

GREATER MANCHESTER PLANNING & HOUSING COMMISSION

Date: **24 JANUARY 2020**

Subject: **TOWN CENTRES UPDATE**

Report of: **PAUL DENNETT, SALFORD CITY MAYOR AND PORTFOLIO LEAD
FOR HOUSING, HOMELESSNESS AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To update the Commission on the progress of GMCA and Government initiatives around town centres.

RECOMMENDATION

Members are asked to:

- Note the contents of the report.

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Historically our town centres have developed as the focal point of our towns and communities. They are the geographical hub for our social and commercial activities, architecture, public space and connectivity. The traditional base of our town centres has been a healthy commercial and retail offer however their landscape is changing rapidly and this is posing a major challenge for local authorities across the country. In recent years we have seen some major developments in both the pace and scale of these changes, for example Marks & Spencer intending to close 100 stores by 2022; closure of branches of Jamie's Italian required to maintain solvency of the company; and nationwide retailers such as Maplin, Toys R Us and Mothercare going into administration. Many household names, whose market dominance was once taken for granted, are now having their existence on our high streets brought into question and it is clear that our town centres will need to change if they are to continue to serve the needs of local communities.
- 1.2 Town centres are among the best-connected places particularly in respect of public transport which would suggest they should be attractive places to live however in many of our Greater Manchester town centres no housing market exists. Addressing this is a key priority in the Greater Manchester Strategy (Priority 4) and is reflected in the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework and the 2040 Transport plan.
- 1.3 Alongside the challenges faced by our town centres, there is a wider national housing crisis. Greater Manchester needs to build more new homes but these need to be high quality, sustainable new homes which fit the needs and aspirations of current and future residents. They also need to be affordable, accessible, energy efficient and well designed. Across Greater Manchester housing delivery has been steadily increasing and in 2018/19 over 11,500 homes were built, which is the highest number built in a single year since 2008.
- 1.4 New homes can play an important role in the revitalisation of our town and district centres. A mix of new homes can help to maintain and increase activity in town centres as the challenges offered by the restructuring of the retail market continue to impact.
- 1.5 Development in town centres supports our brownfield land preference and helps protect our valued green spaces. There are still viability issues across Greater Manchester and we are working to find the right tools and funding models to make that happen including support for smaller, local developers who are often well placed to identify and deliver these opportunities. Creation of housing markets in our well connected town centres helps to support the retail, leisure and employment functions of these important places but also help to relieve pressure on green spaces and Green Belt.
- 1.6 Regeneration of their town centres is a high priority for the Greater Manchester districts and work has been underway for some time to develop strategies to repurpose centres and make them fit for the future.
- 1.7 The Mayor of Greater Manchester made a firm commitment to town centres in his manifesto and in November 2017 he launched the Town Centre Challenge which builds on the positive work being delivered in 9 district town centres. September 2019 saw the launch of the Stockport MDC which was the first in GM and the first ever MDC to focus upon a town centre. On 18 December 2019 Bury was announced as the first Greater Manchester Town of Culture.
- 1.8 The Government has followed this lead and announced various funded and non-funded opportunities through Town Deals, the Future High Streets Fund and Heritage Action Zones, the latter delivered in conjunction with Historic England. The High Streets Task Force, a non-funded opportunity, has been established and is headed by the Institute of Place

Management (based at Manchester Metropolitan University). Appendix 1 details the various initiatives and the districts towns/high streets that they are linked to.

2. TOWN CENTRE CHALLENGE

2.1 The GM Town Centre Challenge is being undertaken in the context of increasing concern about the future of town centres across the whole of the UK. It provides a significant opportunity to secure the regeneration across Greater Manchester's town centres and progress strategic development projects across GM by utilising the GM Mayor's statutory powers, convening powers, and resources with agreement of and conjunction with each of the Local authorities in Greater Manchester. The Mayor's statutory powers are to facilitate and drive regeneration.

2.2 The specific aims for the Town Centre Challenge are 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.

2.3 The table below outlines progress to date.

District	Town centre	Progress
Bolton	Farnworth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farnworth Precinct acquire by Council from St Mowden. • Final masterplan approved by Council.
Bury	Prestwich	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key site of Istanbul Restaurant acquired by Council. • Council is proposing the acquisition of the Longfield Suite and the lease of the Longfield Centre. • Muse Developments is the partner managing the project.
Oldham	Royton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Royton Town Hall and Library to be redeveloped. • Demolition of the 1960/70s extensions to the Library and Town Hall, reducing the overall footprint of the buildings • By relocating the Library into the Town Hall, the existing library space will be freed up for alternative uses which will help contribute towards creating a vibrant town centre for Royton.
Rochdale	Rochdale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friday Food Market (1st Friday of month) on Drake Street launched in March 2019. • Railway station masterplan to be unveiled in early 2020. This could deliver 1000 new homes, create new commercial development and a public square, improve pedestrian and cycle links to the town centre and expand park and ride facilities. • GM Fire Service Museum due to re-open summer 2020 following transformation.
Salford	Swinton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder events planned for early 2020. • Institute of Place Management appointed.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with Future High Street Task Force to develop future funding opportunities.
Stockport	Stockport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MDC formally approved by Parliamentary Order and first meeting held – September 2019 • Town Centre West Consultation concluded in September 2019.
Tameside	Stalybridge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feb 2019 - 38 affordable rent apartments in Castle Street Phase 1 development (former Tame Foundry textile mill). Phase 2 of 18 apartments underway and due for completion March 2020. • Successful in securing Historic England's Heritage Action Zone funding to create a heritage walk and organize cultural events to boost tourism.
Trafford	Stretford	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special-purpose company formed with Bruntwood in July 2019 to bring forward plans Stretford Mall. • Bruntwood-Trafford partnership acquired Stretford Mall in September 2019. • Consultation session held on 11 November 2019 to showcase initial plans for Stretford Mall. • Consultation session on 7 November 2019 to showcase initial plans for former Kellogg's site. Plans outline residential-led mixed use development to include housing, primary school, offices and public realm.
Wigan	Leigh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refurbishment of Turnpike House commenced. • Redevelopment of Mather Lane mill (known as Loom Wharf) expected by end of 2019. In August 35 of 98 apartments had already been sold. • Engie constructing 100 homes at Hilton Park for Sigma Capital, expected completion May 2021. • Leigh Town Hall refurbishment of 1st floor and renovation of 2nd floor due for completion January 2020.

3. STOCKPORT MAYORAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

3.1 Stockport Town Centre West Mayoral Development Corporation (Stockport MDC) is the first Mayoral Development Corporation in Greater Manchester and the first MDC to focus on a town centre. It is set to deliver against some of the biggest challenges facing towns and urban centres in the UK today. The MDC was established by Parliamentary Order on 2nd September 2019.

3.2 A Strategic Regeneration Framework has been prepared which aims to re-purpose 130 acres of Stockport Town Centre from predominantly low-density industrial land to create a whole new urban neighbourhood in Greater Manchester, providing 3,500 much-needed new homes on brownfield land, alongside fuelling the continued economic and social revival of Stockport Town Centre.

3.3 A Board has been created and the first meeting of the Stockport MDC took place on 9 September 2019. The Strategic Business Plan sets out the actions for the first six months.

3.4 The Strategic Regeneration Framework proposes the role of the Stockport MDC:

- Deliver the single institutional platform for land assembly, master planning, development facilitation, site preparation, development briefs, infrastructure and place creation.
- Harness the resources of local and national government to secure maximum impacts and efficiency.

- Create a diverse mix of investment propositions and development partners as the development unfolds.
- Take full advantage of the powers available to the Mayor for land acquisition and other activities.
- Create the opportunity to access experienced and proven skills bringing together the Council and other public sector partners (Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Transport for Greater Manchester and Homes England) to create the earliest momentum for physical change.
- Efficient planning decisions/presumption in favour of sustainable development which aligns with the local plan and the principles of the Strategic Regeneration Framework and the Supplementary Planning Document.
- Powers over planning and business rates will remain with Stockport Council.

4. TOWN OF CULTURE

- 4.1 The Town of Culture accolade will be an annual award highlighting the distinctive creativity and diversity of one of Greater Manchester's many towns, putting a spotlight on the remarkable art, culture and heritage that exists across Greater Manchester. The accolade will see investment in 2020 totalling £120,000 designed to aid a burst of creativity in the town and across the borough with local people encouraged to devise or participate in cultural events which could range from festivals, family days, concerts, exhibitions and opportunities to explore, reflect on and enjoy the heritage of the area.
- 4.2 On 18 December 2019 at The Fusilier Museum, Bury Griff Rhys Jones OBE announced Bury as the inaugural Town of Culture. Following the announcement an expert panel held a discussion on all things culture; the panel included David Rudlin (Director, Urbed), Lisa Nandy MP (Wigan), Alison McKenzie-Folan (Chief Executive, Wigan Council), Fiona Gibson (Interim Chief Executive, Liverpool Everyman & Playhouse Theatres), Sacha Lord (Night Time Economy Adviser for Greater Manchester), Victoria Robinson (Chief Executive, The Met) and Geoff Little (Chief Executive, Bury Council).

5. GOVERNMENT FUNDING ANNOUNCEMENTS

- 5.1 The £3.6bn Towns Fund was announced by the Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government (MHCLG). It comprises funding for Town Deals (£2.6bn) and the Future High Streets Fund (£1bn). Before earlier announcements the Towns Fund was called the Stronger Towns Fund. The High Street Task Force will be providing support services to chosen pilot areas in the coming month. An announcement regarding a 'Town of the Year' competition have been made recently however further details are awaited.

Appendix 2 sets out these Government funding streams in more detail.

TABLE 1 – Greater Manchester town centres/high streets and their related initiatives.

District	<i>GM initiatives</i>			<i>Government initiatives</i>			
	Town Centre Challenge	MDC	Town of Culture	Town Deals	Future High Streets Fund (Phases 1a & 1b)	High Streets Task Force	Heritage Action Zones
Bolton	Farnworth			Bolton	Farnworth (1a) Bolton (1b)		
Bury	Prestwich		Bury				
Manchester						Withington	
Oldham	Royton			Oldham	Oldham (1a)		
Rochdale	Rochdale			Rochdale	Rochdale (1b)		Rochdale
Salford	Swinton					Swinton	
Stockport	Stockport	Stockport		Cheadle	Stockport (1a)		
Tameside	Stalybridge						Stalybridge
Trafford	Stretford				Stretford (1a)		
Wigan	Leigh				Wigan (1a)		Tyldesley Wigan

This section sets out the funded and non-funded town centre opportunities announced by Government.

1. TOWNS FUND

1.2 The £3.6bn Towns Fund was announced by the Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government (MHCLG). It comprises funding for Town Deals (£2.6bn) and the Future High Streets Fund (£1bn). Before earlier announcements the Towns Fund was called the Stronger Towns Fund.

1.3 For clarity, a timeline of announcements is detailed below:

- October 2018 – MHCLG announces £675m Future High Streets Fund to help local areas to respond to and adapt to changes.
- March 2019 – Theresa May announces £1.6bn Stronger Towns Fund to boost economies of left behind towns.
- July 2019 – Boris Johnson commits an extra £1bn to the Stronger Towns Fund (now £2.6bn overall) and an extra £325m to the Future High Streets Fund (now £1bn overall).
- September 2019 – MHCLG confirm to Channel 4 that the Stronger Towns and Future High Streets Funds have been combined under the moniker of the Towns Fund.

2. TOWN DEALS

2.1 The £2.6bn Town Deals fund, previously referred to as the Stronger Towns Fund, is a MHCLG non-competitive designation earmarked to 'level up' towns across England. In total 101 towns have been nominated by MHCLG and invited to bid for up to £25m funding each. The funding will provide the core public investment in Town Deals and additional funding may come from other sources or parts of Government. The Government has published the Towns Fund Prospectus and allocated initial funding to help councils work up Town Investment Plans by summer 2020. Along with the Future High Streets Fund (£1bn) the Town Deals make up the overall £3.6bn Towns Fund.

2.2 Bolton, Oldham, Rochdale and Cheadle have been chosen from Greater Manchester. Each town receive an initial funding amount based its population meaning that Bolton, Oldham and Rochdale will each receive the capacity funding allocation of £173,029 while Cheadle will receive £140,000. By the end of January 2020 each town will have to form a Town Deal Board made up of public, private and voluntary partners who will help to develop the Town Investment Plans and business case.

2.3 Town Deals will be agreed in two stages:

- **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 interventions.

2.4 Town Investment Plans should focus on the objectives of the Towns Fund which are:

- **Urban regeneration, planning and land use:** ensuring towns are thriving places for people to live and work, including by: increasing density in town centres; strengthening local economic assets including local cultural assets*; site acquisition, remediation, preparation, regeneration; and making full use of planning tools to bring strategic direction and change.

- **Skills and enterprise infrastructure:** driving private sector investment and ensuring towns have the space to support skills and small business development.
- **Connectivity:** developing local transport schemes that complement regional and national networks, as well as supporting the delivery of improved digital connectivity

2.5 Town Investment Plans should set out investment priorities to drive economic growth and align with the Local Industrial Strategy, local environmental strategies, Local Plans, Spatial Development Strategies and Local Transport Plans. Town Deals will then be agreed in one of three tranches during 2020 – March, the summer and the autumn.

2.6 A ‘Towns Hub’ will be set up within MHCLG to work directly with the chosen places to help local people develop their plans, evaluate emerging plans, share best practice and make the case for funding across wider government departments.

2.7 Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick will visit all chosen areas in 2020.

2.8 Prospectus timeline of activities:

- Nov 2019 – Initial funding distributed to Lead Councils
- 19 Nov 2019 – Deadline to submit completed readiness checklist
- End Jan 2020 – All Town Deal Boards convened (including publication of towns boundary)
- Early 2020 – Further guidance published on Stage 2
- Summer 2020 – All Town Investment Plans produced – summer 2020
- 2020-21 – Town Deals agreed
- 2020 – A competition for further Town Deals

3. FUTURE HIGH STREETS FUND

3.1 The £1bn Future High Streets Fund is a MHCLG competitive fund. In Phase 1 of the Fund 100 high streets were shortlisted across England. Along with Town Deals (£2.6bn) the Future High Streets Fund makes up the overall £3.6bn Town Fund.

3.2 Farnworth, Stockport, Oldham, Stretford and Wigan were shortlisted in Phase 1a of the Future High Streets Fund in July 2019. It was then announced in September 2019 that Bolton and Rochdale had been shortlisted in Phase 1b. These high streets now move to Phase 2 and have received £150k of funding to develop business cases for capital funding to implement their transformational scheme.

3.3 Each local authority that has moved to Phase 2 can now bid for up to £25m of funding. ‘Shovel ready’ projects (those with planning permission already confirmed) will be looked on more favourably and fast-tracked for funding.

3.4 Timeline for Phase 2 and beyond:

- **High Streets in Phase 1a** – decision expected spring 2020, funds released in May, and funds must be spent by 31 March 2024.
- **High Streets in Phase 1b** – decision expected autumn 2020, funding released to be confirmed, and funds to be spent by 31 March 2024.

3.5 A second round of bidding is expected in 2020.

4. HIGH STREETS TASK FORCE

- 4.1 In July 2019 MHCLG announced that a High Streets Task Force would be set up to offer hands-on support to local authorities and communities who want to transform their high streets however this does not include any funding opportunities. The Government appointed the Institute of Place Management (Manchester Metropolitan University) to deliver the service.
- 4.2 The Task Force, in agreement with Government, has identified 14 bids which were close to succeeding in Phases 1a and 1b of the Future High Streets Fund. In GM those selected are Withington and Swinton. These places will be pilot areas to test the Task Force's services/support/tools ahead of nationwide roll-out in July 2020. 6 further pilots will be announced in due course.
- 4.3 An assessment of the 14 unsuccessful bids is now complete. The 'Transforming Your High Street' report has looked at each Expression of Interest including the vision, capacity levels, business rates, needs, approach used and then concludes with suggestions to improve proposals for any future funding bids. From January until May/June the pilot areas will be able to access services suggested in the report. The Task Force are keen to test all their services so the pilots will benefit from a greater range than other areas following roll-out. The services available include:
- Diagnostic visits
 - Opportunities to discuss with 'movers and shakers'
 - Access to experts from relevant fields for a maximum of 3 days to progress a specific issue e.g. RTPI, Built Environment, Institute of Place Management, RICS, Design Council, Landscape.
 - Mentoring from experts aimed at solving capacity issues.
 - 'Developing a shared vision workshop' focused on understanding the process of visioning e.g. clarity, aspiration.

5. HERITAGE ACTION ZONES

- 5.1 £95m of funding has been announced to revitalise historic high streets across England. £92m made up of contributions from the DCMS's Heritage High Street Fund (£40m) and MHCLG's Future High Street Fund (£52m) will be overseen by Historic England and used to create 69 new High Street Heritage Action Zones. A further £3m from the National Lottery Heritage Fund will be used to support a cultural programme to engage people in the life and history of their high streets. The funding aims to turn empty and underused buildings into creative spaces, offices, retail outlets and housing to support wider regeneration of selected locations by attracting future commercial investment.
- 5.2 The North West region has been allocated £18.7m which represents the second highest regional allocation. 14 of the 69 locations are in the North West with Wigan, Tyldesley and Stalybridge being selected in GM. Wigan will use up to £1.27m to restore vacant historic buildings on King Street to help support the creation of jobs and increasing footfall in the action zone area. In Tyldesley the project focuses on Elliot Street and aims to bring buildings back into viable use, tackle parking issues, refurbish five vacant buildings and encourage businesses based in Conservation Areas to comply with shop front design criteria. The Stalybridge proposal focuses on a heritage walk leading from the railway station down Market Street and into the Historic Quarter of the town. A programme of cultural events involving local people is also planned to attract tourists to the Historic Quarter.

5.3 Government funding for the three projects will be confirmed in January 2020 following a final assessment.

5.4 Drake Street, Rochdale – which runs from the railway station to the Town Hall – was previously designated a Heritage Action Zone in 2017. The Council has received £600,000 of grant funding from Historic England to help remove buildings within the Heritage Action Zone from the Heritage at Risk register. To aid delivery the Council formed a partnership with Rochdale Boroughwide Housing, Link4Life, Rochdale Development Agency, the Co-operative Heritage Trust and the Co-operative Councils' Innovation Network. The funding has helped to set up a grant scheme to bring vacant buildings back into use through restoration and renovation, surveys have been carried out on all buildings within the area and Manchester School of Architecture students are working with the HAZ to investigate new uses.

6. TOWN OF THE YEAR

6.1 In January 2020 the Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick announced that towns across England will be able to compete in a new Town of the Year competition.

6.2 MHCLG said it will celebrate towns' achievements in areas such as entrepreneurship, technology, community, enterprise, and integration. It will also support communities realise their potential through innovation, creativity and community spirit.

6.3 The competition will be launched later in 2020 and further details will be announced in due course.