

Cabinet Member Consultation			
Report title:	Enabling a Vibrant City Centre		
Cabinet member(s) consulted	Consulting employee	Mode of consultation	Primary date of consultation
Cllr John Reynolds	Service Development Manager	e-mail	13 June 2018
Key comments arising from consultation (if applicable):			

Stronger City Economy Scrutiny

26 June 2018

Report title	Enabling a vibrant city centre	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor John Reynolds Stronger City Economy	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Tim Johnson, Strategic Director	
Originating service	Local Economy	
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Report to be/has been considered by	Strategic Executive Board	12 June 2018
	Place Leadership Team	29 May 2018

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel is recommended to:

- Endorse the current approach to diversify the city centre's role and focusing on making the centre a desirable place to visit and spend time.
- Consider other future actions to creating a vibrant city centre.
- Endorse a taskforce approach to continue to proactively respond to the repurposing of the city centre.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To provide an overview of changing trends within town and city centres and current and potential approaches in Wolverhampton to ensure a vibrant city centre going forward.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 City centres are changing nationally with ongoing major restructuring in the retail market. Over recent years the Council has been taking a proactive approach to creating a vibrant city centre.

- 2.2 A report on policy implications of town centre and retail trends (BIS December 2014) found that virtually all of the sampled town centres have recorded an increase in vacancy rates over the past decade. The 2008-09 recession and subsequent years of slow growth have had more of an impact on the centres in the sample that were already struggling. The key trends and drivers of change which have generally had a negative impact on high street footfall, spending and vibrancy are:

- A national shift from physical retail to online which has reduced demand for retail space;
- a large-scale switch to discount retailers post-recession;
- consumers increasingly seeking a shopping 'experience', which tends to favour larger, high-quality destinations;
- The preference for retailers of larger goods to locate on ring-road sites or in out of town retail parks;
- The differential business rates regime between physical stores and online retailers has put the former at a cost disadvantage;
- The change in retail shopping has left many large store holders with excess floorspace. This is being managed by either store closures or shrinkages, for example locally the Marks & Spencer's store on Dudley Street reduced their footprint around 2008.
- The reduction in floor space has been compounded by a number of food and beverage operators (such as Prezzo and Jamie's Italian) seeking to reduce the number of outlets as consumers have cut back on their discretionary spending.

- 2.3 The report found that those centres who face a challenge attracting visitors, particularly when they face competition from a neighbouring regional centre or out-of-town retail outlet, can combat this trend by giving people a reason to visit through encouraging more diverse centre uses. This includes diversifying the city's roles so that they become workplaces and meeting places as well as shopping centres, and by making the centre a desirable place to visit and spend time. The report highlights the need to:

- Promote an increase in leisure and cultural uses, including the evening and night time economy, to better compete with out-of-town centres – for example, the Westside development;
- Consolidate retail within the town centre and allow flexible change of use in non-core areas – for example, the investment in the Mander Centre;
- Where there is a surplus of office space, enable conversion to residential where appropriate, and improve the existing stock of office space to encourage localised

footfall throughout the day – for example investment in Grade A office accommodation at i10;

- Encourage temporary uses in vacant units, and events such as markets and festivals – such as the Food and Drink festival which attracted 18,000 people in its inaugural year.

2.4 There are a number of factors affecting the city centre which are outside of the council's control these include:

- A number of high profile retail failures over recent years including BHS and Woolworths. These failures have left large and hard to let stores vacant throughout the country.
- The split between retail spend at physical stores and online has been moving rapidly. The ever-reducing share of retail spend will inevitably mean this trend will continue with further closures of retail stores.
- Government grant programmes are rarely directed at the retail sector. This limits the ability of any Council to step in and intervene when a retailer is in trouble.

2.5 Part of the Council's approach has been to support increasing footfall and visits to the city centre. This includes increasing the number of people who live in the city centre, the number of people who work in offices in the city centre, the number of people who attend events and programmes and the number of business visitors. This will help in the process of preserving a level of retail activity in the city centre.

2.6 However establishing detailed and accurate city centre footfall is difficult. The Stronger City Scrutiny Panel learnt more about the footfall counter owned by the BID at the meeting in February 2018. Whilst some footfall and usage data is commercially sensitive, we do have data on visit numbers to key sites, for example:

- Central Library: 376,754 (in 2016/17)
- Art Gallery: 98,606 (in 2016/17)
- Mander Centre: 400,000 (week leading up to Christmas 2017)
- Wolverhampton Football Club: 457,092 (2016/17)

2.7 There is an ongoing challenge to improve the validity and frequency of this data to inform city planning. As part of the smart city programme, work is underway to look at improved footfall counters using street furniture, accessing mobile phone data and other data via a city centre WiFi concession.

3.0 Wolverhampton City Centre – Current context

3.1 Wolverhampton city centre is important to Wolverhampton's economy containing over 20% of Wolverhampton's businesses employing 19,500 employees. Wolverhampton is currently enjoying record levels of private and public investment with £3.7 billion pounds planned to be injected into regeneration projects citywide, including £992 million pounds either on site or planned in the city centre alone.

3.2 Wolverhampton City Centre is a key area for retail in the Black Country, with a turnover of around £535 million. The City Centre has around 1.8 million square feet of

commercial space of which one million square feet is retail and the remainder leisure, restaurants, pubs, hotels and offices. There are around 700 shops of which around half are independents and a long established market that operates four days a week. Around 30% of the total retail floor space is accounted for by the town's two managed shopping centres, the Wulfrun Centre and the Mander Centre.

- 3.3 A recent review of Wolverhampton City Centre found that Wolverhampton performs relatively well when compared to cities of a similar size, characteristics and demographic. Wolverhampton city centre was ranked 69th out of 4,500 centres. However, despite a catchment area of 439,612 spreading into South Staffordshire, it only attracts 23% of its catchment area.
- 3.4 Wolverhampton City Centre retail update study (December 2014) informed the development of the City Centre Area Action Plan. Nationally, the recession had a significant effect on town centres with well-known businesses closing down, increasing vacancy rates and an increase in representation of charity shops, discount retailers, betting shops and payday loan businesses and falling demand for floorspace. The study conducted a health check on Wolverhampton city centre which found a decline in its overall health and vitality reflected in:
- High level of vacancies, due to the size of the premises not meeting market need;
 - Under representation of convenience and service retailers; and
 - Sharp fall in commercial rents.
- 3.5 However, the centre performed well in respect of:
- Accessibility in terms of its central location and excellent motorway and regional and national rail links.
 - Good level of environmental quality with a number of well-maintained public spaces/squares and architecturally important buildings.
 - Well represented amongst the basket of 100 retail and service traders typically found in a sub-regional centre the size of Wolverhampton.
- 3.6 The study recommended the Area Action Plan reflect the restructuring which has taken place in the retail industry and consolidate city centre functions attracting a range of other forms of activity to attract footfall and bring in new customers, visitors and investment including the need for more residential development. The Council has therefore been proactive in developing its approach to transition the city centre into a place which retains vibrancy, character and purpose.
- 3.7 The global real estate company CBRE assisted the Council in assembling an investment prospectus. A key aspect of the work behind this was to review the potential strength of the Wolverhampton market. This revealed that the city centre has the potential to expand its office market if it could construct further high-quality offices in the vicinity of the new station. The work also showed that Wolverhampton has the potential to further develop urban housing in and around the city centre, especially if we can create sites of a high-quality. The addition of new workers and residents could also drive an improvement in the leisure offer, increasing the number of cafes and bars in the centre

- 3.8 Wolverhampton city centre boasts several regionally significant cultural venues however has traditionally struggled to capture linked leisure spend from visitors to these key locations. There is a perception that evening activity is dominated by specific visits, either 'in and out' to existing cultural facilities or vertical drinking establishments for late night visits and that there is little to appeal to families seeking earlier evening activities and branded restaurant chains. However, the city centre does contain a number of independent restaurants offering a range of world cuisines – Wolverhampton came third in Curry Capital of Britain three years in a row – and local businesses are investing in the city including a street festival and new comedy and music venue which opened in April 2018.
- 3.9 The Council's plans have also looked at how to attract residents from the city and beyond to visit the city centre as the incidental spend of these visitors can make a big difference to food, drink and retail outlets. The recent food and drink festival, held for the first time in 2017, attracted 18,000 people over a weekend. As a result the Council is preparing plans to vastly improve the centre's capability to host events of all sizes. This will include performance areas, organised pop-up spaces and the reduction of traffic to make spaces pleasant and safe for large crowds.

4.0 Response to the news on Beatties, House of Fraser Group

- 4.1 On 7 June 2018 it was reported that Beatties, House of Fraser Group in Wolverhampton was included in a proposed company voluntary arrangement deal that would affect 31 stores across the UK. The stores have been identified as part of a review that would reduce costs and secure the long term future of the remaining 28 stores in their portfolio.
- 4.2 The Chief Executive of House of Fraser stated that "The retail industry is undergoing fundamental change and House of Fraser urgently needs to adapt to this fast-changing landscape in order to give it a future and allow it to thrive. The stores estate has created an unsustainable cost base which, without restructuring presents a threat to the business."
- 4.3 The news of the proposal has led to a strong local reaction. There is an emotional attachment to the 131-year-old Beatties flagship store and concerns have been raised about the employees and the iconic listed building.
- 4.4 The Council have responded swiftly to the news, drawing upon the experiences gained from the closure of BHS and recently with Carillion. An internal team has been convened and connections are underway with representatives at House of Fraser and Beatties, and with local key partners including Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), and West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA).
- 4.5 The team will be looking to engage with:
- The House of Fraser business to understand the immediate impact on the store in Wolverhampton.
 - The Beatties Store Manager to assist, when appropriate, employees of the store who may be affected.

- The Managing Agents Habro, and in due course the owners, regarding the future of the building.

4.6 At the same time the Leader of City of Wolverhampton Council and the Mayor of West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) are in talks to look at an approach to assist the House of Fraser store remain in the city.

4.7 On 11 June 2018 further news has been received on another retailer in the city, Poundworld which has entered administration. Poundworld have a presence in city centre and employ a number of local people. The Council have commenced engagement with the store managers and will work together to support those employees who are affected and to make connections to training provision and other vacancies in the city.

5.0 Enabling a vibrant city centre

5.1 The Local Government Association handbook on revitalising town centres (May 2018) explored various mechanisms councils are using to lead the revival of local town and city centres:

- **Parking, access and travel:** improvements to the whole journey, considering parking in a joined-up way including traffic management, strategic planning and economic development. The Council is responsible for c.25% of the city centre's car parks, and is currently working on improving the parking experience including exploring 'Smart Parking' that utilises technology to provide seamless parking. Significant investment is underway in public transport, cycling and walking access, including the £150 million Interchange project, improved bike sharing facilities, accessible vehicle charging points and improved Vehicle Messaging Systems coming forward. These will improve the access in and around our city and provide smoothing traffic flows through key junctions.
- **Property and planning:** the Council has a pivotal role in shaping planning and development including a role in setting out the vision and framework for the future development of the area through 1) local plans; 2) long-term master planning to rebalance the role of city centres; and 3) facilitating land assembly to unlock property development.
- **Street scape and public realm:** Councils have a leading role in creating well-designed places through better use of the streetscape and public realms and investing in the public realm and streetscape. The City of Wolverhampton Council has developed a connected places strategy setting out its approach as set out in 4.12 below.
- **Business support:** supporting independent shops and local business networks including Business Improvement Districts, to enable joint marketing and capture benefits from city centre events. Wolves at Work Employer Engagement team support a number of city centre businesses, retail hospitality and office, to facilitate recruitment and workforce development. The Councils Enterprise service will continue to actively pursue initiatives and areas of support to assist business development and growth.
- **Place branding and marketing:** working with partners of the city, a city brand is being developed which brings together the city's cultural features and other

characteristic, that will help establish a strong positive brand about Wolverhampton and the city centre. Events are also a critical element of engaging local community and attracting new visitors. Investment in arts and culture can help boost local economies attracting visitors, creating jobs, boosting businesses, revitalising places and developing talent. Cultural anchors such as libraries, theatres, museums can play a key role in hosting events, attracting additional footfall, underpinning regeneration and boosting the evening economy.

- **Digital technology and data:** use digital technologies to improve how people enjoy and experience what town and city centres have to offer including boosting the way they are promoted, accessed, used, organised and understood.

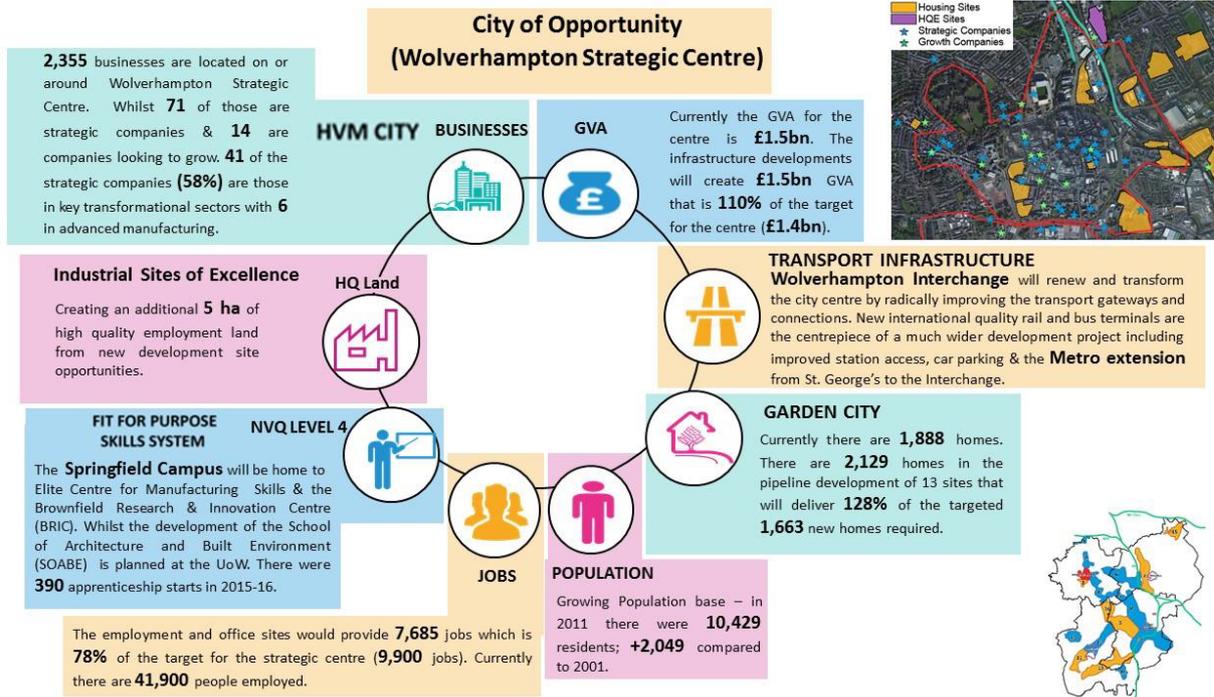
5.2 The Council has been taking a proactive approach to create a vibrant city centre. The Council's approach set out in relation to these recommendations in the short and medium term are given below.

Property and Planning

5.3 Wolverhampton City Centre's area action plan (AAP) outlines the approach to regenerate the city through to 2026 providing new business and housing. The city centre vision is:

“a vibrant, walkable, safe, attractive and family-friendly city centre full of opportunity and potential. The city centre will be compact enough to be welcoming and accessible, but large enough to boast some of the region's best retail, leisure and cultural facilities. Wolverhampton will be a renowned university city that retains its historic character, has an enhanced natural environment made for living, learning, working and enjoyment with the best streets and public spaces. In short, a city centre to delight, achieve and thrive”.

5.4 The Council continue to promote opportunities to the private sector through a range of channels, including showcasing at the international property event MIPIM and other property industry showcase events to develop relationships with key developers and investors. The **City Centre Investment Prospectus 2018** sets out a clear direction for Wolverhampton city centre for the next decade, which will see the city become a key office location for the region, with a leisure and retail offer that underpins significant residential expansion. This vision for growth is shown through a number of key 'change zones' that will transform the city centre supported by public sector investment in lining these key regeneration sites. These change zones are as follows:



- 5.5 Westside Leisure Quarter:** Westside brings the opportunity to reinvigorate an underperforming part of the city centre, introduce new uses currently missing and support the long-term viability of the city's existing facilities. An outline planning application has been granted on the £55 million scheme to include a multiplex cinema, 50,000 square feet of additional leisure space, new restaurants covering 40,000 square feet and a multi-storey car park for phase one of the project. Construction on this phase is expected to be completed in 2020, with phase two finishing in 2022. The Westside Link project will ensure that Westside is seamlessly integrated to the retail core with an emphasis on high quality, pedestrian-friendly public realm public realm and connectivity improvements. This is designed to support existing operators, independents and attract new operators and create the opportunity to develop this sector and address the shift to experience-led retail.
- 5.6 Interchange & commercial gateway:** aims to radically transform the main gateway to the city including the creation of a substantive new business district which has capacity to deliver up to one million square feet of grade A office space over strategic sites. Activities underway include the construction of the new railway station and the extension of the Midland Metro. The £13 million i9 building will provide 50,000 square feet of grade A office space when completed in 2020. Going forward, this scheme will involve bringing forward other interchange development propositions for the Banana Yard and surrounding area.
- 5.7 Canalside Quarter:** aims to provide desirable city centre living and a destination for visitors with shops, walkways, cycle paths and leisure facilities. Forming a key element of the area is the Springfield campus, a £100 million plus initiative to transform a 12 acre, Grade II listed former brewery, into an architecture and built environment super-campus. Work has begun on assessing the zones within the Canalside Quarter area to pave the way for the construction of new homes. 900 homes and student accommodation that have been developed across three sites since 2008. In time, the Canalside Quarter is

expected to grow to in excess of 600 new homes as it establishes itself as a vibrant residential and leisure area for the city.

- 5.8 **Reducing vacant properties:** There are currently 100 vacant shops and premises in the city centre (16%), predominantly in lower footfall areas. A key challenge relates to void spaces in key trading streets when banks and retail close down ahead of a lease break event. In these circumstances there is no incentive for the landlord to re-let the space as they will be receiving the rent even as the property is unoccupied. This is particularly the case when bank branches close. Banks usually pay high rents and have a strong covenant. If the building owner wants to re-let the store they would have to terminate a lease which almost certainly will be generating more revenue than re-letting to an alternative user.
- 5.9 The nature of city centres are changing. The changing and challenging market for retail nationally has meant that as a city, we need to rebalance the city centre to one less reliant on spread out retail cores. The schemes above are important in enabling us to diversify the city centre footfall with increased office space, city centre living and improved leisure offer. The Council has a role in place shaping but has limited ability to intervene around vacant properties not in our ownership.
- 5.10 Where properties are not being maintained, under Section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, we can use discretionary powers to require the owners to clean up the land and building if the condition and appearance is considered to have an adverse effect on the amenity of an area. Where the Council is the owner of properties, we seek to minimise vacancies through marketing vacant properties. However, this is done as part of a broader planning exercise – for example, the Council is currently responsible for holding vacant properties at Southside where they form part of our wider regeneration proposals for the area.
- 5.11 **Markets:** Wolverhampton's new £4.9 million market in Southside fronting Cleveland Street is due to open Summer 2018 and will comprise of 20 cabins and 48 stalls. The market will offer flexibility to trade from bigger cabins, event space, a secure site with measures in place to combat hostile vehicles while still allowing access for traders to load and unload, CCTV, integrated lighting and power, free WiFi, canopy covered walkways, offices, customer toilets, and comprehensive parking and storage facilities.
- 5.12 Although city centre living opportunities are at present relatively limited, WV Living the Council's house building company is exploring the viability of the conversion of space above shops as city centre housing. The Council are also ensuring that residential space is incorporated in a range of mixed use developments coming forward. In addition, private developers are converting unused office premises to residential including Coniston House adjacent to Chapel Ash.
- 5.13 Last year the Council and Wolverhampton Business Improvement District (BID) launched the 'Wolverhampton Independent Retail Awards'. Now in their second year, these awards are all about celebrating and praising the entrepreneurial spirit, dedication and hard work involved in running and managing a successful independent business.

Street scape and public realm

- 5.14 Complementing the city centre regeneration developments, **Wolverhampton's Connected Places Strategy** outlines the vision, strategy and priorities for a people centred approach to improving Wolverhampton's city centre's streets and public spaces. Creating a public realm that is pleasant, cleaner and feels safer not only has a sound economic rationale, but also fosters civic pride and provides a range of social and the health benefits for local residents. It has seven themes:
- **Identity** - understanding local distinctiveness is key to creating successful places. The approach will build on heritage including four conservation areas and St Peter's church; meeting places such as Queens Square; linkages between key destination; public art; and illumination.
 - **Events** including city centre festivals and events that the whole city can participate in. The approach will build on animation building on existing events; design in order to host large scale events supporting the evening and night time economy.
 - **Wayfinding** - encouraging innovative ways to build connections across the city through a design led approach reinforcing local character referencing the city's unique heritage and cultural offer; sign placement; and gateways including the new transport interchange.
 - **Safety** through good lighting used to aid way-finding and add visual interest; city centre living and new leisure, eating and entertainment uses, such as those planned for Westside will also help to add vibrancy and footfall during the evening; crossing the ring road.
 - **Digital and Smart** through securing investment in broadband, Wi Fi and other digital networks; and electric vehicle charging. Wolverhampton has recently secured £4.9 million investment to connect 196 public sector premises across Wolverhampton.
- 5.15 A number of key projects in the Connected Places Strategy delivery plan are already in the development pipeline. These include Cleveland Boulevard, which will see significant improvements to the connectivity to new housing developments at The Royal Hospital site, and a Molineux Quarter link which working alongside the University and Football Club will contribute to the improved connectivity of the stadium and campus with the City centre core.
- 5.16 **Westside Link** is also a significant public realm project contributing to improving the vibrancy of the city centre, and is identified within the Connected Places Strategy as an early priority. The project focuses on Victoria Street, Queen Square, Lichfield Street and adjoining streets, and seeks to significantly improve the public realm, remove traffic, create multifunctional events spaces and improve connectivity between the Westside Development, the city centre core and transport interchange. The project will support the attraction of greater visitor numbers and present a strong proposition to new investors.
- 5.17 As part of **Lighting the City**, in partnership with Wolverhampton BID, visitors to the city centre can now see streets, public features and open spaces brought to life by new LED lighting throughout the year. The scheme focuses on a one and a half mile walking route through the city centre including the dressing of Dudley Street and Cheapside trees with lights, a light curtain in Exchange Street, Queens Square fountains and steps

and new lights at St Peter's Garden. The scheme showcases architecturally interesting features and buildings, creating a more interesting and attractive environment. Lighting schemes are also being incorporated through planning conditions in new developments, public realm improvements and connectivity projects.

- 5.18 A **City Centre Team** is being developed to have responsibility for all commercial regulatory matters in the city centre bringing together the Service Lead, Senior Environmental Health Officers and Compliance Officers. The team will be the Council's primary point of contact for the majority of businesses in the city centre and it is envisaged that there is potential to extend this role beyond simply ensuring regulatory compliance.

Place branding and marketing:

- 5.19 The city's Economic Growth Board has commissioned a new city centre brand, which was well received at the Business Breakfast in September 2017 and continues to be shaped.
- 5.20 The **Wolverhampton Business Improvement District (BID)**, which attended the Stronger City Economy Scrutiny meeting on 13 February, is a local, private sector-led organisation whose role is to deliver the improvements that businesses want in a defined area. Across the UK BIDs have invested in their areas, delivered physical improvements to towns and cities, increased footfall by promotions, marketing and events, reduced business costs through collectively procuring trade waste collections. The priorities of Wolverhampton BID are:
- Professional and planned marketing campaigns highlighting the Wolverhampton offer, boosting footfall for the range of multiple and independent retailers, restaurants, bars and nightclubs and cultural venues.
 - A programme of annual events dedicated to attracting footfall and realising Wolverhampton as a family destination
 - Raising the profile of the city centre and changing perceptions through radio and TV advertisements establishing a new Wolverhampton image through media and marketing groups.
 - Voucher Scheme – retaining spend in the city by producing a Wolverhampton City Voucher.
 - A dedicated Wolverhampton website <http://enjoywolverhampton.com/> providing visitor information, joined up offers and incentives for people to celebrate and make use of all that Wolverhampton has to offer.
- 5.21 **Culture** adds vibrancy to city centres and Wolverhampton has a strong cultural offer. An analysis of the creative economy in Wolverhampton has demonstrated that the city has nationally significant clusters in museums, galleries and libraries and music, performing and visual arts. The city centre has a number of cultural assets including the Art Gallery, with the best collection of Pop Art in UK, the Civic Halls and Grand Theatre. The Civic Halls provide the largest entertainment and concert facility in the Black Country and attract visitors from across the UK and beyond. A recent study in to the visitor economy and the value of this brings identified that these venues generated £7.9 million of GVA and support 637 jobs directly and indirectly in the local Wolverhampton economy. In

2016/17, despite the Civic Halls being closed for refurbishment, Wolverhampton's cultural venues attracted over 2 million visitors to the city.

- 5.22 **Events** play an important role in attracting visitors to the city, changing perceptions, creating civic pride and providing economic benefit to the city. The Council and partners facilitate and organise a programme of public events to engage with the community and animate the public space. In the last twelve months significant city centre events have included the recent Wolves' promotion party (over 80,000 visitors), City of Wolverhampton's inaugural food and drink festival (18,500 visitors), Wolves Pride (6,000 visitors), Christmas lights switch on (12,000 visitors) and the inaugural Victorian Christmas Market (15,000 visitors). The economic benefit to the city from these events alone is estimated to have brought over £2 million spend.
- 5.23 For 2018/19 the Council is leading work to deliver, support or enable an even wider programme of events across the city. This work will bring a co-ordinated approach to developing the city's whole events offer and allow for a structured approach to be adopted to marketing this offer. The Council has recently awarded its themed markets tender contract and allows scope for new events to be added to the current themed markets offer. Potential concepts at this stage include a chocolate festival, a speciality cheese and wine market and a vinyl records fayre.
- 5.24 **Arts and Placemaking** can play an important role in adding to the vibrancy of a city. Arts projects also help to develop vibrant and animated places. Around 100,000 people participated in the Wolves in Wolves sculpture trail in 2017 visiting areas of the city that they would not have normally visited. With an estimated spend at £17 per head, it was estimated to have helped generate £1.7 million for the city's economy. The Mini Wolves exhibition increased visitor numbers at the Art Gallery by 50% compared to the same period the previous year. Other initiatives include "leaves and light" which is illuminating and greening the city around landmark buildings and public art including living green walls and pocket parks.
- 5.25 **Digital technology and data**

As part of future proofing the city centre and our ambitions to become a Smart City, the following smart initiatives are currently being explored:

- **Gigabit Wolverhampton:** the Council has secured £4.9 million to fund a local full fibre network for a public sector fibre network to connect 196 public sector premises across Wolverhampton.
- **Gigabit Vouchers:** partners are supporting take-up of vouchers to fund infrastructure costs to connect to ultrafast broadband
- **Public WiFi:** tender for concession agreement to use street furniture to enable public WiFi in the city centre at no cost to the Council. During soft market testing, some companies offer a free app highlighting what to do in Wolverhampton to promote the city centre offer.
- **Footfall and dwell time measurement** using smart technology to run smart devices to capture footfall. The Council is bidding for a European Regional Development Fund Smart City infrastructure project which would fund smart city enabled technology on street lights.

Longer term opportunities

- 5.26 The scale of recent development in Birmingham and other parts of the West Midlands has removed many of their most developable sites. In particular, there is often a premium on land close to major transport hubs. The lack of easy land availability in central Birmingham (and the increased cost) will mean developers and investors will look further afield. Because of the timescales they need to work to sites which involve complex land transactions, multiple ownership or other complicating constraints are disregarded. By having a pipeline of available sites, with complexities removed and planning certainty the Council can attract investment projects to the city.
- 5.27 The more information the Council can generate on key lease break events with major retailers and office occupiers, the greater the targeting we can do to support businesses to remain in the city and attract new businesses. The Council undertake regular dialogue with store managers and commercial agents, and need to continue to do this.

Key Stakeholders

- 5.28 To achieve our vision of a vibrant city, it is crucial we work closely with key stakeholders including:
- Wolverhampton BID – which aims to increase footfall and visitor numbers to the city through marketing and events, changing perception and initiatives to retain spend.
 - The University of Wolverhampton – who have 23,000 students, who also bring their friends and families to the city during graduation events.
 - Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club – which attracted 457,092 visitors in 2016/17 and its recent promotion to the premier league will help to raise the city's profile attracting new visitors.
 - Construction projects underway in the city to connect contractors.
 - Local businesses are already investing in the city opening new venues and arranging their own events.
 - New investors and occupiers to the city, to engage at an early stage the city centre offer.
- 5.29 A collaborative approach between many of the key stakeholders and the Council has been underway for a while. The Council and partners will look to continue to strengthen this approach and propose to create a City Taskforce Team to:
- Ensure effective ongoing dialogue with shop owners and retail sector.
 - Ensure effective ongoing dialogue with landlords and agents of property in the city centre.
 - Maximise opportunities to promote vacant properties.
 - Review and streamline approach for approvals for 'pop up shops' and other effective temporary use of space.
 - Ensure there is effective employment and enterprise support to businesses and employees.
 - To continue to build the events programme for the centre, working closely with the BID, promoters and venues in the city.

- To have a clear approach to target regional, national and international leisure and business visitors.
- Liaise with the Local Enterprise Partnership and other key stakeholders to identify other opportunities to increase vibrancy.
- Replicate the response that was established for Carillion, when news of closures is received.

6.0 Questions for Scrutiny to consider

6.1 The Scrutiny Panel are asked to consider existing and future actions to creating a vibrant city centre, including a city taskforce team approach to continue to proactively respond to the repurposing of the city centre.

7.0 Financial implications

7.1 The report provides an update on activities that enable a vibrant city centre, as yet there are no further proposals and current financial obligations are stated, therefore there are no financial implications arising directly from this report. Implications for any proposals formulated will be considered as part of separate reports. [ES/07062018/G]

8.0 Legal implications

8.1 As there are no actual proposal yet, there are no specific legal implications arising from this report. When proposals have been formulated, a new reflection as to legal implications will be required. [RB/01062018/D]

9.0 Equalities implications

9.1 Equalities implications are taken into account when developing activities that enable a vibrant city centre such as accessibility relating to public realm work.

10.0 Environmental implications

10.1 Activities that enable a vibrant city centre have positive environmental implications. For example, the new transport interchange will encourage more people to use public transport to visit the city centre.

11.0 Human resources implications

11.1 There are no human resource implications.

12.0 Corporate landlord implications

12.1 There are no corporate landlord implications.

13.0 Schedule of background papers

13.1 There are no background papers.