

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 21st April 2015

Report of: Executive Director of Economic Growth and Prosperity

Subject/Title: Crewe Town Centre Regeneration Delivery Framework for Growth

Portfolio Holders: Councillor Don Stockton, Housing and Jobs

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 For the benefit of both residents and businesses, it is vital that the Council develops policies and projects that help to support the vitality of its town centres. This is needed in order to promote their future development and regeneration, and ensure they are well positioned to compete against other towns and out-of-centre developments, which continue to impact on the success of our town centres.
- 1.2 Crewe town centre is at a pivotal point in terms of its potential to attract new investment, increase footfall from residents and visitors, and instil greater civic pride. A revival is already underway, instigated in part by the Council's investment in the new £15m Lifestyle Centre and the approval of a University Technical College (UTC) for Crewe. Alongside this is the prospect of Crewe being the selected as the location for HS2's North West Gateway station, which would transform the economy of Crewe.
- 1.3 As part of its approach to promoting regeneration, the Council has developed a draft *Regeneration Delivery Framework for Growth* (Appendix 1), with the support of development and regeneration consultancy DTZ. This sets a compelling vision for the immediate future of Crewe town centre ahead of the opportunities that may emerge from HS2. It provides a route map to support the economic prosperity of Crewe Town Centre through development that would bring in millions of pounds of new investment. As well as physical development of key sites, it recognises the need to ensure that the public realm is enhanced and provision is made for improving use of green spaces in the town.
- 1.4 The draft Framework report identifies three priority actions which require consideration through this and other reports being presented to Cabinet. These relate to:
 - Tightening of planning policy so that the town centre is in a much stronger position to compete against out-of-centre locations and help prevent leakage of retail and leisure investment and footfall. This matter is explained further in this report.

- The opportunity to acquire key town centre properties that, either individually or collectively, provide the most viable prospect of delivering a transformative regeneration scheme within the town centre that will address key issues identified in the draft *Regeneration Delivery Framework*. This matter is the subject of the separate report to Cabinet 'Strategic Acquisition – Crewe' (April 21st).
- Taking forward options for provision of a bus interchange to ensure that accessibility by public transport for local residents is enhanced. This matter is the subject of the separate report to Cabinet 'Crewe Bus Interchange Facility' (April 21st).

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Cabinet is recommended to

- a) consider and endorse the draft *Crewe Town Centre Regeneration Framework for Growth* report (Appendix 1) including the vision, objectives and action plan;
- b) agree to further consultation with key stakeholders prior to formal approval of the Framework by Cabinet, including specific consultation on the planning policy approach as identified below; and
- c) endorse the policy approach identified in the Framework report (Appendix 1 Para 5.19 – 5.26) and Para 11.9 - 11.15 of this report that:
 - i) from a planning perspective, the primary objective must be to protect the Town Centre from uses, within it and in the wider area, that will undermine its vitality and viability as a Town Centre;
 - ii) supports a limited extension to the indicative Crewe town centre boundary, which includes the Tesco supermarket. This will inform the identification of the town centre boundary in the Site Allocations and Development Policies element of the Local Plan; and
 - iii) sees the focus within the defined Town Centre being clearly on uses which support the Town Centre including retail, leisure, business and residential uses with each application being considered on its merits in terms of how it can support the objectives for the Town Centre. This is supported by policy EG5 (Promoting a Town Centre First Approach to Retail and Commerce) and Strategic Location SL 1 Central Crewe in the emerging Local Plan Strategy.

3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 The draft *Town Centre Regeneration Delivery Framework for Growth* sets out a compelling vision for a revitalised Crewe town centre in the immediate future in preparation for the opportunities that may emerge from HS2. It goes onto identify both current constraints and the significant opportunities to regenerate key parts of Crewe town centre, leading to its strengthening overall. Whilst the

retail sector is experiencing significant change nationally and globally, the Crewe town centre core is assessed as having great potential as a destination which is not being harnessed currently, and has even more significant potential when consideration is given to the longer-term prospects offered through securing Crewe as HS2's North-West Gateway and the creation of a rapid transit link between a new station and the town centre. The Framework will play a key role in helping to support the Council in leading the regeneration of the town centre.

- 3.2 From a planning perspective, the draft Framework identifies that the primary objective must be to protect the town centre from uses within it, and in the wider area, that will undermine its vitality and viability as a town centre. As such the emerging policy framework which supports promoting a 'Town Centre First' approach' is critical, and this will help to prevent further leakage of retail and leisure investment and footfall from the town centre. This proposed approach is in conformity with Government guidance and the Council's saved and emerging Local Plan policies

4.0 Wards Affected

- 4.1 All Crewe Wards

5.0 Local Ward Members

- 5.1 All Crewe Ward Members

6.0 Policy Implications

- 6.1 The proposal in this report relates directly to five key outcomes identified in the Council's Three Year Plan:

Outcome 1: Our local communities are strong and supportive. Individuals and families are self-reliant and take personal responsibility for their quality of life. Communities are cohesive, with a strong sense of neighbourliness. There is genuine civic pride and mutual respect.

Outcome 2: Cheshire East has a strong and resilient economy. Cheshire East is known as a good place to do business – we attract inward investment, there is access to a high quality workforce and our businesses and visitor economy grow, to create prosperity for all.

Outcome 5: People live well and for longer. Local people have healthy lifestyles and access to good cultural, leisure and recreational facilities. Care services focus on prevention, early intervention and physical and mental wellbeing.

- 6.2 This report aligns strongly to the Council's *Economic Development Strategy* and its more recently created *Vision and Strategy for Economic Growth: East Cheshire Engine of the North*, which articulates the need to increase investment in our town centres, by ensuring they offer themselves as attractive locations for retail and leisure operators.

- 6.3 As part of the Council's All Change for Crewe regeneration programme, there is previous work that has laid the way for this report. This includes:

Prospectus for Crewe: Sets out the Council's development priorities for the town centre, based on five key zones, and three development areas under the Council's influence. This served to garner interest from the development community and instigate dialogue which has helped to inform this report.

All Change for Crewe - High Growth City: Reflects recent progress in the wider Crewe area, including Bentley's expansion, plans for geothermal energy and investment secured to enhance connectivity through road and rail.

7.0 Implications for Rural Communities

- 7.1 None

8.0 Financial Implications

- 8.1 The *Regeneration Delivery Framework for Growth* includes a set of recommendations for the Council to consider, both now and in the near future. Some of these may result in immediate receipts, and others result in other capital investment that may yield a return.

9.0 Legal Implications

- 9.1 The Localism Act 2011 introduced the General Power of Competence, which allows the Council to do anything an individual can do, provided it is not prohibited by other legislation. These powers have replaced the previous wellbeing powers. However, the use of these powers must be in support of a reasonable and accountable decision made in line with public law principles.

10.0 Risk Management

- 10.1 The principle risk is that, without further strengthening of the policy position in support of a 'Town Centre First' approach, there will continue to be proposals for out-of-town-centre development that undermine this approach to promoting the regeneration of Crewe town centre, and that the benefits arising from new investment in Crewe will fail to be maximised.
- 10.2 In particular, with the prospect of Crewe being selected as the location for HS2's North-West Gateway there is a risk that, failing to plan ahead in terms of the town's regeneration, will result in the obvious opportunities emerging from this investment and growth will fail to be realised.

11.0 Background and Options

- 11.1 As referred to in Para 1.2, the Council recently commissioned the preparation of the *Crewe Town Centre Regeneration Delivery Framework* which sets out a route map to support the transformation of Crewe town centre. The draft Framework includes:

- a Vision for the town centre and a series of key objectives

- an Action Plan to support the economic prosperity of Crewe Town Centre
- a framework for the potential acquisition and intervention by Cheshire East Council in respect of a number of priority sites
- and a review that informs the emerging planning policy of Crewe Town Centre to feed into the Local Plan process.

11.2 This framework does not replace or supersede statutory development plans which have or are being prepared by Cheshire East Council. It seeks to stimulate public and private investment to maximise the benefits for the town.

11.3 The town centre is identified as having a number of constraints including: perception; key gateways to the town are dominated by car parks; movement through the Town by foot is in some cases along poor quality corridors/vacant or underutilised buildings; and, of most significance, challenging retail and leisure markets both nationally and locally.

11.4 However, post-recession, as developer interest starts to grow and opportunities such as Crewe's offer become more attractive on the back of new investment including HS2 are realised (e.g. connectivity between town centre and SuperHub station, and other infrastructure improvements around town centre), Crewe needs a strong framework which will showcase the town's development sites and a programme of actions to overcome its constraints. The Framework sets out a series of site specific and overarching actions to respond to its objectives.

11.5 The report sets out a vision for *the Regeneration Delivery Framework* as follows:

Capitalising on investment proposals such as the planned Lifestyle Centre and the University Technical College and proposed HS2 North West Gateway Hub Station and the Town's growing population, to re-establish Crewe Town Centre as the vibrant and attractive "Hub" offering a strong range of retail, leisure, employment and residential opportunities serving local businesses, shoppers, residents, students, visitors and rail passengers.

11.6 This Vision will be supported by the following objectives:

- § To stimulate new investment in the Town Centre including retail, leisure, residential and business by bringing vacant sites back into use, intensifying the use of underperforming sites and utilising Cheshire East Council's assets
- § To increase the number of Town Centre users, their dwell time and spend
- § To diversify the housing stock in and around Crewe Town Centre and to increase the catchment of the Town Centre
- § To make it easier to get into and around the Town Centre by foot, bicycle, bus and car
- § To improve the quality and amount of the public space (including green space) and public realm (including green infrastructure) that links key spaces, buildings and the town's heritage and cultural offer in the Town Centre and to the Railway Station / proposed HS2 Station
- § To transform perceptions of Crewe Town Centre
- § To provide sustainable development and design and support the Council's renewable

energy agenda.

11.7 The Regeneration Delivery Framework comprises four priority themes:

1. **Investment in Opportunity Sites** - Too much of Crewe Town Centre is either vacant (buildings and sites), underutilised or dominated by surface car parks. Cheshire East Council owns a number of sites within the Town and is committed to using these to stimulate private sector investment to attract new users and uses to the Town Centre
2. **Improving access by all modes of movement into and within the Town Centre** to make it easier to get into and around the Town Centre by foot, bicycle, bus and car. The Framework will build on the current improvements already being delivered by the Local Sustainable Transport Fund programme and seek to attract additional resources to further influence travel behaviour and promote more sustainable forms of travel in and around Crewe to reduce congestion and encourage visitors to explore what the Town has to offer
3. **Improvements to the public realm** - Currently there are only a few examples in the Town Centre of high quality public realm. Careful thought needs to be given when development sites are brought forward to ensure that the public realm between these sites and the Town's existing offer is enhanced to support the principles of the Framework. The priority needs to be given to key gateways and routes/corridors. This builds upon the commitment to greening the Town set out in the Green Infrastructure Action Plan for Crewe
4. **Town Centre First** approach will remain with an emphasis on supporting mixed use investment in the designated Town Centre. This will seek to enhance vibrancy, increase visitor/consumer footfall and spend and deter any proposals that could undermine this. Until the Core Strategy is in place, the Regeneration Delivery Framework will be used to support the determination of planning applications setting new expectations for Crewe - poor quality and ill thought-out schemes will not be acceptable whilst higher quality buildings and public realm will be.

11.8 The Framework has identified 14 opportunity sites and advocates the following approach to supporting investment in and around them.

Types of Interventions	Sites
Priority sites where the Council should consider taking a direct role to deliver the regeneration priorities of the Town Centre	Royal Arcade and adjoining land
Other sites in the Council's ownership where the Council should work with the private sector to support development in accordance with the principles of the Regeneration Delivery Framework	Wrexham Terrace Car Park Civic and Cultural Quarter Lyceum Square/Market Shopping Centre Phoenix Leisure Park Oak Street Car Park and High Street The former Victoria High School Site Chester Street Car Parks
Sites to be brought forward by the private sector/existing landowners	Victoria Centre/Asda Vernon Way Retail Park Mill Street Macon Way
Sites with limited development opportunities where improved linkages to Town Centre should be supported	Grand Junction Retail Park Nantwich Road

11.9 The Framework sets out a series of site-specific and overarching actions to support the realisation of its Vision, under each of the themes:

Overarching Actions

Sites

S1 - Work with owners to bring priority sites forward to support new retail, leisure and residential investment in the Town. Aim to diversify uses to encourage more visitors to the town and grow evening economy

S2 – Lobby for relocation of Cheshire Archive to Crewe Town Centre - various options are being considered. Municipal Building would provide a sustainable future use for this Listed Building whilst also strengthening the Town’s cultural offer and provide an opportunity to increase footfall in the vicinity of the Theatre

S3 - Need to encourage greater collaboration of occupiers to encourage them to work together to support the long term future of the Town. Longer term consider scope to establish Business Improvement District.

Access Improvements

A1 - Assessment of options for new Bus Interchange - short term option and then longer term option to support emerging investment proposals for the Town

A2 - Review of existing car parking provision - need to determine which of car parks can be released for redevelopment and ensure sufficient car parking to support Town Centre at appropriate price

A3 - Further improvements in cycling as part of a programme to reduce congestion - next phase to recent improvements being delivered as part of the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) Programme and cycling strategy

A4 - Tackle pinch-point and congestion at Earle Road. Lobby to deliver as part of HS2 investment

A5 - Creation of pedestrian priority zone - need to encourage people to explore more of the Town, dwell longer and spend more money

Public Realm

P1 - Determine programme of public realm and access improvements within the Town Centre and between the Town Centre and Rail Station (and longer term to link to HS2 North West Gateway Hub Station). Use the Regeneration Delivery Framework recommendations to determine an appropriate capital spend programme including focus on making the Town as easy as possible to get to and then encourage users to park up and walk around the Town and to dwell longer

P2 - Delivery of public realm improvement including public art and green infrastructure - use the Regeneration Delivery Framework to establish expectations on quality of public realm and secure contributions to improve gateways, key corridors and public squares.

Planning policy

11.10 From a planning perspective, the *Regeneration Delivery Framework* identifies that the primary objective must be to protect the town centre from uses within it, and in the wider area, that will undermine its vitality and viability as a town centre. As such the emerging policy framework which supports promoting a ‘Town Centre First’ approach is critical. The designation of Crewe town centre as a Strategic Location in the Local Plan Strategy is also supported as this provides the town centre with an appropriate status to encourage investment, regeneration and improving green infrastructure.

- 11.11 In terms of boundary, the draft *Regeneration Delivery Framework* supports a limited extension to the indicative Crewe town centre boundary which includes the Tesco supermarket. This will inform the identification of the town centre boundary in the Site Allocations and Development Policies element of the Local Plan
- 11.12 Although Grand Junction Retail Park is close to the town centre given the nature of its occupiers and its separation from the Town Centre by the railway line, it clearly functions as an out of town location.
- 11.13 Given the significant changes that are occurring in the retail market in terms of demand for regional and sub-regional town centres the focus should not be on protecting retail uses per se, but to encourage a wide range of uses which support the attractiveness of the town centre. The focus within the defined town centre should be on uses which support the town centre including retail, leisure, business and residential uses with each application being considered in its own right in terms of how it can support the objectives for the town centre.
- 11.14 The importance placed on encouraging residential investment in the town centre by the emerging planning policy is fully supported. This will be critical to supporting the aspirations of the *Regeneration Delivery Framework*, in particular to increasing the overall catchment area of the town centre and encouraging the amount of footfall and extending the core hours of activity. This, in turn, should support the existing cultural offer of the town.
- 11.15 In terms of the out-of-town sites, the Framework identifies recommendations in relation to their planning status.
- 11.16 It is recommended that this part of the draft *Regeneration Delivery Framework* report (Appendix 1 Para 5.19 – 5.26) is given consideration at Cabinet to establish it as a material consideration in determining planning applications. It is also recommended that, to give the strategy further status, public consultation should be undertaken prior to being formally endorsed by Cabinet.

12.0 Access to Information

- 12.1 The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writers:

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Appendix 1: Plan of Crewe town centre and key opportunity sites

Appendix 2: Crewe Town Centre Draft Regeneration Delivery Framework for Growth