

Economy and Growth Committee

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Date of Meeting: | 30 November 2021 |
| Report Title: | Town Centre Regeneration Update |
| Report of: | Director of Growth and Enterprise |
| Report Reference No: | EG/10/21-22 |
| Ward(s) Affected: | All wards |

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1.** The Corporate Plan states that ensuring Cheshire East is a thriving and sustainable place is a corporate priority. In pursuit of this aim it states that the Council will pursue the successful delivery of regeneration programmes in Crewe and Macclesfield and will work with stakeholders and partners to produce town centre recovery plans for other towns.
- 1.2.** Town centre regeneration programmes and town centre recovery plans specifically support the delivery of the Corporate plan as follows:
- Open – The production of published plans for town centre regeneration /recovery provides clarity and transparency in the Council’s ambitions and approach, visible to all.
 - Fair– The production of town centre recovery plans developed using a consistent methodology, will enable a fair comparison of the issues and opportunities in all key service centres.
 - Green – The delivery of town centre regeneration schemes creates multiple opportunities to reduce carbon emissions on a project-by-project basis.
- 1.3.** This report provides an overview of progress in meeting the Council’s stated objectives for town centres. Specifically, it includes updates on:
- The expansive Crewe town centre regeneration programme;
 - Projects being progressed to support the revitalisation of the borough’s most frequented centre - Macclesfield;

- Emerging Town Centre Vitality Plans for the borough's nine key service centres;
- Short term recovery interventions being progressed to support post Covid-19 town centre recovery utilising Welcome Back Funding.

2. Recommendations

2.1. That the Economy and Growth Committee:

- 2.1.1. Note the progress which has been made in relation to the development and delivery of town centre regeneration projects in Crewe and Macclesfield.
- 2.1.2. Note the progress made in developing Town Centre Vitality Plans for Alsager, Congleton, Handforth, Knutsford, Middlewich, Nantwich, Poynton, Sandbach and Wilmslow, and agree that the draft reports shall be issued for public consultation in early 2022, and that a report shall be made back to this committee post that consultation with specific recommendations aligned to those reports.
- 2.1.3. Note the ongoing work to support town centre recovery across all principal towns and key service centres and proposals for revenue spend to be claimed back from the Welcome Back Fund.

3. Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1. The report provides an update on progress in delivering priority actions set out in the Corporate Plan, in the interests of transparency with residents, businesses, and other local stakeholders. This update is being provided for the Economy and Growth Committee given their responsibility for determining policies and making decisions in relation to economic development, regeneration, skills and growth.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1. As this is an update report there are no other options to consider.

5. Background

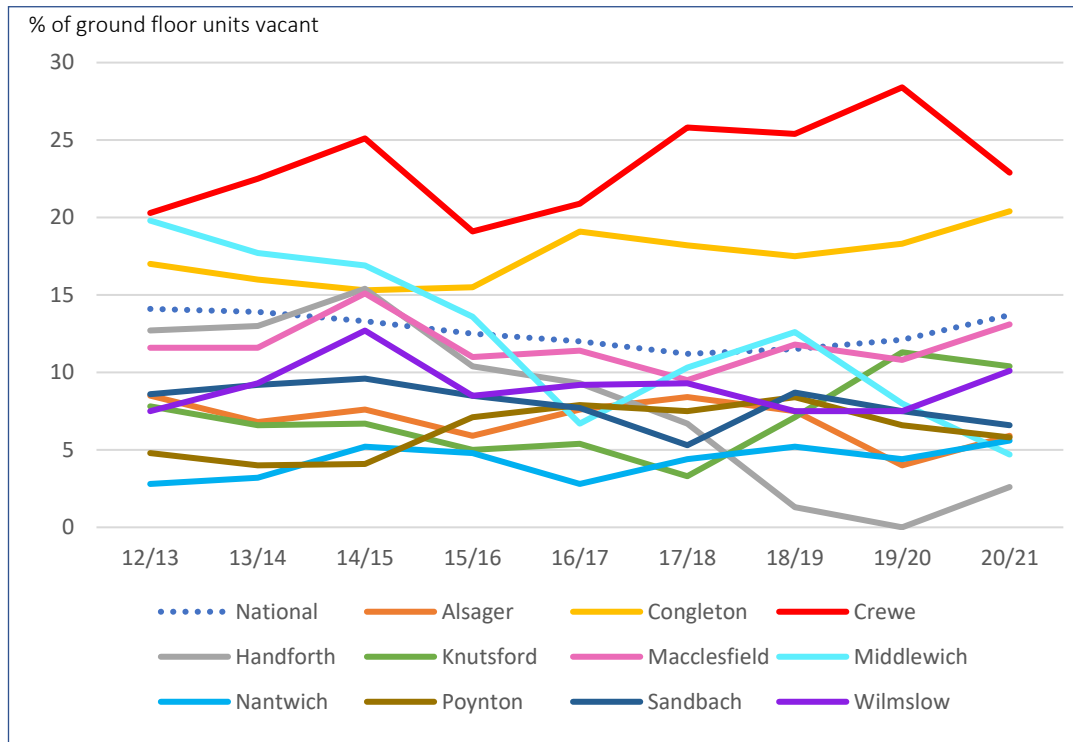
Town Centre Health

- 5.1. Town centre health is measured in terms of vitality and viability. Every 5 years the Council commissions an assessment of town centre vitality and viability. The last full town centre health checks were published in June 2020 as part of the Cheshire East Retail Study Partial Update and give an overview of town centre health before the Covid 19 pandemic.
- 5.2. Aside from these 5 yearly health checks, the Council has until recently had very limited current data to help it understand the vitality and viability of town centres. Annual ground floor vacancy surveys are undertaken. These have been reported annually to Strategic Planning Board as part of the Council's

annual Authority Monitoring Report (AMR), but these can be a crude measure when taken in isolation.

- 5.3.** Recorded town centre vacancy levels since 2013, including the figures from the April 2021 survey, yet to be reported in the 20/21 AMR, are shown in **Figure 1** and, in more detail **Appendix A**.

Figure 1: Vacancy levels across town centres



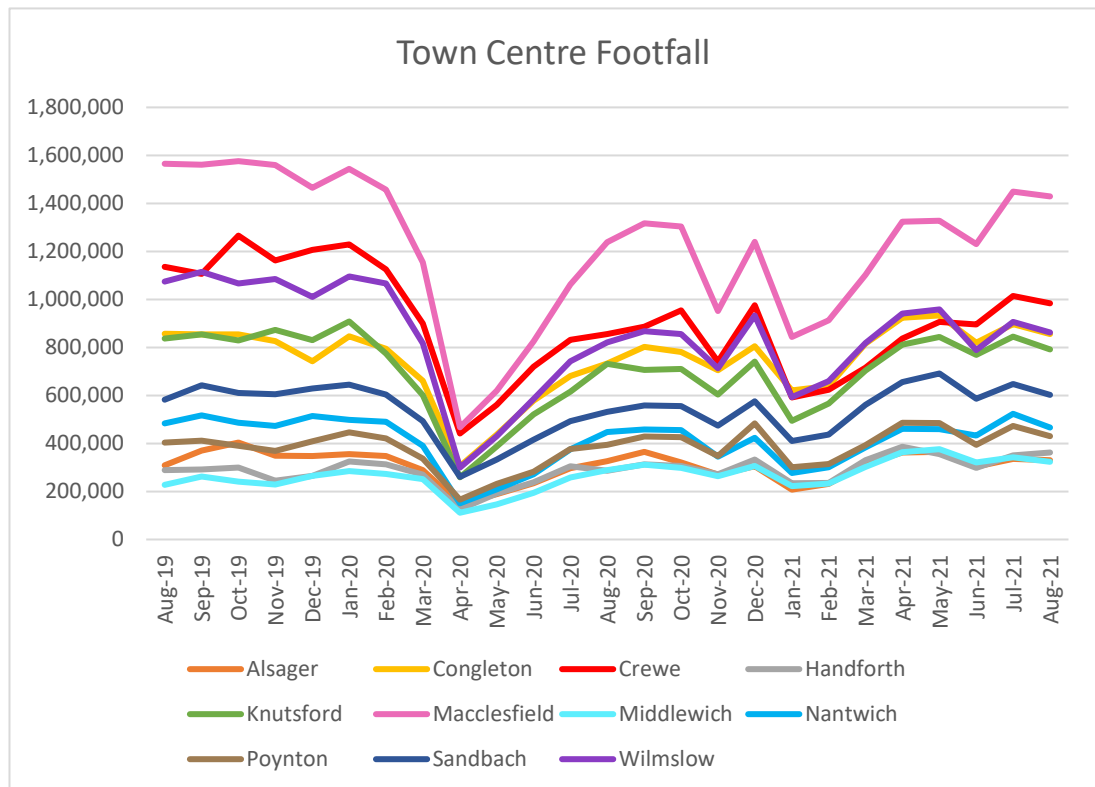
- 5.4.** Broadly speaking, as can be seen, the vacancy surveys show the consistently highest vacancy levels in Crewe, with Congleton also having recorded vacancy rates above the UK average, and other towns having vacancy rates hovering around or below the national figures. However, these town wide figures mask important detail and may distort the impression of a centre’s health. As an example, whilst the graph shows Congleton with relatively high vacancy rates, examination of the survey data shows that this is largely due to two concentrated clusters of vacancies, one in the area around the market, the other, the units in Capital Walk. The units around the market are understood never to have been fitted out and are not actively marketed. Those at Capital Walk again were not marketed for some time. Thus, although the vacancy levels in Congleton seem high on the graph, if units which are not being marketed by their owners were discounted, the centre’s rates would be significantly reduced. Similarly, in Crewe, Figure 1 shows a dip in vacancy levels in 2021. This could be misinterpreted as the centre’s health improving, but in fact relates to the demolition of previously vacant units.

- 5.5.** Historically, CEC did not have access to any more regular and consistent data to assist in understanding town centre health. The Welcome Back Fund, detailed later in this report, has presented a short-term funding opportunity,

enabling the collection of footfall/visitor information across the borough's two principal towns and 9 key service centres to March 2022.

- 5.6. This data is valuable in that for the first time the Council can compare activity levels across 11 town centres, knowing that data is collected in a consistent manner. This data enables a better understanding of overall levels of activity, dwell times, spread of activity through the week and at different times of day etc and allows comparisons to be drawn across towns. For example, prior to this data being available, whilst Crewe and Macclesfield were always understood to be the two 'principal' towns, it was not known that Macclesfield has such substantially higher visitor numbers than Crewe.
- 5.7. Basic footfall level data is shown in **Figure 2** and **Appendix A** allowing comparison of footfall across centres, and an understanding of the impacts of Covid-19 on footfall.

Figure 2 – Town Centre Footfall Aug 2019 – Aug



CEC Approach to Town Centre Regeneration

- 5.8. Each and every town centre across the borough is an important hub for the residents and businesses in its catchment. Whilst CEC is committed to supporting the health of town centres, with challenges around funding and resources, the Council has to prioritise where it focuses regeneration activity, or risk having no significant impact.
- 5.9. Crewe has the most extensive regeneration development programme. This is primarily because the Council has been able to make a strong case for Government funding linked to the opportunities around HS2, and because the Council has acquired major town centre assets, making the progression of major capital schemes possible.

- 5.10.** The Council also recognises the importance of Macclesfield as the centre with the highest number of retail/service units, and the highest footfall by some considerable margin, and has worked to develop a clear strategy for its revitalisation. Whilst several opportunities to apply for funding from the Government or other external public sources have been taken, Macclesfield town centre has not met the criteria for funds to be awarded. The Council has therefore had to adopt a different approach to town centre regeneration in Macclesfield, less focused on large scale capital projects, and more on incremental change, collaboration with other key stakeholders such as the Town Council, and on stimulating, encouraging, and supporting appropriate private development.
- 5.11.** With regard to other towns, it is recognised that with the rise of internet retailing, all town centres will likely have to adapt and change to varying degrees to remain healthy. Some centres may naturally and gradually diversify away from retail as businesses close and become available, but during a period of transition, centres may need support. All towns are individual and there is no recognised single strategy which will suit all centres. How best to support individual towns will vary from place to place. The Council has recognised this and has resourced the development of Town Centre Vitality Plans for all Key Service Centres across the borough.
- 5.12.** The remainder of this report provides an update on individual elements of the Council's regeneration programme for town centres.

Crewe Town Centre Regeneration Update

- 5.13** In 2015 the Council approved a Regeneration Delivery Framework (RDF) for Crewe town centre, purchased the Royal Arcade as a strategic acquisition, and agreed to the procurement of a development partner for the redevelopment of all or part of the Royal Arcade site. Since that time, Crewe's regeneration programme has progressed, supported by external funding secured from the *Local Growth Fund*, *Future High Streets Fund* and *Towns Fund*, which support and build upon the objectives set out in the RDF. The RDF also sits alongside other key strategies including the Crewe Town Investment Plan and the Crewe Cultural Strategy which, with strong stakeholder support, seeks to place culture and heritage at the heart of Crewe's regeneration and culture-led economic growth.
- 5.14** Crewe town centre's current regeneration programme is essentially based on a drive to 'provide more reasons for more people to visit the town centre more often'. The programme started with the delivery of the Crewe Lifestyle Centre in 2015, providing an integrated leisure, library, and social care facility in a single purpose-built setting. This was followed by the establishment of Crewe Engineering & Design UTC – the first vocational educational facility of its type in Cheshire. Both of these had significant council involvement utilising the Council's own property assets.
- 5.15** The next wave of projects was instigated in 2017 and included the remodelling of Crewe Market Hall to create a vibrant new leisure, retail and community space in a Grade II Listed building, which was supported by

£2.6m funding from Cheshire & Warrington LEP's *Local Growth Fund*. The Market Hall has proved extremely popular to date, although its success will be judged by its longer-term impacts on the town centre. (See **Figure 3**)



- 5.16** Over the same period, plans have advanced for the redevelopment of the Royal Arcade site. Reflecting the national changes to retail across the country, this has taken longer to progress than had been anticipated and required some flexibility on the part of the Council and the developer it procured - Peveril Securities. A comprehensive redevelopment is the subject of a development agreement and, in September this year, the scheme was granted planning consent as a two-phase scheme; the first phase comprising a new bus station and 400+ space multi-storey car park is expected to be completed by summer 2023, with a commercial scheme that includes a cinema, other commercial leisure and retail uses open in 2025. (**Figure 4**)



- 5.17** Over the past two years the Council has been successful in bidding for and securing funding from the Government. £14.1m has been awarded from the

Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) to support ten projects that support town centre regeneration objectives. These include:

- four projects that improve accessibility and movement into and around the town centre;
- two that create new opportunities for residential living;
- two that generate new jobs and commercial activity;
- one that supports the creation of a sustainable energy network between key buildings;
- part of a much larger project to create a new History Centre in the heart of the town.

5.18 Another exciting project is the History Centre - Design and feasibility work is progressing for the project. The aim being to provide a new building to both accommodate part of the Cheshire archive and a local history facility on the site of the former Crewe Library and adjacent undercroft car park. This project requires a cocktail of funding. Whilst a significant amount has been identified through the Heritage Lottery Fund, *FHSF* and *Towns Fund*, it is also dependent on co-funding from the Council. Part of this requirement relates to the cost of demolishing the former Crewe Library and adjoining Civic Centre Car Park. A second stage bid to National Lottery Heritage Fund to support this project is planned for spring/summer 2022.

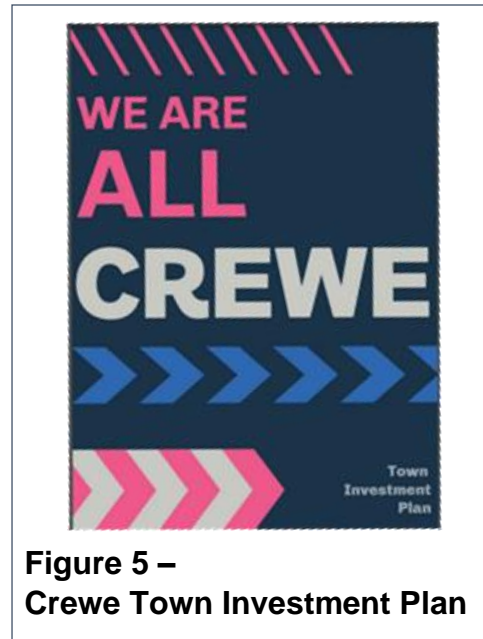
5.19 Further information was contained in a report to Cabinet on 10 November 2020 (refer to Background Papers at the end of this report).

Crewe Town Board and Towns Fund

5.19 In late 2019, Crewe was identified by the Government as being eligible for Government funding from the *Towns Fund* – a programme related to the *Future High Streets Fund*, but with objectives linked to the town's wider needs and aspirations. A requirement of the funding was to establish an independent Town Board to lead on the selection and delivery of potential projects. Collaboration between the Council, Town Council, MP and other stakeholders led to the establishment of Crewe Town Board in 2020, which immediately set about to develop its funding proposals.

5.20 Since then, the Board has:

- Conducted a comprehensive analysis of the needs and aspirations of Crewe's residents;
- Undertaken extensive stakeholder and community consultation;
- Developed a Town Investment Plan, linked in Background Papers to this report; (**Figure 5**)
- Shortlisted from 60+ projects to select ten projects which have all passed the Government's initial eligibility tests;
- Been awarded an allocation of £22.9m;
- Submitted more detail on the plans and processes to deliver all ten projects by 2026.



**Figure 5 –
Crewe Town Investment Plan**

- 5.21** The ten shortlisted projects were selected on the basis of several factors including the benefits they bring for local residents how they add address evidenced local priorities including public health, environment, community, culture and connectivity.
- 5.22** Although Crewe Town Board plays a key role in the regeneration of Crewe, its formal role is only advisory; the Council retains legal responsibility as accountable body, drawing upon the expertise of its officers and engaging with ward councillors.
- 5.23** Six of the Towns Fund projects are Council-led projects, but four are led by other stakeholders (Everybody Sport & Recreation, Crewe Town Council, OnSide and the Always Ahead Charity). Prior to progressing each of these project leads are required to produce a comprehensive business case, which will be appraised by the Town Board, council officers and independent experts. We expect that all projects will complete this process over spring/summer 2022 prior to final Government approval. All of them will be the subject of further consultation and some may require other approvals, e.g. for Council co-funding or planning consent. A summary of the current Crewe project pipeline is provided in Appendix B.
- 5.24** The Council's Economic Development service is leading on the management of this comprehensive regeneration programme, but its success is dependent on the capacity of key 'enablers' in other services, including Estates, Planning, Legal, Finance, Communications and Rural and Cultural Economy.

Macclesfield Town Centre Regeneration

- 5.25** Prior to 2018, the Council pursued a number of significantly scaled town centre development schemes on Council owned land to boost the draw of Macclesfield town centre as a destination. Each time, factors outside the Council's control, such as wider consumer shifts and commercial markets, ultimately undermined the viability of those schemes.
- 5.26** In 2018, after developers withdrew from a planned land sale to facilitate a new town centre cinema, the decision was taken to re-define and articulate a new longer-term, whole centre regeneration plan for the town centre. The Macclesfield Town Centre Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) was drafted, and following public consultation, was subsequently approved by the Council in October 2019.
- 5.27** The Macclesfield SRF is not a blueprint for redevelopment. Rather, it sets out a clear vision, objectives, and spatial framework for regeneration, together with advised strategic actions to be considered as and when resources allow. In October 2019, officers asked Cabinet to note intended priority actions to be taken forward stemming from the SRF as follows:
- Developing detailed designs for the public realm, prioritising in the first instance Chestergate and the Historic Heart of the town;
 - To seek to identify any available existing funds which might be utilised to progress the development of: a town centre movement strategy; a regeneration focused town centre car parking strategy; an options appraisal for Macclesfield's markets, public realm enhancements, and a review and options report on the use of Macclesfield Old Town Hall;
 - To start to consider options for the transformative redevelopment of the Station Gateway, liaising with interested parties to identify potential routes forward;
 - As and when the timing is appropriate, to pursue further actions recommended in the SRF and Delivery Plan following all normal Council procedures as appropriate to the particular recommendation.
- 5.28** Since October 2019, a number of activities aligned to these priorities have been taken forward as detailed below:

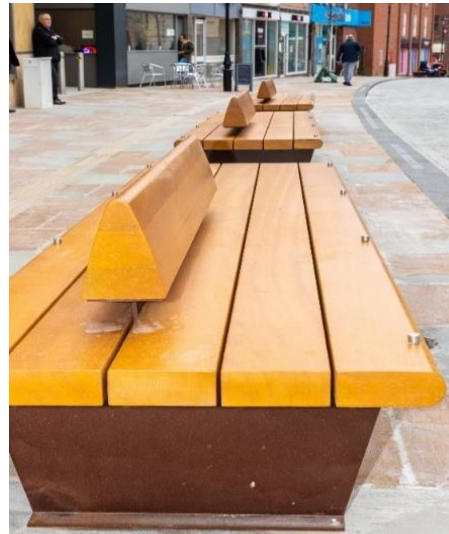
Recently delivered projects

- 5.29** One of the priorities for Macclesfield, aligned to the SRF is the improvement of the public realm as and when resources allow.
- 5.30** The principal scheme delivered in Macclesfield town centre since October 2019 is the transformation of Castle Street public realm. Whilst this scheme was conceived prior to the approval of the SRF, it is entirely aligned with many of the SRF objectives. Using high quality materials, the scheme was

designed to help enhance the town centre environment, raise aspirations, and change perceptions. Key elements of the scheme included the widening of pavements to create new opportunities for outdoor seating to encourage and support the viability of hospitality businesses, and bespoke creative elements to ensure distinctiveness.

- 5.31** Delivery of the scheme commenced on site in April 2021 and has now been completed with the official reopening held on October 8th. Images of the Castle Street scheme are shown at **Figure 6**.

Figure 6: Castle St Public Realm Scheme



- 5.32** One of the key reasons Castle St was selected for this investment of circa £1.6m was the high number of longstanding vacancies in the area and the scope for public spending to encourage further private investment.

- 5.33** Since the detailed designs were developed and the Council's intentions to invest were announced, two substantial gateway premises on Castle Street, vacant for the best part of a decade, are now seeing investment. The value of this private investment; in the former Tax Office at Craven House, and the former Cheshire Building Society premises opposite, equates to circa £7m, demonstrating how investment in the public realm can stimulate wider economic growth and regeneration.

- 5.34** Complementing the main public realm scheme on Castle Street, a short distance away on Mill Street, a pocket park has also been created this year on an overgrown parcel of vacant land with new paving and planting areas and seating recycled from Castle Street.
- 5.35** A third intervention in the public realm on Market Place Macclesfield, is the creation of a currently temporary outdoor hospitality area in Market Place, delivered in conjunction with Macclesfield Town Council, a community interest company (Macclesfield Hospitality Action) and local businesses all working in a truly collaborative manner. That collaboration stemmed from the creation of the Macclesfield Town Centre Recovery Working Group, a new local working group set up to support town centre recovery in the short term, with members spanning the Town Council, CEC, Peaks and Plains Housing Trust, Cheshire East CVS, Macclesfield Hospitality Action and Macclesfield Museums.
- 5.36** The outdoor hospitality area was conceived as a mechanism to support the viability of a cluster of hospitality businesses around Market Place. CEC Regeneration Service pursued the temporary closure of four blue badge parking bays on Market Place, relocating three on King Edward Street. This enabled local businesses to apply for temporary pavement licences for outdoor seating, supported and encouraged by Macclesfield Hospitality Action. Macclesfield Town Council then provided funding for planters and seating. This collaborative approach has seen a transformation of the north part of Market Place, which could not have been achieved by any one party working in isolation and is a good demonstration of what can be achieved on a very small budget where local stakeholders share a vision and work collaboratively. Before and after images are shown at **Figure 7**. The group are now collaborating again to explore the option of making this outdoor seating area permanent.



OFFICIAL

Pipeline projects

- 5.37** Aligned to the priorities set out in the SRF, a number of pipeline projects are now also being progressed, and are at concept, start up, initiation, feasibility or concept design stage. At this point in time, whilst limited funds have been made available to test feasibility and establish costings, the progression of any of these projects to implementation phase will be dependent on capital funding being secured.
- 5.38** In June 2021, a bid for circa £14.5 million was submitted to the Government's Levelling Up Fund (LUF) seeking funding for the delivery of three of the more ambitious of these pipeline projects. CEC has now received notification that this bid was not successful. For this particular funding stream, the Government has classified Cheshire East as being within the lowest priority category for funding and whilst this does not prevent bids being submitted, it will significantly reduce the chances of a bid being successful. The news that the bid was not successful is therefore not unexpected. Officers will be considering any feedback provided and will look to use any insight gained to submit future bids.
- 5.39** The pipeline projects currently being progressed for Macclesfield town centre are outlined below:

Further phased public realm works

- 5.39.1 One of the biggest challenges in Macclesfield town centre is the appearance and functional limitations of outdated public realm, where narrow pavements and limited restrictions within the 'pedestrian' zone, mean vehicles dominate, pedestrians are often marginalised, and businesses can't make the best use of outdoor areas. CEC funding is being used to develop designs for further stages of public realm interventions, focused on the historic heart of the town centre - Market Place and Chestergate, since this area was identified in public consultation on the SRF as the public's first priority for regeneration intervention. Concept designs have been developed in the last few months and have been the subject of a recently closed public consultation.
- 5.39.2 The round 1 Macclesfield LUF bid sought funding to progress the detailed design and implementation of the above public realm scheme for Chestergate and Market Place with an additional expansion into the Park Green area of the town centre.

Macc Market

- 5.39.3 The SRF additionally highlighted the opportunities for improving Macclesfield markets to support town centre regeneration. A second project included in the LUF bid was for the transformation of Macclesfield markets, both indoor and outdoor, which would enable the dated underutilised indoor market in the retail core to be transformed into a vibrant, curated market and venue space, creating new commercial and

community floorspace in the heart of the town centre embodying the SRF vision for Macclesfield - "Green, Creative, Social and Quirky".

- 5.39.4 CEC Regeneration Service are currently in the process of procuring a study to look at a range of options for the transformation of Macclesfield markets, mindful of the desirability of enhancing these assets even if LUF bids are unsuccessful.

Old Sunday School

- 5.39.5 Macclesfield's Old Sunday School is a landmark Grade II* listed building adjacent to the retail core. Saved from demolition in the 1980s, it houses the town's only cinema on its upper floor - a well-utilised community facility. However, the ground and first floors have a poorly connected and divided layout, inhibiting visitor flow and limiting community and commercial uses. These floors need repair and repurposing to be 'business-ready' for new cultural and community users. Funds were sought as part of the Macclesfield LUF bid to enable the delivery of the Sunday School project. The delivery of this project would be led by the Silk Heritage Trust.

Additional Pipeline projects

- 5.39.6 Aligned to the SRF, an Options and Feasibility Study is currently underway, considering the scope for rationalising and consolidating Council owned parking around the Station Gateway and the Churchill Way corridor. This study is testing opportunities for unlocking sites for development which could enhance the town centre offer, improve the appearance of key areas, and boost employment and town centre living, all to the benefit of the overall vitality and viability of the town centre. The ongoing study is due to be completed by January 2022 and will enable the Council to better understand: the development potential of the study areas; options for redevelopment and likely viability; the anticipated social/public value of viable options; the best mechanism to deliver the preferred option(s); and anticipated costs. Engagement with ward councillors will be undertaken as findings emerge.
- 5.39.7 The Regeneration Team are also in the process of commissioning a study looking at a wide variety of potential options to increase utilisation of the Old Town Hall in Macclesfield.
- 5.39.8 Given the popularity of the temporary outdoor seating area created this year in Market Place, a study is also now planned to look at options for increasing outdoor hospitality opportunities in the area around Park Green, with or without funding from the LUF.

Key Service Centres - Town Centre Vitality Plans

- 5.40** The Council recognises that with the wave of internet retailing and online service provision, all town centres are facing changes and challenges. Centres are having to face a future where they are less retail based and more

multi-functional. To help the Council identify how it can best support individual town centres to transition successfully, the Council has commissioned a specialist team to engage with Town Council's in the borough's nine key service centres and their stakeholders, and to develop nine bespoke Town Centre Vitality Plans, one for each town centre.

- 5.41** This work commenced in 2020 with initial stakeholder engagement sessions. Baseline overview reports have been produced for each centre and shared with town councils. These baseline reports bring together in one concise document for each town, an analysis of the town centres as they currently exist, with an overview of any existing plans and policies for the town centres. The team has also produced a 'Toolkit' report, which identifies the top 25 factors impacting on town centre vitality and viability which can be influenced at the local level (as identified by the Institute of Place Management and High Street Task Force) and sets out examples of initiatives to support those top 25 factors.
- 5.42** The next stage of the work is now ongoing, with further liaison with town councils and other stakeholders. Building on the baseline reviews and taking inspiration from the Toolkit, this phase of work will identify what might be key priority initiatives to focus on to support the health of their individual town centre. The TCVP work recognises that regeneration is not necessarily synonymous with major capital redevelopment schemes. That might be the right approach for one town but completely inappropriate in another. The Town Centre Vitality Plans are about helping both town councils and CEC work out the most appropriate priority actions for each town on an individual basis, whether long term major capital projects or more readily deliverable smaller interventions.
- 5.43** Draft Town Centre Vitality Plans are due to be produced by the end of this year. It is planned that these will be the subject of a public consultation exercise in early 2022. Final drafts of the Town Centre Vitality Plans, together with feedback from the consultation, and recommendations from the expert external team will then be reported back to Economy and Growth Committee before TCVP are formalised.

Welcome Back Fund

- 5.44** The Welcome Back Fund is providing councils across England a share of £56 million from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to support the safe return to high streets and help build back better from the pandemic. This funding builds on the £50 million Reopening High Street Safely Fund (RHSSF) allocated to councils in 2020. In total, across both funds, the Council has been awarded up to £679,067. All funds must be defrayed by the end of the current financial year for the Council to be able to claim them back from the ERDF.
- 5.45** The Council has entered into a funding agreement and officers are pursuing activities to support the short-term recovery of town centres, liaising with the town councils of the two principal towns and nine key service centres, seeking their views, support, and assistance.

- 5.46 Activities within scope for this funding are restricted to specific, tightly constrained categories. All interventions also need to be temporary. The principal activities delivered using WBF to date have focused on temporary public realm interventions and public information campaigns.
- 5.47 Temporary public realm interventions were introduced in 17 High Streets to enable and encourage social distancing, including provision of awareness raising signs, social distancing pavement markings, traffic management and erection of temporary barriers to widen footways in locations of high footfall where social distancing was problematic.
- 5.48 Public information campaigns to encourage safe return to High Streets were run in 2020 and spring 2021. The most significant of these was the ‘Say Hi to the High Street campaign’ launched in Spring 2021 which included: a poster campaign focusing on key safety messages; a social and online media campaign with a series of mini videos promoting eleven town centres produced; and a direct mailshot to 187,000 business and residents. (See images at **Figure 8**) Working collaboratively with town councils to help push the campaign out to social media and local businesses, the social media campaigns showed an estimated reach of 60.3K on Facebook and 68.8K on Twitter.



5.50 Following consultation with town councils, a range of further activities are currently being pursued before spring March 2022 including: pre-Christmas media campaign to promote shopping local in the run up to Christmas and advertising any local late-night openings, events etc; spring media campaign focused on valuing and supporting local town centres; leaflets to promote the pavement licence process to encourage hospitality businesses to get ready to make the most of outdoor pavement seating next summer; purchase of deckchairs, chairs, tables and gazebos to facilitate local events and use of outdoor public space in town centres; procurement of equipment to support local volunteer groups wanting to help keep their town centre litter free; creative light box installations in Macclesfield and Crewe town centres; planters and plants to supplement those already purchased by town councils. Activities may have to be adapted as procurements are pursued to try and maximise beneficial impacts for our town centres.

Conclusions

5.51 The last 18 months has seen considerable progress on a number of key strategic regeneration projects, despite the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic. More work than ever before is now being undertaken to identify potential pipeline projects in a wider range of town centres and it is anticipated that public consultation on draft Town Centre Recovery Plans will occur in early 2022.

5.52 There are however a number of risks and challenges with the regeneration of town centres moving forward. The procurement of construction services and supply of construction materials has been the subject of significant disruption and cost inflation over recent months. This is starting to impact on project timescales and project budgets and represents a large risk to the regeneration programme.

5.53 Whilst there is much that could be done to support our town centres with available funding, the reality is, that if the Council is to maintain a balanced budget, many projects which would be beneficial to the regeneration or revitalisation of town centres are only likely to proceed to implementation with Government or other external funding. This is not to diminish the value of having well developed town centre regeneration project plans, which are often a key requirement when Government funding opportunities are announced.

5.54 With the surge in online retailing and service provision during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the associated accelerated reduction in high street presence of many larger retailers and services, it seems likely that our town centres will continue to face challenges. Maintaining a watching brief on town centre health will be important as will continuing to think innovatively about how best the Council can maximise the impacts of its efforts to support our town centres.

6 Consultation and Engagement

- 6.1** All wards contain residents who access a variety of town centres. In developing strategies for town centre regeneration, it is normal practice to engage stakeholders in identifying key issues and opportunities and to undertake a full public consultation on draft strategic plans. For individual projects aligned to an approved strategy, the degree of consultation and/or engagement will vary from project to project, determined on a case-by-case basis.
- 6.2** Both the Regeneration Delivery Framework for Crewe town centre and the Strategic Regeneration Framework for Macclesfield town centre were consulted on widely prior to finalisation and approval. The Town Centre Vitality Plans currently being developed in draft will be made available for a six-week public consultation, planned in early 2022. This process allows emerging plans to be tested and adapted according to consultation feedback.

7 Implications

7.1 Legal

- 7.1.1 The report notes the progress made with the Town Centre regeneration schemes. Legal support has been provided and is ongoing, advising on the property, planning and funding aspects of the schemes as they have developed.
- 7.1.2 The vitality plans coincide with the emerging SADPD which promotes a town centre first approach to retail and commerce: essentially acknowledging the fundamental role that the town centre plays in the vitality of the Borough and how their futures can be best secured. These plans are in their infancy and will be consulted upon next year and once the SADPD has come into force.
- 7.1.3 Para 7.2 below identifies various grant funding streams the Council has received funding from to support its town centre regeneration and recovery plans. In each case the funding is granted on the basis of terms and conditions. Prior to accepting each tranche of funding legal should be asked to review and comment on the funding terms and conditions. From the finance implications set out below (paras 7.2.3 and 7.2.4) the Council is adhering to the grant conditions which is important as failure to do so could give rise to the application of sanctions against the Council and an obligation on the part of the Council to repay funds awarded in whole or in part by way of clawback. There is therefore a need to monitor the position on an ongoing basis .

7.2 Finance

- 7.2.1 As this is an update report with no decision required, there are no direct financial implications stemming from this report. The following funding

streams are being used to finance the various town centre regeneration activities set out in this report.

- 7.2.2 *Future High Streets Fund (FHSF)*: The Government has already confirmed a funding award of £14.1m to support ten regeneration projects in Crewe. The Council Cabinet meeting of 10 November 2020 delegated authority to the Executive Director – Place to accept the grant and approve the associated Supplementary Capital Estimates. The initial grant for 2021/22 has been received and is being managed in line with the grant conditions. Grant funding for future years is subject to approval, linked to the Government’s Comprehensive Spending Review. Council co-funding of projects is subject to approval on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the constitution, including committees, delegations and other advisory groups (e.g. Capital Programme Board).
- 7.2.3 *Accelerated Towns Fund (ATF)*. The Government has previously confirmed a funding award of £0.75m to support the Ly² project in Crewe, in response to a funding proposal from Crewe Town Board. The Council Cabinet meeting of 10 November 2020 delegated authority to the Executive Director – Place to accept the grant and approve the associated Supplementary Capital Estimate. This grant has been received in full and is being managed in line with the grant conditions.
- 7.2.4 *Towns Fund (TF)*. The Government has announced a funding allocation of £22.9m to Crewe Town Board, for ten projects which the Council has responsibility as accountable body. However, this allocation is still subject to confirmation, as each project is required to submit a full business case which will require independent appraisal and approval by the Town Board. The Council’s S151 Officer is engaged with this process which is expected to complete in summer 2022. The Full Council meeting of 22nd June 2021 delegated authority to the Executive Director – Place to approve Supplementary Capital and Revenue Estimates up to the value of the Towns Fund grant award, as well as authority to incur expenditure in line with the conditions of the Fund.
- 7.2.5 *Welcome Back Fund (WBF)*. The Government has awarded CEC up to £679,067 from the WBF to support short term, revenue based, activity to support the recovery of High Streets from the impacts of Covid-19 and to enable safe reopening of town centres. This is ERDF funding, and the Council must cover expenditure initially and then seek to reclaim from the fund. To date £231,909 has been claimed back. All expenditure must be defrayed by the end of March 2022.
- 7.2.6 As indicated in 5.24.1, one of the projects benefitting from external grant funding is also dependent on co-funding from the Council. Part of this

requirement relates to the cost of demolishing the proposed site and its immediate surrounds; this is the former Crewe Library and Civic Centre Car Park.

7.2.7 The projects recently delivered in Macclesfield described at 5.29-5.36 have been funded by CEC, other than the temporary outdoor hospitality area in Market Place, which was a collaboratively delivered project with elements of funding from CEC and Macclesfield Town Council, with the Town Council making the greater financial contribution. Feasibility work on pipeline projects in Macclesfield is also being funded by CEC. As described in 5.39.2-5.39.5 a bid has been made to the Levelling Up Fund to enable future delivery of three of three major projects in Macclesfield town centre but has not been successful in round 1.

7.2.8 The Town Centre Vitality Plans are being developed using CEC funds. No funding has yet been identified for any suggested activities or projects which those plans may recommend.

7.3 Policy

7.3.1 The Corporate Plan recognises that successful town centres are vital to ensuring thriving urban and rural economies with opportunities for all, but town centre regeneration projects can support more than a thriving economy. If designed and delivered with more holistic thinking, town centre regeneration projects can help deliver on a wealth of policies including: enabling accessible, well designed, affordable homes; making best use of corporate assets; tackling crime and anti-social activity; improving open spaces for people to socialise; supporting the move to being carbon neutral; and facilitating the uptake of cycling and walking.

7.4 Equality

7.4.1 There are no direct implications for equalities stemming from this update report. Equalities Impact Assessments (EIA) are carried out relating to new regeneration strategies or plans and individual regeneration projects.

7.5 Human Resources

7.5.1 There are no direct implications for human resources stemming from this update report.

7.6 Risk Management

7.6.1 There are no direct implications for risk management stemming from this report.

7.7 Rural Communities

7.7.1 Since this report focuses on town centres there are considered to be no specific implications for rural communities. Clearly many residents of rural areas will be utilising the services and facilities found in our town centres where they can access them.

7.8 Children and Young People/Cared for Children

7.8.1 Town centres offer facilities and spaces which can be used by residents of all ages. Key to successful town centres is recognising that younger people may look to town centres to provide activities and opportunities in a different way to older generations. It is important in developing town centre regeneration strategies that we aim to engage with children and young people to test their views on emerging ideas.

7.9 Public Health

7.9.1 The quality of the built environment is a determining factor for mental and physical health. Noise, pollution, access to safe spaces to cycle and walk, quality of open space, opportunities for people to meet and socialise, access to services and appearance can all play a part. Therefore, town centre regeneration strategies and projects can have an impact on mental and physical health. Creating an accessible, inclusive built environment that enables everyone to play an equal role in society is important in protecting and enhancing everyone's well-being and health.

7.10 Climate Change

7.10.1 Town centre strategy and regeneration projects provide many opportunities to help the Council in delivering actions related to environmental sustainability. Each project will present different opportunities, and these are now considered routinely at all stages of project development.

| Access to Information | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Contact Officer: | Jo Wise - Development and Regeneration Manager Jo.wise@cheshireeast.gov.uk 07870 391694 |
| Appendices: | Appendix A: Town centre vacancy and footfall data Appendix B: Summary of Crewe Town Centre current project pipeline. |
| Background Papers: | Crewe Town Investment Plan Portfolio Holder Decision to enter into GFA for RHSSF Cheshire East Council Cabinet report 10 November 2020 |