
REPORT TO:	Environmental and Development Services Committee	AGENDA ITEM: 7
DATE OF MEETING:	1st June 2006	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	Deputy Chief Executive	OPEN PARAGRAPH NO:
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	Marilyn Hallard, Design and Conservation Officer, x5747	DOC:
SUBJECT:	Swadlincote Town Centre Study and Masterplan	REF: 13.3.10.1
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	Swadlincote	TERMS OF REFERENCE: EDS04

1.0 Recommendation

- 1.1 That the Swadlincote Town Centre Masterplan for public realm improvements (STCM) be approved by the Council as a comprehensive plan for future improvements to the town centre.
- 1.2 That the STCM be used to support funding bids for public realm improvements.
- 1.3 That the STCM be used to promote development and inward investment to Swadlincote.
- 1.4 That, where appropriate, contributions towards implementing the STCM be negotiated from developers seeking planning permission for commercial development within and adjacent to the town centre.
- 1.5 That plans for the first phase of implementation, amounting to £361,00 worth of works, be developed further.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To consider approval of a) all the long term proposals for improvements to Swadlincote Town Centre contained within the Swadlincote Masterplan and b) progression of the first phase of implementation for completion prior to April 2007.

3.0 Executive summary

- 3.1 The masterplan develops recommended action plan proposals set out in the Swadlincote Vision and Strategy (February 2001). It comprises a multi million pound package of environmental improvements, primarily on publicly owned land, designed to capitalise on Swadlincote's heritage assets and promote its regeneration.
- 3.2 The preparation of the Vision and Strategy involved extensive public consultation and the development of the masterplan has been guided by liaison with members and officers of the District Council and officers of the County Council, consultation with a wide range of stake holders and taking into account the views of the community following a public exhibition in March 2006.
- 3.3 The masterplan has been designed as a tool for guiding comprehensive but phased improvements to the public realm over a period of about fifteen years. The works include re-paving, decluttering the streets, better lighting and signing, and improvements to approaches, car parks and gateways. The masterplan has been safety and access audited to ensure that highway safety and access for people of all abilities is maintained.
- 3.4 It is proposed that the pedestrian regime established in the early 1980's should continue. Access for vehicles would remain as existing apart from no longer allowing vehicles to pass across the top (north side) of The Delph between West Street and High Street.
- 3.5 A key element of the repaving is to create a safer alternative means of segregating vehicles and pedestrians to the current ad hoc arrangement of bollards, planters and other street furniture. It is proposed that this should be achieved by reintroducing kerbs and channels to visually and physically segregate road and footway surfaces. Flush kerbs are maintained in High Street. Elsewhere traditional raised kerbs are re-established.
- 3.6 The Delph has been re-planned to provide a high quality attractive focus to the town centre giving it a better sense of place and to create a space that will generate a sense of civic pride and where people will want to be.
- 3.7 Budget costings have been prepared and the total cost of all the improvements is £5.7 million. The scheme has been split into a number of phases of implementation to keep each phase within manageable costs.
- 3.8 External funding of £361,000 has been secured for the first phase. This must be spent and reclaimed 31st March 2007. In order to meet this deadline the procurement of these works needs to begin in June.

- 3.9 In order to continue to implement the plan the Council will need to secure additional capital funding in the future.
- 3.10 Because inward investors in the town will benefit from the masterplan enhancements it is considered that developers should make a contribution towards its implementation.

4.0 Detail

REASON FOR AND AIMS OF THE MASTERPLAN

- 4.1 The desirability of improving Swadlincote streets and other parts of the public realm was first set out in the Swadlincote Vision and Strategy which was adopted by the Council in February 2001. It made numerous recommendations for regenerating the town centre including re-paving and de-cluttering the streets, improving The Delph and improving the approaches and gateways taking into consideration such issues as pedestrian/vehicle priorities, disabled access and enhancement of the conservation area.
- 4.2 Public realm improvements are one significant way in which local authorities can influence and promote the regeneration of town centres. Using heritage assets to underpin the regeneration of town centres is a well established strategy that helps areas to move forward and develop without abandoning tangible links with their past. Such a strategy for buildings is already being used with success in Swadlincote. The town's historic merit, sadly neglected in the past, but formally recognised by the designation of the conservation area in 1990 is now much more fully understood and appreciated. Capitalising on the town's heritage assets has already enabled the Council to access substantial amounts of external funding including Heritage Lottery and East Midlands Development Agency funding for Sharpe's Pottery Museum and English Heritage funding for the Heritage Economic Regeneration grant scheme (HERS). Both these initiatives, focused on building improvements, have made a significant impact on the appearance of the town centre and are helping to change its image and patterns of use in a very positive way.
- 4.3 Similar high quality improvements to the public realm will complement and build on this and the aim is to produce an attractive, timeless, locally distinctive, high quality public realm that continues to capitalise on Swadlincote's heritage assets, attracts inward investors and promotes growth in the local economy. East Midlands Development Agency funding and private sector funding has already been obtained for the production of the masterplan and for the first phase of implementation.

SCOPE, CONTENT AND PROCESS OF THE MASTERPLAN

- 4.4 The masterplan covers the whole of the town centre and proposes the re-paving of High Street, The Delph, West Street, Market Street, Midland Road and Belmont Street. In place of the current wall-to-wall block surface more traditional roads with kerbs and channels are proposed. All surfaces in High Street will be level and elsewhere there will be raised

kerbs. The Delph will be re-profiled to create two level areas and an amphitheatre arrangement of shallow tiered seating all re-paved in sandstone slabs. Elsewhere footways will be blue brick pavers and roads (with the exception of High Street which will be blue brick) surfaced in 'tarmac'. Kerbs and channels will be granite. Street furniture will be kept to a minimum and will be plain, not pseudo traditional and not starkly contemporary. Bollards will only be used where absolutely necessary (for instance to block off the High Street during the day). There will be a generous number of seats. There will be improvements to the 'pocket park' on Market Street, additional tree planting and the majority of existing trees will be replaced with semi mature new trees.

4.5 Outside the central area the plan allows for improvements to Civic Way incorporating a wide grass verge with tree planting and an attractive boundary wall to screen and soften the car parks and views of the backs of buildings. A wider footway from the Bus Station is proposed. These two proposals will involve the loss of some car parking spaces but with the addition of some 350 spaces at the Morrison's supermarket (due to open October/November) it is felt that the town has sufficient capacity to accommodate this.

4.6 The masterplan has been produced by consultants. The design team comprised; architects (Race Cottam Associates - Wm Morrisons' architects), urban designer and landscape architect (Martin Woolley, The Plan Shop), Quantity Surveyors (Rex Proctor & Partners), Highway Engineers (Bryan G Hall) advised and instructed by the District Council's Conservation Officer and the County Council's Urban Designer. The masterplan comprises the following elements:

- An urban form analysis
- A strategic framework plan including proposals for gateways, car parks, lighting, and signage
- Detailed proposals for repaving and street furniture
- Sketch design ideas for some potential development sites/building improvement

4.7 The urban form analysis was the first stage. Its findings can be summarised as:

- the town centre retains a traditional high street character with a town square (The Delph) and has attractive buildings
- town centre streets are well linked to car parks and the bus station through jitties and passageways but some of these are not well maintained, lit or signposted
- bollards and other street furniture used to manage traffic movement and parking is confusing and causes obstruction to vehicles and pedestrians and particularly wheelchair and pushchair users and the visually impaired
- the existing paving and some buildings give it a dated and neglected image

- the town centre is not readily visible from the approaches and some first impressions on arrival are of neglected, ancillary and service areas
- some town centre streets are not well defined or enclosed with frequent gaps, less active building frontages and views of unmaintained back land

4.8 As the process developed the following options and issues were considered; how to promote civic pride, how to strengthen the towns identity, how to achieve timeless quality, how to engender a safer environment, how to provide access for all abilities, how to give the Delph an appearance commensurate with its status as the 'town square', how to reduce the conflict between vehicles and pedestrians, extending or reducing the existing pedestrianisation in terms of area and hours of operation, changing the direction of traffic flow, extending or reducing on street parking, changing the times service vehicles are permitted into the town, providing modern or period street furniture, extending the outdoor market, how and whether to incorporate public art, whether to keep or replace existing trees, how other attractive market towns have been improved.

4.9 In order to make the masterplan proposals robust they have been based on a detailed land survey, positions and depths of services have been established and traffic counts have been undertaken. The re-paving proposals have been worked up to a very clear level of detail in close consultation with the Highway Authority. The aim has been to incorporate the majority of the urban design detailing in a form that can be developed with confidence to working drawing stage for implementation.

4.10 Budget costings have been prepared. The overall cost, at current day prices, is £5.7 million plus fees. The scope of the masterplan is wide ranging and so the consultants were asked to break the areas up into practical phases for gradual implementation, see 'Annexe A'. It is proposed that the order and extent of implementation should be tailored to the availability of funding.

CONSULTATION

4.11 Before the study and masterplan began discussions were held in order to establish a corporate Council view on town centre issues and the masterplan content was discussed including consideration of a sketch plan, which tabled the idea of re-opening the High Street to traffic. These initial discussions involved the Town Centre Officers Group and a small group of members including the Chair of this committee, urban area members, the Council's Heritage and Design Champions and the Chair of Overview and Community Scrutiny Committees.

4.12 Following the production of the Urban Form Analysis key stakeholders and once again, officers and members were consulted before the initial masterplan proposals were set out. A list of the key stakeholders and a

record of their comments is appended at the end of the Urban Form Analysis. At this stage there was a clear almost unanimous desire not to open up the High Street to traffic but to retain the current pedestrian regime and to reduce the conflict between vehicles and pedestrians. It was clear that most stakeholder groups were as aware as Council officers and members of the shortcomings of the current appearance and operation of the town centre streets and there was a large measure of support for the concept of improving the town's image. Discussions were also held with The Derbyshire Association for the Blind and the South Derbyshire Disability Focus Group. In order to ensure that the needs of people with disabilities are addressed fairly and responsibly Faithful and Gould were commissioned to undertake and access audit of all the proposals.

4.13 Taking on board these views the masterplan proposals were developed for public consultation. An exhibition was held over three days in March. More than 370 people attended and the Council received 174 written responses containing people's views. Details of the public exhibition and an analysis of the responses are on the Council's website and are summarised in 4.15 below.

4.14 Overall the response was very positive. People recognised that Swadlincote needed to be more attractive to visitors, that The Delph had great potential and an overwhelming majority felt that proposals should capitalise on Swadlincote's heritage assets. Improving the segregation of pedestrians and vehicles was popular, as was maintaining the existing restricted vehicle access and keeping on-street parking for disabled badge holders. People generally agreed with removing clutter and keeping street furniture to a minimum but the idea of using contemporary street furniture wasn't universally popular. The proposed curved tiered seating in The Delph and reintroduction of raised kerbs in some streets produced a mixed reaction. Some thought these excellent ideas, whilst others raised concerns for those with mobility problems and pushchairs. However a greater number of respondents agreed than disagreed with these elements of the plan. There was broad agreement that existing levels of pedestrianisation should be kept and the current hours of traffic exclusion were about right but a significant percentage thought that the hours should be extended. Most people were against more on-street parking in the town centre. More greenery was generally well received and pocket parks welcomed with the proviso that they are well maintained. There was a general consensus that town centre seating was important and should be retained but the bollards get in the way and look ugly. There were a few requests for a piece of public art that would reflect Swadlincote's heritage. Other general concerns about the town centre included the variety and quality of shops, the quality and scale of the market, safety of alleyways (jitties) and lack of CCTV.

4.15 The proposals were subsequently developed to take into account the views of the public. The plan retains the shallow tiered seating in The Delph, an arrangement which it is felt will stamp an attractive identity on

the space and offer opportunities for outdoor events. Ease of access for the less mobile is accommodated with graded (gently ramped) areas at the sides, ribbed stone pavings have been introduced to assist the visually impaired and strategically placed stone seats have been designed for the top to act as a 'safety barrier'. These stone seats could also provide a central location for public art perhaps with a local history dimension. Bands or panels of carved stone, fired clay or bronze could be incorporated. The costings don't currently include for any public art.

4.16 Conventional road surfaces and raised kerbs have been retained in the plan for West Street, Market Street, Belmont Street and Midland Road. These streets are and will continue to be open to traffic at all times to accommodate the blue badge holder parking. Conflict between vehicles and pedestrians is particularly bad here and it is anticipated that if raised kerbs are not introduced it would be hard to resist the re-introduction of bollards to control and direct traffic. Having well marked and signed parking bays set out at the lower road level will make the provision easier to control and police than the thoroughly confusing existing regime. A drop off/pick up point area has been incorporated on West Street for the community bus.

4.17 The public concerns about restricted retail offer and safety cannot be addressed directly in the masterplan proposals. Indirectly of course there is an impact. The motivation for the improvements is to promote regeneration and make Swadlincote more attractive to inward investors. As the town grows so too will the retail offer. Crime and disorder issues are the remit of the Council's Safer Community Partnership and there is currently no intention to introduce CCTV. The Council has however recruited three Safer Neighbourhood Wardens as a result of which there will be an increased uniformed presence in the town centre. The plan does include for improvements to street lighting, including lighting to jitties.

DESIGN IDEAS FOR DEVELOPMENT SITES

4.18 The four potential development sites identified in the Vision and Strategy (2001) all impact in some way on the public domain. For this reason the masterplan includes sketch ideas for them. One further site at the Coppice Side end of the High Street is also illustrated. The sites are:

- Midland Road to Belmont Street
- Midland Road to the Bus Station
- the south side of The Delph
- the south side of the former Sharpe's Pottery site
- small site adjacent to 78 High Street

4.19 For each site there is a block plan, some precedent photographs, a perspective sketch and a list of design principles. The intention is that these ideas should focus and promote discussion for the future of these sites through the development control process. The sketches show high quality buildings the design of which responds sensitively to their setting, is locally distinctive and sympathetic to character and appearance of

Swadlincote Conservation Area. But they have contemporary elements that establish a 21st century identity.

- 4.20 The ideas for The Delph are intended to improve the quality of the space and those on either side of Midland Road are designed to create a strong sense of identity and frame an important visual gateway to the town centre. The Sharpe's Pottery ideas help to give better definition and enclosure to Alexandra Road and open up routes to make the town more 'permeable'.
- 4.21 The illustrations should not be regarded as development briefs but as development control tools to assist negotiation and promotion of high quality design.

LONG TERM MAINTENANCE

- 4.22 Currently the County Highway Authority is responsible for maintenance on highway land and the District Council is responsible for maintenance on other non highway land (e.g. parts of The Delph). Discussions about appropriate future maintenance are being held with the County Council and will have to be agreed between all relevant parties.

PHASE 1 IMPLEMENTATION

- 4.23 Through a section 106 Agreement attached to the planning consent for their superstore Wm Morrison Supermarkets plc have contributed £190,000 towards the cost of producing the Swadlincote Town Centre Masterplan and the first phase of physical improvements. Using this as match funding the Council has secured a further £247,000 from East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA) through the Derby and Derbyshire Economic Partnership (DDEP). £361,000 of this is available for the first phase of works.
- 4.24 An initial analysis of the various optional areas has been undertaken. Works to the Civic Way approach to the town give the 'best fit' with the available secured funding and would produce a good regenerative impact.
- 4.25 It is proposed that a further report on the details of phase 1 be brought before a future committee.

5.0 Financial Implications

- 5.1 The cost of the masterplan has been met by external funding. A further £361,000 of external funding has already been secured for phase 1 and no further Council funding is requested for its' implementation.
- 5.2 The total estimated cost of the masterplan proposals is £5.7million. Its' full implementation cannot be achieved within existing resources. A long-term implementation strategy will need to be developed which maximises external funding opportunities. The masterplan has been designed as a fund raising tool to help lever in external funding.

- 5.3 Various possible external sources of funding have been identified including; East Midlands Development Agency, Heritage Lottery Fund, Landfill Tax Grants and Private Sector contributions.

6.0 Community Implications

- 6.1 Regeneration of the town centre bolsters the local economy, helps local businesses to thrive and increases choice for Swadlincote visitors and shoppers.
- 6.2 Investment in the public realm creates confidence and will signal the fact that regeneration is continuing.
- 6.3 The masterplan will assist the implementation of sustainable environmental improvements that will build on the success of the Swadlincote Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme and exploit the heritage assets of the town. This will promote tourism and improve environmental quality for all.
- 6.4 Failure to invest appropriately in the public realm is likely to lead to economic and environmental decline, which could affect the long term viability of the town centre.
- 6.5 The public consultation resulted in a very high level of support for the proposals. See website.
- 6.6 Consultation with key stakeholders revealed dissatisfaction with the current cluttered confusing environment and a genuine desire to see improvements.

7.0 Conclusion

- 7.1 The masterplan is an ambitious and far reaching set of proposals designed to attract inward investment, which could deliver substantial regenerative rewards for Swadlincote.
- 7.2 It will allow the Council to plan comprehensively for future town centre improvements in a flexible way and will enhance chances of obtaining further external funding from the public and private sectors.
- 7.3 Implementation of the first phase will demonstrate the Council's commitment to regeneration and will enable the secured funding to be spent within the required deadlines.

8.0 Background Papers

- 8.1 Swadlincote Masterplan drawings and report. File Ref 13.3.10.1
- 8.2 Swadlincote Urban Form Analysis. File Ref 13.3.10.1 and web site
- 8.3 Results of public exhibition. Website

- 8.4 Access Audit. File Ref 13.3.10.1
- 8.5 Transportation Report. File Ref 13.3.10.1
- 8.6 Safety Audit. File Ref 13.3.10.1
- 8.7 Services Report. File Ref 13.3.10.1
- 8.9 Land Survey. File Ref 13.3.10.1