

Report of Cabinet

Subject: Ambition Arnold visionary masterplan

Date: 12 December 2024

Author: Assistant Director of Housing, Growth and Regeneration

Wards Affected

All

Purpose

To seek approval of the Ambition Arnold visionary masterplan and to note the outcome of the public consultation that formed part of the development of the masterplan.

Key Decision

No

Recommendation(s)

THAT:

- 1. Approval of the Ambition Arnold visionary masterplan as a strategic framework to shape and drive potential future interventions in the town centre.**
- 2. The findings of the Ambition Arnold masterplan public consultation and Arnold Town Benchmarking Review to be noted**

1 Background

- 1.1 In 2023 the Council approved a budget of £200,000 to support the development of a town centre masterplan and feasibility works, branded Ambition Arnold.
- 1.2 The approval was based upon the understanding that to address the issues of decline in Arnold town centre a strategic masterplan was required on which a robust scheme for improvements could be based that are deliverable and commercially and economically viable. The strategic plan providing a framework for potential future development and leveraging funding and investment.

- 1.3 In November 2023, the Council was successful in securing an additional £150,000 One Public Estate Programme 10 funding to extend and support the wider Ambition Arnold project.
- 1.4 In 2023 the Council appointed through the SCAPE framework, Wilmott Dixon to undertake the Ambition Arnold masterplan and relevant feasibility works to RIBA 2. Wilmott Dixon's supply chain includes Leonard Design Architects who were appointed to develop a visionary masterplan for Arnold town centre.
- 1.5 The draft Ambition Arnold baseline review and visionary masterplan was completed in July 2024 and included a review of the town's strengths and weaknesses as well as the opportunities and challenges to improving the town and its long-term sustainability. The report considered a range of issues such as vehicle movement into and within the town centre, public transport, parking, entrance points into the town, active travel, streetscape, difficult access points, flooding issues, topography, key buildings, and heritage. A number of key themes arose from this review which included opportunities to:
- Improve the leisure and cultural offer in the town to draw footfall and add vibrancy to the town.
 - Improve the public realm across the town (including soft landscaping opportunities) and connectivity between green spaces to encourage visitors and increase dwell time in the town.
 - Improve to shop fronts and promoting a more diverse retail offer and enhanced and expanded market place offer
 - Create a sense of arrival to both the north and south of the town
 - Develop a car parking strategy to support the town
 - Potential for a future public service hub
- 1.6 In July 2024, the Portfolio Holder for Growth and Regeneration approved the decision to undertake a consultation exercise to seek the views of the public and stakeholder on the developing themes and vision contained in the masterplan. The decision included the intention to present the final Ambition Arnold Baseline Review and Visionary Masterplan to Cabinet during Autumn 2024.
- 1.7 The Ambition Arnold consultation exercise took place during July – August 2024 with an executive summary being produced of the Ambition Arnold vision. The summary was made available both on-line and in hard copy format. The public and stakeholders were invited to review the vision for Arnold and participate in providing feedback by completing a questionnaire that was available both on-line and in hard copy in different languages and font settings on request at the drop-in events at the Arnold Library. The plans were also presented to various stakeholder groups including the

Youth Council and Gedling Borough Council's Developer Forum (refer Appendix 1). An Ambition Arnold video was posted on social media to promote the consultation and the Council's Contact magazine was also used to promote the consultation.

- 1.8 To encourage participation in the consultation and survey respondents were offered the option of being entered into a prize draw with the opportunity of winning £50.
- 1.9 The consultation period closed on the August 2024 with 652 responses to the survey. The Ambition Arnold Survey Results Report summarises the finding of the consultation including the profile of responses and commentary provided. The report is contained in Appendix 2.
- 1.10 The main findings of the consultation are summarised below.
 - Arnold town centre feels tired and is in need of investment (92%)
 - A more diverse and wider range of shops would attract more shoppers to Arnold town centre (88%)
 - The shopping environment could be more appealing by having a distinct character including more attractive shop fronts to enhance the shopping environment (85%)
 - The town would benefit from a focus on improving the regular market and more events for the community to engage with (84%)
 - There should be investment to improve the pedestrian experience and to make the town feel safe during the day and evening and a more welcoming place to walk around (87%)
 - The town benefits from good public transport links (86%)
 - Improving facilities in the parks across the wider town centre to encourage the community to use them and the town more (85%)
 - Improving the appearance of the town. (92%)

The survey results also found support for expanding and improving

- health, health and leisure, swim, and gym facilities in the town (77% very important/important),
- theatre and cinema provision (74% very important/important)

The consultation confirmed broad support for a more modern library facility with cultural and learning opportunities (69% strongly agree/agree) and

better access to council, healthcare, and welfare services in the town (74% very important/important).

1.11 The survey provided the option for comments with the most frequent topics being listed below:

- Anti-social behaviour
- Improve accessibility for visitors with physical, sensory and neuro divergence needs.
- The reduction of vacant shops
- More attractive shopfronts
- Better provision for young people
- Increased police presence
- Better lighting and CCTV
- Provision of more green areas
- Additional car parking and free parking
- Improve leisure centre
- Improve toilets

1.12 The commentary also made reference to a number of considerations when planning the future for the Arnold town centre that included

- Retain local heritage
- Deliver only practical and realistic developments
- Don't overdevelop the Arnold town centre
- Ensure money is well spent throughout.

1.13 Analysis of the survey responses identified young people (aged 15 – 25) to be underrepresented in the survey when compared to the demographics of the borough (Census 2022) (refer to the Equality Impact Assessment Appendix 5). However, local schools and community groups were invited to take part in the survey and submit collective responses. The responses of all groups were broadly aligned to the main findings of the survey with 100% of young people considering a need for a more diverse and wider range of shops to be very important/important. Likewise, expanding and improving health, leisure swim and gym facilities (77%) and cycling access were also rated to be more important to this group (70%).

1.14 The findings of the Ambition Arnold survey are supported by an independent Benchmarking Review undertaken by People and Places during summer 2024. The Benchmarking Review was commissioned by Wilmott Dixon, as part of the Ambition Arnold contract of works. The Review benchmarked Arnold Town (213 units across the town), with similar small towns across the country (localities with less than 250 units). The benchmarking provides comparative data to evidence the need for regeneration development which can support future funding applications. The Benchmarking Review Report is contained in Appendix 3.

1.15 The Benchmarking Review confirmed that:

- Arnold town centre has a higher than National Small-Town Average (NSTA) in (A4) drinking establishments, (A5) Hot Food Takeaways, (D2) Assembly and Leisure
- The number of shops with a nationwide presence are 10% higher than the NSTA but shops that are unique to the town is 15% lower than the national average.

The Benchmark Review identified a number of positives associated with the town that included.

- **Footfall** on market and non-market days were both above the NSTA, 112% and 52%, respectively.
- **Consumer spend** as reported by 50% of town centre users (£20.00) was 18% above the NSTA
- **Convenience** and ease of walking mirrored the NSTA
- **Transport links** were classed as the most positive aspect of trading in Arnold by businesses, double the NSTA. The geographical location of Arnold was also considered to be a positive aspect to trading in the town.
- **Car parking** was stated as a positive by 75% of businesses, 48% higher than the NSTA, with town centre users stating this to be a positive 13% above the NSTA

1.16 The Benchmarking Review highlighted a number of areas where there was room for improvement that included.

Visit recommendations: 56% of town centre users would not recommend a visit to the town, 38% higher than the NSTA

Anti-Social Behaviour: 44% of town users reported that safety was a negative aspect of Arnold, 28% higher than the NSTA, with a key theme to emerge in the feedback that there was a need to reduce anti-social behaviour and increase police presence in the town.

Vacancy rates: 14% of commercial ground floor units in the town are vacant 5% higher than the national average with town centre users commenting that there was a need to reduce the number of vacant units

Retail Offer: 50% and 515 of businesses and town users respectively rated the mix of retail offer to be a negative aspect of Arnold.

Physical Appearance: 65% of town centre users reported that the physical appearance was a negative aspect of Arnold 40% higher than the national average with town centre users highlighting the need to improve the physical appearance of the town.

Public Toilets: 57% of town centre users stated public toilets are a negative aspect of the town centre

Market: The number of traders at the Eagle Square Market was reported to be below the national average of 15 (4 traders on a Friday). 65% of Town Centre users stated that they did not use the market with the key reason being limited number of stalls and choice.

2 Proposal

- 2.1 The findings of the July – August 2024 Ambition Arnold public and stakeholder consultation and Benchmarking Review 2024 align and support the key themes of the Ambition Arnold Baseline Review and Visionary Masterplan as outlined in Appendix 4. The masterplan was updated following the consultation to include reference to the feedback received from the public and stakeholders.
- 2.2 The Ambition Arnold masterplan provides a vision for interventions that will address the decline of the town as supported by the public consultation. The masterplan provides a framework for interventions that will encourage increased footfall into the town through a mix of new and enhanced services and facilities which will stimulate the local economy and diversity of the retail offer. It provides a vision for streetscapes that are accessible to all, appealing, green, and safe that provide opportunities for events and markets to support a vibrant town centre that draws upon its cultural heritage whilst supporting local businesses and instilling civic pride.
- 2.3 The masterplan identifies practical opportunities to improve the physical appearance and amenities of the town, provides open and safe pedestrian areas, access to green spaces and public realm improvements. The vision identifies opportunities to improve and enhance access to leisure, cultural and other services and facilities within the town whilst safeguarding public transport links and recognising the importance of town centre parking provision. It is proposed that the Ambition Arnold visionary masterplan is

formerly approved as a strategic framework to shape and drive potential future interventions in the town centre.

3 Alternative Options

3.1 Do Nothing

Although the Council has the option of not approving the Ambition Arnold visionary masterplan, the Council has undertaken a public and stakeholder consultation exercise which has received positive support.

- 3.2 The masterplan provides a basis and framework for future investments and funding to ensure the long-term viability, sustainability, and prosperity of Arnold Town Centre. Therefore, a “do nothing” option would fail to take advantage of using the masterplan to shape the future of the town and investments.

4 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The masterplan identified potential interventions within the Arnold town centre that would be subject to separate business case development and approvals. There are no immediate financial implications arising from the approval of the Masterplan.

5 Legal Implications

There are no direct legal implications arising from the approval of the masterplan.

6 Equalities Implications

- 6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was completed and updated to reflect the Ambition Arnold consultation exercise.
- 6.2 An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken if an investment decision is required arising from the Ambition Arnold visionary masterplan.

7 Carbon Reduction/Environmental Sustainability Implications

- 7.1 The Ambition Arnold visionary masterplan includes a number of opportunities for investment to support carbon reduction and environmental sustainability. The report includes reference to opportunities to improve pedestrian access active travel across the town centre. The vision also has regards to the greening of public spaces and includes consideration of flood risks.
- 7.2 A Carbon Impact Assessment will be undertaken if an investment decision is required arising from the Ambition Arnold visionary masterplan.

8 Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix 1: Ambition Arnold Executive Summary

- 8.2 Appendix 2: Ambition Arnold Survey Results
- 8.3 Appendix 3: Benchmarking Review
- 8.4 Appendix 4: Ambition Arnold Baseline Review and Vision
- 8.5 Appendix 5 Equality Impact Assessment

- 8.6 Appendix 6 Carbon Impact Assessment

9 Background Papers

- 9.1 Ambition Arnold, Leader Report 31 October 2023
- 9.2 Ambition Arnold, One Public Estate Programme 10 Grant Award, Leader Decision, 29th February 2024
- 9.3 Ambition Arnold masterplan consultation, Portfolio Holder Regeneration and Growth, 3rd July 2024

10 Reasons for Recommendations

- 10.1 The masterplan is to provide a framework for regeneration, investment and funding for the future that can support the long-term sustainability and prosperity of the town.

Statutory Officer approval

Approved by:

Date:

On behalf of the Chief Financial Officer

Approved by:

Date:

On behalf of the Monitoring Officer