



Committee and Date

Cabinet

14th December 2022

Item

Public

Future Oswestry Plan

Responsible Officer

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1. Synopsis

The Future Oswestry Group have led work to progress the Future Oswestry Plan ("FOP"); a guide to future development and investment decisions in the area. The FOP has been consulted on and the next phase is to develop a supporting Delivery Plan.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. The Shropshire Plan 2022 - 2025 is the overarching strategic plan for the council, which sets the direction and the golden thread for other plans and strategies. The Shropshire Plan will deliver the council's focus on having a healthy population, supported by a healthy economy and environment, and a healthy, well-run council, helping people live their best life in Shropshire. The FOP supports these objectives and will contribute to a healthy economy principally through the development of Oswestry as a vibrant destination that attracts people to live in, work in, learn in and visit. As emerging projects developed as part of the Future Oswestry Vision come forward, these will be tested against the key objectives of the Shropshire Plan to support the council's healthy economy, people and environment priorities, as set out in the Shropshire Plan to ensure the golden thread through strategies is developed.
- 2.2. This report is to inform Cabinet on the results of the consultation undertaken on the FOP and provide an update on how consultation feedback is being used to develop the Delivery Plan and amend the governance arrangements for the Future Oswestry group.
- 2.3. The Future Oswestry Master Plan Consultation report was presented to Cabinet on 19th January 2022, at which Cabinet agreed the

consultation arrangements and to receive the final FOP for endorsement.

2.4. The vision within the FOP is for Oswestry to become:

- A better place to live
- A better place for business, and
- A healthier and more sustainable town.

The vision aligns and reflects the key objectives of the Shropshire Plan. The emerging outcomes and deliverables of the Future Oswestry Delivery Plan will feed into the performance management arrangements for the Shropshire Plan, and the Economic Growth Strategy's Strategic Locations theme. The emerging key outcomes and deliverables of the Future Oswestry delivery plan (as appropriate) will feed into the council's performance management framework and associated delivery plans to track and evidence progress and demonstrate impact using key performance indicators.

2.5. The outcomes of the consultation were analysed and discussed in full by the Future Oswestry Group to determine the next steps. The comments and responses have been used to reflect the emerging priorities within the FOP and also used to inform ongoing work that the Future Oswestry Group members have been involved in. Work undertaken following the consultation is outlined in section 8 of this report.

2.6. The FOP is not a fixed blueprint but the start of the process to bring forward potential projects and initiatives. Further engagement will follow as the vision and ambitions develop into clearer proposals, providing opportunities for people to have their say and influence developments as the vision is followed and the ideas move forward.

2.7. The vision set out within the FOP provides the direction and guiding principles for the delivery plan. The delivery plan will provide the key steps to deliver the vision and ambitions of the FOP. The assessment of individual projects to be included within the delivery is set out in 8.5 and 8.6 of this report. This delivery plan will be reviewed annually to monitor how the projects are progressing against targets, reflect changes of demand and need and respond to new opportunities.

2.8. Endorsement by each of the Future Oswestry partner organisations, including Shropshire Council, will enable the FOP to act and be used in a number of important ways, to:

- A. implement local policies already in place as a material consideration in planning decisions – such as those associated with maintaining Oswestry's status as one of Shropshire's major commercial centres, and capitalising on the regenerative

- benefits of the town's heritage assets through the ongoing High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) programme;
- B. inform the emerging and future policy framework – such as the priorities being outlined in the adopted and emerging Local Plans; and
 - C. be a material consideration in planning decisions on key areas of the town to help ensure the vision outlined in the Future Oswestry Plan is delivered in the longer term.

3. Recommendations

That Cabinet

3.1 approves the Future Oswestry Plan,

3.2 agrees that the principle of using the Future Oswestry Plan as a material consideration in decision making on relevant planning applications can now be established. The degree of weight that can be attached to the Future Oswestry Plan will depend on the individual circumstances and is a matter for the decision taker in each case.

REPORT

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1. The FOP, which forms Appendix A has been consulted on and comments and a summary of the consultation feedback is set out at Appendix B. The results of the consultation and comments received on priorities (as outlined in 8.), areas of focus and big ideas suggested have been carefully considered by the Future Oswestry Group. The feedback received is being used to feed into the emerging Delivery Plan to inform proposals for any activities or projects.
- 4.2. An updated ESHIA was undertaken specifically for the consultation on the draft FOP. FOPAn updated ESHIA was undertaken specifically for the consultation on the draft Future Oswestry Plan. This has now been updated as part of this ESHIA to demonstrate that the Future Oswestry Group's ongoing approaches to continuous engagement with Protected Characteristic groupings as part of the development and delivery of the Delivery Plan. The screening indicates that positive impacts would be anticipated for a variety of intersecting groupings (Age, Disability, Pregnancy and Maternity, Sex and Social Inclusion) through a range of ongoing engagement processes and through the delivery of specific projects sitting within the Plan itself. There will also be efforts made to engage with groupings and their advocates

where links may usefully be made with specific target groups such as people with health problems and disabilities. Actions may then be more readily identified from evidence gathered to enhance the positive impact of the Plan for these groupings, leading to better outcomes overall for communities in Shropshire

4.3. There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendation in this report. There may, however, be legal implications arising from projects/work which come forward through the Delivery Plan and advice will be sought as appropriate.

4.4. It will be necessary to keep the delivery plan under review. The economy and prevailing property markets will change, and decisions might be made which change the context within which the FOP must be seen. The intention however is for the FOP to be a flexible, long-term call to action – not determining specific projects or initiatives but flagging a range of potential projects and opportunities on which further discussions should be had and local collaborative decisions be made.

4.5. Risk Assessment for taking forward emerging projects

Risks	Mitigations / Opportunities
Reputational risk to the Council	Ensure openness and manage expectations through clear communications. This will be supported by a communications and engagement plan developed with the elected Community Representatives and Future Oswestry members.
Ongoing engagement opportunities are missed	For each of the projects identified to be brought forward, an assessment will be required including a detailed viability appraisal to ensure that the proposal can be delivered. Engagement with the wider community and/or key stakeholders will be undertaken as appropriate to the proposed impact and project activity.
Engagement is seen not to be accessible and inclusive	Future engagement opportunities to be promoted through press notices, the Council’s website, and other media as appropriate. Ensure that the venues used are accessible to all who wish to participate, and that times when community engagement activities

	take place are reasonable and appropriate. Engagement will not rely solely on electronic methods.
Ad hoc development and missed opportunities	The FOP will guide future developments in line with the vision and objectives consulted on and will be used to support future funding bids to support regeneration priorities within the town.

- 4.6. The FOP aligns with and reflects the four objectives of the Shropshire Plan and the strategic location theme of the Economic Growth Strategy. The emerging key outcomes and deliverables of the delivery plan (as appropriate) will feed into the Economic Growth Strategy and Shropshire Plan performance management assessments.
- 4.7. The FOP supports the Shropshire Plan's objectives and will contribute to a healthy economy principally through the development of Oswestry as a vibrant destination that attracts people to live in, work in, learn in and visit. The Shropshire Plan objectives and priorities will be applied in the development and monitoring of the Future Oswestry Delivery Plan and feed into the council's performance management framework, to ensure the Shropshire Plan's golden thread through the strategies is developed.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. The costs incurred in the preparation of the FOP was met by One Public Estate Programme funding supplemented by funding from Oswestry Town Council. The consultation programme was funded and resourced through existing Economic Growth team budget. There are no further financial implications for Shropshire Council in relation to the adoption of the FOP.
- 5.2. As development proposals and projects come forward, in the context of vision set out within the FOP, and subject to the Council's role being determined, they will be subject to further business case assessment, financial appraisal and the Council's governance and reporting procedures.
- 5.3. Some of the ideas within the FOP will be suitable for immediate or short-term commencement, whereas others will require a medium to long term aspirational approach dictated by need, market influences and future growth. Timescales for developing some of the more ambitious ideas could extend and potentially evolve over the next 15 years.

- 5.4. For each of the projects identified to be brought forward, an assessment will be required. This will include a detailed viability appraisal to ensure that the proposed project can be delivered, and outline the process that will be taken to deliver the project including the securing of funding, attraction of market interest and timescales for delivery. Engagement with the wider community and/or key stakeholders will be undertaken as appropriate to the proposed impact and project activity.
- 5.5. Funding from a variety of sources including public sector and private sector investments is essential to implement the projects that will deliver the FOP.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1. There are no direct effects on the Council's climate change agenda, arising from this report. However, the development of future projects may provide opportunities to make a positive contribution to:
 - Energy and fuel consumption
 - Renewable energy generation
 - Carbon offsetting or mitigation
 - Climate change adaptation
- 6.2. As development proposals and projects identified through the FOP come forward, these projects will be thoroughly investigated, and business cases developed. These projects will individually be appraised against the key Climate Change considerations.
- 6.3. One of the key themes of the FOP vision is for Oswestry to be a healthier and more sustainable town. The Delivery Plan for the FOP will align with other strategies and areas of work such as the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan to encourage sustainable travel options.

7. Background

- 7.1. Shropshire Council, Oswestry Town Council and Oswestry BID have been working together as the Future Oswestry Group to develop a vision and future plan for Oswestry. The FOP was initially developed through engagement with local stakeholders, businesses, and residents. This was then tested through engagement activities and the consultation survey which ran for 6 weeks from 9th February to 24th March 2022.
- 7.2. Engagement activities included drop-in sessions held in multiple venues providing opportunities to discuss the content of the vision document. The survey sought to understand how people felt about

the vision and the opportunities for each of the focus areas identified. It also aimed to determine what priorities and ideas were most important to local people.

- 7.3. Respondents to the consultation survey agreed with the proposed vision for the FOP. The comments provided highlight how much the people of Oswestry care about their town and its future. The comments vary in nature from comments specific to certain buildings, locations or features within Oswestry, to other comments focussed on issues or needs for the town.
- 7.4. The feedback obtained through the survey is crucial and is being used by the Future Oswestry Group in making better informed investment decisions through the prioritisation and targeting of resources. Overall support for the vision and clearer prioritisation of the big ideas and the proposals for each main location, means the proposals can be firmed up and more detailed projects developed.

8. Additional Information

- 8.1. A summary of the consultation results is attached as Appendix B. The comments and support received through the consultation on the FOP and its vision highlighted the following priorities:

- making the town centre shopping streets more attractive,
- bringing vacant buildings back into use,
- making walking and cycling safer and more enjoyable,
- a public transport hub,
- public realm improvements to Festival Square and Bailey Head,
- bringing the former Morrisons site back into use for shopping or leisure, and
- managing car parking

- 8.2. The survey included many open comment questions designed to ensure survey respondents had the opportunity to share their thoughts and priorities. These comments highlighted the issues that seemed to matter the most, including:

- Design to reflect the character and history of Oswestry,
- Improved shopping and recreational facilities,
- Support for local businesses and the local economy,
- Public transport and active travel options,
- The need for robust infrastructure to support any increases in housing provision and growth,
- Provision of facilities for children and young people, and
- Importance of local services, culture and leisure

- 8.3. For each of the four keys areas of focus and potential big ideas, comments have been received which will feed into the emerging Delivery Plan to inform proposals for any activities and projects.
- 8.4. The next steps are to develop the delivery plan which will identify those priority projects to be considered and brought forward. This plan will set out current priorities and long-term aspirations and will be reviewed annually.
- 8.5. As projects identified through the FOP come forward through the delivery plan, they will be thoroughly appraised by the Future Oswestry Group, supported by the relevant officers to determine the most appropriate route and lead body to bring forward the project proposal. Subject to the Council's role being determined for that activity, the proposal would be subject to a business case assessment, financial appraisal and the Council's governance and reporting procedures. Any legal implications arising from the project proposal will be explored and advice sought.
- 8.6. Each of the projects identified within the FOP will need to be examined further as factors which may influence implementation include:
- Prioritisation,
 - Interdependences with other projects,
 - Funding,
 - Land availability and ownership agreements,
 - Temporary arrangements and phasing,
 - Parking, traffic, and access, and
 - Local support and input from key stakeholders.
- 8.7. Engagement with the wider community and/or key stakeholders will be undertaken as appropriate to the proposed impact and project activity.
- 8.8. Some of the ideas within the FOP will be suitable for immediate or short-term commencement, whereas others will require a medium to long term aspirational approach dictated by need, market influences and future growth. Timescales for developing some of the more ambitious ideas could extend and potentially evolve over the next 15 years.
- 8.9. The FOP provides further guidance on achieving a number of strategic policy objectives set out in the adopted Local Plan (the Core Strategy and SAMDev Plan). The new draft Shropshire Local Plan (2016 – 2038), which is currently being Examined by the Planning Inspectorate, will set the scale of growth for the town and identify site allocations to support the delivery. It contains a draft policy for Oswestry (S14.1) explicitly recognises the need for development to respond positively to any guidelines set out in any masterplans, such as the FOP, adopted by Shropshire Council. The FOP has established

a compelling and challenging shared vision and development framework for the town. Whilst the Local Plan provides the starting point for planning decisions on development proposals, if adopted by Shropshire Council, it is intended that the FOP will form a material planning consideration when making such decisions. The weight to be given to it will be a matter for the decision maker in each case.

- 8.10. The priorities identified as part of the consultation have been used to feed into ongoing work such as the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) to identify future long-term cycling and walking infrastructure scheme improvements and into the Oswestry Future Connectivity Plan to consider the range of transport and connectivity challenges. The consultation feedback has also been used to inform and strengthen funding bids prepared including the Levelling Up Fund Round 2 submitted in July and considered as part of a submission for infrastructure improvements to the Department of Transport (DfT). This work has also fed into partner discussions regarding the Restore Your Railway submission to the DfT. Further public engagement activities are being planned for the new year to provide details of the LCWIP schemes, design work for potential public realm schemes and updates on the Future Oswestry priorities.
- 8.11. In response to comments received regarding engagement in the development and delivery of ideas and priorities, the Future Oswestry Group, working alongside the appointed Community Representatives, are planning further public engagement activities for the new year to provide details of the LCWIP priorities and proposed schemes, design work for potential public realm schemes and updates on the Future Oswestry priorities.
- 8.12. In response to comments received during the consultation on the re-use of the former Morrisons building, the site was remarketed and has received strong interest from prospective retail tenants. This interest is currently being considered in the context of previous decisions taken by the Council concerning the acquisition and subsequent surrender of the lease by Morrisons. The potential for a strong retail use could address the short-term problems associated with vacant buildings and could bring local employment opportunities and economic growth to the town. However, the re-development of the wider area of the Cambrian Gateway is still a longer-term ambition, options for the longer-term will be considered as part of the ongoing review by the Future Oswestry Group.

9. Conclusions

- 9.1. The results of the consultation support the vision set out within the FOP. Endorsement is sought from each of the Future Oswestry partner organisations to ensure the FOP has the status required for it to be used to coordinate change.

- 9.2. This process will enable the FOP to act and be used in a number of important ways, to implement local policies already in place as a material consideration, inform the emerging and future policy framework – such as the priorities being outlined in the adopted and emerging Local Plan, inform decisions to be made by relevant authorities – and where appropriate will be a material consideration in planning decisions on key areas of the town to help ensure the vision outlined in the Plan is delivered in the longer term.
- 9.3. A review of the current governance arrangements of the Future Oswestry group will be undertaken to reflect the development of the Delivery Plan and agreed engagement activities to ensure the Delivery Plan is collectively driven forward with the Future Oswestry partners.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Cabinet report 19th January 2022 - Future Oswestry Master Plan Consultation

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Councillor Dean Carroll

Local Member

Councillors Joyce Barrow, Steve Charmley, Steve Davenport, Vince Hunt, Mike Isherwood, Mark Jones, Duncan Kerr, Robert Macy, John Price and Chris Schofield

Appendices

Appendix A Future Oswestry Plan

Appendix B Future Oswestry Plan Survey Report

Appendix C ESHIIA Future Oswestry Plan (post consultation 2022)