

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 16 January 2020

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Enterprise, Community and Resources

PORTFOLIO: Transportation & Physical Environment

SUBJECT: Major Schemes and Funding Update

WARDS: Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 Significant investment is underway to enhance the Borough's infrastructure. This comprises the Silver Jubilee Bridge (SJB) maintenance package; deconstruction of the SJB access road and viaducts in Runcorn ('delinking'); and the enhanced access into the Runcorn Station Quarter (RSQ) to deliver that masterplan. Junction construction at 'Widnes Loops', to enhance connectivity into Widnes and West Bank, is being undertaken consecutively with the delinking works in Runcorn. Individually these are complex pieces of work, even more so when tackled in combination, with each project impacting on the other.
- 1.2 This report provides an update on the above major projects that are in delivery, together with new relevant funding opportunities that have arisen. If secured, these funds will allow scheme enhancements, programme refinements, and additional phases of the Runcorn Station Quarter Masterplan to be brought into scope. The total of all funding opportunities could provide Runcorn with an investment of between £50m and £71m.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1) Project progress is noted;**
- 2) Funding bids are submitted with a view to securing funding for the full programme of works, enhancements, and additional phases of the Runcorn Station Quarter Masterplan and wider Runcorn Vision (see section 5.1 – 5.8); and**
- 3) In association with recommendation 2), Council be asked to approve the amendment of the capital programme to £50m in respect of the SJB Delinking and Runcorn Station Quarter, to reflect the updated position regarding opportunities for grant funding.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Capitalising on the closure of the Silver Jubilee Bridge (SJB) for major maintenance, the development of an enhanced access into Runcorn's west coast mainline station is underway, together with the removal of the 'Trumpet Loop' and associated elevated infrastructure. Site work has been challenging with a number of constraints that have had to be overcome. These have included a significant number of uncharted services that have needed relocation; the discovery of asbestos bonded into construction materials; and an enhanced project scope to include additional road connections. However, the pace of work on site has been rapid, and recently the new roundabout has begun to take shape, with new surfaced road connections between the roundabout and Shaw Street now visible. Most of the old 'Trumpet Loop' itself has been removed, and demolition will start in January of the western overhead viaduct that once carried traffic onto the SJB. Based on the current programme, the scheme is expected to be fully complete by summer 2020. The closure order on the Weston Expressway is in place until September 2020.
- 3.2 The major maintenance programme on the Grade II listed SJB is almost complete. This could not be undertaken while the bridge carried traffic, and therefore this has been the first opportunity since 1961 for comprehensive refurbishment. The entire steel arch structure has now been completely repainted. A new paint system has been applied from bare metal up to a decorative coat. A structural cable has been successfully replaced, the first time this has been attempted. Taking two years of advanced modelling and planning due to all cables being under maximum load, it was impossible to simply remove one cable. A means of transferring the stresses onto a temporary arrangement had to be devised, before removing the old cable, inserting a new hanger, and then transferring the load back onto the new section. The final aspect of this project is the preparation of the road deck in preparation for the reopening to vehicles. This will involve the existing carriageway surface being planed off and renewed, with new expansion joints installed, and new lines and demarcations, including splitter islands that will form the protected lanes for cyclists. The bridge will be reopened to vehicles at the same time as the RSQ works complete in summer 2020.
- 3.3 A permanent junction into West Bank and Widnes from the Mersey Gateway Bridge is under formation. This replaces the temporary road and offset mini-roundabout with a new signal controlled junction. The legacy of previous development in this area had resulted in a significant amount of ground condition issues (for example old basements and foundation slabs) together with intertwined services from almost all major utility companies. Delays have been experienced while these constraints were resolved and the utility companies have moved and protected their assets to allow construction of the new junction to continue. At the present time, kerb lines and road surfacing has been carried out,

together with the installation of a splitter island. As a consequence of the ground conditions, the new junction is expected to fully complete by summer 2020.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The significant investment described in this report flows from the Council's strategic policies contained in the Local Plan, the Mersey Gateway Plus regeneration strategy, and the Local Transport Plan.
- 4.2 These strategic documents are supported at a more detailed level through documents that capture ambitions at a more focussed scale, for example the Runcorn Station Quarter Masterplan and Runcorn Vision documents. The ambition for the Runcorn Old Town area is:
- Build a stronger town centre
 - Improve linkages, accessibility and movement
 - Utilise assets, waterways, culture and heritage
 - Grow the residential offer
 - Realise the full potential of the mainline station and connectivity to major cities.
- 4.3 Project delivery relies upon having a clear strategy for the Borough's development. This process identifies the infrastructure and regeneration schemes needed to support that development. Schemes need to be supported by quality feasibility, options appraisal, and design work to turn them into deliverable projects. The value of this approach yields significant advantages when grant funding bids are pursued because they can be supported by a robust business case demonstrating value for money. The limiting factor with this approach are the up-front costs of financing this feasibility work, as costs for large multi-million pound schemes can require up to £250k to be invested in the production of a full business case with scheme designs that are suitable for procurement and start on site.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

New Funding Opportunities

- 5.1 Newly announced funds could provide Runcorn with access to pot of up to £71m, giving Runcorn a 'once in a lifetime' transformative opportunity. The following bullet points summarise the funds that could bring significant additional investment to the Runcorn Station Quarter (RSQ) project and move subsequent phases into delivery, including the Station Piazza, public transport hub, and connectivity into the Town Centre. Beyond the RSQ Masterplan, the Runcorn Vision document highlights the opportunities for regeneration within the town centre.
- Town Deals – up to £25m Government (MHCLG) funding allocated for Runcorn (launched at the end of September). Not competitive.

- Future High Street Fund – bids of up to £25m (£675m national pot) for Runcorn Old Town. Competitive. £150k capacity fund provided.
- Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Mayoral Fund - Transforming Cities Fund - £19.9m bid in for Runcorn Station Quarter. Competitive.
- LCR Town Centre Commission Fund – Combined Authority / Mayoral fund of £1m allocated for Halton Lea. Not competitive.

Town Deals

- 5.2 Eligible Activities for funding include urban regeneration to ensure towns are thriving places for people to live and work. Example outputs include increasing density in town centres; strengthening local economic assets including local cultural assets; improving transport and digital connectivity; and site development (site acquisition, remediation, and preparation). There is strong strategic fit between the eligible activity criteria and the ambitions for regeneration in Runcorn Town Centre.

Future High Streets Fund

- 5.3 The objective of the funding is to renew and reshape town centres and high streets in a way that improves experience, drives growth and ensures future sustainability. To bid, local authorities are required to define the specific challenges faced by their high streets, to set out their overarching strategic ambition for what the high street or town centre should become, and what needs to be done to make this possible. However, this funding cannot be used for ‘superficial enhancements’ e.g. shop frontages; business grants etc.

Transforming Cities Fund

- 5.4 A bid for up to £19.9m has been submitted to the Combined Authority to enhance the programme of works to improve access to Runcorn Station and regenerate the vicinity of the station and town centre. The bid seeks to deliver the next phase of the RSQ masterplan including a transport hub, new Piazza, new road linkages, and improved connectivity.

Halton Lea Town Centre Commission Fund

- 5.5 For completeness, the funding allocated to Halton Lea from the Liverpool City Region Mayoral Fund is referenced as part of the overall funding opportunity that has been directed towards Runcorn.

Runcorn Station Quarter and Town Centre - Next Phases

- 5.6 If the bids into the funds described above are successful, that investment will secure the full programme of works that are in delivery, provide an element of contingency, and allow the next phases of the masterplan to move to implementation.
- 5.7 Together with the transport hub linking the station to Runcorn Town Centre, facilitating greater mobility and promoting active travel for residents and visitors, the next phase of works includes construction of

the Cavendish Street Link which involves highway improvements, including a new direct connection through to Shaw Street, and additional taxi stand facilities. The works will also deliver a new 'Piazza' area outside Runcorn Station that will offer inviting, high quality public realm helping to create an improved sense of place and facilitate modal transfer between the station, buses and taxis calling at Cavendish Street. Improvements to footways and cycleways will also be delivered to enhance active mode connections between the Station Quarter and town centre. The high utilisation of private cars for journeys in the wider Runcorn area will be addressed through the prioritisation of pedestrians and cyclists and the implementation of a new bus service timetable that will increase the number of buses calling at Runcorn Station from 4 to 15 services per hour.

- 5.8 Beyond the improvements and new infrastructure described above, future phases of the project envisage relocation of existing station car-parking, and housing and commercial development surrounding the station. If the total funding described in 5.1 could be secured, then these future phases could be implemented.
- 5.9 Depending on the success of the bids for funds outlined in this report the Council will need to keep the project constantly under review and will have to exercise a degree of prioritisation as the scheme progresses. Executive Board will be kept apprised of the progress on each element of the programme. However, this is clearly a great opportunity to regenerate this area of the Borough, which also presents wider opportunities for the whole of Halton.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

Indirect benefits will be gained from a much improved physical environment for local communities. There will be benefits to this group from the health and safer implications described below.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

Good transport networks are fundamental to economic growth and employment. In the long-term there are strong prospects of new job creation as a result of an enhanced leisure, business, retail and cultural offers in Runcorn town centre. Investment in the station will ensure this facility continues to attract high passenger numbers and its connections to London and other major cities.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

The project will deliver active travel linkages between the station, town centre, canal, and over the SJB. The improved rail and bus offer will increase opportunities to use public transport, thereby engaging an element of active travel and also environmental benefits. Removal of the overhead viaduct will have a positive local impact on air quality.

6.4 A Safer Halton

Upon completion, the projects will provide safer, off-road and interconnected routes between the station, town centre, canal and SJB for cyclists and pedestrians. Removal of bridges, embankments, and overhead viaducts increases natural surveillance and the perception of light and space. This will make the local area feel safer to those who travel through these new areas.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

The combination of projects will provide a much improved urban environment for visitors and residents. There will be direct implications for the Council's priorities through the achievement of regeneration projects as set out in the relevant strategic documents (Local Plan, Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy Plus, RSQ masterplan, and Runcorn Vision).

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 With any regeneration or construction scheme there are risks associated with uncertainty arising from various aspects of the process, such as securing funding, the need to acquire land, material availability and fluctuating prices (Brexit), severe weather, securing regulatory consents, environment factors (breeding birds), and from ground conditions that are experienced when work starts (such as contamination, uncharted utilities). These risks are impossible to eradicate and are dealt with by the inclusion of contingencies to draw upon. Consequently, if any of these key risks arise in project delivery, the consequence usually translates into increased costs and extended programmes for completion of the works. To mitigate these risks, detailed project planning and survey work is always undertaken.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 There are no Equality and Diversity implications arising from this report.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Local Plan	Municipal Building	Tim Gibbs
Runcorn Station Quarter Masterplan	Municipal Building	Wesley Rourke
Runcorn Vision	Municipal Building	Wesley Rourke