

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18th March 2019

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING, ECONOMY AND REGENERATION FOR CABINET 7TH March 2019

CREDITON TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN

Cabinet Member **Cllr Richard Chesterton**
Responsible Officer **Mrs Jenny Clifford, Head of Planning, Economy and
Regeneration**

Reason for the Report: To define the scope for the commissioning of consultants to assist in the preparation of a Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document and Delivery Plan (SPD) for Crediton Town Centre in the budget year 20/21.

RECOMMENDATION

- i) That the scope and geographical area of the Masterplan be agreed.
- ii) That delegated authority be given to the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration to engage consultants to assist with the preparation of a Crediton Town Centre Masterplan and Delivery Plan in the budget year 20/21.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: To ensure delivery of key plans for Mid Devon, including a thriving economy, better homes, empowering local communities and caring for the environment.

Financial Implications: The cost of engaging consultants would be in the region of £60,000. The funding will be identified within the 20/21 service budget.

Legal Implications: In order for the masterplan to be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document, two stages of public consultation need to take place in accordance with the requirements of the Council's Statement of Community Involvement. Whilst not forming part of the Development Plan, once adopted it will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

Risk Assessment: There are few risks with regard to this report. However there is a risk that failure to undertake Masterplanning for Crediton could hamper the town's ability to meet its potential. Furthermore there is a risk that without a masterplan identifying opportunities for improvements the town could deteriorate. For the masterplan to be successful it needs to have achievable actions. To ensure that this happens it is proposed that the Masterplan would include identified interventions which will need to be assessed to demonstrate their deliverability.

Equality Impact Assessment: No equality issues identified for this report.

1. BACKGROUND.

- 1.1. The Mid Devon Core Strategy 2007 sets the direction of growth for Mid Devon for the plan period to 2026. It focuses development on the three main towns: Tiverton, Cullompton and Crediton. Crediton is the smallest of the three towns in Mid Devon but serves a large rural population. Crediton is strategically located on the A377, Exeter to Barnstaple Road.
- 1.2. Policy COR15 of the Core Strategy identifies Crediton as continuing to develop as a small market town with aims to increase the self-sufficiency of the town by reducing the need to travel to Exeter by widening and expanding employment opportunities, enhancing retail provision and improving access to housing and services for its population. It requires the Council to promote a reduction in traffic on congested streets within Crediton, improve local air quality by enhancing walking and cycling opportunities and implementing initiatives within the air quality action plan. This includes the provision of a link road between the A377 and Lords Meadow Industrial Area (completed in 2014). It also seeks to promote public transport improvements and manage the town centre so that economic regeneration and heritage complement one other by promoting new homes, shops, leisure, offices and other key town centre uses which are well designed and contribute to the vitality and viability of the town.
- 1.3. The emerging Local Plan Review 2013-2033 identifies Crediton as a small and vibrant market town. Policy S12 states that:

“Policy S12 Crediton

Crediton will continue to develop in its role as a small and vibrant market town, serving a rural hinterland in the western part of the district. The strategy aims to improve access to housing within the town, expand employment opportunities and improve the quantity and quality of the existing retail provision. Proposals will provide for approximately 786 dwellings, of which 220 will be affordable and 14,700 gross square metres of commercial floorspace over the plan period.

The following development will be supported over the plan period:

a) Proposals which support the economic regeneration of the town centre, including the provision of new homes, commercial development, cultural facilities and other key town centre uses which support the town centre’s viability and vitality. Particular support will be given for proposals which improve the quantity and quality of existing retail provision within the town centre. All proposals within the town centre will need to play a positive role in sustaining and enhancing the significance of the area’s heritage;

- b) Proposals which respect the setting provided by the open areas of hillside and the adjoining historic parklands of Creedy Park, Shobrooke Park and Downes;*
- c) Continuation of measures to support the implementation of the Crediton Air Quality Action Plan, including enhanced walking and cycling opportunities around the town;*
- d) Enhance the tourism facilities and visitor role of the town and surrounding area; and*
- e) Community and education facilities and other infrastructure to support the development proposed. “*

1.4. The Local Plan Review builds on existing strategic allocations in the adopted Local Plan. The Allocations and Infrastructure DPD (AIDPD) allocated a number of sites for residential and employment development including the completed Link Road between the A377 and Lords Meadow site. Policies CRE1-CRE10 of the Emerging Local Plan Review re-allocate or introduce new sites to support Policy S12. Policies CRE1-CRE10 of the emerging Local Plan Review propose to allocate a total of 62.04 hectares within the settlement limit of Crediton; to provide 768 dwellings and 9,820sqm of commercial development.

1.5. In addition, Policy CRE11 of the Emerging Local Plan identifies that funds secured through development proposals along with other external sources of funding will support the delivery of the physical regeneration and enhancement of the town:

“Crediton Infrastructure

The Council will use Community Infrastructure Levy and planning obligations where appropriate, seek external sources of funding and work with partners to deliver the following infrastructure for Crediton:

- a) Enhanced pedestrian and cycle facilities to serve development;*
- b) Bus service enhancements;*
- c) Air quality improvements;*
- d) Expansion and improvement of primary and secondary education facilities;*
- e) Public open space and green infrastructure;*
- f) Expansion of emergency fire and rescue services;*
- g) Library reconfiguration to provide Devon Centre;*
- h) Extra care housing;*
- i) Community facilities including provision for children / youth;*
- j) Potential highway improvements; and*
- k) Provision of works to reduce flood risk.”*

1.6. There are air quality issues within Crediton town centre which are having an adverse effect on living conditions and the attractiveness of the town centre. Part IV of the Environment Act 1995 requires local authorities to review and assess the current and likely future air quality in their areas against those objectives in the National Air Quality Strategy. Where objectives are not likely to be met then the local authority is required to designate an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) at the relevant locations. The local authority must then draw up an action plan setting out the measures it intends to take in

pursuit of the air quality objectives within the area covered by the AQMA. Crediton has been designated as an AQMA. An action plan was produced in 2006 and reviewed in 2018.

- 1.7. One key air quality objective was the implementation of the Lords Meadow Link Road to take traffic away from the town centre. The completion of the link road has provided significant benefits for the town centre including air quality, a reduction in traffic noise and congestion. The Emerging Local Plan continues to support further air quality improvements (Policy CRE11) through Community Infrastructure Levy and planning obligations, where appropriate.
- 1.8. In addition to Mid Devon planning policy, Mid Devon District Council agreed, at a meeting on 2 July 2014, to designate the 'Crediton Neighbourhood Area' for the purposes of preparing a Neighbourhood Development Plan by Crediton Town Council under Section 61G of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended). The Neighbourhood Plan during the course of its adoption will seek to represent the community's vision and priorities for how they would like to see the Crediton area develop in the coming years. The Draft Neighbourhood Plan sets out a number of policies to be taken into account when proposals for development come forward in the town. They cover issues such as open space / green infrastructure, principles of site layout and design, sustainable modes of transport, community and other infrastructure facilities. Town centre policies include the re-use of above ground floor accommodation for residential use, promoting pedestrian / cycle priority and routes, shop front enhancement and redevelopment of ground floor accommodation where it enhances vitality and viability, retention / redevelopment of existing town centre employment sites and new development to positively contribute to the historic streetscape. Once adopted, the Neighbourhood Plan will form part of the Development Plan for Mid Devon.
- 1.9. In 2018 Crediton Town Council commissioned a 'Crediton Traffic & Urban Realm Feasibility Study'. This study was informed by previous traffic and streets advice given to the Town Council. It sought to fully analyse the current traffic and urban realm conditions within the town centre and main approach roads. This study included the creation of a vision for the High Street. The study also presented a series of conceptual designs for various parts of the High Street and its approaches.
- 1.10. The 2012 Retail Study identified that 43% of frequent visitors' main purpose for visiting was shopping. Shopping habits nationally have changed. It is suggested that within the Masterplan scope it could be considered how Crediton could respond to changing shopping habits. It would be sensible to draw upon work such as the Grimsey Review 2 (2018) to inform consideration on how Crediton could respond to the National trend of changing High Streets in order to enhance the quality of the environment and attract more visitors.
- 1.11. The 2016 Household Survey indicates that 81% of Crediton residents undertake their main food shopping trip outside of the town centre. The convenience retail offer in the town centre appears to be mainly supported by 'top up' food shopping trips. Due to the relatively small size of convenience

shops in the town centre the majority of the centre's main and top-up food market share is leaking to the out of centre Tesco and Morrisons stores. Conversely the comparison goods retail offer performs generally better, which predominantly comprises independent antique and second hand goods shops, although some sectors such as clothing and audio visual equipment are generally subservient to Exeter. Despite the centre having a below average representation of service goods retailers, Crediton still has two national high street banks and a number of cafes, restaurants and takeaways. The vacancy rate also remains below the national average. It is suggested that the scope of this Masterplan includes consideration of these issues.

- 1.12. The Greater Exeter Authorities are currently considering the health of town centres. Early indications from that work suggest that Crediton is performing as a reasonably healthy town centre despite its proximity and access to Exeter city centre.
- 1.13. There has been a great deal of positive feedback with regard to the town in recent years however there is still a great deal that could be done to help the town reach its full potential. Crediton is a town that benefits from good community activity and higher town centre business occupancy rates than the other Mid Devon towns. However the town still has potential to reduce the need to travel to Exeter by widening and expanding employment opportunities, enhancing retail provision and improving access to housing and services for its population. Crucially attention is needed to enhance the built environment and local heritage. Crediton has some wonderful buildings and yet there are a number of buildings within the Conservation Area which could benefit from enhancements. Similarly gateway treatments could be considered along with improving the quality of some of the public spaces. There is potentially more that can be done to strengthen the town's identity and celebrate its culture and its historic associations. An example could be greater promotion of Crediton being the birthplace of St Boniface (Patron Saint of Germany).

2. THE ROLE AND PURPOSE OF A MASTERPLAN.

- 2.1. Key to delivery of the regeneration of the town centre is the development of a masterplan to guide the process. A masterplan is a comprehensive plan that acts as a blueprint for the development of an area: setting out principles for the way in which it will develop on a comprehensive basis, coordinating policy and planning requirements. It is considered essential that the town centre is the subject of a masterplanning process to ensure that the development, regeneration and enhancement of the town centre develops in tandem with housing and employment growth elsewhere in and around the town.
- 2.2. Once the masterplan is finalised it will set out the firm direction for the regeneration of the town and provide the basis for detailed consultation with all interested parties.

- 2.3. It is proposed that the masterplan includes a delivery plan to ensure that the masterplan outcomes are deliverable. This would include details of potential incentives and funding opportunities.
- 2.4. The masterplan would be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). Whilst the SPD will not in itself form part of the Development Plan, it is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. The preparation of an SPD requires two stages of public consultation in accordance with Mid Devon's Statement of Community Involvement. The Masterplan SPD would work within the framework of policies S12 and CRE11 of the Local Plan Review and also focus on implementation and delivery of the key priorities envisaged by those policies. It is anticipated that the work on this SPD would be completed during the financial year 20/21.

3. AIM AND SCOPE OF THE CREDITON TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION MASTERPLAN AND DELIVERY PLAN.

- 3.1. The aim of the masterplan is to provide a clear strategy to ensure that Crediton town centre meets its full potential as an attractive, thriving vibrant place with a strong economic function, now and into the future.
- 3.2. Crediton town centre should be a place of choice and quality, with a good range of shops, services, cultural and leisure opportunities, offering something different to nearby centres, set within an attractive and pleasant environment reflecting the history and character of the place. It will provide a comprehensive masterplan for the town centre which addresses the key issues, makes recommendations for regeneration and enhancement of the town centre, as well as a wider focus on transport infrastructure and set out delivery and funding options.
- 3.3. The masterplan should seek to strengthen the economy by creating new opportunities for businesses, jobs, shops, leisure, heritage and culture, and public spaces to make the town a more attractive place to shop, relax and stay, strengthening the town's role as a growing market town. It should also consider sustainable transport options, movement and links.
- 3.4. The key objectives of the masterplan are considered to be:
 - Improving the quality of the town centre in terms of heritage, public realm, air quality and traffic congestion.
 - Improving sustainable transport, walking and cycling within the town and physical links to and from existing and new housing and employment developments.
 - Consideration of transport management initiatives and rationalising car parking. Identification of how these may deliver public realm benefits.
 - Improving the retail, leisure, cultural and tourism offerings within the town centre.
 - Improving the economic function of the town centre so that it is able to compete with / complement new business, retail and leisure offerings.

- Achieving a prosperous town centre developed in harmony with significant planned housing growth.
 - Improving the identity, character and visitor experience.
 - Improving the evening economy.
 - Identifying development opportunities within / adjacent to the town centre.
- 3.5. The masterplan would sit alongside and supplement other initiatives such as the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 3.6. The suggested geographical area of the masterplan is shown in **Appendix 1**. This incorporates the town centre and areas identified by the Town Council's 2018 study. The Council wishes the local community to have a key role in the development of the masterplan and the masterplan should build on the aspirations for the town set out in the emerging Neighbourhood Plan. It should draw upon work such as the Grimsey Review 2 of High Streets (2018) and local studies such as the recent Crediton Town Council commission on Traffic and Public Realm (2018). This will involve engagement with stakeholders such as the Town Council, Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, the Highway Authority and Chamber of Commerce as well as at least two stages of public consultation.
- 3.7. It is envisaged that the masterplan would be developed in two stages: an initial scoping exercise leading to the development of options, followed by the development of a draft masterplan with delivery and funding options.
- 3.8. It is intended to commission consultants to assist in the preparation of this masterplan during the financial year 20/21. This report seeks authority to do so and sets out the intended scope of the geographical area to be covered.

Contact for more Information:

Christie McCombe, Area Planning Officer, (Major Projects, Tiverton EUE)
01884 234277 cmccombe@middevon.gov.uk

Adrian Welsh, Group Manager, Growth, Economy and Delivery
01884 234398 awelsh@middevon.gov.uk

List of Background Papers:

Emerging Local Plan Review
Draft Neighbourhood Plan (Crediton)
Crediton Traffic and Urban Realm Feasibility Study (2018)

Circulation of the Report: Members of Cabinet