

Market Towns Investment Plans

Meeting: Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee

Meeting date: Wednesday 15 January 2025

Report by: Head of Economy and Regeneration

Classification

Open

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

Bromyard Bringsty; Bromyard West; Kington; Ledbury North; Ledbury South; Ledbury West; Leominster East; Leominster North and Rural; Leominster South; Leominster West; Ross East; Ross North; Ross West;

Purpose

This report provides an overview of the development Market Town Investment Plans for Herefordshire's five market towns in 2021-22, in order to seek the views of the scrutiny committee on the benefits of the process and how projects identified are being progressed.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) **That the committee notes this report and;**
- b) **The committee considers lessons learnt with the implementation of the Market Town Investment Plans.**

Alternative options

1. The Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee has requested that this matter is considered, in order that the council can learn the lessons from the development of the Market Town Investment Plans and considers what, if anything else, needs to be done to support this initiative. There are no alternative options.

Key considerations

2. In September 2020, the council commissioned consultants, Rose Regeneration to work with town councils and other local stakeholders to develop, through local engagement, Market Town Investment Plans, (MTIPs), for each of the five market towns: Bromyard; Kington; Ledbury; Leominster and Ross-on-Wye. Whilst Herefordshire Council commissioned the development of the plans, it was the intention that they would be led locally within each town.
3. This was in recognition that Herefordshire's market towns play a critical role in the county's economy, as focal points for employment; for retail, tourism, leisure and culture; for business investment and growth; for housing; and for access to services. The market towns often provide the key interface between the wider rural areas, access to employment and local services, and connectivity to and from Hereford and other neighbouring areas.
4. The aim of the commission was to: "develop a coherent set of investment plans through local engagement with market town councils and stakeholders to identify a longer term vision for the growth of the towns to enable sustainable economic development to meet the towns".
5. Each MTIP is underpinned by an evidence base indicating the economic situation in each town, and is based on extensive local stakeholder engagement. Each MTIP identifies a wide range of potential pipeline projects to support economic development and delivery of each town's vision. An indication of the impact of each potential project was analysed using the theory of change and, where appropriate, the MTIP identifies potential sources of funding, including: opportunities for external grant funding, institutional funding, or council funding. The MTIPs will, therefore, guide capital investment in market towns and support their economic recovery and development.
6. Overall, the development of the MTIPs has highlighted that there has been a long-term lack of investment in the five market towns with the suggestion that most require significant enhancement to infrastructure, public realm, shop front/ building etc. in creating the conditions for growth. Establishing a clear strategic rationale, local evidence base, and identification of prioritised projects with local stakeholders means the county is now well placed to seek support through future rounds of government funding, such as the Levelling up Funds, UK Shared Prosperity Funding or Future Towns Funding.
7. All five MTIPs, (which are enclosed as Appendices 1 to 5 to the report), were approved and adopted as providing direction for the identification of future economic development projects in the market towns at Cabinet on 31 March 2022. The key projects identified in each MTIP are summarised below.
8. **Bromyard** - the MTIP for Bromyard identifies a number of potential projects that will contribute to the delivery of the town's vision. These include:
 - Development of employment opportunities:
 - a. EcoHub – development of new employment land
 - Improvements to support the visitor economy:
 - a. Bromyard Eastern Enhancement – a range of proposals including a permanent festival site; community facilities; public realm improvements; and shop front grants scheme
 - b. Greenway – phased development of a multi-user track from Bromyard to Rowden
 - Civic amenities, skills development and projects aimed at young people:
 - a. Health and Wellbeing Hub in the centre of Bromyard

- b. Skills Development – development of the Skills Foundry, a collaboration between NMITE, HCA and Rural Media as part of Hereford’s Stronger Towns Funding bid, to include Bromyard in a hub and spoke delivery model

9. **Kington** - the MTIP for Kington identifies a number of potential projects that will contribute to the delivery of the town’s vision. These include:

Development of employment opportunities:

- a. New employment site

Improvements to support the visitor economy:

- a. Promotion of Kington’s role as a significant walking centre with a strong crafts sector
- b. Kington lighting and banners scheme
- c. Improved food and drink attraction/offer
- d. AONB Status
- e. Wesleyan Chapel

Civic amenities, housing, skills development and projects aimed at young people

- a. Shop/Building Frontage Scheme
- b. Kington High Street Regeneration and Kington Market Hall and surrounds
- c. Kington Police and Fire Station relocation and redevelopment

10. **Ledbury** - the MTIP for Ledbury identifies a number of potential projects that will contribute to the delivery of the town’s vision. These include:

Development of employment opportunities:

- a. Viaduct site – 3 Ha employment allocation - business units
- b. Employment Land at Little Marcle Road

Improvements to develop a more sustainable and fully functioning town:

- a. Rail parking and access
- b. Landscaping at Master House/ St Katherines Car Park leading to the High Street
- c. Shop Front Grant Scheme

Civic amenities and projects aimed at young people

- a. Conversion of Town Council offices to Tourist destination
- b. Relocation of Playing Fields
- c. Viaduct site – Student accommodation

11. **Leominster** - the MTIP for Leominster identifies a number of potential projects that will contribute to the delivery of the town’s vision. These include:

Development of employment opportunities including new employment land and incubator space for new and expanding businesses:

- a. Facilitation of Marsh Court the Former Dales site
- b. Old Priory development after its community asset transfer
- c. Leominster Enterprise Park Extension
- d. Leominster Incubation Hub

Improvements to support the visitor economy and transport in the town:

- a. Leominster Railway Station/Mobi Hub
- b. Worcester Bromyard Leominster Greenway
- c. Corn Square (part of Heritage Action Zone)
- d. Shop/building frontage grant scheme (Part of Hereford Action Zone)
- e. Leominster Fire Station relocation and redevelopment / Leominster Watercourse Project / The Grange Masterplan
- f. Food and Drink Attraction
- g. Visitor Accommodation

Skills Development and projects aimed at young people

- a. The Skills Foundry

12. **Ross-on-Wye** - the MTIP for Ross-on-Wye identifies a number of potential projects that will contribute to the delivery of the town's vision. These include:

Development of employment opportunities:

- a. Mixed use development on Model Farm
- b. Broadmeadow and Tanyard Lane Development

Improvements to support the visitor economy:

- a. Brampton and Sellack Cycleway
- b. Riverside Canoe Bunkhouse & Pontoons
- c. Museum Without Walls
- d. Civic amenities and projects aimed at young people
- e. Enhanced sports centre and skate park
- f. Market House and Apron Plaza and High Street pedestrianisation
- g. Community facilities at the Ryefield Centre
- h. Shop/building frontage grant scheme

13. Overall, the MTIPs identified that in the majority of the towns there is a demand for additional employment land. For example, stakeholder feedback and evidence in Ross-on-Wye established that the lack of employment land is a significant barrier to growth, limiting business expansion and forcing existing or potentially new businesses to look elsewhere, often out of the county.
14. In late 2021, whilst the MTIPs were still being finalised, Herefordshire Council used discretionary funding from the Government, as part of the Covid-19 recovery, to support all five market towns. Through this process, the Council awarded £20,000 from Welcome Back funding and £10,000 from the Great Places to Visit Fund to each of the Town Councils, with projects reflecting some of the emerging themes from the plans. and a summary of the Town Council Activities are shown as Appendix 7.
15. In relation to Leominster, a number of the projects identified in the MTIP, including the enhancement of Corn Square and the delivery of a shop/ building frontage grant scheme, have been achieved due to the Historic England funding of £1.3 million and Herefordshire Council's match funding of £2.1 million towards the Leominster Heritage Action Zone project, which has significantly improved the quality of the public realm and conservation of the heritage of the town.
16. Since the MTIPs were adopted in 2022, these have been used as key reference documents to reflect the priorities for each respective town. The idea is that the MTIPs will be used to guide the council and act as a platform for potential funding bids, as and when suitable funding opportunities become available for capital investment to support the economic recovery and development of the market towns. Within each MTIP there was a commitment that Herefordshire Council will continue to work with the Town Councils and other local stakeholders to identify new project and funding opportunities, carry out feasibility and foundation work, and support local organisations to apply for funding.
17. Alongside the MTIPs, there has been other Herefordshire Council investment in the five Market Towns, from sources including Section 106, Highways, as well as UKSPF and REPF. Much of this may have contributed towards some of the themes of MTIPs. Whilst not exhaustive, examples of this investment is listed in Appendix 7, alongside the Covid-19 recovery mentioned above.
18. Soon after their publication and adoption of the MTIPs in summer 2022, three of them were used to support applications for Round 2 of the Government's Levelling Up Fund. Local Authorities were permitted to support one application per parliamentary constituency, plus transport-focused application, so it was agreed to submit the following three applications:
 - a. North Herefordshire constituency – a package of public realm improvements in Leominster and Ledbury town centres and enhancements to the Leominster Old Priory building.
 - b. Hereford and South Herefordshire constituency – development of the site infrastructure and development plots for the Ross Enterprise Park
 - c. Transport Theme – a package of transport and active travel measures in and around Hereford city, including the Hereford Travel Hub.

Whilst, considerable effort was taken in developing these three bids, which were supported by £125,000 Government Capacity funding, unfortunately, the only project which was successful was the transport themed one, focussed around the development of the Hereford Transport Hub.

19. Given the significant focus and desire to develop more employment land within market towns, and following the disappointment of the Levelling Up Fund application for Ross Enterprise Park, as part

of the budget setting for 2024/25, Herefordshire Council allocated £12 million within the Council's Capital Programme to support the development of employment land. This involved allocating £8 million towards the development of Phase 1 of the Ross Enterprise Park, and £4 million to be used to explore opportunities within the other four market towns.

20. Work is now well underway on the final detailed design of Ross Enterprise Park, with work on site due to commence in 2025 and further investigations are ongoing in relation to the other market towns.
21. Around the same time as submitting the Levelling Up Fund bids in summer 2022, Herefordshire Council also identified an opportunity to use some of the Council's allocation of UK Shared Prosperity Funding to support the development of feasibility studies for each of the market towns, to allow them to progress some of the projects within their MTIPs. This was in recognition of the fact that it is often difficult to find revenue funding to progress projects to the point where they can then apply for capital funding and £25K was allocated for each market town for spending in 2024/25.
22. Officers have been working with town councils over the last few months to identify which projects they wish to take forward using the UKSPF feasibility funding, and then developing detailed specifications and commissioning consultants to take these projects forward between December 2024 and March 2025.
23. The feasibility study funding is being used to support the following projects for each town:
 - Bromyard** – Bromyard Town Council delegated this project to the Bromyard Development Community Interest Company, who are being supported to consider a range linked initiatives to the east of Bromyard, which they are collectively referring to as the Bromyard Eastern Enhancement Project. The project involves:
 - a. Carrying out a feasibility study to explore the potential expansion of the Linton Trading Estate, the establishment of a permanent enhanced festival site and the creation of a 'green commute' along the old railway line into Bromyard.
 - Kington** – supporting Kington Town Council with a study covering three town centre priorities, including:
 - a. Reviewing town centre car parking and considering options to increase suitable parking provision for the town.
 - b. Consideration of the potential relocation of the Police and Fire Station to a more accessible location, to enhance response times and free up space within the town centre for either housing or additional car parking.
 - c. Developing options to improve the Market Hall and its surrounds, building on its limited use for markets, to address the poor state of this listed building, improve the visual appearance to the town, and identify solutions to address the physical restrictions and potential threats, costs and opportunities for the building.
 - Ledbury** – supporting Ledbury Town Council to develop a local tourism, events and markets plan, with the aim of:
 - a. Maximising the tourism opportunities for the town, improving the local markets and events offering, considering options to improve the local Visitor Information Service, increasing joint working between the various heritage buildings and local attractions, and ensuring that local businesses benefit from the improving profile of Herefordshire as a result of the work of Herefordshire County BID.
 - Leominster** – supporting Leominster Town Council to establish a way forward for the Leominster Old Priory.

- a. Carrying out a feasibility study into the development of a business incubation hub and shared business space at the Old Priory Centre, including providing options for delivery models.
- b. Considering potential future uses for the areas of the Old Priory building currently occupied by Leominster Youth Hostel, including an options analysis, recommendations and suggested delivery models, identifying likely costs and next steps for development.
- c. Understanding future options for sustainable transport links to the above projects located at the Old Priory site, which should include a full review of current and planned transport links.

Ross-on-Wye – supporting Ross-on-Wye Town Council to explore the feasibility of two town centre projects:

- a. Consideration of the pros and cons of pedestrianising or introducing pedestrian-priority schemes for the town centre, to increase the town centre footfall, support greater economic activity and improve the visitor experience.
- b. Investigating the development of an external area adjacent to the Market House, known as the Market Apron, to create a flat area from the steps of the Market House to hold markets and other town centre events.

Community impact

24. Herefordshire’s market towns play a critical role in the county’s economy as focal points for employment; for retail/ tourism/ leisure/culture; for business investment and growth; for housing and for access to services. The market towns often provide the key interface between the wider rural areas, access to employment and local services, and connectivity to and from Hereford.
25. The development of the MTIPs was led by stakeholders in each of the market towns, supported by Rose Regeneration and the Council. The MTIPs have identified a range of potential projects that are important to the economic development of the market towns.
26. At the time of the production of the MTIPs, the then County Plan 2020 - 2024 stated that: “We shall also build new community facilities and bring forward new employment sites throughout the county. In making these investments we will continue to balance environmental, economic and community returns and will carry forward measures which further manage demand for our services.”
27. The new Herefordshire Council Plan 2024 – 28 states that, as part of the Council’s growth objectives, we will: “Support market towns and Hereford city to be vibrant hubs through working with residents, local organisations and businesses.”

Environmental Impact

28. The MTIPs align well with the Council’s [environmental policy commitments](#) particularly in terms of the commitment to: “Promote links between environmental sustainability, economic growth and wellbeing.”
29. The Core Strategy 2011 to 2031 recognised that: “Sustainable communities need economic growth to ensure they are active and thriving. Wealth underpins social and cultural activities and the conservation of our environment. Ensuring a strong and diverse economy will help give people in Herefordshire more opportunities for work within the county, which could reduce the number of people needing to travel outside the county, thus helping to reduce carbon emissions and increasing the prosperity of Herefordshire residents.”

30. Identifying potential economic development projects and schemes to develop employment land and incubation space locally in the market towns has the potential to contribute to the reduction in the amount that people have to travel to work.

Equality duty

31. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to consider how it can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that it is paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.
32. As the MTIPs are very high-level and do not address the actual delivery of projects, it is not believed that it will have an impact on the council's equality duty at this stage. An equality impact assessment (EqIA) was carried out when the MTIPs were developed and is included in Appendix 6 and EqIAs will be carried out for any projects taken forward by Herefordshire Council.

Resource implications

33. As a background report for the Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee, there are no direct resource implications to this paper.
34. Any future Herefordshire Council funding or resources to support the delivery of MTIP projects would need to be considered separately.
35. Support and liaison with Town Councils about the delivery of MTIP projects would generally be through the Economic Development team, and would be subject to staff capacity and alongside other priorities.

Legal implications

36. The MTIPs are high level direction-setting documents and have no formal status. Any of the projects proposed in the MTIP will be subject to a further decision and therefore there are no legal implications arising from this report

Risk management

37. The following are the primary risks identified in delivering the MTIP project:

Risk / Opportunity	Mitigation
<p>There is a risk of reputational damage to the council, as stakeholders may expect all projects identified as a priority to be funded by the council.</p> <p>However, funding available from the council generally, including for the MTIP projects, is constrained.</p>	<p>The purpose and scope of the MTIPs was clearly communicated at each stage.</p> <p>Regular stakeholder consultation sessions were held. Ward members attended each relevant market town stakeholders group.</p> <p>The fact that not all projects are suitable for capital spend was clearly communicated to the stakeholders.</p>

<p>Projects being considered for funding are likely to be subject to the development of detailed business cases, and would need to meet specific eligibility requirements, which may include conditions that they generate an income or capital receipt to repay the investment.</p>	
<p>Local stakeholders may not agree with the priorities identified in the plans</p>	<p>The MTIPs have identified a wide range of proposed projects to support the growth of each town through local engagement and consultation.</p> <p>Stakeholders were invited to moderated sessions to discuss and agree a prioritised list of projects.</p> <p>Final drafts of the reports were shared with Town Councils.</p>
<p>Funding may not be available for all identified schemes, and will be heavily dependent on Government funding and their priorities.</p>	<p>The MTIP process has established an informed pipeline / prospectus of projects with a clear strategic rationale and evidence base to support future grant applications for government funding.</p> <p>While funding may not be immediately available for all the projects within the MTIPs, the plans are intended to support applications for current and future grant funding (as it becomes available). They are, therefore, intended to maximise the likelihood of successful grant applications in the future.</p> <p>Further technical work and advice is required in order to develop the outline business cases and assess deliverability.</p>
<p>Phosphates risk in the County affecting the progression of certain projects.</p> <p>This is likely to particularly affect those in North Herefordshire.</p> <p>The main risk is that there will be a small increase in costs to obtain phosphate credits.</p>	<p>The council is working to mitigate the impact through the construction and management of integrated wetlands.</p> <p>It is anticipated that developments in the area will be able to buy 'phosphate credits' to contribute to the wetland scheme to ensure that the development maintains 'nutrient neutrality'. Schemes offering to contribute will then be considered for approval.</p>

Consultees

38. There was considerable stakeholders engagement and consultation by the consultants in all five market towns throughout the process of developing the MTIP documents, including Town Councils, Ward members, local business and organisation leaders and owners, land and business owners, as well as charities and other employment support agencies.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Leominster Market Town Investment Plan
- Appendix 2 – Ross-on-Wye Market Town Investment Plan
- Appendix 3 – Ledbury Market Town Investment Plan
- Appendix 4 – Bromyard Market Town Investment Plan
- Appendix 5 – Kington Market Town Investment Plan
- Appendix 6 – Equality Impact Assessment (dated 10 Sept 2021)
- Appendix 7 – Welcome Back Funding: Town Council Activities

Background papers

Report and minutes of Herefordshire Council Cabinet on 31 March 2022, when Cabinet approved the Market Town Investment Plans for the five Market Towns.

Service Level Agreements with all five Town Councils in relation to the allocation of Welcome Bank funding for each Market Town, dated November 2021.

Report and minutes of Herefordshire Council Cabinet on 29 June 2022, when Cabinet approved the submission to government of three bids to the Levelling Up Fund by the deadline of the 6 July 2022.

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Please note this section must be completed before the report can be published		
Governance	Henry Merricks-Murgatroyd	Date 06/01/2025
Finance	Karen Morris	Date 23/12/2024
Legal	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Communications	Luenne Featherstone	Date 09/01/2025
Equality Duty	Harriet Yellin	Date 07/01/2025
Procurement	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Risk	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.

Approved by Ross Cook Date 09/01/2025

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

MTIP	Market Town Investment Plan
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