisation of Thatcham Broadway could improve the localised air quality by reducing car movements in the space.

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Health Impact:	X			The Town Centre Strategies could have a positive impact on community health and well-being through improvements public realm and aforementioned improvements to air quality and promotion of active travel.
ICT Impact:		X		Not applicable
Digital Services Impact:		X		Not applicable
Council Strategy Priorities:	X			The regeneration of town centres is a key priority for the Council.
Core Business:		X		Not applicable
Data Impact:		X		Not applicable
Consultation and Engagement:	<p>An online public survey was run from December 2022 to January 2023 which received 1,700 responses across both Thatcham and Hungerford. Four workshops were also held, two for each town, to get the views and input of key stakeholders (including businesses, community groups, and Hungerford and Thatcham town councils) on the issues in the towns and subsequent proposals.</p> <p>Within the Council, consultants engaged with the Leader, Portfolio Holder, Executive Director (Place) and officers from Economic Development, Planning, Environment and Highways.</p>			

3 Executive Summary

- 3.1 This report seeks the Council's endorsement of the Town Centre Strategies for Thatcham and Hungerford as frameworks to reposition the town centres' offer to ensure they continue to meet the needs of residents, businesses, workers and visitors.
- 3.2 The development of these Strategies is the beginning of a much longer and more involved engagement process. Their purpose is to provide a high level framework for improvements to Thatcham and Hungerford Town Centres which the Council will seek to secure funding to deliver through various sources.
- 3.3 If endorsed by the Council, the Strategies will be taken forward for engagement with key stakeholders including Thatcham and Hungerford Town Councils. The proposed projects will be worked up in more detail, including business plans and funding

applications and additional funding sources for public and private sector investment will be identified. This will follow the same format as the Newbury Masterplan delivery programme.

- 3.4 A Programme Initiation Document will be developed for delivery of the Strategies and they will form part of our wider Town Centres Programme, including delivery of the Newbury Masterplan. The Town Centres Programme (including Newbury, Thatcham and Hungerford) has a revenue and capital budget across two years in order to work-up projects in detail, support further funding bids and support their implementation. The capital budget is £134,000 per year for 2022/23 and 2024/25. The revenue budget is £130,000 per year for 2022/23 and 2024/25.
- 3.5 The Programme will become part of a wider Place Infrastructure Programme being developed to allow the Council to consider its priorities for infrastructure funding and delivery across the District as a whole.

4 Background

- 4.1 The Council commissioned Hemingway Design to lead a consultant team including New Masterplanning, following a procurement exercise, to engage with residents and stakeholders (including Thatcham and Hungerford Town Councils) and develop both Town Centre Strategies in tandem. The governance of the project was undertaken by Economic Development Board.
- 4.2 The engagement begin with a walk around and workshop with each Town Council and a number of invited local stakeholders and businesses, to set the context of the towns for the consultants and begin to explore key issues. This was followed by an online public consultation from December 2022 to January 2023 which received over 1,700 responses in total – testing the views of local people on the key issues in the town, and which improvements and proposals they most prioritised. This was then followed by final follow-up workshops and presentations with the Town Councils and local stakeholders to review the findings of the survey and proposals.
- 4.3 The consultant team then produced the final draft Strategies during and following this process. The final drafts are attached in the appendices below. It should be noted that the proposals set out in the Strategies have not been assessed against each other, nor against wider regeneration objectives for the Council. Endorsement of the Strategies by the Council does not mean that all the proposed projects will be taken forward by the Council alone. It will be for the Council and other stakeholders to agree which projects should be prioritised against the limitations of partners' funding and resources.

5 Summary of key proposals in the Town Centre Strategies

- 5.1 The key features of the Town Centre Strategies can be summarised as follows, which were arrived through the process of holding workshops with stakeholders and assessed through a public consultation:

5.2 Thatcham

- Creating a 'village centre like' quality at The Broadway
- Improving the parks and green spaces

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- Creating opportunities for independent and start-up businesses
- Creating a dedicated space for markets and events
- Reducing impact, noise and pollution from traffic circulation at The Broadway
- Encouraging shoppers to visit the whole town centre on visits, not just the Kingsland Centre
- Providing better community facilities in the town centre
- Reducing the impact of the A4 and making it safer for people to cross
- Making car parking less confusing

5.3 Key proposals include full or partial pedestrianisation of The Broadway; co-locating the Library and other public facilities into a 'Community Hub'; improvements to the gateways to the town centre; and physical changes to the A4 to lower traffic speeds.

5.4 Hungerford

- Encouraging tourism by promoting Hungerford's heritage
- Encouraging visitors to stay longer and explore more of the town centre
- Promoting the use of the canal and green spaces for recreation and leisure
- Integrating community facilities within the town centre
- Reducing the impact of traffic on the high street
- Increasing opportunities for independent cafes, restaurants, retail and other start-up businesses
- Improving space for markets and events
- Improving walking routes to the high street from car parks and the train station
- Enhancing arrival into the town centre

5.5 Some of the key proposals including creating a new 'town square' outside the Town Hall by removing a section of car parking, which could be used for markets and events; creating spill out space for businesses on the High Street; and improving pedestrian connections between Bridge Street and the High Street.

5.6 The main common themes emerging through the consultation process and proposals in both strategies is the need to make more space available for pedestrians in the town centres, create intentional spaces for markets and events and improve their 'walkability' when coming from outside the centre.

6 Commentary and risks

6.1 There was a strong response from members of the public and local stakeholders during the development of the Town Centres Strategies, with over 1,700 respondents to the online survey and answers which compelled a strong need for the improvements and proposals in the Strategies. The Strategies are aligned with the Council's strategic priorities, key strategies such as Economic Development and Environmental, and with the visions of Thatcham and Hungerford Town Councils. There are however some key risks which are highlighted below along with mitigation measures.

6.2 With the exception of a small budget described in the financial section above, which is to be used on the Town Centres Programme which includes the Newbury Masterplan, there is currently no provision in the Council's budget to deliver these proposals.

Risk – lack of Council funding or staffing resource means the proposals can't be delivered.

Mitigation – prioritise against regeneration objectives and seek funding from CIL, S106 and from external funding sources such as central government funds.

- 6.3 The Strategies, particularly Thatcham, contain proposals which may be of concern to some members of the local community. For example the full or partial pedestrianisation of Thatcham Broadway, or measures to reduce the speed and impact of traffic on the A4 as it passes through Thatcham Town Centre. The Strategies recognise that should the Council and stakeholders decide major proposals like this are a priority, they would be subject to further feasibility work and appropriate levels of public consultation before being implemented.

Risk – the delivery of the Strategies fail to win public support and/or meet public expectations.

Mitigation – develop a communications plan to ensure that information is shared in a timely and effective way and appropriate consultation is carried out. Also work closely with a steering group of key stakeholders in both towns, including the Town Councils to support prioritisation and delivery.

7 Other options considered

- 7.1 The Thatcham and Hunger Town Centre Strategies could be rejected by the Council, in which case they would not be taken forward. However, this is likely to result in lost opportunities to secure external funding and public or private sector investment for the town centres, to the detriment of local residents, businesses and visitors.

8 Conclusion

- 8.1 The Thatcham and Hungerford Town Centre Strategies provide a strategic framework to reposition the town centres to ensure they continue to meet the needs of residents, businesses, workers and visitors. They have been developed in collaboration with residents, key stakeholders and the Town Councils.
- 8.2 The Strategies will form part of the Council's Town Centres Programme, including Thatcham, Hungerford and Newbury. Two FTE officers in the Economic Development Team will lead on driving forward implementation of the Strategies, and on seeking funding for those proposals which are prioritised.
- 8.3 It is clear that the Council cannot deliver the Strategies in isolation, so steering groups of key stakeholders including the Town Councils will be set up to help drive forward delivery of both Strategies, as for the Newbury Masterplan. The Steering Groups will provide direction on the delivery of the Strategies that will ultimately require sign-off by existing Governance structures including Economic Development Board and the Town Councils' own boards.
- 8.4 There is significant work to be done to work up the proposals to the level of detail required to enable the prioritisation of projects in order to seek external funding from the

public and private sectors. Therefore, it is envisaged that prioritisation of projects will be the first workstream for the Town Centres Programme.

9 Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix A – Equalities assessment
- 9.2 Appendix B – Thatcham Town Centre Strategy
- 9.3 Appendix C – Hungerford Town Centre Strategy

Background Papers

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: No:

- The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval
- Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council
- Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position
- Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or associated Task Groups within preceding six months
- Item is Urgent Key Decision
- Report is to note only

Officer details:

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Appendix A

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) - Stage One

We need to ensure that our strategies, policies, functions and services, current and proposed have given due regard to equality and diversity as set out in the Public Sector Equality Duty (Section 149 of the Equality Act), which states:

- (1) A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
 - (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;*
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; This includes the need to:
 - (i) remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;*
 - (ii) take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;**
 - (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it, with due regard, in particular, to the need to be aware that compliance with the duties in this section may involve treating some persons more favourably than others.**
- (2) The steps involved in meeting the needs of disabled persons that are different from the needs of persons who are not disabled include, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities.*
- (3) Compliance with the duties in this section may involve treating some persons more favourably than others.*

The following list of questions may help to establish whether the decision is relevant to equality:

- Does the decision affect service users, employees or the wider community?
- (The relevance of a decision to equality depends not just on the number of those affected but on the significance of the impact on them)
- Is it likely to affect people with particular protected characteristics differently?
- Is it a major policy, or a major change to an existing policy, significantly affecting how functions are delivered?
- Will the decision have a significant impact on how other organisations operate in terms of equality?
- Does the decision relate to functions that engagement has identified as being important to people with particular protected characteristics?
- Does the decision relate to an area with known inequalities?
- Does the decision relate to any equality objectives that have been set by the council?

Please complete the following questions to determine whether a full Stage Two, Equality Impact Assessment is required.

What is the proposed decision that you are asking the Executive to make:	That the Thatcham and Hungerford Town Centre Strategies be endorsed by the Council.
Summary of relevant legislation:	N/A
Does the proposed decision conflict with any of the Council's priorities for improvement? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes • Support everyone to reach their full potential • Support businesses to start develop and thrive in West Berkshire • Develop local infrastructure including housing to support and grow the local economy Maintain a green district • Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships 	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If yes, please indicate which priority and provide an explanation
Name of Budget Holder:	Jehona Hansell
Name of Service/Directorate:	Development & Regulation
Name of assessor:	Katharine Makant
Date of assessment:	13/02/2023
Version and release date (if applicable):	

Is this a ?		Is this policy, strategy, function or service ... ?	
Policy	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	New or proposed	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Strategy	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Already exists and is being reviewed	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Function	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Is changing	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Service	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		

(1) What are the main aims, objectives and intended outcomes of the proposed decision and who is likely to benefit from it?	
Aims:	To endorse the Town Centre Strategies for Thatcham and Hungerford for progression towards delivery in partnership with key stakeholders.
Objectives:	To reposition both Town Centres to to ensure they continues to meet the needs of residents, businesses, workers and visitors.

Outcomes:	Thatcham and Hungerford Town Centres are perceived by residents, businesses and visitors as attractive and vibrant places to live, work and visit.
Benefits:	Thatcham and Hungerford Town Centres continue to thrive and grow to the benefit of businesses, residents and visitors.

(2) Which groups might be affected and how? Is it positively or negatively and what sources of information have been used to determine this?

(Please demonstrate consideration of all strands – Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion or Belief, Sex and Sexual Orientation)

Group Affected	What might be the effect?	Information to support this
Age		
Disability		
Gender Reassignment		
Marriage and Civil Partnership		
Pregnancy and Maternity		
Race		
Religion or Belief		
Sex		
Sexual Orientation		

Further Comments:

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(3) Result

Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could contribute to inequality?

Yes No

There has been no evidence as part of the responses received to date to suggest that people within the Protected Characteristics groups are likely to be negatively affected. However, we will continue to monitor this aspect throughout the delivery of the Strategies and further action will be considered should this change.

Will the proposed decision have an adverse impact upon the lives of people, including employees and service users?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>There has been no evidence as part of the responses received to date to suggest that people within the Protected Characteristics groups are likely to be negatively affected. However, we will continue to monitor this aspect throughout the delivery of the Strategies and further action will be considered should this change.</p>	

If your answers to question 2 have identified potential adverse impacts and you have answered ‘yes’ to either of the sections at question 3, or you are unsure about the impact, then you should carry out a EqlA 2.

If an EqlA 2 is required, before proceeding you should discuss the scope of the Assessment with service managers in your area. You will also need to refer to the EqlA guidance and template – <http://intranet/index.aspx?articleid=32255>.

(4) Identify next steps as appropriate:	
EqlA Stage 2 required	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Owner of EqlA Stage Two:	
Timescale for EqlA Stage Two:	

Name: Sam Robins

Date: 13/02/2023

Please now forward this completed form to Pamela Voss, Equality and Diversity Officer (pamela.voss@westberks.gov.uk), for publication on the WBC website.