

REPORT TO:	Executive Board
DATE:	21 January 2021
REPORTING OFFICER:	Strategic Director Enterprise, Community and Resources
PORTFOLIO:	Physical Environment
SUBJECT:	Runcorn Town Investment Plan (TIP)
WARDS:	Mersey Ward

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report seeks approval to submit Runcorn's Town Investment Plan. The deadline for submissions is 31st January 2021. Therefore, it is proposed that sign off of the final document is delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader and Portfolio Holder Physical Environment

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Executive Board

1. Agrees in principle to the Runcorn Town Investment Plan and project list; and
2. Delegates approval of the final submission of the Runcorn Town Investment Plan to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader and Portfolio Holder Physical Environment in order to meet the 31st January deadline.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

On the 1st November 2019, Government issued the Towns Fund Prospectus inviting 100 towns to develop a Town Investment Plan to benefit from up to £25m funding each from a national £3.6bn fund. Runcorn was one of the towns that was invited to develop a TIP.

The Government's stated objective of the Towns Fund is 'to drive the economic regeneration of towns to deliver long term economic and productivity growth' through capital investment in:

1. urban regeneration, planning and land use: increasing density – strengthening local economic assets – site acquisition, remediation and preparation
2. skills and enterprise infrastructure: ensuring towns have the space to support skills and small business development

3. connectivity: developing local transport schemes and improved digital connectivity

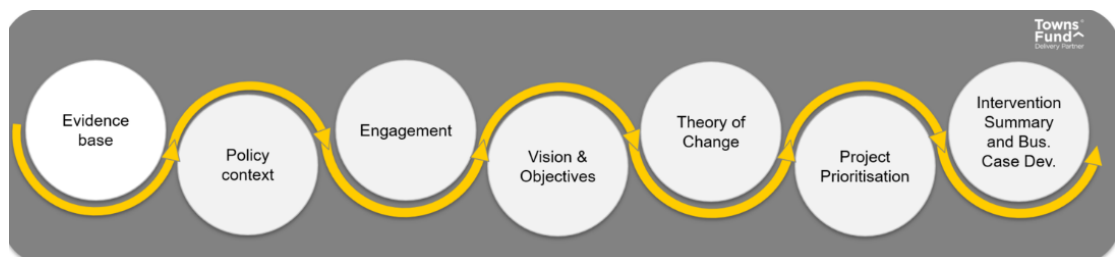
The prospectus identified a number of actions that would need to be taken, including the requirement for a Town Board to be established by the end of January 2020 with an independent chair. The role of the Board is to:

- Develop and agree an evidence based Town Investment Plan
- Develop a clear programme of interventions
- Coordinate resources and influence stakeholders

The approach by the Runcorn Town Board to developing the Investment Plan comprised the following stages:-

- contextual review
- stakeholder engagement
- vision;
- project development and review
- draft and final reporting

Government Guidance is clear that there should be a golden thread approach which aims to ensure alignment across the key components of the TIP which is shown below.



<https://townsfund.org.uk/blog-collection/golden-thread>

The **contextual review** considered the evidence based and policy context. The Board considered the challenges and threats facing the town such as market failures as well as COVID-19 impacts. Information from the Towns Fund Data dashboard and HBC Research and Intelligence was used to understand the challenges the town is facing as well as the strengths and opportunities the TIP can support and build on. These were considered alongside other local, regional and national policy to ensure that the TIP linked to make a more powerful case for investment.

Due to COVID-19 **stakeholder engagement** was carried out predominately online. The My Town website gathered suggestions from the public which ultimately fed into the long project list and a public questionnaire was completed by over 600 people. A limited number of paper questionnaires were circulated to groups in the Runcorn Old Town

with limited access to the internet. There was also engagement with Halton Business's via Halton Chamber zoom meetings and young people at Riverside College and Power in Partnership (PIP) to ensure that they could help shape the vision for Runcorn.

Feedback from the government's consultants advised that further engagement work and feedback from the community and stakeholders was needed to test out whether the projects that have been developed, are in line with local aspirations. As a result, further survey work and consultation is being undertaken to address this.

The **Vision Statement** evolved from and built on this work and sets out the objectives and themes for the TIP, which also supports how the projects were prioritised.

Project Development and review includes the theory of change and project prioritisation. A long list of projects was compiled from the My Town web site and suggestions from the public and groups directly to the Board members. A prioritisation process was undertaken to ensure that the projects which best fit the funding criteria were taken forward. The government criteria above was supplemented with 10 local measures agreed by the Town Board. Projects were scored and the following projects were agreed for inclusion in the TIP as they have the strongest links to the vision and evidence of need:-

The emerging projects are set out below:

Project descriptions

Creative and Digital Cluster: Local residents do not always have the necessary skills to access the higher skilled job opportunities with the businesses on the outskirts of town. There is demand for more digitally skilled workers. This project will deliver a new skills facility on the high street providing especially young people access to creative and digital play, learn, and training for future employment opportunities.

Mixed-use High Street Hub: Runcorn is an area where many residents suffer from poor health in comparison to average levels. The project will deliver a new health and education facility on the high street providing local residents improved access to a wider variety of health, wellbeing, and training services.

Unlock Runcorn: Runcorn town centre has suffered from under-investment by the private sector, low footfall, and low average spend, with high vacancy rates and many hot food takeaways. The project delivers a new and unique visitor attraction, maximising the use of heritage and waterways assets, providing increased footfall and spend, to make the town centre thrive.

Brindley Theatre upgrade: The town centre currently lacks welcoming public spaces and well-designed buildings at its heart. The project delivers a well-designed extension to the Brindley Theatre with a large café-restaurant, and a welcoming, safe, and inclusive civic space on the Brindley green, providing a more accessible and visible cultural destination, increasing dwell time and supporting the evening economy.

Runcorn Station Quarter: There are a lack of businesses located in the town centre providing better job opportunities. The project delivers a new enterprise facility at the station gateway, with quality modern offices, that are not available in the town centre. This will attract new businesses, providing a wider variety of job opportunities in the heart of the community, more accessible to local people.

New homes: The project would deliver new quality homes on a variety of sites, which have been left undeveloped due to contamination, and other issues. This will provide new homes for an ageing population and attract families with young children to achieve mixed developments.

High Street transformation: Runcorn town centre environment is relatively dominated by car use. The project will create a more pedestrian and cycling friendly High Street environment, whilst maintaining bus priority, providing better local connections, and more opportunities for active lifestyles, social interaction, and wellbeing.

The final drafting of the Runcorn TIP is underway and must be submitted by 31st January 2021. Members will recall that the Council also submitted a bid for Future High Streets Fund. Unfortunately the Council received notification on 26th December 2020 that its FHSF bid had been unsuccessful. Feedback from Government for the reasons behind that decision is being sought to ensure that any lessons to be learnt from that process can be taken into account in the TIP submission.

Following submission, feedback on the Town Investment Plan is expected by the end of March 2021 and if successful in passing this stage, the Board will have a further year to work up detailed, individual project business plans.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The potential 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.

These strategic documents are supported at a more detailed level by documents that capture the Council's 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.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Preparation of the Town Investment Plan has been made possible with a revenue grant of £162,019, which has been used to provide additional specialist development support. Further revenue funding will be required from April 2021 to develop each of the project business cases for submission March 2022. This funding required to buy in specialist advice and is likely to be approximately £200,000.

In July 2020 the Council were informed that they would receive an interim capital payment of £750,000 from the Town Fund to commence projects and support with the bringing forward of some sites for development.

In order to draw down £25 million of Town Deal Funding, it is estimated that £5m of matching funding will be required.

This funding will be required for land acquisitions, site preparation and improvements to the basic scheme to ensure a more sustainable development.

The matching funding will be sought from a number of sources including the Council, National Lottery and the Combined Authority. A further report will be brought to the Board when it is known what external funds have been secured.

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 employment, learning and skills as well as the health and safer implications described below.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

In the long-term there are strong prospects of new job creation as a result of an enhanced digital and cultural business cluster in the town centre. The mixed use hub will provide Riverside College students training and work experience opportunities in a healthcare setting.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

The projects will deliver improved active travel linkages between the station, town centre, canal and Crosville car park. The improved bus offer will increase opportunities to use public transport, thereby engaging

an element of active travel and also environmental benefits and will have a positive local impact on air quality.
The mixed use hub will provide improved health screening facilities in a central town centre facility.

6.4 A Safer Halton

Upon completion, the projects will provide safer, and interconnected routes between the station and town centre for cyclists and pedestrians. Improvements. Repurposing of buildings and encouraging more evening activity at the Brindley increases natural surveillance and 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 an improved urban environment for residents and visitors.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

All regeneration programme have associated project risks with uncertainty arising from various aspects of the process, such as securing match funding, the need to acquire land, material availability and fluctuating prices (COVID and Brexit), severe weather, securing regulatory consents, environment factors, ecology assessments and from ground conditions that are experienced when work starts (such as contamination, uncharted utilities). These risks may lead to increased project delivery timescales and costs. These risks are highlighted in the Project Template and work to reduce and mitigate these will be undertaken during the stage 2 detailed business case.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

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
Town Investment Plan Project Prioritisation List	Municipal Building, Widnes	Wesley Rourke