

## Westhoughton Town Centre Regeneration

### Town Centre Capital Improvements Masterplan

In 2019 £16m funding was secured to improve Urban District Centres within the Bolton borough - Horwich, Westhoughton and Little Lever (Farnworth was already benefitting from such a scheme). The idea being to consult with stakeholders and residents to find ways to regenerate town centres to make them more vibrant, more economically viable and to better serve residents. The process led by Bolton Council and nominated Urban Regeneration Consultants (BDF) involved the setting up of a Steering Committee made up of councillors, community leaders and retailers to develop and steer these plans. For Westhoughton the £4m was to be used in tandem with £2.5m earmarked for refurbishment of the Town Hall, Library and underused Carnegie Hall.

The process was interrupted by Lockdowns and WFH, however by 2022 physical progress was being made with work starting.

#### Timeline

- First meeting of Westhoughton Town Centre Steering Group Meeting - 10th July 2019.
- Steering Group Meetings (2019...) and Workshop (November 2019).
- Westhoughton Area Forum Town Centre Masterplan Presentation - 3rd October 2019.
- Public Consultation (February 2020).
- Westhoughton Steering Group Final Presentation (March 2020).
- Bolton Council Executive Cabinet Approval 'Westhoughton Town Centre Strategy' (ECMDL764) - 9th November 2020.
- Bolton Council Executive Cabinet Approval 'Implementation of District Centre Priority Key Development Proposals (Westhoughton) – Phase 1' (ECMDL4686) - 15th March 2021.
- Future Use of Civic Buildings Presentation to Westhoughton Town Council - 15th June 2022.

**Docs:** [Map](#) | [Area Forum](#) | [Proposals](#) | [Workshop](#) | [KPDs](#) | [Consultation Overview](#) | [Public Consultation Report](#) (56 pages) | [Consultation Headlines](#) | [Strategy Report](#) | [Future Use of Civic Buildings](#) | [FAQs](#) (Masterplan) | [Project Summary](#) (WCN)... *more docs to be added.*

### Community Involvement (Chronological Order)

#### ***WCN Meeting - Tuesday, 10th September 2019 [M34] (from Minutes)***

Agenda Item: Town Centre Capital Improvements Masterplan

Steve Freeborn (Chair) introduced Phil Lamb of Bolton Council, Principal Project Officer (Growth and Regeneration at Directorate of Place) to tell us about the exciting plans for investment accessing a significant Council-approved allocation of £16m of funding from the £100m Town Centre Strategy; funds to be used for targeted intervention in Farnworth, Horwich, Westhoughton and Little Lever Town Centres.

Phil started with an overview of problems facing High Streets – high rents, vacant units, falling sales, online purchasing and the struggle to survive – and the need to support our town centres with new initiatives and investment as well as diversifying their offer and including more residential use by all age groups, with the Council becoming more proactive whilst taking on board what local residents want to see. There are 3 strands: Master-planning; Direct Intervention, and also leveraging into areas as much Public Sector investment as possible.

Residential engagement and feedback given to Consultants will feed into the Master-planning process to determine the share of this £16m pot for Capital Investment; Westhoughton also has a separate fund of £2.5m for the upgrading and refurbishment of the Town Hall (funds left over to go to the Westhoughton Town Centre pot). A Steering Group made up of councillors and stakeholders (including representation for



Community groups [WCN]) has been set up, meeting once so far... Already successfully master-planned (GM Mayoral Challenge) and accessing further funds (£25m – Govt. Future High Street Fund), Farnworth is being used as the model for the process. With an outside consultant in place by early October, work and consultations - to include site visits, workshops and accessible public events - will run over the coming months with a report and recommendations to be submitted for approval to the Council by 31/3/20. Whilst led by the Council and Consultants, the key aim is for the Westhoughton Masterplan to be grounded in what residents and stakeholders want, what gives the best social and economic return for that investment, and what represents a clear vision for the Town Centre.

Phil Lamb then took questions from the room covering use of consultants, expertise and timescales; land ownership and possible Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs); clarifying Capital Investment as something new, physical and owned at end. A first draft map was circulated which defined the Town Centre area as discussed and debated by the Steering Group; the contributions of the many community hubs around Westhoughton acknowledged. Phil can be contacted on 01204 336136. Questions, feedback and Ideas can be sent to [westhoughtontowncentrefunding@bolton.gov.uk](mailto:westhoughtontowncentrefunding@bolton.gov.uk) as part of consultation.

**WCN Meeting - Wednesday, 27th November 2019 [M35] (from Minutes)**

**Agenda Item: Town Centre Capital Improvements Masterplan**

Following on from the last meeting [M34], attended by Phil Lamb of Bolton Council (Regeneration), Chris Buckley (Steering Group) gave an update on progress with the scheme offering significant capital investment (quarter share of £16m) to boost and attract more people into the town centre.

There is a separate pot of money £2.5m for refurbishment of the Town Hall and underused Carnegie Hall. Bolton Council has appointed external consultants (BDP), and a Steering Group made up of stakeholders from across the community, business and local councillors has met three of times to discuss preferences and possibilities. A first proposal has the three available (vacant) sites - Gaiety, Mill Street and adjacent to Sainsbury's - given over to housing. Does Westhoughton need yet more housing? It had been suggested that the Gaiety site could become a public/community asset, such as a functional community space or, with leveraged investment, a multi-purpose leisure venue – something that would draw people into the town centre, and have a ripple effect for other businesses.

There followed some discussion, Veronica Swinburne cited the great job done with Radcliffe (Market Hall), it incorporating venue configurations for community activities/entertainment. Another good model for regeneration is Altrincham, which has had much media coverage. It was felt it would be a pity not to make the most of this opportunity, given a significant sum of money is available for investment.

The Public Consultation on initial proposals to happen early in 2020 [22/1/20 & 25/1/22 at Library], with [new draft] plans [based on realistic proposals and priorities] signed off by the end of March [the Westhoughton Masterplan]. It is important for local people get involved.

**Match Programme Article - Daisy Hill FC v. Pilkington 30th November 2019**

As part of WCN's community contributions to Daisy Hill FC match programme an article was produced giving information about Town Centre Investment.

One of the interesting developments of late is funding being made available for capital investment and targeted Intervention of a number of Bolton borough town centres including Westhoughton, which will get a share of a £16m pot of funding with the aim of address problems facing High Streets (high rents, vacant units, falling sales, online purchasing and the struggle to survive), and boosting their use for retail, leisure and residence. Recent Master-planning of Farnworth is being used as a model... *Click on thumbnails to view full article.*

## **WCN Meeting - Wednesday, 12th February 2020 [M36] (from Minutes)**

### Agenda Item: Town Centre Capital Improvements Masterplan

Jason referenced today's Public Consultation drop-in session at the Library for the potential investment in the town centre (¼ share of £16m, plus a separate £2.5m for Town Hall refurbishment). He briefly went through the six Key Development Proposal areas as per the feedback questionnaire:

- KDP1: Street remodelling along Market Street.
- KDP2: Upgrading key pedestrian links.
- KDP3: Redevelopment of the Town Hall.
- KDP4: Promotion of new homes on council and privately owned land.
- KDP5: Improving access to the Library and Carnegie Hall.
- KDP6: Developing a car parking strategy.

There was some discussion of the proposals. One question on fixing Market Street's uneven road surface - it was believed this would fall under the Council budget. It was thought perhaps any remedial work might be delayed for when Market Street, whilst still 2-way, is - as suggested - narrowed in places for more pedestrian/outside seating areas (some skepticism given the short British summer and unpredictable weather).

It was felt that if the idea is to draw people into the town centre the vision presented is lacking, given that all vacant sites: Gaiety, Mill Street and adjacent Sainsbury's have residential allocations – once built on there is nowhere to put anything else. Residential developments bring with neighbour concerns (noise, light, nuisance...), and could be counter-productive in a small town setting; there is already a lot of residential property in the vicinity of the town centre.

Whilst clearly extra investment would have to be accessed, a town this size (approaching 30,000 with ongoing, planned and possible developments), needs more amenities... the jewel of a modern flexible 200+ capacity entertainment/civic venue that could be used for concerts, theatre, exhibitions, etc. could certainly draw people into the town centre and boost the local economy.

In spite of it being an issue raised during consultations, there are no plans for additional parking, suggesting that rationing might be the solution to short-term (shoppers) v. long-term (workers) parking. The Town Hall redevelopment proposals see it being used to encourage business start-ups (more pressure on parking?). A café is suggested, though there are plenty of them on Market Street currently. The Town Council Chamber is there, though is in a dilapidated state. Crime concerns are a hot issue, one suggestion: incorporating a police post in the refurbished building? The Carnegie Hall being made more accessible for community/other use is a positive, though it is relatively small (100 capacity maximum, fewer with tables) – even the Westhoughton Local History Group struggled to fit their members in at a recent meeting/presentation. Whether it gets any of the Town Hall investment is not clear. It needs to be managed from Westhoughton (not Bolton as currently) – Library, key code entry or perhaps with an arrangement with local pub supplying staff and product when needed, and having the keys to open up/lock up?

It was felt that there are many positives in the plans with some contention and reservations; this is an important opportunity for residents to influence change and have a say on the future shape of the town centre by filling in the printed questionnaires or doing it online.

There is second drop-in is on Saturday, 15th February. The deadline for public feedback is Sunday, 23rd February. The Masterplan to be finalised by March 31st, and put to Bolton Council for approval, with any work commencing in the short-term. For more information go to [investinbolton.com/westhoughton](https://investinbolton.com/westhoughton).

### **Facebook Announcement - 27th February 2020**



Following consultations during the last few months, the Public Consultation for the Westhoughton Town Centre Master Plan is now up for public consultation with drop-in sessions at Westhoughton Library - Wed 12 Feb 2020 3pm-7pm and Sat 15 Feb 2020 3pm-7pm.

The plan would see Westhoughton get a share of a £16m pot to improve/regenerate the town centre to meet the challenges of today.

A webpage has been set-up with information and documents, and an online survey is available - deadline for submission of all questionnaires is Sunday 23rd February 2020.

There is a separate budget of £2.5m to be used to renovate both the Town Hall and Carnegie Hall, which will fall under this regeneration project.

Local people should look at this and voice their opinion [investinbolton.com/./westhoughton](https://investinbolton.com/./westhoughton).

### **WCN Catch-up and Meeting mailer - 4th May 2020**

The Westhoughton Town Centre Action Plan was unable to be concluded although a Final Presentation was issued to members of the Steering Group with feedback on the consultation with the proviso that it was not shared – I would certainly have given an update at forthcoming meeting given we'd discussed it and WCN is a representative organisation. Suffice to say some WCN comments made the report:

- Additional parking (needed).
- Already plenty of cafés on Market Street.
- Residential developments bring problems – already lots in vicinity of town centre.
- Suggest a 200+ capacity entertainment / civic venue.

Meeting did not take place due to Lockdown.

### **WCN Meeting - 23rd September 2020 (Zoom) [M37] - Round-up (from Minutes)**

Whilst activity from both amateur dramatic groups has been somewhat limited – both churches out of bounds – The Bethel Crowd and Westhoughton Methodist ADS keep in touch with their troupe. It is unlikely we will see any shows for a while. The Bethel Church undergoing remodelling and refurbishment; the Methodist Church Hall itself has had some maintenance issues. It is a pity the Town Centre Regeneration Plans have not addressed a need for a multi-purpose civic and community venue for a town this size.

Notes: Final meeting ahead of Final Draft for Bolton Council – August. Online with 15 participants. Two 'difficult' private sites taken out of priorities – Mill Street; Gaiety. Park to be included – Councillor pressure. No definitive word on Town Hall or Carnegie Hall.

*WCN Update and News in Brief - 16th July 2021 (from email to groups)*

### **Agenda Items: Bethel and Town Centre Regeneration**

#### *The Bethel Church/Bethel Crowd*

There were plans back in 2019 to refurbish the Bethel Church (Westhoughton United Reformed Church) through a sell/rental scheme to accommodate a larger nursery have some office space and incorporate religious and theatrical activities.... Unfortunately, with lockdown uncertainties, delays, problems with finance, this has fallen through with unfortunate consequences.

The rebranded nursery has relocated to School Street (Brighter Bunnies); and the Elders of the church have announced that the church is to close, and responsibility for the building and graveyard handed over to the synod. A final regular church service will take place on Sunday, 25th July; a final act of worship planned for 2nd October with the handover. The building will be put up for sale. The church congregation is investigating a Local Ecumenical Partnership with the Methodist Church on Wigan Road.

The leaves the Bethel Crowd homeless and without a theatre to perform in – the troupe has been going for some 50 years and do 3-4 shows a year, and is particularly important in bringing through young talent. They intend continuing as an independent society, and have been offered a rehearsal facility at Daisy Hill FC, which has recently refurbished its clubhouse. The question of a venue in which to perform is to be resolved; longer term the theatre group will require a big space to rehearse, store scenery and costumes, and perform and host an audience. The building had also been used for meetings, fayres and luncheon clubs, as well as occasional concerts, so it will be a big loss to the wider community.

### **Town Centre Regeneration (Strategy and Masterplan) ([link](#))**

With input from a Steering Group (made up of Council Officers, Consultants, Councillors, Businesses and Community) the plan for Westhoughton for Capital Investment from the Town Centre Strategy Fund was formally approved (15/3/21), with £3.1m to be spent in the medium term in Westhoughton, covering improvements to pedestrian links, a carpark strategy, remodelling of Market Street and improvements to Central Park (including some community amenity though refurbishment of pavilion buildings). Additional funding may be leveraged from Greater Manchester Transport/'Streets for All' initiatives (Market Street).

The purchase of the (Mill Street) site to provide for additional parking (45 spaces) is being considered. As is the acquisition of "a future development site for mixed-use development including public square" (Gaiety\*). Another priority will be the "Future use of Civic Buildings in Westhoughton (Town Hall/Carnegie Hall and the Library)". There is little detail on this, however a separate budget of £2.5m is also available.

\*There is a live planning application for residential apartment blocks and bungalows on the Gaiety site (11417/21) which is being supported by Bolton Council Adult Services Commissioning Team, which will be before the Planning Committee soon. If approved, it takes out that plot of land which should have been set aside for civic / community / retail use.

*Comment: I've long felt the town needs a 'venue' / Community and Arts Centre, especially given the growth of the town and the vibrant community here. With the Gaiety site gone, an option left is to re-imagine the Carnegie Hall/upper floor of the Library as a self-contained flexible space independent of the library that could accommodate theatre and music performance and exhibitions whilst having the flexibility to host community group meetings and activities. Perhaps the Bethel Crowd could have a new home...? It would require some rejigging of the library and either connecting into the Town Hall or even extending to the rear... and likely more capital investment than is on the table.*

Elsewhere uncertainty over the future the Day Care Centre at the Winifred Kettle, which was good space and made available to the community as part of its refurbishment in 2016, could mean another 'community asset' is gone. People have been asking questions and not getting answers...

The issue of venues and community space is an issue. The Hope Centre currently out of action, needing work doing. The George Formby Society have asked about a new monthly venue following changes at the Mercury Hotel – news just in that they are moving to the Conservative Club from 25th August for their monthly meetings.

### **WCN meeting - Wednesday, 21st September 2021 [M38] (from minutes)**

[HEART/Hulton Park...] This promoted a discussion on the perennial issue of over-development in Westhoughton... There was frustration voiced over the number of large and small housing developments – accelerating since the adopted 2011 Bolton Local Plan gave way to the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (now Places For Everyone) – pressure on infrastructure and services, the loss of green hinterland stopping urban sprawl and the lack of investment for new bespoke community facilities. It was noted that sites at Lee Hall, Bowlands Hey and Ditchers Farm (previously Protected Open Land) that found themselves in the GMSF first draft but were then withdrawn, are all being developed...

The loss of the Bethel Church (home to the Bethel Crowd), the Hope Centre and Winifred Kettle being out of action, and uncertainty over the Carnegie Hall, all detrimental to community life. Westhoughton has long needed investment in a venue that could cater for larger events such as shows and exhibitions – the Gaiety

site, which has a planning application for a residential development (not the best option for a town centre location that becoming more vibrant and social), would have been ideal for a new civic and community, multi-purpose building. The Gaiety (and Mill Street) sites were removed from the recent £4m Town Centre Regeneration consultation, which is focusing on Market Street ambient/pedestrian improvements and some investment in Central Park...

The Chair made reference to the *Blackrod Community Centre*, which whilst not a new building, is a sizeable space with a stage and flexible enough to be used for concerts, meetings, exhibitions, functions and even indoor sports. It has a capacity of 175 (150 if tables used).

### First sight of plans for refurbishment of Civic Buildings (15/6/22)

With activities at the library disrupted during 2020 - 2022 due to Lockdown and refurbishment work (heating system and windows replacement), consultants had been working on plans for both the Town Hall and the Library building which includes the Carnegie Hall. Ahead of a Steering Group meeting (27/6/22) Town Councillors were given a presentation of the draft proposals - the intention to make better use of the buildings and bring the Town Hall back to life.

Following concerns raised by some residents as civic buildings proposals emerged Council Leader, Martyn Cox, releases a statement on the proposed plans [Bolton News](#) (22/6/22).

### Key Proposals

#### Town Hall:

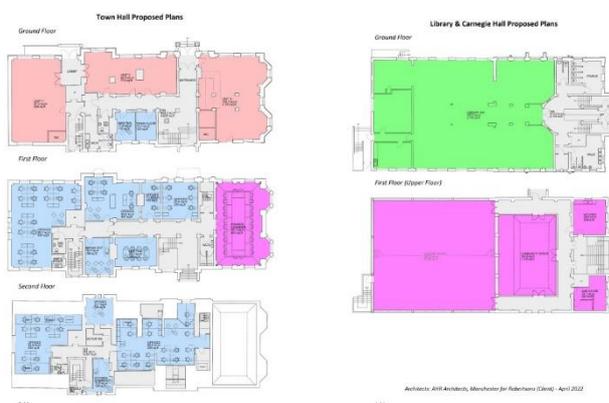
- With no Bolton Council services, the building (3 floors) is to be used for retail (2 Cafés) and Offices.
- The Town Clerk will move back into the Town Hall. This frees up space on the upper floor (Library).
- The Town Council Chamber is to be refurbished and brought back into use.

#### Library and Carnegie Hall:

- As intended, to allow anytime use of the upper floor, it will have a separate independent access and not be connected to the Library. Access via the main entrance and Carnegie Hall staircase. Lift access available.
- The stairs to the upper floor will be removed from the Library - this will create more room in the Library as well as creating a large open space on the upper floor.
- A community room is to be created in the Carnegie Hall for meetings. A perimeter corridor will allow access to the larger room.
- The kitchen remains in-situ.

### Comments

Whilst not formally adopted the plans are a step in the right direction and have taken on board many of the comments during the consultation. Bringing the landmark Town Hall back to use is a positive - perhaps it would have been good to explore a Police Post and town centre presence [This option has been declined by GM Police]. The office space appears in two forms - actual offices and a hot-desking set-up.



The upper floor of the Library building will now resemble the 'Blackrod Community Centre' with a large flexible space and room set-up for meetings - with kitchen and bar facilities.



The upper floor currently houses a lot of historical items - display cabinets, murals and filing cabinets. These items are of important local value and interest and will need to be accommodated in new scheme maintaining access and public view. Whilst there is additional space within the Library with the stairs removed, thought needs to be given to this perhaps even using the Town Hall if flow permits.

The upper floor space usage will need to be developed to allow flexibility of use for meetings, public gatherings, exhibitions, entertainment - could this space be adopted by currently the homeless Bethel Crowd? The Blackrod centre has a stage than allows performance and the hall itself can cater for concerts, exhibitions, meetings and even indoor sports. Depending upon configuration seating in rows or tables it can hold between 150 and 200 people. Extra storage (theatrical) could be created in the space behind the Library.

The underused Carnegie Hall sees the useable space reduced because of the corridors that have been created to access the back hall. There are some 20 groups that use the Library for meetings and sessions, the largest of which is Westhoughton Local History Group - attendees can number 80-100 with presentations up front. Will this room be flexible - moveable partitions? There is no natural light. Perhaps a solution is to have an L-shaped rather than a U-shaped corridor taking the meeting room to the windows. The bar moved into the new hall (function room).

The Library is a key community asset with books, computers, some quiet reading/meeting and educational space downstairs; it has also allowed and managed the use of the upper floor space allowing many groups small and large to meet (for free). We do not want any group to lose their space/access, so how this is to be managed in the future and who has access needs addressing. The lack of use of the Carnegie Hall has been down to the need to go through Bolton Council and the cost to hire with a caretaker needed to open and lock up.

Covered at the WCN meeting 29/11/17 [[M27](#)], from 2018 Westhoughton Library has provided a 'One-Stop-Shop' for Bolton Council services following the decline in use of [Westhoughton Town Hall help desks](#) and subsequent relocation of staff to Bolton. An *Information Point* was established and Library staff were given extra training and were able to help and advise local residents with Council-related matters, supported by a direct phone line to the Bolton Centre for more involved enquiries including Universal Credit. There have been no Bolton Council services in the Town Hall since 2018. Unfortunately, with Lockdowns and continued uncertainty the Library is currently not operating a 'One-Stop-Shop' (to be followed up).

*Library Opening Hours:*

Monday 10am–5pm | Tuesday 10am–7pm | Thursday 10am–5pm | Friday 10am–5pm | Saturday 10am–5pm | Wednesday & Sunday Closed.

All in all with some caveats it is positive proposal and one that will help the community and be an asset to the town centre. The Steering Group and engagement with the public will address any issues and necessary tweaks to the plans.

*On 25/7/22 (updated 21/9/22) the Bolton Council Regeneration Team issued a response to questions have been raised following the recent Steering Group meeting in relation to the Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan - [FAQs](#) on project and plans.*