

Report title	City Centre Public Realm Improvements Programme- Phase 2 (Lichfield Street / Queen Square) - Outcome of stakeholder and public engagement		
Decision designation	AMBER		
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Steve Evans City Environment and Climate Change		
Key decision	No		
In forward plan	Yes		
Wards affected	St Peters		
Accountable Director	John Roseblade, Director of Resident Services		
Originating service	Transport		
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Report has been considered by	City Housing and Environment Leadership Team	10 February 2023	
	Strategic Executive Board	24 January 2023	

Recommendations for decision:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve the next steps for the development and delivery of the City Centre Public Realm improvements programme – phase 2 (Lichfield Street / Queen Square) project.
2. Delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for City Environment and Climate Change, in consultation with the Director of Resident Services, to approve the award of the main works contracts for the City Centre Public Realm phase 2 Lichfield Street and Queen Square project as a 2 stage award, stage 1 being Early Contractor Involvement, and stage 2 will be the main works construction at a total estimated contract value within the available project funding limits.

Recommendation for noting:

The Cabinet is asked to:

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

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The report outlines the outcome of the public and stakeholder engagement on the concept design of the next phase of the City Centre Public Realm improvement programme for Lichfield Street and Queen Square, which took place between 8 November and 9 December 2022.
- 1.2 It also sets out the next steps for the design and delivery of the project for Cabinet approval.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The City Centre Public Realm Improvement Programme was derived from the Council's Connected Places Strategy which was approved in 2018. The programme has so far delivered a number of significant public realm interventions including the current transformational phases which are nearing completion in the Victoria Street area and around the Civic Halls. Both of these phases were fully funded by the Future High Street Fund at a total cost of £15 million.
- 2.2 In 2018 the Council commenced consultation on ambitious plans to recast the city centre, to arrest decline and create an environment which encourages activity of all kinds, promoting a healthy and accessible city centre. The Connected Places Strategy became the cornerstone for a comprehensive package of infrastructure investment, with a focus around public realm, placemaking, access and movement.
- 2.3 Before the pandemic, high street vacancy rates were increasing at a steady rate largely due to changes in consumer habits, the rise in online retail, out of town retail and harsh economic positioning of major retailers. However, from the onset of the lockdowns the nation saw a marked decline in city centre activity and vacancy rates soared as footfall and spend declined. Whilst this pattern has improved post pandemic, general recovery has been very slow in all sectors nationally, with vacancy rates on the high street remaining around 14% on average, with some parts of the country suffering significantly higher rates.
- 2.4 In February 2023, whilst footfall figures for the city centre have shown a small increase of 10.9% (compared to 15.6% nationally) overall footfall throughout the city remains around 30% lower than pre pandemic levels.
- 2.5 Studies have shown that cities that have seen an increase in footfall and improved economic positioning, have done so by diversifying their offer away from pure retail to experiential activities through events and attractions and by improving public spaces to create the infrastructure for these activities as well as enhanced walking, cycling and dwell space. Data from Living Streets suggests that improved public realm increased footfall by 20 to 35% resulting in reduced vacancy rates.
- 2.6 It is with this in mind that the next phase of the City Centre Public Realm Improvements Programme will be designed and developed. Linked to a robust and inclusive five year

events programme, the public realm programme has already received significant financial support from Central Government from both Department of Levelling up, Housing and Communities and Department for Transport. The drive to continue to deliver on local priorities as set out in our local plans continues to create confidence within Central Government that Wolverhampton is committed to arresting decline in its high streets.

- 2.7 The alterations to infrastructure and introduction of improved facilities for buses, cycling and walking are a critical aspect which underpins the wider City Centre Public Realm Programme and Connected Places Strategy for the city. Over the past four years the Council has been working to develop and deliver these schemes utilising a mix of funding opportunities appropriate to the intended outcome. The City Centre public realm improvement works are essential to create the desired outcomes for the city and the necessary conditions for growth.
- 2.8 In 2020 at the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Emergency Active Travel Fund (EATF) provided an opportunity for the Council to accelerate the infrastructure changes, and as a result the traffic movements through the city centre have been altered and a balance of priority already shifted towards pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users through bespoke bus and cycle infrastructure provision. The EATF funding also served as a catalyst for the transformation of key retail and leisure areas and created a springboard for delivery of a public realm scheme to enhance the area through the Future High Street Fund. This next phase of improvements builds upon the success of these interventions to extend the benefits across the wider city centre.
- 2.9 The EATF helped facilitate changes to improve social distancing and increase walking and cycling as a means to travel safely by creating wider open spaces for safe walking and cycling routes. This led to the early intervention to close Victoria Street to traffic other than time restricted servicing and as part of the Government Reopening the High Street initiative, pavement build outs were created in Victoria Street to assist the hospitality sector to reopen safely with extra areas for outdoor dining. In Lichfield Street, Queen Square and Darlington Street pavements were widened, bus stops were built out, traffic movement restricted to one way westbound and a new segregated cycleway was created.
- 2.10 The proposed works within this new phase will formalise some of the arrangements already introduced as part of the EATF investment and build upon these well received changes. There are several benefits which are anticipated as a result of the proposed investment, including transport and economic growth.
- 2.11 The concept proposals in brief will deliver:
- One-way westbound bus movement through Lichfield Street, Queen Square and Darlington Street.
 - Improved bus stop facilities with increased space for boarding and alighting passengers.

- A net gain in bus stops including new stops being created in Princess Square and Lichfield Street.
 - Potential bus Lane facilities on the Ring Road between Stafford Street and Waterloo Road and a potential bus gate in Princess Street.
 - New two way cycle route through Queen Square and Lichfield Street creating the arterial link to a host of other new cycle lanes being developed within the City Centre Programme.
 - A network of bus facilities which provide route and boarding / alighting options across the city centre.
- 2.12 In line with the direction of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and LTN 1/20 guidance, the scheme aims to provide a continuous dedicated cycle route that links into a number of new and improved cycle lanes throughout the city centre. The EATF allocation has already provided funding for successful new cycle routes and crossings along the Ring Road central reservation and as part of the Future High Street Fund projects, which are currently under construction, other new routes are being developed to create a comprehensive network, linking into the Queen Square and Lichfield Street which will serve as the spine of the network and main link to the City's Transport Interchange.
- 2.13 Wider, more attractive footways with enhanced public realm and placemaking will connect directly into the areas already being developed as part of the wider City Centre Public Realm Programme of projects, which includes pedestrian priority areas and new events spaces designed to host a variety of activities.
- 2.14 Improved lighting, wide footways and increased CCTV coverage will all contribute to a safer and more inviting environment for people to walk, cycle, but also dwell and participate. The environment will encourage and promote safe interaction between different modes of transport and city centre activities within the core space.
- 2.15 The outcome of the access and movement changes delivers opportunity for new events spaces which will draw in visitors and increase footfall within both the scheme area and the wider city centre. Supported by the Council's Events City Programme and the opening of the Civic Halls in 2023, it is anticipated that the project and associated development and regeneration schemes will significantly improve the city centre as a key leisure destination within the region, increasing visitor numbers, footfall and spend per person.
- 2.16 The increased priority for active travel as a means of movement within the city core is a prime indicator of the Council's dedication to improve the health and well-being of its citizens and the ongoing commitment to tackle climate change.
- 2.17 In 2022 over 4500 people helped shape Our City, Our Plan, the strategic framework for levelling up our city which sets out how we will build a more prosperous and inclusive

Wolverhampton. The Plan includes specific priorities in relation to healthy, inclusive communities and a thriving economy in all parts of the city. This next phase of the City Centre Public Realm Improvements Programme directly contributes to the health and well being and climate change agendas which was so heavily supported within the Our City, Our Plan refresh consultation.

- 2.18 In order to act on these priorities that were supported by the local and business communities, the Council committed to sourcing external funding to deliver this next phase of the programme.
- 2.19 A funding package of £2.97 million has already been secured from the Towns Fund for this next phase in Lichfield Street and Queen Square and the business case for £9.5 million of funding, which is required to deliver the scheme, from the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) is currently being developed, along with a further bid from the Active Travel Fund round 4. As part of this business case it was necessary to gauge and secure support for the scheme from stakeholders and the public.

3.0 Outcome of Stakeholder and public engagement

- 3.1 Consultation on the phase 2 (Lichfield Street and Queen Square) proposals with key stakeholders has been ongoing for a number of years, and the current draft concept plan represents significant amendment from previous iterations. Reflecting the previous feedback we have received to ensure the space we ultimately create is fit for purpose. It was important that we engaged with the wider community at an early stage to ensure the objectives and need for the project are widely understood and that the appropriate decision to proceed and the detail of that design is undertaken in an informed way. It was essential that dialogue started on the concept idea whilst there is a credible funding route being pursued, to provide some level of assurance around delivery in a timely manner.
- 3.2 The City Centre Public Realm Member Reference Group have oversight of the public realm programme and at their meeting on 30 September 2022 the group endorsed the engagement plan for this next phase of works
- 3.3 A number of social media and local media posts were put out over a six week period to ensure that as many groups, individuals and businesses were aware of the engagement as possible.
- 3.4 It was recognised that any engagement on this new phase should be dealt with sensitively and with due regard to the engagement undertaken as part of the development and implementation of previous phases of the programme. It is anticipated that there may be an element of concern for disruption associated with the new phase of works, primarily as a result of actual or perceived disruption from the current works. As such, the timing of this latest round of engagement had to be carefully judged and balanced.
- 3.5 Disruption of some form is inevitable, the key to minimising the level of impact and to reduce or mitigate against the risks and issues above is early engagement to understand

the needs of those impacted and either tailor the approach appropriately or support the individual or business.

- 3.6 As part of the Council's commitment to engage with stakeholders, businesses and the public on major transformational projects within the city, the project has been the subject of extensive, inclusive and robust consultation over the past few months culminating in a public consultation exercise which completed on 9 December 2022.
- 3.7 Each stage of the engagement will be lead and managed by City Council staff, ensuring direct Council involvement and contact. The project team have experienced that whilst a dedicated Contractor Public Relationship Manager has proved invaluable on the phase 1 and 3 project works, businesses felt that direct council engagement was vital. Each contact was logged, and as part of this early business engagement, signposting to business support will be available to businesses to help them prepare for the period during the works programme, and the wider transformational change anticipated for the city centre.
- 3.8 Engagement for this phase of the programme was intended to begin with an ability for stakeholders and the public to comment on the concept ideas for the project prior to detailed design taking place. It involved extensive face to face discussions with individual businesses, stakeholders and residents, outlining the concept ideas for the works and ensuring that everyone understand the wider outputs and outcomes for the project. They were assured that the design process will be iterative and that details around the design and programming will be shared at every stage.
- 3.9 In addition to business and resident engagement, the public also had the opportunity to comment on the concept proposals through the Council's online consultation portal linked through the Invest website. Key stakeholders were also consulted directly including;
- BID Board and their stakeholder groups including the Business and Retailers group and Pubwatch
 - The Grand Theatre
 - Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Taxi working groups
 - St Peter's Church
 - The Council's Staff Equality Forums
 - The Youth Council / Take Over Day participants
 - West Midlands Police
 - University of Wolverhampton
 - Local disability groups

- 3.10 To date there has already been extensive engagement with both Transport for West Midlands,(TfWM) National Express and the West Midlands Combined Authority in respect of bus and cycle movement and infrastructure provision, these discussions have directly informed the concept ideas that were presented for wider consultation.
- 3.11 TfWM Bus Team and representatives from National Express have been included in discussions around the scheme to evolve the access and movement proposals and to ensure they reflect the Bus Back Better guidance.
- 3.12 National Express as main operator in the city have provided a letter of support for the delivery of the scheme, recognising the essential outcomes required for Wolverhampton which would benefit buses. Impacts upon bus services, routeing and patronage have all been considered, and further work is proposed in collaboration with operators to ensure these benefits are achieved. The benefits for buses have been identified through this on-going dialogue and business case evaluation. At present 14% of visitors to the city centre arrive by bus (National Express).
- 3.13 The infrastructure for cyclists complements existing routes and wider proposed route improvements across the city centre and wider city area, including existing and emerging LCWIP priorities and Active Travel Fund projects currently being delivered. National Cycle Route 81 runs through the city core and will connect into the identified infrastructure improvements. The scheme has been shared with Adam Tranter (WM Walking and Cycling Commissioner) who provided the following indication of support;
- "Connectivity in our urban centres is important and I'm pleased that, through engaging with City of Wolverhampton Council and Black Country Transport, they have committed to a serious improvement in active travel provision as part of this programme. The Council has already taken on feedback from me about the need for high-quality segregated infrastructure and improved north/south connectivity for people cycling. This builds on previous and recent schemes for active travel where the Council has shown their ambition and the political will required to rapidly increase active travel. As Commissioner, I will remain involved and updated on this project as it develops."*
- 3.14 Through the 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. Queries around servicing of the businesses were raised and will be considered and communicated to businesses in more detail during the next stage of design.
- 3.15 In addition to stakeholder and business engagement the wider public engagement through the Council's online consultation platform resulted in 284 responses. Of this number 53 % were in favour of the concept proposals whilst 47% were against. All of the responses from the stakeholder groups, businesses and the public have now been analysed and can be grouped into a number of key themes.

THEME	RESPONSE
<p>Disabled access and parking – Proposals must include adequate provision for disabled parking in the city core and have due consideration to accessibility for the elderly, the disabled and families particularly in terms of distance from parking and bus stops. The removal of one way bus travel east bound was also raised as a concern in this respect. Detailed design of paving and street furniture should also take into account blind and partially sighted visitors needs. Many felt that the wider footways would be an advantage to disabled visitors and especially those requiring a wheel chair or mobility scooter.</p>	<p>The concept proposals do not result in any net loss in disabled parking spaces and every effort will be made to ensure existing disabled parking locations are maintained or suitable alternative locations considered. Bus stop locations will be carefully considered to minimise distances from key attractors and destinations. Ongoing consultation is planned with interest groups as well as the Council’s Staff Forums.</p>
<p>Bus Lane provision – Some concern was also expressed about the presence of a single bus lane arrangement which could potentially lead to queueing buses and restricted passage for emergency vehicles.</p>	<p>Consideration will be given to apportionment of road space, cycleway and footway to ensure safe functioning of the network.</p>
<p>Value for money- Funding should be directed elsewhere within the Council services</p>	<p>All funding for the design and delivery of the project is from Central Government sources allocated specifically for Transport and Regeneration purposes.</p>
<p>Future of the city centre- A large number of respondents felt that improving the public realm was misplaced and that the Council should direct its efforts into attracting better retail and leisure activities into the city centre to increase footfall. More business support should be offered small businesses to stay in the city.</p>	<p>Whilst the Council can create the environment and infrastructure for growth it cannot directly invest in business activity on the high street. Business Support is available to businesses throughout the city who require help and advice. For those affected business in the project area further targeted help will be offered before and during the construction period.</p>
<p>Cycle lanes- Many respondents considered the new cycle lanes to be a real positive addition to the city centre environment, creating a safe and attractive alternative to vehicular travel. Whilst some felt that evidence of need based on current usage needs to be demonstrated to receive support. The introduction of increased number of safe cycle parking was also supported. Some also felt that to strengthen the benefits, cycle routes should be extended outside the</p>	<p>Monitoring of cycle lane usage is ongoing as part of Towns Fund Project monitoring and evaluation. An uplift in numbers using the facility has been demonstrated in the past 12 months. Work is ongoing to ensure the provision of strong cross city cycle routes.</p>

<p>Ring Road along arterial routes and that junctions should priorities cyclists.</p>	
<p>Taxi access and ranks – There was support for taxi access in the night time economy and requests to ensure taxi ranks are located in the city core in order to ensure safety for night time users but also easy access for daytime drop off and pick up using banks and retail. One disability group expressed concern that some disabled people felt that taxis in Queen Square / Lichfield Street at their current rank /parking location near to the banks and often on the pavement was very hazardous especially for the blind and partially sighted.</p>	<p>Consultation is ongoing with the Taxi working groups to ensure that the design and location of new ranks and access for all taxis is appropriate, safe and functional whilst recognising the key outcomes for the project.</p>
<p>City Centre parking charges – The reduction of charges, free parking (even at limited times) and park and ride options were all offered as solutions to a declining footfall.</p>	<p>The issue of parking charges and alternative parking arrangements is outside the remit of the project, however, the wider parking provision is considered as part of the Connected Places delivery plan.</p>
<p>Greening the city and reducing carbon emissions – Many people felt that by increasing the greening of the city and reducing vehicular movement in the centre the city would be a more pleasant place to be and would significantly help with climate change ambitions. Many also cited the health benefits to providing more active travel alternatives in the centre. The proposal to integrate St Peters Gardens into the streetscape of Lichfield Street was also supported.</p>	<p>This theme is a core outcome for the project and will be supported by careful design throughout the project development.</p>
<p>Delivery timescale – a number of respondents expressed a need for the scheme to proceed as soon as possible in order that the benefits can be realised.</p>	<p>The programme for delivery of the project is time critical due to funding stream parameters.</p>
<p>Events and new attractors – Many felt that a much improved public realm where café culture and on street activity including art displays, markets and events could thrive would significantly improve the city’s position in terms of a destination. Safe spaces for family activity was very much supported and encouraged as a key outcome of the proposals.</p>	<p>The project team will be working closely with the Council’s City Events team to deliver the infrastructure to support the Events City agenda and planned Events Programme.</p>
<p>High quality materials and design - Many of those that support the proposals called for high quality durable materials that required less maintenance.</p>	<p>The high quality materials, finish and installation methods used in the first two phases of programme will be replicated in the new phase of works.</p>

- 3.16 In addition to the general themes above some of the stakeholder groups raised specific comments which are reported below.
- 3.17 **Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Taxi working groups** -The current concept plan allows for one way westbound only traffic, apart from during specified loading times. In order to reduce the vehicular movement through the city core further and ease congestion particularly during the daytime, an early iteration of this proposal is for taxis to only travel through Lichfield Street and Queen Square during the evening period (times to be agreed). This option is being considered as monitoring has proven that taxis predominantly use these streets, particularly in the daytime, to cut from one side of the city to the other without stopping to pick up or drop off. There is also daily evidence of use of the area around Queen Square to rank up, often double parking, causing congestion for buses and safety concerns for pedestrians and cyclists. New ranks have been provided on the periphery of the Queen Square in Darlington Street and an option to create new taxi rank facilities in Exchange Street and Cheapside to support the Safe Haven initiative during the evening period is being considered as well as a queuing arrangement in Paternoster Row to feed the Darlington Street rank during the day. It is acknowledged, that taxis play a vital part in supporting the evening economy and it is with this in mind that the proposals would allow for full access by taxis into the phase 2 area during the evening period.
- 3.18 This proposal was presented to both the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire taxi working groups where concern was raised about this affected their businesses and that disabled and elderly customers in particular would be disadvantaged by this proposal. As such it is proposed that the project team and Licensing work with the taxi trade on the potential options to mitigate concerns and look at the possible provision of new ranking facilities within the area.
- 3.19 **St Peter's Church** – St Peter's Church has been a key stakeholder throughout the development of the proposals due to their prominent location within the scheme and civic importance. They very much welcomed the proposals to improve the public realm and placemaking in the city centre and are happy with the one way arrangement however they strongly requested that serious consideration is given to their need to maintain access for their official funeral / wedding vehicles. They also expressed concern about the possible loss of disabled parking in Lich Gates and access for their volunteers to park within the church grounds off Lich Gates, citing that disabled parking in Wulfruna Street and Exchange St / Cheapside is too far from the church entrance.
- 3.20 As part of the next stage of the design process, the church have been assured that work will take place to consider how access can be maintained for the vehicles needing to reach the church directly as part of wider access and servicing arrangements for the area.
- 3.21 **Youth Council - Take Over Day** – On 18 November the Youth Council's Take Over Day event was held in the City's Art Gallery. Young people from across the city received a

presentation and workshop on the new phase of the public realm improvements and were given the opportunity to share views and ideas on the project. Overall the concept ideas were well received, with the young people particularly supporting the reduced traffic flow, increased greening and segregated cycleway. All of which they felt contributed significantly to the Council's climate change agenda aspirations. Many were keen to be reassured that bus timetabling and access would not be affected or restricted through the city centre and out to the rest of the city and their respective schools and colleges. The Youth Council invited the project manager to bring further updates and opportunities to contribute to the design of the scheme through their regular events and meetings.

- 3.22 **The Grand Theatre** – The Theatre's pivotal location within the scheme means that their support for the project is vital to achieving the necessary outputs and outcomes for the project. The theatre have expressed their support in principal and ongoing engagement is planned to ensure that their specific service, parking, sign posting and wider city centre concerns are addressed at every stage.
- 3.23 **West Midlands Police** – The Police have offered their support for the overarching outcomes for the project which will increase footfall, natural surveillance and encourage families and older people into the city at varying times of the day. They have also made some recommendations which are already being considered including increased and targeted lighting, removal of sodium lighting and replace with brighter LED lighting and new CCTV cameras where coverage is poor or obstructed. They also requested that emergency vehicle routes should be maintained particularly in bus lane provision areas and advocated the use of taxi marshals at well located ranks in the city core. They were particularly encouraged by the provision of the hostile vehicle mitigation measures planned at the peripheral junctions in the project area making the events space activities safe for all. As with the other stakeholder groups, the project team will continue to work closely with the West Midlands Police.

4.0 Next Steps

- 4.1 The next steps for the project are to begin detailed design, taking into account comments made during this early engagement. It is proposed that this next stage of design will begin in March 2023. Funds to support this work are accounted for within the Towns Fund allocation for the project and will help inform the Full Business Case for the CRSTS funding application. It is anticipated that the CRSTS business case will be submitted in March 2023 for an early decision in the new financial year.
- 4.2 All stakeholders engaged with during this phase will receive further opportunity to comment on the next stage of design.
- 4.3 Early Contractor Involvement (ECI) needs to begin in March 2023 in order to achieve the timeline for delivery of existing Towns Fund money and forecast CRSTS funding. Any slippage of timescales beyond this point may result in the Towns Fund spend profiling and programming being significantly compromised leading to reputational damage for the Council and the CRSTS funding approval being delayed or withdrawn.

- 4.4 ECI activities give us the opportunity to shape proposals and the programme with intelligence from the anticipated contractor. This makes for more effective engagement and feedback with stakeholders and the wider public about potential issues and disruption and offers greater confidence in any milestones and key dates we ultimately forecast. The cost and time associated with making any concessions within working practices can be accounted for at an early stage, minimising the risk of overspend and offering clarity of what is expected to happen when, as early as possible.
- 4.5 In addition, timeline pressures exist around the Temporary Traffic Regulation Order (TTRO) which was put in place in December 2021 in order to facilitate the temporary one way traffic movement and cycle provision which was implemented as part of the Covid pandemic measures which Councils were mandated to put in place to help implement social distancing measures. The TTRO for the area comes to an end in June 2023 and if it is not renewed or permanent measures agreed for a new TRO application then the previous two way traffic flow, with reduced footway opportunities and only a single contraflow cycle route would need to be reverted back to and the funding from CRSTS would be lost as the benefits stated within the business case of an improved pedestrian and cycling environment would not be able to be realised. It is anticipated that as the current TTRO has already been extended once that a further extension would be unlikely to be approved by the Department for Transport. There would also be a cost to the Council associated with the re-instatement of the previous highway arrangement.
- 4.6 Support for businesses is a vital part of the engagement activity identified throughout this project. Work with businesses from earlier phases has highlighted the importance of early engagement with local traders. Consultation and engagement have already commenced and this will need to be a regular activity between officers, traders and the contractor. Although the council has no legal responsibility to pay disruption payments, the council has said it is committed to provide business support in numerous ways. The engagement will help identify where support may be needed and the role of the council and or partners to assist
- 4.7 This report therefore requests delegated authority to approve the award of the main works contractor for this phase of the project in order that ECI can begin as soon as possible.
- 4.8 An Individual Executive Decision Notice (IEDN) will be prepared to approve the award of the main works contracts for the City Centre Public Realm phase 2 Lichfield Street and Queen Square project as a two stage award, stage one being Early Contractor Involvement, and stage two will be the main works construction at a total estimated contract value within the available project funding limits.

5.0 Evaluation of alternative options

- 5.1 The project aims to create a significantly improved pedestrian and cycling environment, which builds greater connectivity between the city's transport interchange, the key strategic regeneration initiatives and the city core. Focussed around Lichfield Street,

Queen Square and Darlington Street the project will provide the “missing link” between the phase 1 project in Victoria Street, phase 3 around the Civic Halls and the city’s Interchange whilst increasing footfall within and around the area which will contribute to the overarching output of increased retail activity. In addition to creating more attractive, well connected public realm, the project will create an enlarged events space in Queen Square, and smaller scale events spaces at the top of Victoria Street and in Lichfield Street. This option presents the greatest opportunity to achieve the maximum benefits and to accord with the desired outputs and outcomes identified within the Towns Fund allocation for the project and the CRSTS bid.

- 5.2 Other options around removing all traffic in the project area and returning to two way vehicular movement have been discounted as they would not achieve the required outputs for the funding streams.
- 5.3 The detailed design of the scheme will ensure that a possible option to deliver a reduced area of improvement around Darlington Street and Queen Square can still be undertaken in the event that the CRSTS funding is not secured in part or whole. Thus allowing for a phased delivery if necessary. This will ensure that the approved Towns Fund spend and required outputs can still be achieved.
- 5.4 The option to ‘do nothing’ is not recommended because if the Towns Fund grant is not spent or spent as per the agreed drawdown schedule then all or part of the £2.97 million offer will be withdrawn, and the opportunity to deliver key priority projects and create conditions to stimulate further investment will be lost or deferred indefinitely. In addition the CRSTS bid for £9.5 million would need to be withdrawn as the project would not deliver any of the required outputs.

6.0 Reasons for decision

- 6.1 The project directly supports The Our City: Our Plan outcomes. In particular, it will help provide a “Thriving economy in all parts of the City” by re-purposing the city centre and surrounding areas through widening the offer and supporting the evening economy. It will also get “more local people into good jobs and training” by supporting existing city centre businesses and by delivering accessible new job opportunities in the leisure and cultural sectors.
- 6.2 Changing the way people access and move around the spaces within our city centre is a critical aspect to support the city’s ambitious plans for redevelopment, and in reimagining the role of the declining city centre for a new era. Core to these aspirations is ensuring access for all whilst promoting sustainable low carbon modes of transport and healthy lifestyles.

7.0 Financial implications

- 7.1 The Towns Fund element of the funding for the project is the first of two funding streams which will ensure the full delivery of the phase 2 scheme. The approved capital programme already includes the first tranche of funding secured from Towns Fund

totalling £3.0 million. The second tranche of funding for £9.5 million is being sought from the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS). The Business Case for this element of funding is currently being finalised for submission to the Combined Authority for approval. Additional funding through the Active Travel Fund 4 is also being scoped out to provide additional funding for cycle route and junction improvements.

7.2 The projects can be fully funded from Towns Fund and other public sector sources therefore any funding dependencies have been removed, ensuring that CWC as the accountable body is able to deliver the TF programme by March 2026.

7.3 Any early contractor involvement and design will be met from the approved capital budget funded through Towns Fund grant.
[ES/04012023/W]

8.0 Legal implications

8.1 The City of Wolverhampton Council will seek legal advice in relation to the transactions detailed in this report to ensure that the Council is acting in accordance with its statutory obligations, processes and its Constitution.
[AS/07022023/A]

9.0 Equalities implications

9.1 As part of the detailed business cases for individual projects, an equality analysis has been undertaken to identify the likely impacts on certain protected groups and the actions that will be taken to address or mitigate against any negative impact identified in the assessment. In respect of the public realm projects this is being continuously informed by ongoing consultation with individual interest groups to ensure that the design and implementation proposals provide appropriate measures to ensure accessibility for all.

10.0 All other implications

10.1 The City Centre Public Realm projects more so than ever, offer a clear and targeted response to the challenges the high street will face by creating the environment for change brought about by changes in consumer and visitor behaviour to enjoy activities around events rather than high street shopping and more particularly walking and cycling over car borne travel as we have become to appreciate the benefits for the environment, health and climate change.

10.2 The Connected Places Strategy, which identified the City Centre Public Realm Projects as early projects for delivery, plays an important role in the delivery of the Council's Health and wellbeing agenda.

10.3 The delivery of certain temporary elements of the public realm projects have already had significant positive implications to the City's emergency transport response to the Covid 19 measures introduced by Central Government. Going forward the delivery of the

full permanent scheme for Lichfield Street and Queen Square public realm will further strengthen these positive outcomes of increased walking, cycling and public safety.

11.0 Schedule of background papers

- 11.1 Cabinet 10 April 2019 - [Westside Link Public Realm Proposals – Outcome of consultation for phases 1 and 2 and potential delivery programme for phase 1](#)
- 11.2 Cabinet 9 December 2020 – [Towns Fund update report](#)
- 11.3 IEDN – Towns Fund Projects – Supplementary budgets (Bilston, Wednesfield, City Centre Public Realm phase 2) October 2022

12.0 Appendices

- 12.1 Appendix 1: Lichfield Street CGI and Project boundary