

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL	Cabinet 10 April 2019
--	--

Report title	Westside Link Public Realm Proposals – Outcome of Consultation for Phases 1 and 2 and Potential Delivery Programme for Phase 1	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Steve Evans, City Environment Councillor John Reynolds, City Economy	
Key decision	Yes	
In forward plan	Yes	
Wards affected	St Peter's	
Accountable Director	Ross Cook, Service Director of City Environment	
Originating service	City Development	
Accountable employee	Ruth Taylor Tel Email	Senior Regeneration Officer 01902 555635 ruth.taylor@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	City Environment Leadership Team Regeneration Leadership Team	11 March 2019 02 April 2019

Recommendations for decision:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve development phase funding as outlined in section 6 of the report for all phases of the Westside Link Project, to construction design stage and Early Contractor Involvement.
2. Approve submission of a Full Business Case for Phase 1 to the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership, West Midlands Combined Authority and/or Central Government for potential funding opportunities.

Recommendation for noting:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Note the outcome of the public and stakeholder consultation and responses provided to address the issues raised.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The report outlines the outcome of the public and stakeholder consultation process carried out on phases 1 and 2 of the Westside Link proposal, which took place in November and December 2018.
- 1.2 It also sets out the recommended delivery phasing of the project for Cabinet approval.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Westside Link project is a transformational public realm scheme designed to repurpose Wolverhampton City Centre by creating a high quality pedestrian environment, improved pedestrian and cycling connectivity within the city core and creation of new public spaces capable of hosting large scale events and activities in support of the “Events City” concept. The strategic objective of the project is to reinvigorate and drive economic investment into the City Centre by increasing footfall and visitor spend.
- 2.2 On a recent visit to the city national retail guru Bill Grimsey observed the vulnerability of the City Centre to the closure of national high street retailers and banks. He noted that the trading performance of the two main indoor malls is weak, with the Mander Centre yet to completely fill vacant units despite its relatively recent major refurbishment. The potential loss of Beatties department store, and increasing levels of voids in the area around Victoria Street, could leave the City Centre facing a further downward spiral of declining footfall and lack of confidence to invest, unless there is action to aid it’s recovery. The Westside Link project is rooted in a need for the Council to intervene to ensure the City has a viable centre for the future, offering a diverse opportunity for activities and events to create the attraction to increase footfall and visitor spend.
- 2.3 As part of the formulation of the business case for the development of the Westside Link project, an economic appraisal was commissioned from leading economic advisors Regeneris, who recognised that without a thriving City Centre, these aspiration and advantages will be challenged and undermined. Wolverhampton City Centre has been in a state of steady decline for a number of years, and there are challenges preventing the City from reaching its aspirations that the Westside Link Scheme can directly help address. They identify that there is a strong and accepted market failure case for investing in the public realm. The private sector has little incentive to invest in the public realm, as there can be no direct financial return. Intervention by the public sector is therefore required in order to ensure an effective supply of good quality public space to facilitate the growth of diverse sectors of activity within the City Centre that will in turn directly improve its economic positioning.
- 2.4 A transformational City Centre focused investment scheme in the public realm, such as the Westside Link, is much needed. It will play an important role in tying the city’s planned regeneration investments together. It will improve the image and perception of the City Centre, increase the number of visitors, encourage private sector investment,

and ultimately contribute towards delivering economic regeneration and a revival of the City Centre.

- 2.5 Following the completion of the concept plans for the Westside Link project and member endorsement to consult in September, engagement with the public, businesses and stakeholders on the project began in October 2018. During this period of time extensive engagement has been undertaken with a variety of specific interest groups including taxis, disabled groups, Wolverhampton BID, cycle forum, Transport for the West Midlands, Bus operators, Wolverhampton Youth Council, all affected businesses and St Peters Church.
- 2.6 Whilst the public consultation has now concluded ongoing engagement with key stakeholders continues as the plans for the development evolve.

3.0 Outcome of the Consultation on phases 1 and 2

Businesses and stakeholders

- 3.1 The public, businesses and stakeholders were consulted over a period of 8 weeks during October and November 2018.
- 3.2 The majority of the City's stakeholders are very much in support of the project and understand the wider economic benefits which will transpire. Letters of support have been received from major landlords and investors Hortons Estates, Benson Elliott and Urban and Civic who have indicated that the delivery of the Westside Link proposals will have a direct and significant impact on their future economic activity within the City centre. Other major partners including Wolverhampton BID and the Grand Theatre have also shown commitment to endorse and champion the project. Through the Connected Places Stakeholder Group both the University of Wolverhampton and Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club have added their strong support for the proposals.
- 3.3 All businesses directly affected by the proposals have been contacted on an individual basis. Through these one-to-one meetings, most businesses offered their support for the proposals subject to adequate access arrangements being retained. Most understood that 'do nothing' was not an option in an increasingly challenging retail environment and saw significant benefits in an enhanced events programme in the City Centre. A small number of independent businesses added that they would be considering expansion of their business or premises should the proposals go ahead.
- 3.4 Responses were received through face to face engagement and through the receipt of feedback forms distributed to all businesses in the affected area.
- 3.5 By the completion of the consultation period 230 written responses were received from the public with 51% indicating that they were not in favour of the scheme and 49% in favour. In addition, two petitions were received. One from the congregation of St Peters Church and one led by a trader in Lichfield Street. The objections raised focussed on two main issues and were directly related to the delivery of phase 2 (Queen Square / Lichfield

Street). There were no direct objections raised to the removal of buses from Victoria Street (Phase 1).

Objection	Proposed Response
Loss of bus access and stops along Lichfield Street, Darlington Street and Queen Square would lead to a reduction in accessibility into the city centre, especially for the less mobile	The project team have modelled each individual affected bus route to understand the alterations required to the route, additional travel times and the relocation of bus stops. In summary the alternative bus stops will add an additional 2 minutes onto bus journey times and result in an additional maximum 3 minute walk for an average able bodied passenger. The project team are currently working closely with Transport for West Midlands and National Express to alleviate any issues around bus rerouting.
Loss of disabled parking	Any loss of disabled parking will be minimised with most affected bays being reprovided within the city centre close to current and proposed amenities and destinations.

- 3.6 Of those who welcomed the scheme most were positive about the opportunities that the creation of new events spaces and improved public realm will bring to the City Centre, and many people recognised that greater footfall in the city would have a positive effect on improving the economic positioning of the city centre.

Youth Council

- 3.7 During the consultation with the public, the project team were very conscious that despite every effort to engage with all sectors of the community through a variety of means including social media, the majority of the respondents were older members of the community who had specific concerns with accessibility. As a consequence, some targeted consultation was undertaken with groups representing the young people within the City during national "Take over day" on 23 November 2018. At the event the Youth Council and associated youth organisations received a presentation on the Westside Link scheme and at the conclusion of a debate on the project were asked to comment on whether they supported the project. There was overwhelming support (90%) for the project with most of the young people considering that the project will bring in more people, improve the City Centre as a place for activity, leisure and entertainment and that the consequence would be that more businesses would locate in the City Centre due to increased footfall. Most of the young people said that they currently go outside the City Centre for leisure and entertainment activities, however 90% of them said that if Westside Link was to go ahead and more events took place in the improved squares and spaces they would visit the City Centre more often.

Express and Star poll

- 3.8 In addition to this consultation process, the Express and Star held an independent survey of its readers to assess support or otherwise for the proposals. At its conclusion, the newspaper reported that 54% were in favour of the scheme. This is despite the poll being embedded within the context of a negative piece focussing on the concerns of one business owner.

Transport for West Midlands and National Express

- 3.9 Both Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) and National Express (NX) were consulted as part of the original work for the Connected Places Strategy. Feedback on the Strategy from both parties during this time was very encouraging and they recognised that in order to support the regeneration and healthy living agendas, the projects initially identified within the Strategy Delivery Plan would need to be delivered. Initial concept ideas around removing traffic from the core area of the City to improve the pedestrian experience and connectivity was agreed as a priority to achieve the outcomes of the strategy.
- 3.10 TfWM were engaged from the onset as the concept plans for Westside Link were developed and were seen as the “broker” for conversations with all of the bus operators in the city. A series of meetings were undertaken with TfWM between February and December of last year, during which time detailed modelling of all of the affected routes were discussed, options evaluated and opportunities presented for them to comment. Meetings were then held with NX, other bus operators in the City and TfWM to discuss individual routings and necessary enabling works.
- 3.11 Despite detailed mitigation discussions, NX remain concerned about the effect on timetabling and the distance passengers would have to walk to relocated bus stops as a result of the development of the Queen Square phase. In particular, they were concerned about the effect that this may have on patronage and marginally viable routes. Both NX and TfWM acknowledged, however, that the Victoria Street phase had significantly less effect on overall bus services and patronage, and that changes to bus routing could be accommodated. The proposed effect on bus routes and stops for the Victoria Street phase is shown in Appendix 2.

St Peters Church

- 3.12 As part of the consultation on the Westside Link proposals, engagement with the Reverend, volunteers and congregation of St Peter’s Church has been extensive. A series of meetings between September 2018 and January 2019 has allowed the project team to understand the detail of the objections voiced by the ‘Church’ in respect of the scheme.
- 3.13 As part of the consultation responses 28 letters of objection were received from the congregation as well as a 147 name petition. The objections raised only related to the delivery of the phase 2 element of the scheme. The objections and proposed responses are summarised below;

Objection	Proposed response
<p>Removal of the ability for volunteers to park within the church gates which has an access off Lich Gates during the week. Six of these volunteers are identified as having a Blue Badge.</p>	<p>6 new disabled spaces have been included in the scheme along Wulfruna Street providing level access along St Peters Close and Lichfield Street into Lich Gates.</p> <p>All disabled parking bays will be retained in Cheapside, allowing disabled volunteers and parishioners level access to St Peters House and the church via Exchange Street and Lich Gates.</p> <p>Some volunteers currently park within the church gates. Consideration is being given to the possibility of permit parking within nearby Council car parks to help reprovide this facility.</p>
<p>Inability of maintenance/ delivery vehicles to access the church during the day</p>	<p>All maintenance and delivery vehicles will be afforded access into Lichfield Street and Lich Gates during an approved service access period in the morning and early evening as currently exists in Dudley Street. Emergency repairs will be managed and accommodated as necessary.</p>
<p>Inability of volunteers to afford to pay for parking in the nearby city centre car parks</p>	<p>The church already has some permit parking in the Civic Centre car parks and the possibility to increase this number is currently being considered.</p>
<p>Access to the church for disabled parishioners and visitors for events and services with the removal of the 4 disabled bays in Lich Gates.</p>	<p>As above.</p>
<p>Access to Lich Gates for funeral and wedding cars.</p>	<p>Access for formal funeral and wedding vehicles will be managed by prior arrangement. There is only likely to amount to less than 10 events per year.</p>

3.14 The Council's responses to the issues raised by the Church have been articulated back to the congregation, however there still remains a concern that the distance from the disabled bays to the church door is too far for their disabled volunteers and parishioners to travel.

4.0 Evaluation of alternative options

- 4.1 The consultation on the project involved only the Victoria Street phase (Phase 1 -Victoria Street, Salop Street, School Street, and Skinner Street) and Queens Square phase (Phase 2 -Lichfield Street and Queen Square) of the project. Following assessment of the responses it was clear that the Victoria Street phase was deliverable in its entirety without significant issues to resolve in terms of bus relocation, access, and servicing.
- 4.2 The Queens Square Phase however, as evidenced above, does pose issues that have not yet been resolved. Further work is required to produce options which will help mitigate against negative effects identified.
- 4.3 At this stage phase 3, Civic Halls has not been consulted on.
- 4.4 The options put forward are;

Option 1	Issues / compromises
Retention of a one way, west bound bus lane along Lichfield Street and Queen Square. This option would only include the minimum enabling works required in order to realign the highway. This is the preferred approach put forward by TfWM and NX	<p>By retaining a westbound bus only lane, the volume and frequency of traffic will be significantly reduced and bus stops and routes will remain unchanged in one direction. The benefits anticipated from the creation of a much improved pedestrian only events space of considerable scale however, will be significantly diminished. The high quality new features and materials which form part of the full scheme will not be implemented due to value for money considerations and requirements around retaining a carriageway. There are concerns about pedestrian safety with this option and objectives around hostile vehicle mitigation cannot be achieved should traffic be retained through the square.</p> <p>It would need to be determined if an appropriate regulatory mechanism for effectively enforcing the necessary restrictions could be implemented.</p>
Option 2	
Implementation of the full scheme as proposed in the consultation. Creating a fully pedestrianised Lichfield Street (West) and Queen Square and retention of one way	This option will provide a significantly improved and extended civic square with new water feature and events spaces. Pedestrian safety will be improved through a series of hostile vehicle mitigation

<p>traffic, westbound in Darlington Street.</p>	<p>interventions. This option will assist in the development of the Events City concept which will ultimately increase visitor numbers and support the growth of the city's visitor economy. Compromises however need to be made in respect of bus stop relocations and rerouting resulting in slightly longer journey times and walking distances to destinations. These issues can be mitigated against as far as possible through detailed careful design and location of street furniture and layout. Access to St Peters Church will be restricted to official vehicles only.</p> <p>It would need to be determined if an appropriate regulatory mechanism for effectively enforcing the necessary restrictions could be implemented.</p>
<p>Option 3</p>	
<p>Do nothing</p>	<p>As stated above, do nothing is not an option. It is widely acknowledged by key stakeholders, investors, local businesses and the public that the city needs to refocus and repurpose itself to uses and activities that are not reliant on retail. The events city concept is at the heart of the rationale for the implementation of the project.</p>

5.0 Reasons for decision

5.1 All of the options relating to the two phases have been evaluated by the project team and the following recommendations have been made;

- Victoria Street, phase 1 (including Salop Street, School Street and Skinner Street) – This phase has now been designed up to Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) stage 3 detailed design and is ready to move into the construction design stage and early contractor involvement immediately after Cabinet, subject to approval and securing funding. Construction could start on site for this phase in September 2019 should external capital funding be secured. This phase has an 18 month build programme. Urban and Civic, developers of Westside, have stated that early delivery of this phase will have significant impact on the success of the development and is paramount to the integration of Westside into the city centre core.

- Queen Square, phase 2 – The options identified in paragraph 4.3 above have been fully evaluated and it is recommended that further work is needed to design option 1 (above) and understand the implications to the wider network and budgetary requirements. It is recommended that, until this option has been fully evaluated and brought back to members for approval, no further work is undertaken on developing phase 2 through the next design stages. It is also proposed that the project is brought before a joint Scrutiny Panel in June 2019.

5.2 Phase 3, which incorporates North Street, Red Lion Street and adjoining streets around the Civic Halls, was initially intended to be brought forward at a later date and was not part of the initial round of consultation completed recently and is currently at the concept design stage. However, to ensure alignment of works with the other capital works projects, phase 3 is being brought forward to ensure the programme of works for both this scheme and the Civic Halls refurbishment programme can be delivered through a coordinated approach. The programme for the Civic Halls refurbishment project has now been established and there is a clearer understanding of the timeline required for the design and delivery of the Westside Link phase 3 scheme. Progressing the stage 3 design will be a priority over the next three months in order to establish the delivery programme and costs.

5.3 This phase will create a much improved customer experience around the Halls and will provide a safer, usable events area in front of both entrances. The inclusion of anti-terrorism measures around the halls including pedestrian protection is of course an important aspect. Much work has yet to be undertaken to understand the operational requirements of the Halls and the surrounding occupiers before detailed design can be completed, however, given the timeline for the opening of the venue it is important that this work is carried out by the design team as soon as possible in order to achieve a coordinated delivery timeline. It is therefore recommended that the phase 3 design stage of the scheme is undertaken at the same time as the construction design and delivery of the Victoria Street phase.

6.0 Financial implications

6.1 To date a budget of £421,000 has funded the design stages 1 to 3 for Phase 1 - Victoria Street and Phase 2 - Queen Square. This budget was resourced from the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (BCLEP) Access to Growth Fund totalling £205,000 and supplemented by an allocation of £116,000 from the Highways Management Reserve and £100,000 from the Regeneration Reserve. This budget will be fully spent by 1 April 2019 therefore to continue to progress further funding is required until capital budgets can be approved.

6.2 Applications for grant funding are currently being sought for the delivery of Phase 1 - Victoria Street with a full business case is due to be submitted to the BCLEP in the next month. The projected costs for the remaining design, development and delivery of this phase are estimated to be £7 million, which includes professional fees for stages 4 to 7.

The application will cover the full anticipated cost of the scheme; therefore, costs incurred in 2019-2020 for this phase could be capitalised against the grant, subject to a successful application.

- 6.3 An application for the Governments Future High Streets fund has also been submitted. The intention is that this funding will support early project initiation phases of a range of schemes and the wider capital bid may provide a financial contribution to the Westside link project, however at this stage this cannot be confirmed.
- 6.4 In the meantime, the Council will need to underwrite the costs in advance of any grant approval to avoid delays in the delivery of the scheme and to ensure continuity for the design team. It is anticipated that costs incurred in 2019-2020 relating to Phase 1 will be £157,000 as detailed in the table below, will be capitalised once grant funding has been awarded.
- 6.5 In addition, the development of the phase 3, requires some up front funding in order to progress the designs to stage 3, so that costs can be established for a further bid for external funding. Advance design on this phase is a priority in order to ensure a coordinated delivery programme for the Westside Link scheme and Civic Halls development project.
- 6.6 Listed below are the currently identified estimated funding requirements for the design and project management fees for 2019-2020. It is anticipated that some of this cost can be capitalised and construction costs will form part of the external funding bids and are therefore not part of this current budget requirement.

Phase	Description of expenditure required	£'000
Phase 1 Victoria Street	Technical design / Project management / Early contractor engagement	157
	Additional surveys	55
Phase 2 Queen Square	Options modelling and project management	40
Phase 3	Stage 3 (detailed design) / Project management	40
Total		292

- 6.7 It is proposed that a total budget of £200,000 is allocated equally from the Highways Management and Regeneration Reserves with an understanding that where costs can be capitalised they will be, thereby reducing the requirement to draw down from the reserve.
- 6.8 This budget will ensure that design, survey and management fees are covered to the end of the stage 4 design and early contractor involvement has been undertaken for phase 1. It will also cover fees for detailed designs and costings for phase 3. In terms of the programme this will cover work up to early July 2019 when it is anticipated that external funding will be secured.

- 6.9 The capital funding proposals for delivery of the various phases of the Westside link project will be subject to further reports.

[HM/01042019/S]

7.0 Legal implications

- 7.1 Any highway improvement project that is subsequently approved for implementation will also require Traffic Regulation Orders. Any Orders for the control of traffic and parking will be the subject to statutory legal procedures and further public consultation.

- 7.2 Authorisation has already been given to the advertising of Traffic Regulation Orders related to the scheme and authority delegated to the Cabinet Member for City Environment to approve the sealing and implementation of the Orders subject to the appropriate approvals being in place.

- 7.3 If any works or services are required, they will need to be procured in accordance with the Council's Constitution and relevant legislation.

[TS/01032019/R]

8.0 Equalities implications

- 8.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment is currently being drawn up and is being informed by the outcome of the consultation exercise. Specific meetings are being held with individual interest groups to ensure that the design and implementation proposals provide appropriate measures to ensure accessibility for all.

9.0 Environmental implications

- 9.1 The project will significantly improve the public realm within the designated streets and will create an upgraded pedestrian and cycling environment. With the reduction and removal of traffic. The project will result in a significant improvement in air quality within the city centre.

10.0 Human resources implications

- 10.1 There are no human resource implications arising from this report.

11.0 Corporate landlord implications

- 11.1 There are no Corporate Landlord implications arising from this report.

12.0 Health and Wellbeing Implications

- 12.1 The Connected Places Strategy, which identified the Westside Link Project as an early project for development, plays an important role in the delivery of the Council's Health and Wellbeing agenda.

12.2 The project will create a vastly improved pedestrian environment designed to encourage a greater uptake of walking and cycling in the city centre. Whilst the removal of vehicles through the city core will also help significantly eliminate emissions.

13.0 Schedule of background papers

13.1 Cabinet (Resources) Panel, 6 November 2018 – [Westside Link Proposal Phases 1 and 2](#)

14.0 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Westside Link Phasing plan

Appendix 2 – Victoria Street phase – bus routing and stop locations