

# Andover Town Centre Masterplan

Report of the Leader

## Recommended:

- 1. That the Andover Town Centre Masterplan (as set out in Annex 2 to the report) be approved as a material planning consideration.**
- 2. That the Andover Town Centre Masterplan be adopted to inform future development of land in the ownership of the Council.**
- 3. That the Andover Town Centre Masterplan be used to inform policies for the emerging Local Plan.**

### SUMMARY:

- The report outlines the process undertaken in the creation of the Andover Town Centre Masterplan and seeks its approval as a material planning consideration and to use it to inform the emerging Local Plan and future development of land within the Council's ownership.

## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The way we use our town centres has changed considerably in the past decade. With the increased popularity and dominance of online shopping, changing habits of customers, and the unprecedented impact of COVID 19 have meant that our town centres face significant challenges and need to adapt to these circumstances.
- 1.2 It is clear from the community engagement that there is a desire for change. Andover has many positive features which can form the basis of a strong physical, social and economic vision. It is time for the town to consider radical intervention where the current urban infrastructure is no longer fit for purpose. To create a vision and spatial framework for the town the Council commissioned consultants to bring forward a Masterplan for Andover Town Centre.
- 1.3 Following significant public engagement and technical work a Masterplan for Andover Town Centre has been completed and is recommended to Council for approval as a material planning consideration.

## **2 Background**

- 2.1 The Council purchased the Andover Magistrates' Court building plus the 48-space car park on 3 July 2015. As part of the One Public Sector Estate programme, work was undertaken with a number of partners to create a combined use building for public sector bodies. This primarily included combining a number of local doctors' surgeries, HCC Community Link, CAB and potentially some additional facilities. Unfortunately this project did not proceed.
- 2.2 Further work was undertaken to consider the options available to the Council to bring the building back into use or re-develop the site. One of these options was to explore a large scale re-development on the site, potentially to also include The Lights theatre.
- 2.3 The Council launched a market engagement exercise in December 2017 to explore the wider opportunities associated with redevelopment of the Andover Magistrates' Court site and The Lights as a cultural quarter. Initial interest from developers had been promising and the scale of the project grew. A Prior Information Notice (PIN) was published on the OJEU website inviting potential bidders to developer days in early 2018.
- 2.4 A revised PIN, which also included a wider area of land, was uploaded to the OJEU website in January 2018. Two developer days were subsequently held and seventeen companies expressed an interest in the redevelopment potential of the site.
- 2.5 Following the developer days' work on the project continued, part of the work included high level viability work. The high level viability work raised concern that the site was not large enough to deliver all of the required constituent parts.
- 2.6 Councillors had also been increasingly concerned about the growing obsolescence of the Chantry Centre given the changing nature of the High Street up and down the country. Councillors had been seeking for some considerable time to bring pressure to bear on the leaseholder of the centre (Aviva) to do something about this situation.
- 2.7 This led to Aviva in conjunction with another partner submitting an investment proposition to the Council. This investment proposition was considered at the time but was not something that the Head of Finance could recommend as a way forward.
- 2.8 The Council instead approved a budget to undertake due diligence on a potential purchase of the leasehold interest of the centre. Following the completion of that due diligence, and with the necessary Council approval in place, the Council gained full control of the Chantry Shopping centre on the 29th March 2019. This was followed later in April by the Council purchasing some additional units in the Upper High Street. These purchases give the Council control of a significant town centre site.

- 2.9 It is important to note that the Council did not resolve to purchase the leasehold interest in Chantry Centre to own and operate it as a shopping centre in its current form.
- 2.10 Having gained control of the site, the Council is now in a position to facilitate regeneration of Andover Town Centre, including the facilities envisaged in what was the Cultural Quarter. Any such proposals could include redevelopment to reflect a more relevant mix of uses such as retail, leisure, commercial and residential uses together with improvements to the public realm.
- 2.11 Immediately following the purchase of the leasehold interest of the Chantry Centre the Council invited tenders from contractors for the production of a masterplan for Andover Town Centre.
- 2.12 In July 2019 the Council appointed Hemingway Design and NEW Masterplanning to prepare a masterplan for Andover Town Centre. The Executive Summary at Annex 1 to the report, Masterplan at Annex 2 to the report and Andover Profile at Annex 3 to the report.

### **3 Corporate Objectives and Priorities**

- 3.1 Andover Vision 2017 – 2037 identifies 5 key themes one of which is being part of a thriving town centre. The Vision recognised that to do this it needs to be creative in developing the future retail, leisure and residential offer for the town centre. Improve the appearance and environment and strengthen and grow the evening and night time economy.
- 3.2 Growing Our Potential – the Corporate Plan 2019 -2023 identifies town centres as a strategic priority. It recognises the need to change the face of the High Street. Future-proofing our town centres to be accessible places where people live, shop, work and spend their leisure time. Enhancing public realm and improving the appearance and environments of our town centres will also require investment over time.

### **4 Consultations/Communications**

- 4.1 Significant public and stakeholder consultation has taken place in conjunction with the Andover Vision, this project flows from that consultation and the identified aspirations of the community.
- 4.2 Hemingway Design and NEW masterplanning have been working with the Council to prepare a Vision and Spatial framework for Andover town centre. Since July 2019, meetings and workshops have been held with a range of businesses, residents' groups, students and other stakeholders. The first public survey received nearly 3,000 responses and events were held at Andover Carnival and the Council-run Four Fun Fridays.

- 4.3 An exhibition was held from 11-15 December 2019 at 4 Bridge Street, Andover where the first findings on the key issues facing Andover town centre were presented and the new possible approach to revitalising the town centre were outlined, and it was also available online. Here the public were asked to fill out feedback sheets, which have been inputted to the online questionnaire, or go online to share their thoughts and ideas. When the questionnaire had closed on the 17 December over 534 had participated.
- 4.4 It is clear that respondents to the first round of consultation feel that Andover town centre, with its rich history and proximity to the River Anton is feeling unloved. It is very positive that the overwhelming majority of residents support change in the town centre. Out of the 2587 respondents, only 11 people wanted the town to stay as it is.
- 4.5 Most local residents visit Andover on a very regular basis and almost 60% visit the town centre once or more a week. This is a positive sign for the town. Not surprisingly, the daytime is the most common time for respondents to visit the town as this is when most shops are open. However it is positive that over a quarter of respondents visit the town centre at 'lots of different times'.
- 4.6 Shopping is the primary reason for visits to the town centre, with 75% of respondents stating that their most recent visits to the town centre were for this reason. It is however very positive to see the wide range of activities for which people visit Andover town centre. 58% percent of respondents recently visited the town centre to eat, drink & socialise. 19% of respondents recently travelled to the town centre for work. 31% of respondents have recently visited the town centre for a cultural, sports or leisure activity.
- 4.7 Although the majority of respondents travel to Andover town centre by car, a large percentage of residents walk to the town centre. The relatively low use of public transport reflects a number of issues, including the ease of access by car and availability of car parking. The closer people live to the town centre, the more likely they are to walk rather than drive. 44% of respondents living within SP10 (approx. 2km of the town centre) walk which is very positive and suggest significant potential for increasing sustainable travel modes as the town's population grows.
- 4.8 There was a mixed response to the provision of town centre housing which needs to be understood in more detail. Although half the people who responded said that they didn't want to see more homes in the town centre, this may reflect a concern to avoid a loss of shops, offices and commercial uses rather than an objection to housing. People's attitudes to housing will therefore be tested in more detail as the study progresses. It is interesting to note that over 60% of younger people (U25) said there was a need for more housing in the town centre, with their priority being the provision of 1 and 2 bedroom apartments.
- 4.9 Two broad issues were highlighted in the survey, increasing the number of shops and restaurants, and improving the quality of the public realm. Improving the quality of the public spaces is particularly important for those residents who visit the town centre once a week or more.

- 4.10 An increased number of shops and restaurants proved most popular with respondents, with an independent offer being slightly more desirable than big chains/multiples. Respondents also felt the town centre needed more green and public spaces for leisure, play, events and cultural uses. Almost 40% of respondents feel that being able to access the river (Anton) for recreational uses would be beneficial for the town.
- 4.11 Very few respondents felt there was a need for more parking in the town centre.
- 4.12 Over 500 responses were received in response to the key findings of the masterplanners, and there was strong support for all the key themes and all the key projects.
- 4.13 Other notable messages included:
- Noticeably high levels of support across all age groups for a 'Social & Inclusive' town which is an important message for the town.
  - Particularly high levels of support for redevelopment of the Chantry Centre, with 64% of respondents giving it the highest possible priority.
  - Within the Chantry Centre, the most popular proposals were providing opportunities for independent traders, pop-up shops and space for events and markets.
  - Within the historic core, there is strong support for improving the lanes and finding a civic or community role for the Guildhall.
  - The most popular 'greening' project is to open up the River Anton, with support for the cafés and restaurants alongside areas for play and for ecology.
  - The proposed 'Anton-Vigo Green Link' and new public space in the 'Well-being Quarter' were popular.
  - There is good support for measures to transform the ring roads, especially reducing the scale of the western gyratory.

## **5 Planning Policy Context**

- 5.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) highlights the need to support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities. This should be reflected in taking a positive approach to their management, growth and adaptation; promoting their long term vitality and viability; and recognising need for diversification whilst accounting for their distinctive characters. The need to identify suitable sites in town centres to meet the scale and type of development needed in the future is highlighted. The NPPF also recognises the role of residential development in ensuring the vitality of centres.

- 5.2 Planning Practice Guidance (which supports the NPPF) flags the role of local planning authorities in promoting a positive vision for town centres, including bringing stakeholders together. There is a need to account for structural changes in the economy, including shopping patterns, and how these impact specific centres. Opportunities to support town centres through complementary uses are identified, including recognition of the role of temporary activities, such as 'pop ups'. Additionally, evening and night time activities are noted as potentially increasing economic activity within town centres if planning appropriately.
- 5.3 The adopted Local Plan (2016) includes three policies directly related to the town centre, these comprise:
- Policy LE11: Main Town Centre Uses – reflecting national policy this directs main town centre uses, such as large scale retail, office and entertainment uses, to the town centres. The extent of Andover town centre is defined and mapped to support the implementation of this policy.
  - Policy LE13: Ground Floor Uses in Andover – this establishes the uses that would be acceptable in principle in certain parts of the town centre (primary and secondary shopping frontages), focusing on Use Classes A1 to A5 (shops, financial and professional services, restaurants and cafes, drinking establishments, and hot food takeaways).
  - Policy LE14: Mixed Development at George Yard / Black Swan Yard – allocates land at Eastern Avenue for a combination of retail, office, housing, leisure and parking uses.
- 5.4 The Council is in the early stages of preparing the next Local Plan, with a refined issues and options consultation having been recently completed. This reflected on the changes in the way town centres are being used and the need for planning policies to be reviewed to account for this, including the potential for a wider range of uses in the centres. The Masterplan will have a role in in informing the direction of future policy.

## **6 Options**

- 6.1 The principal consideration for the Council at this stage is whether or not to adopt the Masterplan as a material planning consideration. To inform that decision the following section of the report appraised the key issues which have been considered. The supporting documents to the Masterplan summarises all the points raised.

## **7 Option Appraisal**

- 7.1 The creation of a Masterplan is a standard planning tool to help secure redevelopment of an area. By creating a Masterplan it establishes a framework for future proposals coupled with articulating clearly an ambition for development. Producing a document that achieves this sits squarely with the aspirations contained within the Corporate Plan and the Andover Vision documents. The approval of this Masterplan is seen as a way to attract investment into the area and act as a catalyst for its redevelopment.

- 7.2 In not having a Masterplan in place it would hinder the ability to secure a well-planned co-ordinated redevelopment. It would restrict the opportunities for seeking external funding because of the lack of a clear vision and delivery vehicle for the area. As part of this exercise officers have visited comparable towns who have Masterplans in place. Having an approved Masterplan helped those authorities secure investment from other Government agencies as well as making it clear to the commercial sector the requirements of any future development.
- 7.3 The connection between the Masterplan and the forthcoming local plan is key. By reflecting the principles within the local plan it provides greater weight as part of determining future planning applications; it provides a more robust position to deliver the aspirations of the Masterplan; and it reinforces the Council's commitment to bringing forward the scheme. The Council are in the process of drafting the next local plan and have consulted upon the refined Issues and Options document over the summer. This document recognises the role that the town centre Masterplan will play and that this will be complemented by specific policies within the local plan. The Masterplan also has wider strategic planning benefits in helping to meet the Borough's future residential and employment requirement which can be reflected in the local plan. The combination of both the local plan and Masterplan provide a strong basis to guide development through the planning process.
- 7.4 Given the time span which the Masterplan covers there may be other external factors which will need to consider when moving forward with the redevelopment (e.g. quantity of public car parking). To future proof the Masterplan has meant that flexibility and resilience has needed to be built into the proposals. This allows for a degree of adaption to the Masterplan if justified.
- 7.5 To achieve the range of uses and benefits to meet the needs of a growing town at the right time will require careful planning and phasing. Inevitably in achieving the vision for the site it needs to be balanced with what uses can be best achieved as well as the viability of the scheme. In considering what uses could be delivered as part of the Masterplan the Council has had the benefit of high level commercial advice. This has helped shape the proposed uses and reinforces that the Masterplan is both aspirational and deliverable.
- 7.6 The nature of the Masterplan is to provide the spatial principles to guide future development in terms of locations, design and uses. There will still be the need for more evidence and technical studies to help inform the development as it comes through the planning application(s) process. The proposals have been created in a way that is mindful of adjoining land uses. However as this is a high level Masterplan it would be a matter for the planning application process to consider any material issues relating to neighbouring land uses and impacts.
- 7.7 Successful delivery of the Masterplan will be at risk from a number of factors some of which will be beyond the scope of the Council to control. Other areas involve land under the ownership of other landowners. Discussions with landowners have been positive and they have expressed enthusiasm about the masterplan. It will be necessary to continue the discussions as the project moves into the delivery phase.

- 7.8 The implementation of the public realm and highway improvements outlined in the Masterplan will require the securing of funding from a variety of sources. This includes the use of Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 obligations. The Planning White Paper (August 2020) proposes an alternative to the current practice with the introduction of an 'Infrastructure Levy'. It is too premature to know whether this funding mechanism will be introduced, how it will be implemented and if this will have an impact on delivery. It will be necessary to keep this under review.
- 7.9 Officers will also seek external funding wherever possible (e.g. from the Local Enterprise Partnership) to help bring forward the public realm and environmental improvements. This would be very similar to Town Mills as the first phase of public realm improvements. The early enhancements can act as a catalyst for attracting third party investment for the later elements of the proposal. The delivery of the proposals will be dependent on the Council working with the commercial sector and other third parties.
- 7.10 In learning from other towns a key to their successful regeneration was the creation and reinforcing of the connections and relationships between areas. To help illustrate this layouts and fly throughs of how the areas could look have been included. The redevelopment of the Town Centre should not be seen as competing with the existing historic core or other areas of the town of Andover but as complementing what is already on offer. The Masterplan envisages a range of uses and environmental enhancements that will encourage people to visit and stay in the town. In this way it will help support the whole of the town centre particularly local businesses.
- 7.11 In considering what uses could be delivered it is necessary to evaluate future demand and consider how this could best meet the needs of our residents. However any scheme that comes forward will need to be financially viable and this will almost certainly shape what uses actually come forward. Any scheme will comprise a mix of uses including a significant amount of residential development.
- 7.12 The Masterplan shows significant areas of redevelopment and this will need to be carefully phased to protect local businesses and the town centre as a destination for the community. There are a variety of ways the town could be redeveloped and specialist town centre regeneration experts will advise how this can best be achieved.
- 7.13 Provision of car parking is a significant consideration and the masterplan shows a number of the parking areas proposed to be developed. There is significant spare car parking capacity to cope with the need for car parking in the town, however, should it be considered that additional replacement parking is required then the council could consider decking one or more of the surface parking areas to ensure there is adequate parking to meet the needs of those using the town centre.
- 7.14 The approval of the content of the Masterplan represents an opportunity to clearly set out the aspiration for a mixed use scheme and deliver on the aspiration of Andover residents and businesses following comprehensive public engagement.



## **8 Risk Management**

- 8.1 An evaluation of the risks indicate that the existing controls in place mean that no significant risks have been identified in relation to the recommendations contained within this report. As the project moves towards the delivery of each phase there will be specific risks that the Council will need to consider and mitigate. At this time it is too premature to undertake this level of risk evaluation.

## **9 Resource Implications**

- 9.1 There are no specific resource implications associated with the recommendations contained in the report. Notwithstanding this there will be resource implications, both staff and financial, for the delivery stage of the project. The Council meeting of 26 June 2019 agreed a budget for both the Andover and Romsey Masterplans'. This was funded from the New Homes Bonus. The completion of this stage of the project has been undertaken within budget. The recommendations within the report do not cause an additional resource pressure that cannot be absorbed through the existing budget or through the existing local plan budget. As the project progresses to delivery any resource implications, both staff and financial, will need to be considered at that time.

## **10 Legal Implications**

- 10.1 The Masterplan is proposed to be a material planning consideration as such the document will have material weight in the planning process and provides a springboard for work to commence on seeking funding to facilitate the proposed the development and infrastructure provision. It also helps support the drafting of the next local plan.

## **11 Equality Issues**

- 11.1 The Masterplan has been produced having engaged with a wide range of the community and the proposals informed by the outcome of those conversations. The EQIA has not identified any potential for discrimination or adverse impact and all opportunities to promote equality have been taken.

## **12 Other Issues**

- 12.1 Sustainability and Addressing a Changing Climate.
- 12.2 Running through the Masterplan are the principles of sustainable development and resilience to the future effects of climate change. The development represents a real opportunity to create a sustainable buildings particular in relation to building and land under the control of the council.
- 12.3 Property Issues
- 12.4 The Council has significant property holdings in the town centre including the Chantry Centre, the Former Magistrates Court and The Lights. The proposals in the Masterplan will significantly influence any potential development or redevelopment opportunities that the Council may wish to pursue in the future.

## 12.5 Wards/Communities Affected

12.6 The town Centre is in the St. Marys ward however the proposals would benefit all Andover residents and those of surrounding areas who choose to visit the town.

## 13 Conclusion and reasons for recommendation

13.1 The proposals drafted were influenced by the views of our communities; technical evidence and specialist advice; and understanding best practice from other comparable town centres that have successfully undergone a process of change.

13.2 The approval of the Andover Town Centre Masterplan would enable the Council to deliver on the aspirations of both the Corporate Plan and the Andover Vision. The Masterplan puts in place the framework for bringing forward development and environmental improvements that help support the future of the town centre.

### Background Papers (Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D)

Andover Vision 2017 – 2037

Test Valley Revised Local Plan (2016)

Test Valley Refined Issues and Options (2020)

### Confidentiality

It is considered that this report does not contain exempt information within the meaning of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and can be made public.

No of Annexes:

3

File Ref:

N/A

Portfolio: Leader (Councillor P North)

Officer:

Paul Jackson

Ext:

8186

Report to:

Council

Date:

28 September 2020