

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Cabinet **DATE:** 14 September 2015

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WARD(S): Central, Upton, Chalvey, Elliman.

PORTFOLIO: Councillor James Swindlehurst, Neighbourhoods and Renewal,
Councillor Sohail Munawar, Economic and Social Inclusion
Councillor Martin Carter, Community and Leisure

PART I **KEY DECISION**

FIVE YEAR PLAN OUTCOME THREE: CENTRE OF SLOUGH

1 Purpose of Report

To inform the cabinet on actions taken under outcome three of the five year plan and agree the adoption of the vision for the centre of Slough.

2 Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action

The cabinet is requested to resolve:

- (a) That the vision for the centre of Slough be endorsed.
- (b) That the strategy for delivering the vision be agreed.
- (c) That the workstreams created as part of outcome three of the five year plan be noted and actions taken under those workstreams.

3. The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan

The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy (SJWS) is the document that details the priorities agreed for Slough with partner organisations. The SJWS has been developed using a comprehensive evidence base that includes the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA).

Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy Priorities

This report and the projects detailed link to the following priorities in the Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy (SJWS):

- Economy and Skills
- Regeneration and Environment
- Housing
- Safer Communities

Projects within outcome three of the five year plan also contribute to the cross cutting themes of the strategy by encouraging civic responsibility and improving the image of the town. The improving image theme is particularly relevant to outcome three of the five year plan.

Five Year Plan Outcomes

The report is an overarching explanation of the actions under outcome three of the five year plan namely:

- The centre of Slough will be vibrant, providing business, living and cultural opportunities.

However this outcome doesn't sit alone and as part of the work, there is reference to, and overlap with:

- Slough will be the premier location in the south east for businesses of all sizes to locate, start, grow, and stay (Outcome 1).
- There will more homes in the borough, with quality improving across all tenures to support our ambition for Slough (Outcome 2).
- Slough will be one of the safest places in the Thames Valley (Outcome 4).
- The Council's income and the value of its assets will be maximised (Outcome 7).
- The Council will be a leading digital organisation (Outcome 8).

4 Other Implications

a) Financial

All outcomes across the five year plan are currently undergoing an outcomes based budgeting process, the aim of which is to realign the Councils budgets to the eight outcomes.

b) Risk Management

Risk	Mitigating action	Opportunities
Legal– competing priorities could create delays.	Appoint external solicitors as required to undertake and provide comprehensive reports and activities as required.	
Property – Land assembly and site acquisitions.	Due regard for Site Identification and land assembly for regeneration purposes. Implement Strategic Acquisitions Policy; One Public Estate Strategy; Asset Challenge process and CPO Policy.	Market conditions can go up as well as down, with the Council benefitting from increased returns during an upturn.
Human Rights	No risks identified	
Health and Safety	No risks identified	
Employment Issues	No risks identified	
Equalities Issues	No risks identified	
Community Support – lack of support or	A programme of community engagement will be	Use of community groups and voluntary sector

engagement	identified as part of the work stream 3 – vision and animation	organisations as part of the engagement process
Communications	No risks identified	
Community Safety	No risks identified	
Financial - Abortive costs including legal and survey fees, staff costs, initial feasibility costs.	Whilst efforts will be made to reduce abortive costs it is inevitable that the Council will on occasions incur costs on projects that do not proceed.	
Project Capacity – resources and finance not available	Outcome based budgeting being carried out. Matrix management of staff resources being implemented.	Partner organisations aid and assistance.
Other	No risks identified	

c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no identified legal implications at this stage.

There are no identified Human Rights Act Implications at this stage.

d) Equalities Impact Assessment

There is no identified need for the completion of an EIA at this stage. Individual work streams may require EIAs in the future, and they will be provided at the appropriate time.

e) Property

All property issues are covered in the main report and appendices.

5 Supporting Information

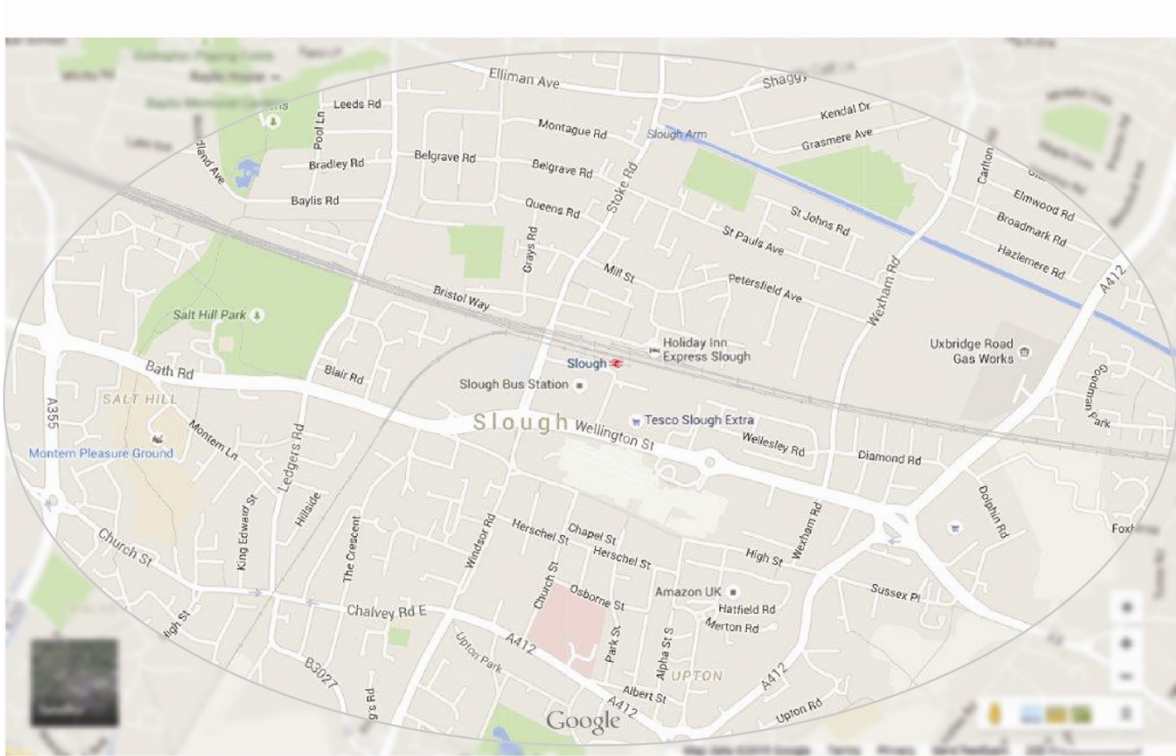
5.1 Outcome three of the five year plan states: The centre of Slough will be vibrant, providing business, living and cultural opportunities.

5.2 In order to achieve this outcome the centre of town vision and strategy will focus on the delivery of two key themes;

- Increasing footfall; and
- Economic wellbeing

5.2 An officer outcome group was set up after the adoption of the five year plan to drive actions under outcome 3, and member task and finish groups have been established to widen the vision and for other key workstreams.

5.3 The centre of Slough consists of much more than the High Street and the narrowly defined area that we have used for planning and other purposes but rather incorporates the wider but defined area indicated by the plan below.



5.4 The vision proposed is:

“The centre of Slough is where people, businesses, shops, transport and public spaces come together to create an atmospheric, high quality and vibrant urban living environment. A place where the latest technology is harnessed, jobs are created, design is innovative and culture is celebrated.”

- 5.5 The vision is intended to change the way the centre of Slough looks and works in a way that changes people’s perception of the place. This is needed to ensure we can attract people to visit, invest, live and work in the centre.
- 5.6 In order to do this we need to emphasise the advantage of Slough’s transport links that will make it one of the best connected places to do business. We also need to improve local connections so the centre can properly serve the town. We need to redefine the role of the centre of Slough so it is less dependent upon shopping and becomes a destination for a whole range of uses. This also means celebrating the fact it is different.
- 5.7 We have produced a high level strategy with a deliberate light touch. It has taken a multi-disciplinary approach to tackling the recognised problems and exploiting the potential strengths of Slough town centre. The strategy is not intended to have any formal status but will form an agreed framework for future development and regeneration.

Strategy

The main elements are:

- A housing led regeneration
- Attracting more business
- Reshaping the shopping centre
- Developing new attractions

- Insisting on high quality development
- Creating a sense of place
- Taking care of and improving the local environment
- Making the most of Slough's place in the world (Next to Heathrow, Windsor and the Thames Valley)
- Getting best value from public and private investment (Slough Pound)
- Connecting the centre with surrounding areas

5.8 Twelve work streams have been created to deliver this new vision for the centre of Slough, which we are calling "Changing Views". Summaries of each are below and those with comprehensive plans are appended to this report.

5.9 (1) Site allocations

To look at all current, upcoming and potential development sites in the centre of Slough to ensure best use to fulfil the vision and to encourage redevelopment or refurbishment to come forward. This includes major regeneration sites such as the canal basin and the Akzo Nobel site, plus smaller sites suitable for housing, business or retail units.

(2) Transport

Ensuring the centre is the best connected town well served by road, rail, air and bus services including cycling and walking facilities, major transport schemes such as Windsor Road widening, WRAtH, Crossrail and options for additional Slough to Windsor rail services.

(3) Showing our vision

Creating a method by which the vision and all its component parts and areas of redevelopment can be brought together and demonstrated to residents, businesses and visitors. This currently includes a video including interviews, animations and CGI and back up printed materials.

(4) Digital High Street / Smart Cities / economic redevelopment

To make the High Street more convenient, accessible and vibrant for all shoppers; to become a centre where retailers understand their customer's needs and requirements. To ensure retailers are working in partnership with each other, the council and other stakeholders of the centre of town.

(5) Public Realm

To focus on the regeneration of open spaces and the spaces between buildings, creating a higher-quality environment including, streets, squares, parks, greenery, surfaces, seating, lighting and highways fittings.

(6) Housing

Leading housing regeneration in the centre of Slough, allocating sites available, as part of the strategic housing assessment. Agree the number, tenure and type of units to be built and a strategy for encouraging quality in terms of appearance and accommodation.

(7) The Curve opening

To launch The Curve to residents, businesses and staff with four days of activities showcasing the building, its facilities and its place in the town centre. Event proposal and accompanying communications plan.

(8) CPO strategy / site acquisitions

Putting in place new strategy to maximise and encourage use of empty and run down properties and sites in the centre of Slough area. To adopt the “use it or lose it” approach with landlords and site owners; if they do not put their sites to good use, we will.

(9) Communications strategy

To implement a comprehensive communications plan on the range of activities being undertaken under outcome three using traditional and social media, marketing and digital methods.

(10) Retail assessment

Following a joint household survey with RBWM we will commission a Slough-specific assessment on the future of retail in the borough; to inform a strategy for the High Street and shopping centre area.

(11) Rationalisation of council assets

To assess all council assets in the centre of Slough and create proposals for the rationalisation of those assets..

(12) Evening economy / active High Street

Creation of a programme of activities: promotional, charitable and council-related for the Town Square, Mackenzie Square and High Street including markets, sporting activities and engaging promotions.

5.10 Next Steps

Once approved, the Centre of Slough Changing Views Strategy will be used for a number of purposes. One of the key things it can do is influence the review of the Local Plan for Slough and be translated into planning policy. The strategy will also be useful in making bids to the LEP, as an inward investment tool, informing disposals and acquisitions, determining transport priorities and deciding spending priorities.

6 Comments of Other Committees

None.

7 Conclusion

7.1 Outcome three is one of the eight Outcomes identified in the Five Year Plan.

Outcome three states: The centre of Slough will be vibrant, providing business, living and cultural opportunities. This report has outlined the actions taken under outcome three and seeks the adoption of the vision for the centre of Slough.

7.2 This report suggests the introduction of a Delivering the vision “Changing Views”

Strategy. If approved it will become part of the Councils overall vision for the town and will help shape and steer not only future developments but also guide Planning Policy and Strategy for the centre of our town. It will be the mechanism by which we measure and define new opportunities.

7.3 The report highlights the work already undertaken by the Member Task and Finish

Group, the officer working group and the 12 work streams of current activity aimed at delivering the vision.

8 **Appendices Attached**

‘A’ - Delivering the Vision – “Changing Views” a strategy

9 **Background Papers**

Work stream documents:

- Work stream 1 – Site allocations plan (word)
- Work stream 2 – Transport (word)
- Work stream 3 – Vision animation proposal (PDF)
- Work stream 4 – Digital High Street (word)
- Work stream 5 – Public realm (word)
- Work stream 6 – Housing (word)
- Work stream 7 – Opening of The Curve (word)
- Work stream 8 – CPO and site acquisition (word)
- Work stream 10 – Retail assessment (word)
- Work stream 11 – Rationalisation (word)

Delivering the vision “CHANGING VIEWS” a strategy

Vision

Our vision is to change the way that the centre of Slough looks and works in a way that changes people's perception of the place. This should then ensure that we can attract people visit, invest, live and work in the centre. In order to do this we need to advantage of Slough's transport links that will make one of the best connected places to do business. We also need to improve local connections so that the centre of town properly serves the town.

We need to redefine the role of the centre of Slough so that it is less dependent upon shopping and becomes a destination for a whole range of uses. We should exploit its location close to Windsor and in the attractive Thames Valley and make this work for rather than against it. This means celebrating the fact that it is different.

In order to achieve this outcome the centre of town vision and strategy will focus on the delivery of two key themes;

- Increasing footfall; and
- Economic wellbeing

Strategy

The main elements are:

- A housing led regeneration
- Attracting more business
- Re shaping the shopping centre
- Developing new attractions
- Connecting the Centre with surrounding areas
- Insisting on high quality development
- Creating a sense of place
- Taking care of the local environment
- Making the most of the Slough's place in the world (Next to Heathrow, Windsor in the Thames Valley)
- Getting best value from public and private investment (Slough Pound)

Housing Led Regeneration

It is considered that the most commercially viable form of development in the centre of Slough is residential. As a result in order to change the way that the centre of Slough is viewed it is proposed to promote a housing led regeneration which will help the local economy as well as improving the appearance and attractiveness of the centre.

The current Core Strategy proposed that 3,000 flats would be built in the town centre but it is now envisaged that this could be a lot higher as a result of the high demand, conversion of offices to residential and the new opportunity sites that have arisen around the centre. Although residential may be the main driver of new development it is important that it doesn't take place in isolation.

This means that we need to create attractive vibrant areas with a mix of uses. It is also important that we get a good quality of design not just of the buildings themselves but also the internal fit out and the surrounding public realm.

Currently the vast majority of flats end up being rented out because this is where the demand is particularly from young people. In the future whole blocks are likely to be developed by specialist private rental companies who will have the incentive to manage them well long term. It is important that we make Slough the location of choice for a new generation of residents who will hopefully shop, work and spend their leisure time there as well. We also need to attract the new and institutional investors in 'build to rent' to ensure quality and a range of accommodation and therefore a mix of people and spending power of residents.

There are a number of major opportunity sites in and around the centre. These include the former TVU site, the canal basin, Akzo Nobel (ICI) and National Grid gas works site east of Wexham Road. Whilst these are large enough to create distinctive neighbourhoods with local facilities, it is important that we create attractive links between sites and the centre in to make new residents feel they are part of the centre and in turn encourage use of the local amenities on offer. Similarly ensure new residents are happy and feel safe to walk or cycle to the railway and bus station.

Success will look like: A range of new high-quality residential properties with links to the High Street, transport and leisure activities.

Attracting More Business

Slough centre has lost a number of large office employers in recent years and has not, until recently seen much demand for new tenants. A lot of lower grade offices have been lost to residential as a result of the Government's changes to the planning rules which has encouraged the change of use to flats. There are also a number of empty sites with planning permission for offices which have not yet been implemented.

Given Slough's locational advantage and its proposed new rail link to Heathrow it is considered that the area around the railway station has the potential to become a "central business district" capable of attracting top firms and a skilled workforce. There are signs that office rents are rising and that confidence is returning to the Slough office market. It is important that we keep our nerve and ensure the office sites in and around the Heart of Slough are retained and are available for the inward investment we can attract back to a revitalised centre.

More office jobs in the centre will not only help local people but also form an important part of the regeneration of the centre of Slough which cannot solely be housing led. It is also important that we get a range of new jobs in the centre and encourage the small incubator type units to come forward which can add vitality and active frontages throughout the centre.

Success will look like: New offices developed and let in particular around the Brunel Junction with new and existing businesses making the centre of Slough their home. Ensuring this positively affects current and new retailers who experience an uptake in revenues as greater demand is generated in lunch time and evening trade.

Developing New Attractions

With shopping likely to have a less important role in the future it is important that we find new reasons for people to visit the centre of Slough.

Building more flats and increasing employment should deliver a captive audience but we need to attract other people into the centre. There is already evidence that a “café culture” is beginning to grow in Slough but we need to encourage new dining, leisure and entertainment facilities. This could take a range of forms from creating family orientated leisure and eating area to promoting a night time economy.

The opening of The Curve gives us the possibility of creating a “Cultural Quarter” around it. We already have a number of hotels but attracting more would bring more visitors and restaurants. The proposal for a Conference centre is intended to boost the need for more hotels, leisure, eating and drinking facilities in the centre of Slough.

Success will look like: A booming early evening economy with a range of visitor attractions, including quality and attractive hotels, restaurants, cinema, Curve performances and a range of leisure activities.

Reshaping the Shopping Centre

Traditionally one of the main functions of town centres was to be shopping centres. Things are however changing rapidly both nationally and locally.

Slough used to be ranked as a “sub regional” shopping centre attracting people from a wide hinterland. The loss of C&A, Littlewoods and Woolworths reflected national changes. The loss of Gap and New Look from Slough centre reflects more localised changes in the way that people are now shopping in the area.

The recent household shopping survey that we commissioned from DTZ showed that Slough was no longer attracting shoppers from outside. Only 10% of Windsor residents and 1% of Maidenhead residents were using Slough town centre for major shopping trips. There was also considerable leakage from within the Borough with the centre attracting 45% of Langley residents and 60% of residents in the rest of the town. When asked why they didn't shop in Slough the main reasons were a poor range of non food shops and an unattractive environment.

Over time we are likely to find that we may have too many shops and too many units with the wrong kind of space. Proposals for the reconfiguration of the Queensmere would help to improve the type and quality of the space on offer. Elsewhere we will have to prune back the amount of shopping floorspace and encourage it to regrow in a different form.

Success will look like: A clean and vibrant shopping area providing a variety, high quality range of shopping experiences including traditional, food, click and collect and leisure which reflects changing times.

Insisting on High Quality Development

One of the advantages that we have is that there are a number of vacant sites and other areas that are likely to come up for development. They have not all come forward because of a lack of viability and lack of demand due to the economic down turn. There are a number of signs that investor confidence is returning. Whilst encouraging new investment to come forward it is important that we insist upon a high quality of design and don't allow development for development's sake.

It is also important that we remove the few existing eyesores which create a poor impression of Slough.

High quality environments can attract business and a wider range of residents which in turn can bring employment, greater spending power and help support a wider range of uses in the town centre. For some developments the extra cost to achieve high quality design might make schemes unviable if Section 106 affordable housing and infrastructure contributions are also sought. A method of assessment needs to be established to help decision making when such policy conflicts occur.

Success will look like: High quality designed new buildings and construction areas with supportive, clean, green and attractive public realm.

Create a Sense of Place

It is also important that individual developments contribute to creating a distinctive sense of place. There should be pedestrian friendly environments which reflect what is happening around them.

In addition to the “Cultural Quarter” around The Curve we could have our own “Curry Mile” at the eastern end of the High Street and make the most of the “Herschel connection” around the park.

We should also exploit the views that you can get from high buildings in the centre of Slough which not only allow you to enjoy looking at Windsor Castle but allow people to appreciate that Slough is situated in the attractive Thames Valley. The proposed public viewing gallery on top of one of the Queensmere towers is an example of this but the principle can be applied elsewhere.

First impressions are important and so we need to make sure the main entrances are attractive for people walking, cycling or driving into or through the centre. The Station forecourt has been improved, the Windsor Road will be transformed, we have plans for the Stoke Road and the proposals for the Queensmere could help the Wellington Street frontage.

Success will look like: Clean and attractive gateways into the centre of Slough with facilities for pedestrians, cyclists and drivers, improving the image and people’s perceptions and creating a place where people want to live, shop and do business..

Taking care of the environment

It is important that not only should the centre of Slough look as green as possible but also that it is developed in as sustainable way as possible.

This means tackling congestion on the roads, improving air quality and enhancing our important green spaces. It also means that proper investment is made in maintaining the urban realm. It is also important that we need to tackle anti social behaviour and reduce the opportunities for and consequent fear of crime in the centre.

Success will look like: Improved and greened public realm alongside transport improvements and more attractive cycling and pedestrian routes. A tree for every new metal post?

Make the most of the Slough’s place in the world

It is recognised that the proposed improvements to Slough’s transport facilities which will make it one of the best located places in the country.

It is important that we also improve the more local transport links through the introduction of the Rapid Transit scheme and an improved rail service to Windsor, including the Chalvey

Halt. Not only will this make the centre of Slough easier to get to for visitors, it will make it more attractive for people to live and work there.

We should in future promote Slough centre not just on the facilities that it provides but also as an area with access to a lot more complimentary ones such as historic Windsor and attractive countryside.

Success will look like: The centre of Slough to be the best connected place – through road, rail, bus, air, cycling and walking facilities.