

Report to Cabinet

Subject: Ambition Arnold, RIBA Stage 2 plans and outline business case for the redevelopment of Arnold North.

Date: 06 November 2025

Author: Director of Place

Wards Affected

All

Purpose

To seek approval of the RIBA stage 2 plans for a new leisure centre, arts centre (including theatre and cinema) and library, and outline business case in readiness for future funding bid submissions or opportunities. To also note the outcome of the public consultation that shaped their development.

Key Decision

No

Recommendation(s)

THAT CABINET:

- 1. Approves the RIBA Stage 2 plans and outline business case in support of a new arts centre (including a theatre and cinema), leisure centre and library for the purposes of supporting any future funding opportunities.**
- 2. Notes the findings of the public consultation on the RIBA stage 2 plans which have been considered as part of the final plan proposals.**

1 Background

- 1.1 In 2022 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 to base a robust scheme for improvements that are deliverable and commercially and economically viable. The strategic plan providing a framework for future development and leveraging funding and investment. As well as improvement to the town centre it was recognised in conjunction with the evolving Strategic Leisure Review that any emerging plan needed to address the issue of ageing leisure facilities in the northern end of Arnold.

- 1.3 In 2023 the Council appointed, through the SCAPE framework, Wilmott Dixon, to undertake the Ambition Arnold masterplan and relevant feasibility works to RIBA stage 2 (concept designs).
- 1.4 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.
- 1.5 Wilmott Dixon's supply chain includes Leonard Design Architects who were appointed to undertake a masterplan exercise. Ambition Arnold's Visionary Masterplan was approved by Cabinet on the 12th of December 2024 (Appendix 6) following extensive consultation with residents and stakeholders.
- 1.6 Following approval, internal engagement took place with the leisure and theatre teams supported by specialist consultancy advice to determine the Council's specific requirements for leisure provision in Arnold Town Centre. The engagement was coordinated by Willmott Dixon and Leonards Design Architects to develop plans for an arts centre (including theatre) and Leisure Centre. Engagement also took place with Nottinghamshire County Council and Inspire to consider how the existing Arnold Library could be redeveloped as part of the ambitious proposals.
- 1.7 Draft RIBA stage 2 plans were prepared by Leonard Design Architects taking on board feedback from the engagement workshops and other technical advice relating to planning and highway matters.
- 1.8 In May 2025 the Portfolio Holder for Growth and Regeneration approved a period of public and stakeholder engagement to support the development of the RIBA stage 2 plans. The consultation took place from 27 May 2025 to 1 July 2025. The five-week consultation included an online survey as well as two drop-in sessions during which staff were available to explain the proposals and answer questions. The plans were also presented to various stakeholder groups including the Gedling Borough Developer Forum and were available for public inspection and engagement at the Arnold Sunner fayre Event at Arnot Hill Park. The consultation was promoted in the Council's Contacts magazine which is distributed to each household in the Borough.

Findings of the consultation

- 1.9 There were 301 respondents and the majority (68%) thought that overall, the regeneration proposals were right for Arnold. 19% of respondents

disagreed and 14% selected the 'Not sure' option. The comparatively high percentage of respondents, from 70% to 90%, agreed with the following regarding the transformation of Arnold:

- Promoting the identity and heritage of our community through art and cultural events in both the art centre and the square
- The cinema/ theatre with comfortable seats, good layout and a wider programme would attract more visitors
- A bigger pool and modern facilities within the leisure centre is needed.
- Some outdoor space like a community garden or dedicated play area next to the library would enhance the leisure use and dwell time.

1.10 In their comments, the respondents most frequently mentioned their suggestions that the swimming pool should include a spectators' seating area to view swimming competition. The most frequently mentioned concern relates to anti-social behaviour in the area and therefore consider it necessary to engage with and provide facilities for young people. A full summary of the survey results and a detailed analysis is included at Appendix 1. The details of the survey undertaken in 2024 are included at Appendix 2.

Leisure Strategy – Interventions

1.11 The Strategic Case for the Ambition Arnold programme sets out a compelling rationale for regenerating Arnold's northern town centre. Arnold urgently requires intervention to replace failing facilities, boost health and wellbeing, and reinvigorate its declining town centre.

1.12 The updated Indoor Built Facilities Strategy, developed alongside the Leisure Strategy, also provides a detailed review of the Council's leisure centres - their condition, performance and future role within the portfolio. Its purpose is to ensure that Gedling has the right facilities, in the right places, operating on a financially sustainable basis.

1.13 The Leisure Strategy identified Arnold as one of the Borough's two strategic hubs, with a large and growing catchment that includes more deprived communities where affordability and accessibility are critical. Demographic analysis showed strong demand for swimming and fitness but highlighted that the existing wet and dry facilities are split across two sites at Arnold Leisure Centre and Redhill Leisure Centre, creating duplication, inefficiency and higher operating costs. The Indoor Built Facilities Strategy therefore recommends progressing with the Ambition Arnold project to deliver a new consolidated leisure centre in the town centre, replacing the existing split-site provision.

RIBA stage 2 plans

1.14 The design development for Arnold North has been guided by extensive consultation with key stakeholders and the Leisure Strategy, with a strategic

focus on delivering a new leisure centre, arts centre including theatre/cinema, library and public square. The preferred scheme was progressed on the basis that the existing dental practice (159 Front Street) and adjoining retail units on Front Street (155-157 Front Street) would be removed to enable comprehensive redevelopment of the site and creation of the new public square, if it is viable for the Council to purchase the additional sites. Should the Council be unable to acquire these sites, to ensure that the scheme remains deliverable, two further design options have been prepared and these are referred to as options A and B. Full details of the plans may be viewed in Appendix 3.

The Preferred Scheme

- 1.15 Central to the design of the preferred scheme is the creation of a new public square, providing a substantial frontage onto Front Street and establishing a high-quality environment for the theatre/cinema and arts venue, leisure centre and library.
- 1.16 The preferred scheme is structured around the creation of a generous new public square at the northern end of Front Street. This space provides a substantial civic frontage, establishing a clear focal point and offering a setting that can support community, cultural events, and day-to-day activity.
- 1.17 The square has been carefully positioned and proportioned to connect directly with Front Street, drawing people into the heart of the development whilst also improving permeability between the site and its uses. This will help to create a safe environment addressing concerns raised in the consultation about anti-social behaviour.
- 1.18 By arranging the new theatre/cinema and arts venue, leisure centre and library around the square, the scheme ensures that the principal entrances face onto this shared space. This maximises activity, natural surveillance, and opportunity for interaction, ensuring the square becomes an animated and welcoming destination.
- 1.19 This option was identified as the preferred scheme as it allows the theatre/cinema and arts venue, leisure centre and library to be delivered in phases, allowing for flexibility in delivery and funding
 - Phase 1: Demolition of the former Working Men's Club and disused retail units, enabling the first phase of public realm and delivery of the new theatre/cinema and arts venue.
 - Phase 2: Demolition of 155, 157 and 159 Front Street, with the new leisure centre and library delivered around the public square (both current facilities will remain operational until replacement facilities are complete).
 - Phase 3: Demolition of the existing library and leisure centre, and provision of further public realm and green spaces. This phase

provides fully accessible routes across the site and improved links to High Street and Druids Tavern car park.

- 1.20 The existing facilities can remain in operation during construction, ensuring continuity of service throughout the build programme.
- 1.21 The preferred option enables a right-sized public square to be established to reinforce the vitality of the town centre and create a civic heart by arranging the buildings to open directly onto the square, animating and activating the space throughout the day. It allows for step-free connections between Front Street and High Street, which can be provided through accessible ramps, potentially allowing for level access across the site in later phases. Less active frontages, such as theatre/cinema boxes and leisure centre service areas, are positioned to the rear, maximising active frontage onto the square. The arrangement also creates a large, clear development site to the north of the library, offering potential for future community uses or residential development to help meet the Borough's housing demand.

Option A

- 1.22 Option A has been developed to demonstrate how the scheme would function if the dental practice were retained, while still delivering the arts venue incorporating a theatre and cinema space, leisure centre, public square and improved connectivity across the site. In this scenario, the existing library is also retained, with works undertaken to reconfigure the public realm around the library and the relocation of key service infrastructure (such as the plant room). This scheme can still be delivered in phases allowing an arts venue (incorporating a theatre and cinema provision) to be delivered in a first phase, following the demolition of the former Working Men's Club and disused retail units.
- 1.23 In this option, the library's existing substation is relocated to the north of the library, enabling demolition of the current substation and bridge link. The dental practice remains in situ, allowing for opportunities to enhance the southern elevation through planting or artwork. Although the 'community garden' element is lost, green space can be maintained around the existing library.
- 1.24 Retaining the dental practice reshapes the southern edge of the site and reduces flexibility in creating a fully open public realm, but the option still enables delivery of the new leisure centre, theatre/cinema, and a significant public square. This scenario balances continuity of services and a reduced land acquisition risk, whilst also offering scope for creative frontage on the wall of the retained dental practice to maintain a coherent town centre.

Option B

- 1.25 Option B has been developed to demonstrate a scenario where both the existing dental practice and adjoining retail units are retained. As with Option A it permits the early delivery of the Arts Centre, the existing library is also

kept in situ, with associated works to adapt the public realm, relocate the plant room, and maintain continuity of service. This option establishes a more constrained site boundary for the new theatre/cinema and arts venue, leisure centre and public square, but enables the scheme to progress without further property acquisition.

- 1.26 In this option, the library's existing substation is relocated to the north of the library, enabling demolition of the current substation and bridge link. Both the dental practice and retail units remain in situ, allowing for opportunities to enhance the southern elevation through planting or artwork. Although the 'community garden' element is lost, green space can be maintained around the existing library. The remainder of the masterplan, including the theatre/cinema and arts venue and leisure centre, is delivered within the adjusted site boundary, with a reconfigured and reduced public square.
- 1.27 The civic square would be compromised by the existing properties in Front Street, but these could be acquired at some point in the future to create a public square and enhance the street scene.

Outline Business Case

- 1.28 The analysis confirms that Options A and B only partially meet the ambitions of the Outline Business Case (Appendix 4) and the adopted Arnold Vision (Appendix 6).
- 1.29 Option A provides a balanced compromise, delivering new leisure and cultural assets and a civic square of useful scale, but losing the library upgrade, greening, and full urban design benefits.
- 1.30 Option B is the most deliverable but also the most compromised, reducing the civic square, retaining outdated buildings, and failing to address key urban design and civic pride issues.
- 1.31 Both options are preferable to the "Do Nothing" scenario and provide credible mitigations should land assembly stall. Yet they remain sub-optimal compared with the Preferred Scheme. The clear conclusion is that full land assembly and delivery of the comprehensive preferred scheme should remain the priority. Options A and B should be seen as fallback positions, offering deliverability at the expense of transformational impact.
- 1.32 A full economic case has been developed for each of the options. It considers capital costs, operating positions, monetised benefits, and benefit-cost ratios, ensuring that the Council has a robust and comprehensive understanding of the economic implications of all potential delivery routes.
- 1.33 The economic appraisal has been completed in accordance with HM Treasury Green Book guidance. The assessment focuses on a set of short-listed options that were deemed realistic and deliverable. Each option has been appraised over a 30-year period, with all costs and benefits discounted

to 2025 prices to ensure comparability. Optimism bias has been applied to capital costs to reflect early-stage uncertainty.

- 1.34 Economic costs include both the one-off capital costs of delivery and the ongoing operating position of the new facilities. Capital costs capture land assembly, construction, fit-out, demolition, professional fees and risk allowances. Operating costs reflect the net subsidy or surplus associated with each facility in steady state, meaning the difference between revenues (for example, leisure memberships or cinema tickets) and expenditure (including staffing, utilities and maintenance). Taken together, these inputs provide the net additional cost to the public sector under each option when compared against the “do nothing” baseline.
- 1.35 The Preferred Option, which assumes full land assembly, remains the strongest and most transformational outcome. It creates a generous civic square, introduces a new library alongside the arts venue and leisure centre, delivers new green space, and maximises wider land value uplift. Economically, it secures the highest benefit–cost ratio (2.80) and achieves the most comprehensive alignment with the adopted Arnold Vision. Financially, while requiring the most significant capital outlay and grant support, it offers the most straightforward pathway to long-term sustainability, removing the current £876k annual leisure subsidy for Arnold and Redhill and delivering a net operating surplus even after borrowing costs.
- 1.36 Option A, which retains the dental practice but acquires the adjoining retail units, performs as a credible mitigation should full assembly not be possible. It delivers most of the cultural and leisure benefits and maintains a public square of comparable size, albeit without new library provision or community garden. Its value-for-money performance is strong (BCR of 2.36), but the scheme is less ambitious, offering fewer public realm and land value benefits than the Preferred Option.
- 1.37 Option B, which retains both the dental practice and retail units, represents the most constrained approach. While still removing the existing subsidy and delivering a positive BCR (1.90), it results in a smaller, less visible public square, no new library, no green space, and a weaker urban design outcome. Although still better than the Do Nothing or Do Minimum options, it falls short of the aspirations embedded in the Arnold Vision.
- 1.38 Overall, the Addendum (included at Appendix 5) confirms that the Preferred Option should remain the Council’s priority. Options A and B provide viable fallbacks but are ultimately compromises that reduce the transformational impact of the regeneration programme.

2 Proposal

- 2.1 The findings of the Leisure Strategy and public consultation undertaken in May - June 2025 and the earlier consultation in July – August 2024 to inform

the visionary masterplan support the RIBA stage 2 plans and outline business case. These were updated following consultation to include reference to the feedback received from the public and stakeholders.

- 2.2 The RIBA stage 2 plans and Outline Business case provides a vision for interventions that will address the decline of Arnold North as supported by the Council's Leisure Strategy and the public consultation. The plans provide a framework for interventions that will encourage increased footfall into Arnold North through a mix of new and enhanced services and facilities which will stimulate the local economy and diversity of the leisure 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 RIBA stage 2 drawings form the basis of further design work for a new leisure centre, arts centre incorporating theatre and cinema, civic square and library (should it be possible to implement the preferred scheme) 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 proposals would also 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 which is unreduced. It is proposed that the RIBA stage 2 drawings and outline business case are formally approved to support future funding opportunities.
- 2.4 As set out in the financial implications section of this report, there is a void that exists between detailed design and funding, and the Council currently has no budget allocated to this scheme which requires a substantial grant award to make it a viable project.

3 Alternative Options

Do Nothing

- 3.1 Although the Council has the option of not approving the RIBA stage 2 drawings and supporting Outline business case, the Council has undertaken a public and stakeholder consultation exercise which has received positive support.
- 3.2 The design work and outline business case provide 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 design work and outline business case to shape the future of the town and its leisure offer.

4 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The cost of the design work and development of the outline business case was within approved budgets for this work. There are no immediate financial implications arising from the approval of the plans. Delivery of the ambitious proposals can only progress if supported by external funding and the financial implications arising from any proposal would need to be fully assessed through a full business case and subsequent approvals.
- 4.2 An Outline Business Case has been prepared which includes an economic case and financial modelling for a number of options including the preferred option and options Option A & B. The financial modelling has been undertaken on a set of assumptions around users, income, potential facilities mix, sources of funding and the revenue costs of borrowing for each option. Whilst these assumptions have been based on best available information to date it should be noted that these assumptions may change as the scheme progress.
- 4.3 Whilst the financial model indicates that the preferred option and both Options A & B are financially viable (based on the assumptions set out in the economic case), the financial position is predicated on a significant amount of funding coming forward which has not yet been identified.
- 4.4 Not only does this funding require significant grant income but also a sizable amount of borrowing will be required by the Council. As stated above the financial model suggests that the borrowing can be repaid by income based on a number of assumptions, however as the scheme progresses the financial modelling and assumptions will need to be reviewed at regular intervals to ensure the scheme remains financially viable and can cover the costs of borrowing that will be needed. Although based on a number of assumptions, it is important to have an early economic case at this stage; in order to be successful in any funding opportunities that may arise, the Council needs to be in a position to be able to effectively demonstrate the financial and economic case for redevelopment, as well as having proposals at a stage where they can mobilise quickly. Once funding is identified, the scheme will only progress if the revised economic case confirms affordability and long-term financial viability.

5 Legal Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising through the approval of the RIBA stage 2 drawings and outline business case. Further approval will be required for any full business case, should grant funding be secured. Advice would also need to be sought on any ongoing procurement requirements. As part of the development of the plans, consultation has been undertaken. The Council has to have regard to the outcome of the consultation when considering plans.

6 Equalities Implications

- 6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been prepared to support this report and may be found at Appendix 7. Whilst there will be physical changes made to the public realm, these will be positive in nature, making the public realm and leisure facilities easier to access and use. The scheme of improvement works has been developed to meet the needs of persons with protected characteristics, taking account of feedback received during the public consultation. Furthermore, the enhanced layout and new surfacing of the car park, pedestrian areas and public realm will make the area more accessible for the elderly and persons with a disability or mobility issues.
- 6.2 The Council must comply with the public sector equality duty under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. Consultation has been undertaken with a wide range of people and this has enabled the Council to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it by encouraging participation in public life and enabling wide ranging views to shape the future of Arnold North.

7 Carbon Reduction/Environmental Sustainability Implications

- 7.1 The Ambition Arnold RIBA stage 2 plans include a number of opportunities for investment to support carbon reduction and environmental sustainability in the construction of the new buildings and open civic spaces. A number of sustainable design features can be incorporated into the proposals, helping to mitigate the environmental impact of the scheme's construction and use. A Carbon Impact Assessment has been completed and is included at Appendix 8.

8 Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix 1 – Ambition Arnold Survey results 2025.
- 8.2 Appendix 2 – Ambition Arnold Survey results 2024.
- 8.3 Appendix 3(i) – RIBA Stage 2 Plans for the Preferred Approach, Option A and Option B
- Appendix 3(ii) RIBA Stage 2 Plans
- 8.4 Appendix 4 – Outline Business Case.
- 8.5 Appendix 5 – Outline Business case Addendum Report.

8.6 Appendix 6 - Ambition Arnold Visionary Masterplan.

8.7 Appendix 7 - Equality Impact Assessment (EIA).

8.8 Appendix 8 – Carbon Impact Assessment (CIA).

9 Background Papers

9.1 Leisure Strategy.

10 Reasons for Recommendations

10.1 To bring Members up to date with the proposal and the works undertaken so far.

10.2 To ensure that evidenced proposals are available to support any future funding opportunities which may arise.

Statutory Officer approval

Approved by:

Date: 08 October 2025

On behalf of the Chief Financial Officer

Approved by:

Date: 08 October 2025

On behalf of the Monitoring Officer