

North Tyneside Council

Report to Cabinet

Date: 28 March 2022

Title: An Ambition for Wallsend

Portfolio: Deputy Mayor	Cabinet Member: Councillor Carl Johnson
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Report from Service Area:

Regeneration and Economic Development

Responsible Officer:

John Sparkes, Director of Regeneration and Economic Development Tel: (0191) 643 6091

Wards affected:

Battle Hill, Howdon, Northumberland and Wallsend

PART 1

1.1 Executive Summary:

At its meeting on 21st February 2022, Cabinet received an update report which identified that, in line with Our North Tyneside Plan 2021-2025, additional Masterplans had been added to the Council's regeneration strategy, and that a report on Wallsend would be presented to a future Cabinet meeting.

An officer team has been working with the Deputy Mayor and have engaged with the Ward Councillors for Battle Hill, Howdon, Northumberland and Wallsend to understand the opportunities and challenges in Wallsend. This has included reviewing the supporting data and to begin to engage with partners to frame the Authority's work to deliver this priority. This report seeks Cabinet agreement to the first stage of that work and a set of policy priorities to inform the next stage.

Our overall aim is to create a vision and a plan to implement it, that provides a vibrant and connected place. As part of this work, three key themes have been identified as policy priorities for inclusion within the plan: These are:

- **Improve the quality of the housing offer in Wallsend;** in particular making the area a focus of the Mayor and Cabinet's plans for 5000 affordable homes and tackling some of the poor quality privately rented housing in the masterplan area
- **Make the town centre and the nearby neighbourhoods great places to visit and live;** improving the street scene, public spaces and working with partners to make sure people feel safe; and
- **Make sure Wallsend residents are connected to good jobs;** using the full range of tools, including adult education, apprenticeships and the capabilities plus the

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

In addition to the above and recognising the contribution Wallsend Town Centre and its environs make to the region's economy, the North East Local Enterprise Partnership and North of Tyne Combined Authority have agreed to fund business case development work to inform master planning and research on the economic opportunities in the area. In parallel, the Government has announced further rounds of the Levelling Up Fund which may be of benefit to Wallsend.

The report provides background and a summary of the work done so far and suggests a set of policy priorities and next steps for Cabinet agreement.

1.2 Recommendation(s):

It is recommended that Cabinet:

(1) notes the work done so far.

(2) agrees the proposed policy priorities including the boundary and scope of the proposed Masterplan as outlined in the report; and

(3) agrees the next steps including wider engagement and to receiving further reports as required.

1.3 Forward Plan:

Twenty-eight days' notice of this report has been given and it first appeared on the Forward Plan that was published on 28 January 2022.

1.4 Council Plan and Policy Framework

This report relates to the following themes in the 2021-25 Our North Tyneside Plan:

- A thriving North Tyneside
- A secure North Tyneside
- A green North Tyneside

The Wallsend Masterplan also relates to the Local Plan 2017 which sets the planning policies to guide the development and regeneration of Wallsend Town Centre and the adjoining areas.

1.5 Information:

1.5.1 Background

Wallsend has a long and proud history dating back to the Roman conquest and occupation where it served as the eastern end for Hadrian's Wall. Whilst the town's name is derived from its Roman origins, the town is perhaps best known for being a manufacturing powerhouse. It was at the centre of industrial growth on the River Tyne throughout the 19th Century and had a worldwide reputation for ship building.

Be it the RMS Mauretania, which held the Blue Riband award for the fastest crossing of the Atlantic for 22 years, or the launch of Charles Parson's Turbinia in 1894, which not

only revolutionised how ships were powered but also revolutionised the modern age by enabling the large-scale production of affordable electricity, Wallsend has always been a centre for cutting edge engineering design and innovation.

The town also has a long list of sons and daughters who have made their mark on the World. This includes current stars of stage and screen such as Vicky Pattison and Charlie Hardwick, music icons such as Sting as well as a host of world class footballers, who passed through the ranks of Wallsend Boys Club including, Alan Shearer, Peter Beardsley and Steve Bruce.

Whilst the fortunes of Wallsend have ebbed and flowed with changes in the national economy and the de-industrialisation of the river in the 1970's and 1980's, the winds of change have blown through the River Tyne corridor over recent years and we have seen a renaissance in advanced manufacturing driven by offshore energy opportunities. This was exemplified with the recent purchase of the Swan Hunter shipyard which saw the site acquired by Shepherd Offshore limited who intend to bring the site forward for manufacturing purposes in line with the Council's objectives.

Building on this, the Mayor through the Council's 'Our North Tyneside Plan' gave a commitment to bring forward a Masterplan for Wallsend Town Centre and at its meeting on 21 February 2022, Cabinet agreed an update to its regeneration strategy "An Ambition for North Tyneside." That updated strategy made clear that Wallsend Town Centre and its environs were a specific priority.

As we emerge from the Coronavirus pandemic, it is evident that our local high streets are at the centre of our communities providing a range of goods and services that meet the needs of residents and visitors. However, they continue to face massive social and structural change, particularly through the move to online shopping and a shift away from retail to leisure activity. A Masterplan for Wallsend will provide a framework for targeted interventions within the town centre to deliver on our policy objectives. It will also provide a clear narrative and strong a platform from which to launch future funding bids.

1.5.3 What we are trying to achieve

As noted in the Executive Summary, working with the Deputy Mayor, Officers have agreed that for Wallsend we will look at 3 themes as priorities for the Masterplan:

- **Improve the quality of the housing offer in Wallsend;** in particular, making the area a focus of the Mayor and Cabinet's plans for 5000 affordable homes and tackling some of the poor quality privately rented housing in the Masterplan area.

This element of the Masterplan will therefore look at improving housing provision and quality within the town centre in line with the Mayor and Cabinet's commitment around affordable homes. The town has a predominance of private rented housing stock to the south of the High Street and tackling some of the poorer quality accommodation will be a priority. The age and condition of some of the stock is also an issue, particularly the pre-1918 terrace properties which are often thermally inefficient and expensive to run for families on limited incomes. However, there are a range of other opportunities for new or improved housing within the town centre and the Masterplan will seek to unlock these

- **Make the town centre and the nearby neighbourhoods great places to visit and live;** improving the street scene, public spaces and working with partners to make sure people feel safe.

How the town centre feels and looks is central to its success. An attractive and high-quality built environment can help engender a sense of place and belonging and civic pride as well as creating economic, social and environmental value. The Masterplan will therefore focus on improving the quality of place by investing in the built environment and promoting the town as a destination for shopping, leisure and living. This will include proposals for improving the public realm as well as reviewing vehicle movements whilst ensuring the town centre remains fully accessible to businesses and visitors.

- **Make sure Wallsend residents are connected to good jobs;** using the full range of tools, including adult education, apprenticeships and the capabilities plus the transport infrastructure around the town to make sure people in the community, who need it, are supported to improve their life chances.

Our residents are key to the success and long-term sustainability of our places and town centres in particular. Thriving residents with good jobs have greater spending power and are able to support thriving local centres by accessing the shops and services located there.

In addition to these three priority themes, the Masterplan will also examine other areas for interventions. This will include looking at opportunity sites for new investment which could include housing, retail and leisure related uses. It will also look at the synergies and connections between the riverside employment areas and the town centre and will examine ways to capture the economic benefits arising from new inward investment and new employment opportunities.

Furthermore, it will also identify key assets within the town centre which help underpin the wider offer and will include key green spaces and buildings such as the Wallsend Memorial Hall, Buddle and GB Hunter Memorial Hospital to see how these can be aligned with the objectives of the Masterplan.

1.5.4 How we will achieve that

Right now: We have already been working to improve the residential offer within the town centre. We have recently refurbished and repurposed residential properties in Charlotte Street which leads to High Street East. Having acquired them from a single landlord where there were significant issues around poor property management / maintenance and ASB, the properties have now been successfully converted from flats to family accommodation. In addition to providing high-quality homes, this intervention has had a major impact on the appearance and perceptions of Charlotte Street and has significantly improved the quality of lives of the residents living there.

The Authority has also been active in securing funding to help deliver on our emerging Masterplan objectives. This includes working with the North East LEP to secure £80K from the Accelerated Development Fund (ADF) to assist in the delivery of the Masterplan. Similarly, we are also securing funding for delivery of the Masterplan through the NoTCA Place Innovation Fund.

We also continue to work with partners to support the delivery of new healthcare facilities to the rear of the Forum Shopping Centre. In addition to providing much needed new facilities and bringing forward a vacant site, the development will also improve the appearance and liveability of the town centre.

Finally, we continue to work with the new owners (Shepherd Offshore Ltd) of the Swan Hunter site to support the delivery of new employment opportunities and to bring forward new high-quality jobs.

Next: Following confirmation of MEND funding from Central Government which seeks to invest in the physical fabric of cultural institutions, we will commence a series of remedial works to the main Segedunum visitor building. We will also seek to attract further external funding to assist with the delivery of transformational changes to the Segedunum Museum offer. This will be to enhance its visitor offer and provide facilities that reflect its World Heritage site status and reinforces its role as a town centre asset which contributes to the wider visitor experience and sense of place.

When funding and timing allows:

As funding becomes available through either NoTCA or Homes England, we will look to implement targeted interventions to improve and diversify the town centre housing offer. This will seek to ensure there is a choice in terms of type and tenure and that it helps provide a balanced local housing offer that appeals to a broad range of residents. There may also be opportunities to deliver new housing through the Council's Trading Company (Aurora) in a similar vein to the schemes recently delivered as part of the North Shields Regeneration.

We will also look to build on our successful series of events in the town centre, such as the current Morph trail and the Peter Rabbit exhibition in Wallsend Customer First Centre, which will drive visitor footfall and promote the town centre as a destination for visitors.

1.5.5 Developing policy priorities

Much of the immediate work is underway following the successful award of funding from the NELEP (ADF) and as noted earlier in the report, work has focussed on understanding the data and establishing some policy priorities. Initial work in the last few months between the Officer team and the Cabinet Member has focussed on:

Baseline Data; Developing a robust empirical evidence base which will underpin the Masterplan and will support future funding bids.

Property ownership and market; We have been getting a full understanding of land ownership within Wallsend Town Centre and the Riverside. This will help us engage with key landowners and other interested parties to help deliver on our policy objectives enshrined in the Masterplan.

Planning; the team have also engaged with planning colleagues in order to have a full overview of the Wallsend elements of the 2017 Local Plan. The proposed policy objectives set out in this report are aligned to and complement the policy objectives set out within the agreed Local Plan.

Transport flows; the team looked at current flows and emerging developments. This work also looked at potential network management plans and how best to achieve some goals to re-route transport and support pedestrians and cyclists. Removing or redirecting traffic at key locations in the town centre will provide for a less vehicle dominated environment providing a better visitor experience. Given narrow pavements along the High Street (East and West), this could include opportunities for pavement widening to encourage more activity in the centre such as outdoor seating areas as well as significantly enhancing the appearance, feel and liveability of the centre.

Housing; finally, the team looked at the strategic housing picture and have considered the current stock, its condition and what housing need there is within the Masterplan area. Wallsend has a diverse housing offer but there is an opportunity to tackle poor quality rented homes and some significant developments to bring quality private sector developments forward.

Alongside this, the officer team have been looking at the national policy direction and best practice to get a better understanding of what success looks like for town centres. This included The High Street Report published in December 2018, and the covid recovery work for Wallsend Town Centre.

As per the Executive Summary section of the report, that work has identified a set of three key policy priorities which Cabinet are asked to agree in order that they might shape the next stages of the work. They are:

- 1) Improve the quality of the housing offer in Wallsend;** As noted in the Executive Summary, the Masterplan should focus on the town's housing provision and the Mayor and Cabinet's plans for 5000 affordable homes.

Of particular interest is the private rented sector, which dominates the southern part of the town as it runs adjacent to the High Street. Tackling some of the poorer quality private rented accommodation will be a priority in improving the quality of place. By providing new opportunities across a range of housing types and tenures, a balanced housing market can be created which will help support and sustain the town centre whilst providing affordable housing opportunities for our residents.

This could include the provision of new build homes as well as the refurbishment of existing homes (and other buildings) which may be underperforming at present due to poor management and a lack of investment – again, particularly in the private rented sector. However, a guiding principle will be to ensure that high quality design and levels of sustainability are paramount in providing a good housing offer which meets the needs of existing residents as well as those we wish to attract to Wallsend.

- 2) Make the town centre and the nearby neighbourhoods great places to visit and live;** improving the street scene, public spaces and working with partners to make sure people feel safe.

This is about creating a high-quality built environment and ensuring that the public realm and our places and spaces are safe and welcoming and reflect the aspiration of our communities. This includes learning from recent projects and setting high standard of design and material for our work within both the public realm and building projects in general. This will help improve the perception of Wallsend as a great place to live, work and visit and will, in time, attract new residents into the town centre which will help ensure its long-term viability and sustainability.

This activity will be supported by better transport flows, stronger infrastructure, and better-quality built environment – all of which will contribute to the wider housing / place offer.

- 3) Make sure Wallsend residents are connected to good jobs;** using the full range of tools, including adult education, apprenticeships and the capabilities plus the

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

This is not just about more, better, and inclusive jobs and building on the work we are doing across the North of Tyne area. It is about ensuring our residents are able to access high quality jobs across the borough and beyond. It is important to ensure residents can access jobs in South East Northumberland or in Newcastle and that the transport connections (including bus, metro and rail) are in place to get people to and from employment areas.

It is also about ensuring that employers recognise Wallsend (and North Tyneside) as an accessible location of choice with a motivated and skilled workforce which are able to meet the needs of industry. This strand of the Masterplan will include facilitating increased economic activity, which will increase footfall and vitality in the town centre.

1.5.5 Next steps

Cabinet is asked to note the work done so far and agree the approach to the next stage.

Work has begun on developing the evidence base for a draft Wallsend Masterplan. Once sufficient thinking has been done to develop a policy narrative linked to potential practical steps to make it happen, the Masterplan is expected to be the basis of widening discussions with Ward Councillors, the Chamber of Commerce, Business Forum and the wider community.

While the technical study work will continue and funding bids to Government will be investigated, Cabinet is asked to agree the approach to the next stage of this work, specifically:

- Further and wider engagement, based on the three policy objectives and an emerging Masterplan to test the thinking done to date and seek input from the community in and around Wallsend; and
- Work to define specific projects and create a programme of activity based on the agreed regeneration strategy and the work already completed and coming next.

Subject to approval from Cabinet, it is anticipated that a draft Masterplan will be subject to engagement in summer 2022, prior to a final version being presented to Cabinet for adoption by autumn/winter 2022. The plan attached as Appendix 1 to this report shows the defined Masterplan boundary. It is the area of greatest need and will be the focus of our future interventions as it will have the maximum impact in achieving our policy objectives. The area includes:

- The riverside (including Swans) running from Benton Way to Davy Bank,
- High Street East & West, Station Road (up to North Road) and the Forum,
- Segedunum Roman Fort & Museum,
- Housing areas to the south and north of High Street West, and
- Richardson Dees Park and The Green Conservation Area.

1.6 **Decision options:**

The following decision options are available for consideration by Cabinet:

Option 1

To approve the recommendation set out in paragraph 1.2 above.

Option 2

To approve and/or reject some or all of the recommendations set out in paragraph 1.2 above.

Option 1 is the recommended option.

1.7 Reasons for recommended option:

Option 1 is recommended for the following reasons:

The scope aligns with the themes within the emerging Levelling Up prospectus and the Masterplan boundary enables the three themes of housing, employment and an improved built environment to be addressed.

1.8 Appendices:

Appendix 1: Outline Masterplan boundary.

1.9 Contact officers:

Paul Dowling, Head of Regeneration and Transport, 0191 643 1441
Graham Sword, Senior Manager - Regeneration, 0191 643 6421
Paul Graves, Regeneration Project Manager, 0191 643 6013
Claire Emmerson, Senior Finance Manager, 0191 643 8109

1.10 Background information:

The following background papers/information have been used in the compilation of this report:

- (1) Our North Tyneside Plan 2021-25 <https://my.northtyneside.gov.uk/category/1241/our-north-tyneside-plan>
- (2) Levelling Up Fund Prospectus <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-fund-prospectus>
- (3) Accelerated Development Fund Grant Offer – Wallsend Masterplan and A19 Corridor Improvements, Report of the Head of Regeneration and Transport, 31 January 2022:
<https://my.northtyneside.gov.uk/sites/default/files/web-page-related-files/Report%20Accelerated%20Devpt%20Fund%20Grant%20Offer%E2%80%93Wallsend%20Masterplan-A19%20Corridor.pdf>
- (4) An Ambition for North Tyneside – Update Report of the Director of Regeneration and Economic Development, 21 February 2022:
<https://democracy.northtyneside.gov.uk/documents/s7901/An%20Ambition%20for%20North%20Tyneside%20-%20Update.pdf>

PART 2 – COMPLIANCE WITH PRINCIPLES OF DECISION MAKING

2.1 Finance and other resources

In addition to ADF grant, North Tyneside Council Match funding for development of the Masterplan has been approved by the Investment Programme Board as set out below:

	ADF Funding 2021/22	Match Funding 2021/22	Total Project Cost 2021/22
Wallsend Masterplan	£80,000	£34,500 Feasibility Budget	£114,500

The Masterplan will include budget costs for interventions such as public realm improvements, highway and building refurbishment works.

2.2 Legal

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. As specific actions are brought forward under the policy priorities set out above the legal implications (if any) for those actions will be identified and reported.

2.3 Consultation/community engagement

2.3.1 Internal Consultation

The Ward members for Battle Hill, Howdon, Northumberland and Wallsend and the relevant Lead Cabinet Members have been briefed. Finance, legal and procurement senior officers have provided advice on this project and the background to this report. There will also be work with relevant service areas to ensure the full effects of the Masterplan are considered across the Council.

2.3.2 External Consultation/Engagement

Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums, as operators of Segedunum, have been advised about the Wallsend Masterplan as have the Wallsend Chamber of Trade. We have also had preliminary discussions with New River Retail, who operate the Forum Shopping Centre, to get an understanding of their longer-term objectives for the centre which includes some proposals for further investment.

Consultation with other stakeholders will take place as the Masterplan is developed to help shape the plan and will be led by the Engagement team.

2.4 Human rights

There are no Human Rights issues arising from this report.

2.5 Equalities and diversity

There are no equalities and diversity issues arising from this report. As the Masterplan and feasibility work progresses inclusive design principles will be central to the development of the proposals.

2.6 Risk management

A risk register will be developed for each of the projects and will be reviewed monthly by the project delivery teams.

2.7 Crime and disorder

There are no crime and disorder issues arising from this report. As the Masterplan and feasibility work progresses, consideration of crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour will be central to the development of the proposals.

2.8 Environment and sustainability

The feasibility work undertaken with this funding is informing the development of robust business cases that include full environmental and sustainability plans for regeneration in Wallsend.

PART 3 - SIGN OFF

- Chief Executive
- Director(s) of Service
- Mayor/Cabinet Member(s)
- Chief Finance Officer
- Monitoring Officer
- Assistant Chief Executive