

REPORT TO: Environment and Urban Renewal Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 18th September 2024

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director - Environment and Regeneration

PORTFOLIO: Environment and Urban Renewal

SUBJECT: Town Deal Programme Update

WARD(S) Mersey and Weston

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Board on the delivery and monitoring of the Town Deal (Reconnecting Runcorn) Programme.
- 1.2 The Report covers an overview of the programme, funding allocation and period, spend and progress to date on individual schemes.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Board notes the content of the Report.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Reconnecting Runcorn Programme Overview

The Reconnecting Runcorn programme is a government allocation from the Towns Fund of £23.6 million running to March 2026 for the redevelopment and improved connectivity of the Old Town area of Runcorn.

- 3.2 The Programme delivery is being led by the Regeneration Team, along with internal and external project leads, and the compliance and monitoring by the Programmes Office.
- 3.3 An overview is provided for each of the eight projects covered by the programme, highlighting progress to date and plans for delivery in the remaining period.
- 3.4 Funding is drawn down based on a spending profile or forecast and monitoring reports are required to be submitted to Government biannually in May and October.
- 3.5 Budgets estimated at the start of the programme are now under pressure due to cost inflation. Progress was fairly slow in the early stages, but schemes are picking up momentum now and

many are in active delivery – see below.

- 3.6 The delivery team, along with the Director, are mapping risk in more granular detail at this stage and a full risk analysis will be presented to the Town Deal Board in September.
- 3.7 A link is included here to a short award-winning film which highlights the key aspects of the programme – https://youtu.be/Hkgv_f9QYzQ - and an overview presentation at Appendix 1 which includes images of each project.
- 3.8 For further information, regular updates and press coverage, please visit www.reconnectingruncorn.info
- 3.9 **Projects Overview**
- 3.10 **1. Runcorn Station Quarter Enterprise Hub (Elite House)**
Project Overview:
The creation of a co-working incubator space located close to the Runcorn West Coast mainline station. Providing quality office space, meeting room hire, event space hire and various ancillary uses at ground floor level such as a café, retail space and toilets.
- 3.11 Current Position:
HBC is currently obtaining legal and property advice to secure an operator for a creative start-up hub. Some essential work is being carried out to the building and the procurement of contractors to install solar PV panels on the roof.
- 3.12 **2. Unlock Runcorn – Landscaping and Visitor Centre and Canal Boat Trip Experience**
Project Overview:
Unlock Runcorn is made up of two strands to open up access to the Canal, as well as introducing a visitor experience offering. Consists of two strands:
- 3.13 Canalside Landscaping
The creation of a landscaped area between Runcorn Station and the new Peace Garden/Temple. The project will also see a small extension to the Canal where the boats used for boat trips can be moored. This is being led by the Council.
- 3.14 Canal Experience
Led by Runcorn Locks Restoration Society (RLRS), this strand includes the creation of a visitor centre and café for visitors to enjoy and find out more about the Canal's history, as well as the introduction of boat trips along a section of the Canal, and an events programme to run throughout the year.

3.15 Current Position:
Planning permission for the HBC landscaping and civil works has been awarded. The project is currently in RIBA stage 4 design and detailed drawings from the landscape architects are being drawn up.

3.16 Runcorn Locks Restoration Society, who will operate the visitor centre and canal boat trips, are in the process of procuring a Project Manager and purchasing the boats.

3.17 **3. Brindley Theatre Enhancements – extended café, new library and outdoor performance area**

Project Overview:

Transforming the already award-winning theatre with a refreshed design, making the Brindley more visible and accessible, taking advantage of a new outdoor public realm and vistas connecting to the town centre. Consists of two strands:

3.18 Brindley Theatre Extension

The extension will expand the current facilities in the Brindley Theatre to enable diversification and the ability to host a larger number of visitors. This will increase local footfall developing a more robust visitor economy. An additional aim is to improve the energy efficiency and access into the theatre. The Granville Street Library is set to relocate into the extension to build into the wider ambition of creating a cultural hub for the community. There will also be a well-designed large café restaurant that will complement the library relocation into the building.

3.19 Brindley Green

This will see the grassed area outside the Brindley Theatre transform into a welcoming, safe and inclusive civic space. It is set to include more accessible entrance points into the venue. As well as landscaping the green space making it suitable for outdoor performances, the scheme will improve the vista across the 'Old Town' of Runcorn.

3.20 Current Position:

A contractor to deliver the scheme has been confirmed and will start on site in August 2024. The outdoor work will follow the completion of the extension.

3.21 **4. Creative & Digital Skills Centre**

Project Overview:

Creating a central hub on Runcorn High Street to bring together a number of Halton's creative companies in one place. This hub will be a place for residents, especially young people, to be able to access creative resources. It is set to be affordable, high quality shared training and learning space where users can learn creative and digital skills, as well as providing training for future

employment opportunities. Consists of three strands:

- 3.22 57-59 High Street
The development of a Victorian shop building of heritage value with an adjoining new build to house Youthy.com- a youth centre for the young people of Runcorn. This will provide a safe space for them to learn and grow their passions. Facilities in this centre are set to include a winter garden, lobby and indoor venue for cultural events, as well as an outdoor garden space to grow fresh produce. The indoor space will also allow for classroom style rooms, kitchen facilities for cooking classes, using some of the fresh produce grown in the outdoor garden, and communal areas for the young people to connect and socialise.
- 3.23 63-65 High Street
The restoration of a Victorian shop with heritage value in the same row of buildings as Hazlehurst and Youthy.com. The Centre will host Mako Create to deliver digital skills training and A Place for Us theatre company to offer performing arts for the local community.
- 3.24 71a High Street
The restoration of this Georgian building is the first of the creative and Digital Skills Hub venues to be completed. Hazlehurst Studios occupy this building and provide high quality studio space for artists and creatives, incorporating accessible ground floor workspaces for artists to work in and hold community workshops and exhibitions in.
- 3.25 Current Position:
Hazlehurst Arts Collective is now well established at 71a High Street, offering a varied and successful programme of events and workshops. Eighteen artists have taken up residence.
- 3.26 A contractor for the Youth Club building (67-59 High Street) has been appointed and is due to start on site in mid-24.
- 3.27 The Digital and Creative Hub in the Camden buildings (63-65 High Street) is currently in design.
- 3.28 **5. Town Centre New Homes – High Street**
Project Overview:
The building of 65 self-contained apartments on Runcorn High Street for over 55's. This will provide much needed additional fully accessible quality homes, specifically designed for the older generation and located centrally, giving residents easier access to the facilities and offerings in the town centre.
- 3.29 **Current Position:**
Halton Housing Association has purchased this site, and a

contractor is now on site. Build should take about 12-18 months.

3.30 **6. Health & Education Hub**

Project Overview:

A mixed-use hub delivering health and education services and providing access to a wide range of health, wellbeing and training services situated in the current Granville Library building. The services are aimed at families, young people and residents living with long-term conditions. Giving the community better access to health services, as well as further education and job-seeking support in a 'one stop' facility.

3.31 Current Position:

Planning permission has been submitted for the Health & Education Hub (current library building). The project is currently in RIBA stage 4 and awaiting detailed drawings, prior to procuring a contractor. Work is forecast to start in Autumn 2024.

3.32 **7. High Street Connectivity**

Project Overview:

This project will improve the accessibility issues within Runcorn Old Town, as well as increasing the opportunities for active lifestyles, social interaction and the wellbeing of the community. Consists of four strands:

3.33 Buddhist Temple Hall and Peace Garden

Situated in the temple car park the Hall is set to become a new landmark building near Waterloo Bridge. Becoming just the third Ubosot Hall in the UK, it will be designed in the Northern Thai style. Not only will this building hold significance for the temple but also the community of Runcorn.

3.34 In addition, an adjacent Peace Garden area is now complete and a Chedi monument, donated and travelling all the way from Thailand by boat, is now installed.

3.35 Street Art

Exploring the town of Runcorn on foot is about to become even more enjoyable. Between the High Street near the Bridgewater Canal and River Mersey, art will be displayed on the viaduct piers. The artist design will showcase some local history from the Dukesfield area, to blend art with the town's unique history.

3.36 High Street Public Realm

Improving the connectivity, accessibility and environment on key routes around the town centre and in turn reduce congestion and pollution. In a push to improve active lifestyles within the community, this is set to include more pedestrian friendly paths, cycle lanes and a new taxi rank.

- 3.37 **St Paul's Mews**
To be able to open up the high street more, this project includes the demolition of a row of buildings and is being undertaken to allow for some of the other plans within the wider programme to be able to take place and be able to reach their full potential. One of the key project strands this feeds into is The Brindley Green.
- 3.38 **Current Position:**
The application for demolition of St Paul's Mews has been approved and the procurement of a contractor is in progress.
- 3.39 The Peace Garden completed; the Chedi was cast in Thailand and this together with a Buddha have arrived in the UK. There was a formal ceremony on Sunday 23rd June 2024 to celebrate the temple anniversary and Si Ra Reuk, or Pagoda Foundation ceremony and the Chedi is now installed.
- 3.40 Following a community project to develop a range of heritage stories, a booklet has been published. An open call has been undertaken to procure an artist to work on a street art commission for the pillars of the Silver Jubilee Bridge.
- 3.41 Public realm works on High Street will be progressed towards the end of the programme. The demolition of St Pauls Mews is due to commence in September.
- 3.42 **8. Town Centre New Homes – Rutland Street**
Project Overview:
A community-led housing scheme to remediate land in Rutland Street in preparation for a newly formed Community Land Trust to take forward the design and build of much needed mixed-use community housing.
- 3.43 **Current Position:**
The Community Land Trust are in the process of commissioning capacity support for the design stage of this scheme.
- 3.44 See **Appendix 1** for a visual presentation of all the Projects in the Programme.
- 4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**
- 4.1 None
- 5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**
- 5.1 Ensuring robust monitoring systems are in place and all project delivery is compliant is key to enabling the full draw down of funding and avoiding any clawback.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

One of the Projects in the Programme will directly deliver a range of health care services from one central base.

In addition, a number of the Projects focus on the delivery of cultural activity which has been proven to have a positive effect on health e.g. The Brindley, Hazlehurst Studios, the Creative and Digital Hub and the Temple.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

Key aspects of the Programme look to support the local creative sector and promote creative industries, particularly to young people. The Town Deal funding seeks make the 'old town' area of Runcorn a more vibrant and sustainable area for residents, businesses and visitors, in particular via the Enterprise Hub at Elite House.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

Youth.Com, led by Power in Partnership will provide a one stop base for young people in the 'old town' area offering a range of free activities and educational opportunities. The Creative and Digital Skills Hub will showcase the creative industries to young people, encouraging them to take up courses and qualifications. And the Health and Education Hub will link into this to support young people with training and careers support.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

The Town Deal Programme includes the delivery of a range of free activities and services for local residents.

The housing schemes have at their core affordability and accessibility.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

None

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

Two affordable housing schemes are included in the Programme.

And the overarching aim of the Town Deal Programme is to improve perceptions and raise aspirations of the area. A professional approach has been taken to the marketing and promotion of the schemes, raising a positive profile of the area and celebrating its assets and people.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 There is a risk of clawback or non-drawdown of funding if the grant

is not managed correctly; however, with careful management and support offered by the Programmes Office and designated Finance Officer, it is anticipated that all funding will be drawn down/defrayed and the outputs and outcomes met.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 Wherever possible, opportunities are widely offered both to input to how the funding is spent and consultation on spend has been undertaken where possible and opportunities to input in a more strategic way by the business and voluntary sector communities via the Town Deal Board.

8.2 Activities and services included in the programme are largely aimed at accessibility and inclusivity.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Wherever possible consideration is giving to the delivery of green initiatives and to the environmental implications of project delivery.

9.2 All projects are asked to consider the environmental implications of delivery and minimise these where possible.

9.3 For example, solar panels are being installed on a number of buildings within the Programme; and LED lights and other energy saving measures included in the Brindley extension.

10.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

None under the meaning of the Act