

Briefing Note

CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
COUNCIL

Title: City Centre Commission Proposals

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Intended Audience:

Internal

Partner organisation

Public

Confidential

Purpose or recommendation

To set out the proposals for the City Centre Commission.

Overview

Following the release of the Grimsey Report 2 on the future of the British High Street, and the scrutiny report reviewing the repurposing of the city centre in June 2018, the council committed to establishing a City Centre Commission. This briefing note sets out the steps which have been undertaken, so far.

Background and context

Since the commitment to set up the City Centre Commission was announced in June 2018, the city has progressed with:

- Partnering with eBay in the UK's first 'Retail Revival' scheme, to support independent businesses in e-commerce.
- Welcomed Bill Grimsey, author of the influential report on the future of the High Street to the city for an initial tour and discussion on the city's plans.
- This was followed up by an Inaugural workshop, held 22nd January 2019, that was facilitated by Bill Grimsey and the team who prepared the Grimsey Review 2 paper.
- Attended the Key Cities Conference held on 28th January 2019, about the Future of High Streets, which included the City of Wolverhampton as a case study.
<https://www.keycities.co.uk/sites/default/files/news/attachments/future-towns-cities-research-report.pdf>
- Progressing with the delivery of key city centre regeneration schemes.
- Submitted key funding bids such as a £6.2m bid to the Cultural Development Fund to support the repurposing the city centre with events, arts and culture.

There are also further opportunities to secure funding to support the repurposing of our city centre. In the October 2018 budget the Government announced a £675m 'Future High Streets Programme'. The initiative will invest in improvements to town centre infrastructure, including increasing access to high streets, reducing congestion, supporting redevelopment around high streets and enabling housing and new workspaces to be created.

Whilst the programme will have an overall budget of £675 million, MHCLG indicatively expects the fund to contribute up to £25 million to projects per local area. Further information on the fund were released on 31st January 2019, and a call has been made for expressions of interest to be submitted by 22nd March 2019.

Support for the establishment of the City Centre Commission and an application to the Future High Street Programme has been with the West Midlands Growth Company (WMGC). The WMGC have been commissioned by the council to undertake actions that will secure new or enhance economic growth opportunities for the city.

Arising from the workshop and the Key Cities conference a number of thought-provoking discussions which the council and key stakeholders should consider, as they look to develop a Commission for the city.

Focus of the Commission

The purpose of the Commission is to review the city's current and planned response to the changing nature of the High Street and propose a direction for the future role of the city centre in regard to retail, commercial, leisure and community activity. The Commission is also to consider the future role of the city centre as a civic and cultural meeting place, as well as the role of city living. The Commission will review evidence from both the public and private sector to assess current and proposed policy solutions and suggest other areas of work for the city to develop in ensuring an effective repurposing of our city centre.

Commission Planning Approach

The aim of the one day workshop was to bring key stakeholders together for a first meeting to look at the process of developing a City Centre Commission for Wolverhampton. This would help define the terms of reference for a Commission, explore what makes winning teams work, establish a set of shared objectives and outputs and a plan of action. It concluded with a contract of business with specific responsibilities assigned to participants

In his introduction Bill and his team set out very clearly the challenges and opportunities city centres are facing. The use of technology being a key influencer in the way city centres are changing and how they will be used in the future.

It was recognised that Wolverhampton has already made significant progress through its regeneration and partnership activity. The eBay programme, the new Interchange, the proposed 5G testbed, city living, the learning quarter and the cultural offer, were sighted as areas which Wolverhampton has undertaken to repurpose its centre.

Bill also went on to compliment the city for taking the steps it had taken, to look at the Commission model, commenting that Wolverhampton was ahead of many other city centres.

The day drew out many ideas and discussions on how the city should approach the Commission, the following summaries the key points:-

Key messages about the Objectives of the Commission

- All current and future plans should be **aligned to an overall plan** that are developed around a community hub concept incorporating health, housing, arts, education, entertainment, leisure, business/office space as well as unique and attractive retail proposition.
- The Wolverhampton City Centre Commission (WCCC) will be **the catalyst** to win the hearts and minds of people whilst building consensus across communities to help bring about a healthier and more prosperous city. The WCCC will tap into all parts of the Local Authority and other stakeholder organisations/institutions in order to get total alignment and leverage all available benefits.
- The WCCC will develop **a vision and a 20-year plan** that has something for everyone, which is as diverse as Wolverhampton's local communities, has technology at the heart of it, extends beyond the boundaries of the City Centre and embraces Wolverhampton's music venue heritage, the football team and the university, recognising the learning aspiration of the City.
- Industry is important particularly aerospace and manufacturing. The vision needs to build on the '**Togetherness' brand**, the industrial heritage and the future industrial opportunities whilst tapping into a sense of pride and cohesiveness.

Those who attended the workshop started to share what they considered could be Wolverhampton's vision or mission statement, these included

- ❖ **Together:** capturing a sense of a tight-knit, friendly community, working and living together
- ❖ **Learning city:** (unlocking potential) tackling the skills agenda
- ❖ **Digital** is an essential part of strategy but is it something different
- ❖ **Diverse** resilient community

Next Steps

Building on the momentum of the workshop and the Key Cities Conference, officers are now looking to take forward the following actions

- Prepare the expression of interest for the Future High Street programme
- Establish the commission with the focus on the individual who should hold the position of Chair.