

Date: 14 November 2019

Subject: Town Centre Challenge

Report of: The Mayor of Greater Manchester

PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report provides an update to Scrutiny Committee on the Town Centre Challenge initiative.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Scrutiny is requested to note and comment on the report and request further updates as appropriate.

CONTACT OFFICERS:

Anne Morgan, Head of Planning Strategy
(anne.morgan@greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk)

David Hodcroft, Principal, Planning & Housing team
(david.hodcroft@greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk)

- Risk Management – N/A
- Legal Considerations – N/A
- Financial Consequences – N/A
- Financial Consequences – N/A
- Number of attachments included in the report – N/A

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Town Centre Challenge Report to GMCA on 26 January 2018

Town Centre Challenge Report to GMCA on 28 September 2018

Town Centre Challenge: Stockport Mayoral Development Corporation Report to GMCA 29 March 2019

The Stockport Town Centre West Mayoral Development Corporation (Establishment) Order 2019 (S.I. 2019/1040)

Stockport Development Corporation Delivery Plan 2019/20 Report to GMCA on 27 September 2019

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Greater Manchester's town centres are at the heart of our communities. However, they are facing growing challenges. The rise of internet shopping, large out-of-town retailers and broader changes to our lifestyles and working patterns has resulted in some town centres struggling to meet the needs of their local communities. The role of town centres as retail locations will continue to diminish and we need to find new futures for them to strengthen their vitality and viability.
- 1.2 Our town centres are some of the best connected places in Greater Manchester, often they are the focal point for bus, rail and Metrolink services yet in most there is no established housing market. This is partly due to 'abnormal' costs of development (often on previously developed land) and partly due to a low end value of any schemes caused by a lack of current housing demand in those town centres keeping prices low. Both of these issues stop housing development in our town centres because the cost of development can be greater than the end value.
- 1.3 However at the same time new homes are needed across Greater Manchester in sustainable and accessible locations to meet the needs of residents and minimise the need for Green Belt land to be used.
- 1.4 Despite considerable efforts town centre regeneration has too often been dependent on and reactive to proposals that developers have chosen to bring forward, rather than being able to take a proactive approach as places would have liked. In the main this is due to:
- A lack of capacity in local authorities to invest the considerable resources needed to proactively bring forward appropriate developments
 - A lack of suitable finance to make appropriate schemes stack up – often this is associated with the 'negative value' of schemes outlined above

2. TOWN CENTRE CHALLENGE

- 2.1 As a response to these issues, the Mayoral Town Centre Challenge was launched in November 2017 with the following towns identified by the individual local authorities:
- Prestwich
 - Farnworth
 - Royton
 - Rochdale
 - Swinton
 - Stockport
 - Stalybridge
 - Stretford
 - Leigh
- 2.2 The Town Centre Challenge is about raising the profile of town centres and using the convening powers of the Mayor to galvanize delivery and change. The Challenge is an opportunity to bring together a range of key stakeholders

and partners in a concerted effort to support the work of local councils to unlock the potential of some of these places.

2.3 The specific aims for the Town Centre Challenge have been focused around:

- Supporting local authorities to address the problems of viability and the need for new investment into town centres
- Harnessing public and private sector drive to deliver change, especially in terms of new homes by releasing the hidden demand for residential development in many town centres
- Combining the ambition of local authorities with the support that the GM Mayor can bring, using the convening powers of the Mayor to galvanize delivery.
- Supporting long term change and the potential of town centres for a range of uses.
- Building on the assets that already exist in our town centres to support specific schemes which can have a catalytic impact.

2.4 Since the launch of the Town Centre Challenge a range of actions has been undertaken with the most high profile being the launch of the first Mayoral Development Corporation in Stockport Town Centre in September. The Mayoral Development Corporation (MDC) is the first MDC in the country to focus on a town centre and will influence the approach to town centre and brownfield regeneration for years to come.

2.7 Activity is underway across all districts and progress is being made through the preparation of town centre strategies and masterplans, land acquisition and negotiation. Funding has been provided by the GMCA (via Planning Delivery Fund and Evergreen surpluses) to support the development of master plans, procurement and delivery strategies, site acquisition, remediation, preparation and regeneration. Districts are driving this work and working with their stakeholders and communities as appropriate and further detail will be provided at the meeting where appropriate.

2.8 A 'Town Centre Living' campaign is proposed for the New Year to highlight the work taking place across the districts in more detail as well as identifying some of the barriers and challenges that exist.

3. WIDER TOWN CENTRE ACTIVITY

3.1 Government has also recognised the importance of towns to our future prosperity and has launched several funding programmes recently. Appendix 1 provides a brief summary of these) Greater Manchester districts have accessed the following opportunities and are currently working on their bids.

- Bolton, Farnworth, Oldham, Rochdale, Stockport, Stretford and Wigan were recently successful in securing funding through the **Future High Streets Fund**.
- Wigan, Tyldesley, and Stalybridge have been announced as successful recipients of received **Heritage High Street** funding from the Government.

- Bolton, Stockport (Cheadle), Oldham, and Rochdale have received funding to develop **Town Deals**.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 Recommendations are found at the beginning of the report

GOVERNMENT FUNDING PROGRAMMES

Towns Fund

Government announced the £3.6 billion Towns Fund in September 2019, following earlier announcements around a 'Stronger Towns Fund' and the Future High Street Fund. 101 places have been invited to work with the government to develop innovative regeneration plans (see <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/100-places-to-benefit-from-new-towns-fund>). A Towns Fund Prospectus was published 1 November 2019 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/towns-fund-prospectus>)

The Prospectus sets out the first stage of agreeing a Town Deal. This will operate as a two-stage process.

- Stage 1: providing capacity support to places to put the structures and vision in place in order to move to the next stage of agreeing a deal
- Stage 2: places to use their locally-owned Town Investment Plan to put together a business case to apply for funding for interventions

Unitary Authorities, District Councils, and Borough Councils in the areas for the towns selected are responsible for developing a Town Deal Board no later than the end of January 2020, then produce a Town Investment Plan no later than Summer 2020.

Agreeing a Town Deal with investment from the Towns Fund of up to £25m per place will be dependent on government receiving high-quality proposals that meet the objectives of the fund and follow the further guidance to be published.

Future High Streets Fund

The Future High Streets Fund is a £1bn competitive fund to support local areas to respond to the challenges high streets face in the light of changing retail patterns. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-high-streets-fund/future-high-street-fund>)

It is intended to serve two purposes: to support local areas to prepare long-term strategies for their high streets and town centres, including funding a new High Streets Taskforce to provide expertise and hands-on support to local areas and co-fund with local areas projects

Local areas are required to provide proposals setting out the overall vision that they wish to achieve for their high street and town or city centre and specific improvements that would contribute to that overall vision. Proposals will be assessed according to value for money and other elements of their business case (e.g. deliverability, strategic fit to the objectives of the fund and ability to co-fund bids where appropriate) and fund is expected to contribute up to £25 million to projects per local area.

Heritage High Streets Fund

Up to £55 million of the overall Future High Streets Fund has been identified to support the regeneration of heritage high streets. This has two elements: helping to restore historic high street properties through Historic England, and equipping communities with their own resources to put historic buildings back into economic use - for example as residential buildings, new work spaces or cultural venues, supported by the Architectural Heritage Fund.