

Culture and Leisure Sub-Committee

31 January 2023

Present: Councillor J Cruddas (Chair)
Councillors K Barrie, D Drummond, L Ferasin, J Kirwin,
G Madden, L Marshall, P McIntyre, A Newman and J Shaw

Apologies: Councillors G Bell and L Bell

C&L17/23 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members reported.

C&L18/23 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.

C&L19/23 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 2 November 2022 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

C&L20/23 An Ambition for Wallsend

Consideration was given to a report and presentation by the Regeneration Project Manager, which provided an update on progress of the development of the Wallsend Masterplan (An Ambition for Wallsend) and the projects that related to culture and leisure.

Following the report to Cabinet of 26 November 2018, *An Ambition for North Tyneside*, a programme of masterplans was initiated to address issues of regeneration and redevelopment across North Tyneside.

At its meeting on 28 March 2022, Cabinet received a report which set out a set of policy priorities for Wallsend Town Centre. These policy priorities were developed with the Deputy Mayor and following engagement with the Ward Councillors for Battle Hill, Howdon, Northumberland and Wallsend and were to inform a Masterplan for Wallsend which is identified as a priority in Our North Tyneside Plan 2021-2025.

The policy priorities agreed by Cabinet were:

- **Improve the quality of the housing offer in Wallsend;** in particular making the area a focus of the Mayor and Cabinet's plans for 5,000 affordable homes along with tackling some of the poor quality privately rented housing in the masterplan area.
- It is also about **making the town centre and the neighbourhoods around it great places to visit and live;** improving the street scene and public spaces and working with partners to make sure people feel safe;
- And finally, it is **about making sure Wallsend residents are connected to good jobs** by using the full range of tools, including adult education services and

apprenticeships and the transport infrastructure around the town to make sure people in the community, who need it, are supported to improve their life chances.

Over the past 6 months, and working with the Deputy Mayor, Ward Members, the Chief Executive and other stakeholders had prepared a draft Masterplan which reflected the Authority's ambition for the town centre and delivered on the policy objectives which were agreed in May 2022.

The draft Wallsend Masterplan (for consultation) was approved by Cabinet on 28 November 2022. Consultation would take place in January and February before an amended Masterplan is brought back to Cabinet in spring 2023.

The draft Masterplan proposes fourteen interventions that would deliver the three policy priorities for Wallsend, as identified by Cabinet.

The interventions build on the cultural and leisure investment in Wallsend over the last 15 years such as Hadrian Leisure Centre, the Wallsend Parks heritage lottery fund refurbishment and the improvements to the Customer First Centre and the library which had enabled a wider range of activities and exhibitions to be accommodated. Wallsend Parks, the town centre and Segedunum Roman Fort & Museum was also the focus for an established programme of events including the fireworks at Segedunum and the annual Wallsend festival.

There were two projects relating to Segedunum which provided Wallsend with a unique opportunity to develop a world class cultural attraction as part of the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site.

Culture and leisure was central to other projects too such as Project 8 – Cycle Corridors, Project 11 – Historic Buildings & Conservation and Project 14 – Events and Animation. There were opportunities in the public realm and built environment projects too for cultural intervention for example by appointing artists or creative practitioners to work alongside architects and engineers in the design teams.

The scope of the Masterplan area was agreed at Cabinet in March 2022. It covered the town centre core of High Street East and West, the Forum shopping centre and Station Road, with their surrounding catchment area of housing. It also included the Segedunum Roman Fort and Museum and Wallsend riverside as far as Davy Bank and to the north it included the Parks, Wallsend Hall, and the former Buddle School and arts centre building. This built on the early engagement with ward members which had helped inform thinking and the direction of the Masterplan.

In addition, since March 2022 the Authority had been working to better understand the issues, challenges and opportunities in Wallsend focussing in particular on the three policy priorities of housing, place and employment. This work included:

- A review of recent reports such as the surveys of town centre businesses and customers in 2021 (the "Understanding the Heart of our Town" report).
- An assessment of the town centre's buildings, roads, streets, footpaths and public spaces and development of ideas for improving them.
- A review of the local property market to better understand the supply of and demand for homes, shops and offices.
- Identification of opportunities to support residents in securing employment and improving their skills e.g., adult education and a "Working Well" employability hub.

- Creation of the River Tyne Task Force with the North of Tyne Combined Authority, Port of Tyne, businesses and other local authorities marketing the offshore energy opportunities under the 'Tyne Powered' brand and providing a collective voice to talk to Government.
- A review of traffic flows, transport usage and car parking.
- Working with the Academic Health Science Network (AHSN) and the One Public Estate initiative to understand the opportunities for the Masterplan to support public health initiatives and provision. The AHSN had recently appointed artists to explore how mental health and wellbeing, through the theme of 'Places of Sanctuary,' can be considered and reflected in designing for the built environment.

The fourteen proposed projects were mostly based on a specific place or building while those covering Business Support, Employment Support and Events & Animation would apply throughout the masterplan area:

Project 1 – Wallsend Town Square: Located at the heart of the town centre the existing square provides a natural focal point for visitors and town centre activities. Refurbishment of these pedestrianised areas next to the Forum Shopping Centre, Customer First Centre and Anson Public House is a key objective of the Masterplan. This will see the space remodelled through new planting, paving and street furniture and it will provide the high quality, multi-functional space at a key 'Gateway' into the town centre.

Project 2 – High Street West, High Street East and Station Road: Improve the appearance and experience on High Streets West, East and Station Road and improve the experience for pedestrians, cyclists, wheelchair users and other town centre visitors. This could be achieved through widening pavements, introducing street trees and seating while retaining access for vehicles and servicing. Providing some design continuity and developing a Wallsend suite of materials and street furniture will be an essential part of this approach.

Project 3 – Segedunum World Heritage Site Gateway: Reimagine Buddle Street and the featureless paved area between Buddle Street and Woolley Street creating a 'pocket park' and an environment that celebrates and recognises you are passing through a historic fort. A key issue will be to enhance the visual appeal and visitor experience whilst maintaining the road as a key riverside traffic route serving industry.

Project 4 – The Forum: New River Retail are planning to further invest and improve the connectivity between Aldi, the Health Centre and the retail shops by removing the large atrium area and replacing it with public realm whilst consolidating the existing retail. The existing two storey car park is a potential development site for which various options are being considered.

Project 5 – Bus & Metro Station: The current Bus and Metro station is in a strategic location sited between the town centre and Segedunum. However, its visual appeal is limited, and the site currently contributes little to the townscape (other than its function as an interchange), and in some ways, creates a barrier between the town centre and Segedunum. The masterplan seeks to explore options to modify the existing interchange through new tree and shrub planting and improved pedestrian and cycle links to Segedunum. This could extend to removal of some or all bus stands enabling new development to progress such as a cycle hub and secure cycle parking or even new build housing.

Project 6 – Housing Streetscape Improvements: The Masterplan proposes to transform the streets in the terraced housing north and south of the High Street East and West creating inclusive, pedestrian and cycle friendly streets that provide space for planting, allow safe children's play and can accommodate future electric vehicle infrastructure. This will

radically improve the appearance, liveability and appeal of Wallsend Town Centre as a destination of choice for new (and existing) residents.

Project 7 – Housing Development (New Build & Refurbishment): Bring forward opportunities to refurbish existing homes and be proactive in bringing forward new build such as the Portugal Place/High Street West/Border Road site as well as windfall sites. This will be complemented by initiatives to raise housing standards especially in poor quality private rented homes. This will build on our success in North Shields where we have successfully delivered new housing opportunities and will broaden the Wallsend housing offer and will help attract new residents who are economically mobile and are able to support local shops and services.

Project 8 – Cycle Corridors: Wallsend is on the National Cycle Routes and therefore has a considerable reach into the local, national and international cycling communities. Improvements to the C2C/Route 72/Hadrian's Cycleway include a possible cycle hub and the creation of new routes north from the C2C via Holly Avenue to the town centre and via Park Road to Richardson Dees Park. These collectively will improve provision and the attractiveness of the routes to cyclists which will have spin off benefits for the town centre.

Project 9 – Segedunum Transformation: The existence of a World Heritage Site within the Town Centre provides a raft of opportunities to drive footfall and spend in the town centre. It also provides the opportunity for the museum to become an asset in the heart of the community which benefits both residents and businesses. The masterplan therefore proposes the transformation of Segedunum Roman Fort & Museum through new galleries, stories about the wider history of the town, together with Augmented Reality (AR) & Virtual Reality (VR) experiences. Works will also involve repairing and reopening the Bath House, relocating the café, creating an outdoor events space and frontage improvements that shouts we are a world-class World Heritage Site. Segedunum presents a unique opportunity to redefine the town centre offer and to improve links to the retail core which will be an essential component of any scheme.

Project 10 – Segedunum Linkages: It is important to draw Segedunum into the town centre offer and to improve the linkages between the two. As such, the Masterplan considers options for interventions to improve and enhance the routes between Segedunum and the Metro Station and town centre which could include additional signage, planting, waymarkers, banners and coloured paving and surfacing.

Project 11 – Historic Buildings & Conservation: Wallsend has some beautiful and well-appointed buildings which reflect the wealth and proud history of the town. The Masterplan proposes to initiate and support ways of restoring and finding new uses for much loved, historic buildings such as the Buddle, the Civic Hall and the former Coach and Horses Public House. We will also investigate the scope for declaring a town centre Conservation Area.

Project 12 – Business Support: Growing the local economy and securing inward investment will be a key ingredient of future success. The Masterplan seeks to deliver a programme of bespoke business support using the grant funding from the Towns and High Streets Innovation Programme. This includes support for start-ups and established SMEs, a town centre business adviser and shop front grants.

Project 13 – Employment Support: One of our key policy objectives for Wallsend is to ensure residents are connected to good jobs and are able to fulfil their potential. Development of the Working Well Employability Hub will provide employment and skills support in one place. Initiatives will also assist people not using mainstream services as

well as improving adult education provision. Digital inclusion will be a key element given that many job adverts and interviews etc., were held on-line.

Project 14 – Events & Animation: Town centres thrive on activity and a varied events programme can help drive footfall, increase visitor spend and, importantly, leads to repeat visits. Expanding the scope and reach of Wallsend’s existing programme to drive footfall and increase participation will be a major contributing factor to the town’s future success. This can be achieved through greater use of the Customer First Centre and Segedunum and exploring new initiatives through AR and VR, town trails and attractions such as drone based light shows.

Information used in the preparation of this report:-

Report to Cabinet 28 November 2022, An Ambition for Wallsend

<https://democracy.northtyneside.gov.uk/documents/s10465/An%20Ambition%20for%20Wallsend%20Report%20and%20Appendix%201%20Appendix%202.pdf>

An Ambition for Wallsend – Draft Masterplan

<https://democracy.northtyneside.gov.uk/documents/s10571/An%20Ambition%20for%20Wallsend%20-%20Masterplan.pdf>

During discussions reference was made to the funding and maintenance of Parks in the area including Richardson Dees; It was explained that a management plan was in place as part of Lottery funding support with initial investments received with potential for follow-up.

Clarification was sought on how the area would be developed without Levelling Up the support of funding; It was explained that there was potential for further Lottery funding and the Authority was looking to submit a second phase bid to secure a £5m package of money for Segedunum, also a third phase levelling up bid to be announced by the Government in due course. Other opportunities included money from North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA) in addition to the £1.9m already secured, Shop Front improvements was also a possibility.

It was noted that as the Authority already had a Masterplan in place and by having a planned structure/framework it was in a good position when bidding for further projects. It was also noted that the Authority needed to be flexible in submitting future levelling-up bids as the Government had confirmed that previous bids could not be re-submitted as the criteria was likely to change.

The Chair, on behalf of the Sub-Committee, welcomed the plans for Wallsend and progress on the development of Wallsend Masterplan projects, and thanked officers and all those who had bought into the vision.

It was **agreed** that the report and presentation on the culture and leisure elements of the developing Wallsend Master Plan (An Ambition for Wallsend) be noted.

C&L21/23 Date and Time Next Meeting

Tuesday 7 March 2023 at 6.00pm.