

Lichfield City Centre Masterplan: Potential Impacts of Covid-19

Executive Summary

This Briefing Note sets out how our urban environment might be reshaped in response to the impacts on the wider economy of the Coronavirus pandemic. It first presents an overview of relevant information relating to town and city centres and how centres might adapt as a result of Covid-19 restrictions. It then considers the Lichfield context and provides recommendations as to how the council might want to proceed in taking forward and implementing the City Centre Masterplan in this new context.

The pandemic has led to a focus on:

- An increased awareness of the need for green space in our town and city centres,
- The importance of a safe and healthy outdoor environment,
- The need for adaptable multifunctional spaces,
- Changing patterns of work with increased home working for many
- The fragility of our public transport systems when exposed to health risk and
- A more local emphasis on accessing services and facilities
- Expected changes in demand for different parts of the property sector and
- Challenges for development viability going forward

Opportunities for the masterplan

Whilst we are entering a period of uncertainty, there is also opportunity. The masterplan is not a rigid blueprint but a flexible framework and the masterplan's overarching approach is still relevant and appropriate. The District Council is thus able to make changes to the proposals where necessary to reflect changing patterns of use and demand in the city centre.

All local authorities will be reassessing and monitoring the impacts of the pandemic not least the changing patterns of use and performance of their centres. Given the masterplan has not yet entered the delivery phase, Lichfield is well placed to be ahead of the curve. A masterplan framework is already produced and can be used to underpin the recovery action plan.

Lichfield is also well positioned as a smaller city to take advantage of the trend to remain local as more people who may travel to Birmingham and other larger employment continue to work from home, at least part time.

Delivery

In terms of activity, there is a chance to assess and undertake a number of early actions which do not compromise long-term delivery of the masterplan but can be undertaken in the meantime to assist in laying foundations for taking the Masterplan forward. The first focus for delivery is public realm strategy and car parking strategy.

Public realm projects which support the business and visitor economy are outlined in the masterplan and can be directly progressed as part of the recovery plan.

In addition, an early reconsideration of the City's parking needs and a review of provision is recommended, as many of the developments in the masterplan involve parking provision. Information collated will help inform any adaptations to the later phases of the masterplan.

Consideration is given to how the development proposals for each of the sites might alter in response to the pandemic suggesting where uses could flex to reflect changes in demand, for example, an increase in residential live/work accommodation instead of small scale offices at Birmingham Road.

Finally, the note looks at delivery implications for the masterplan and the likelihood that the public sector will be called upon to take a more active role in delivery at least in the early years whilst confidence is rebuilt in the economy. Collating an evidence base to support applications for funding is highlighted as an important activity. Access to funding will help to bring forward phases of the masterplan which may otherwise be pushed back.

Lichfield City Centre Masterplan: Potential Impacts of Covid-19

This Briefing Note has been prepared by David Lock Associates in response to Lichfield District Council's request for advice in relation to the city centre masterplan. Specifically, the District Council is seeking advice regarding the potential impacts of Covid-19 on town centres generally, and in relation to the delivery of the city centre masterplan.

The briefing note provides an overview of relevant information relating to town and city centres, with a particular focus on the Lichfield context, and how centres might adapt as a result of Covid-19 restrictions. It provides recommendations on how the council might want to proceed in taking forward and implementing the City Centre Masterplan.

1.1 Rethinking our town and city centre environments

During the pandemic in-person visits to sports and entertainment venues, retail centres, and other mixed-use environments have been rejected in favour of virtual gatherings and Zoom meetings. However, in the long term the virtual world is not a sustainable substitute for human interaction.

Public places play an important role in bringing people together and promoting health and well-being, so the focus now has to shift to ways of making town centres both safe and vibrant. How might mixed-use and public places change post Covid-19?

- A bigger emphasis on multifunctional indoor and outdoor space. Modular building systems may become the norm where flexibility of purpose is key. During the pandemic there has been increased demand for fast build, temporary, prefabricated, and/or highly adaptable venues. Mixed-use developments are well suited to modular construction with its flexibility to add pop up spaces, increase capacity or change uses.
- A renewed focus on making our spaces and places healthier and safer. Healthy building standards will become more focused on the air we breathe. The introduction of outside air will become a greater part of new builds. The introduction of fresh, clean air not only helps maintain healthier environments; it can help dilute the human-to-human passage of airborne elements.
- Foyers and building entrances can provide a safer and cleaner shared environment. Transitional spaces will be particularly important for the larger communal spaces and assembly areas that often anchor a mixed-use development.
- Connected communities will be best placed to take advantage of the new normal. Integrated districts promote human connections. Mixed-use environments which bring the best of residential and commercial architecture together and create shared environments can form the backbone of diverse self-sustaining districts and connected communities. People want to be connected, and bringing goods and services closer to inhabitants, providing better support mechanisms, and even making it easier to contain and communicate health concerns are made possible in a well-designed mixed-use environment.
- The spaces we gather in will be even more important in the post-pandemic world; they will become places not of exile or distancing, but of community and engagement. The challenge is in making them both healthy and connected.

1.2 Changing patterns of working

The lockdown has forced many people to work from home, some for the very first time, and as businesses adapt one of the legacies of COVID-19 could be that many more people end up working from home (WFH) more often and travelling less.

A report from business division of mobile operator O2, has found that nearly half of those surveyed predict a permanent change in employers' approach to flexible working when the COVID-19 lockdown lifts.

The report is based on an ICM study of 2,019 UK workers and a YouGov survey of 4,509 adults (of whom 2,394 were workers). A third (33%) of those who think flexible working will increase are expecting to increase the amount they work from home by at least 3 days a week after lockdown – rising to 81% for those expecting to work at least 1 day a week from home.

A knock-on effect of this change in working patterns is an expected change in people's attitudes to residential locations. If people are commuting less there will be less desire/need to live close to places of work and a move to smaller towns and more rural locations is predicted.

1.3 Effects of the Pandemic on Property Markets

Town Centre Retail

In April 2020, Springboard's latest monthly footfall monitor showed an unprecedented decline in retail footfall 80.1 per cent. This was almost double the level of the downturn in March, which posted a 41.3 per cent drop as the lockdown came into force. June 15th saw the re-opening of non-essential shops and whilst there was an initial surge due to latent demand, footfall was 55 per cent lower on the High Street the following day, compared to the same day last year, as shoppers opted to stay home.

WEEK ON WEEK % CHANGE IN FOOTFALL - TUESDAY JUNE 16 2020 - UP TO 2pm					
SHOPPING TYPE	UK	ENGLAND	NORTHERN IRELAND	SCOTLAND	WALES
UK High Streets	33.60%	35.40%	-0.10%	3.70%	45.70%
UK Retail Parks	15.20%	19.40%	4.00%	-0.80%	7.10%
UK Shopping Centres	23.40%	27.30%	3.20%	-3.50%	20.60%
UK Retail Destinations	26.70%	29.60%	1.70%	0.80%	39.40%

YEAR ON YEAR % CHANGE IN FOOTFALL - TUESDAY JUNE 16 2020 - UP TO 2pm					
SHOPPING	UK	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland
UK High Streets	-55.30%	-53.70%	-69.10%	-77.10%	-55.40%
UK Retail Parks	-23.60%	-19.10%	-46.10%	-38.40%	-2.80%
UK Shopping Centres	-53.20%	-50.90%	-69.00%	-73.90%	-36.80%
UK Retail Destinations	-47.30%	-44.80%	-63.60%	-67.10%	-50.80%

Source: Springboard

We are undoubtedly at the beginning of a long and slow road to recovery for the high street, with retailers now facing the challenge of the new health and safety measures i.e. as deep cleaning, closed changing rooms, limited in-store customer numbers, perspex screens at tills and distancing measures. However, they also need to find ways to encourage customers to shop with them regardless of the changes.

Rakuten Advertising senior vice president, Nick Fletcher, recently commented that “Open doors are by no means a guarantee of returning footfall, and the retail industry will be holding its breath to see how shoppers react to the reopening of stores, and how social distancing is managed.”¹

Building consumer confidence will be key to getting our towns and cities functioning again and retailing will still have a role to play. The trend towards online shopping has been accelerated by the pandemic, but how the online and bricks and mortar offers interface is now more important than ever. We are currently experiencing a ‘temporary normal’ between the high levels of the virus circulating and getting it under control. As yet, scientists are unable to predict how effective a vaccine will be and how long before one is widely available. This makes it difficult to plan for the ‘new normal’ so, building flexibility into any planning is essential.

Leisure

The leisure sector was the first sector to be hit hard by the pandemic, with a loss trade evident prior to lockdown as people chose to stay away. Owners and operators are now focused on the post-pandemic future. Once the expected staged reopening of different business types begins, each sub-sector will have its own specific issues to address, and the speed of recovery will certainly be variable across different geographies. The hope across large parts of the leisure sector is for a reasonably rapid return to previous trading levels as customers enjoy being released from isolation or social distancing rules. However, a number of consumer polls have clearly shown that people are cautious about returning to enclosed spaces.

Office market

Commentators in the property press are agreed that there is likely to be a reduction in the demand for office space post COVID -19. Conventionally, businesses have worked to a rough rule of thumb of circa 100 square feet for every employee. So, a business employing 100 people needed an office building with 10,000 square feet of space. In future, if no more than two thirds of those employees are in the office on any given day, the business could manage with only 6,600 square feet. If this becomes the new norm then demand for office space will change substantially. The design of offices will also need to change with more collaboration space and less workstations.

This change is likely to exacerbate the gulf between secondary and Grade A office space. Where businesses are looking to downsize accommodation, they are likely to seek better quality more adaptable space.⁷

Consultants WSP have observed that changing working practices are not the only determining factor. The economic downturn will undoubtedly result in a fall in occupier demand as some companies retrench or fold.

¹ Nazir, S (2020, June) Reopened stores present a new way of shopping - is it viable? *Retail Gazette*, Retrieved from <https://www.retailgazette.co.uk/blog>

Residential

The housing market has reopened for business and reports have indicated an initial surge in requests for viewings. How this translates to transactions won't be seen for a few months down the line. Recovery in the housing market will be determined by the state of the wider economy and consumer finances. Interest rates are expected to remain lower (at least for the short to medium term) which will support mortgage affordability.

Simon Rubinsohn, RICS chief economist, has stated that "There are already signs that those looking to buy a house are responding to the conditions created by the pandemic by seeking out properties with gardens or balconies and nearer green space".

In terms of new build, developers are continuing to build out sites that were already under construction but there is likely to be some caution around those sites where building has not yet commenced. Housebuilders may also take time to re-evaluate their products to respond to the increase in homeworking by incorporating dedicated working from homes spaces with the required digital connectivity.

Development Risk

Reducing risk. Modular building systems can reduce development risk for mixed-use and multi-phased developments. The use of modular systems makes these developments less reliant on market timing. Projects can advance using modular designs since they can more easily adapt embedded groundwork and infrastructure that make up much of the early investment in mixed-use developments. Since markets can shift during the course of a 2, 3, 4 year or more design and construction period, modular systems make it easier to adjust and adapt.

1.4 Implications for the Property Market Post COVID-19

Values

Property values are established from an evidence of past transactions and sectoral trends. However, given the sudden move into lockdown we now have a situation where:

- Housing transactions suspended for 7 weeks;
- Rent/mortgage holidays were granted in both the residential and commercial sector;
- New business activity has slowed considerably – very few new lettings or investment sales, other than in the warehousing sector;
- Many businesses are retrenching, laying off staff and looking at downsizing or cheaper accommodation alternatives.

Evidence of value established pre-lockdown is therefore out of date or no longer reliable and there will be a delay in securing new evidence with the inevitable time lag for evidence to reach the record books. Regardless of this, sales will take time to recover and investors will not want to crystalize a fall in value temporarily reducing supply. This will lead to:

- Volatility in the market with some sectors, such as hospitality and retail, hit harder than others;
- A higher risk environment for developers and investors which in turn will mean more caution and slower decision making and

- A danger that “fire sales” may establish new tones and may not be truly representative of the overall picture.

Costs

Huge uncertainties exist in the cost side of the equation too. Many unknowns e.g.:

- Will tender prices be renegotiated upwards to reflect revised working conditions, e.g. limited numbers on site to enable social distancing, longer delivery periods, added costs of sanitization stations etc.?
- How many contractors will survive?
- Policy requirements still have to be met... even if deferred i.e. CIL payments,
- Developers still need a profit, and greater risk means higher profit margins.

Evidence will again be out of date, unreliable, inconsistent, and scarce.

How might this affect the main players in the market?

1. Developers and Site Promoters
 - Private sector developers – a period of extreme caution. Evidence of new sustained demand needed before further commitments are made – unless there is some form of Government incentive/guarantee;
 - Private sector site promoters – work likely to continue but pace may be “adjusted” depending on stage of the process;
 - Public sector – may become more prevalent in the development market but this depends on the extent of the impact, grant funding schemes and cash reserves/borrowing capability.
2. Financiers - investors and funds
 - Some property related asset funds “frozen” due to short term value uncertainty;
 - Longer term view – depends on comparison with other forms of investment. If interest rates rise as predicted there may be other more attractive investment opportunities;
 - Investment is likely to be more sector specific – warehousing, research, manufacturing may be favoured over offices and retail;
3. Land Owners
 - If landowners do not need to liquidate assets, they are likely to sit tight as selling now may not maximise value. If no need to sell, why do so now?
 - If the majority are in this position will lead to a supply shortage which could lead to a reboot of the land market as values increase but likely to be limited to premium locations.

Looking Ahead

Assessing development viability will be extremely difficult and individual developers may have different takes on a site depending on how they have weathered the storm. There is likely to be more caution and a lot less competition for sites. Sites in non-prime locations will inevitably be even more difficult to get out of the ground than before. All

analysis will be heavily caveated, and subject to greater sensitivity testing. This is a time for:

- open discussion,
- understanding each other's point of view,
- assessing evidence and trends regularly,
- monitoring the chatter and market commentary,
- noting the changes in an area and
- watching the impact and direction of Government intervention.

As the private sector withdraws, the public sector is set to play a greater role in development either in partnership with the private sector to reduce risk or via direct development. Either way a period of development inactivity is likely to ensue whilst we wait to see how well the Coronavirus is kept under control and what the new normal will look like.

1.5 Public Realm

How will our relationship with public space change after COVID 19? There is much being written about how we use and move through public spaces, with many feeling that this is a once in a lifetime opportunity to make lasting changes that will benefit health and well-being and help to combat climate change.

Unarguably street designs that free space for pedestrians and active mobility can help meet several public health objectives, notably through physical activity and the reduction of pollution exposure.

During lockdown more street space has been given over to walking and cycling to facilitate social distancing. In some cities, roads have been temporarily closed to motorised vehicles. Milan has announced permanent changes with the widening of pavements, the introduction of 35km of new cycle lanes and the removal of vehicle lanes. Other emerging needs besides social distancing may also require some redesign of street layouts e.g. online shopping and home food delivery are creating a higher demand for drop off and delivery space.

The use of green spaces in cities has increased greatly during lockdown which indicates a need for access to smaller green spaces and neighbourhood parks. The need to create more spaces for individuals to relax or exercise has been highlighted. From a biodiversity perspective, continuous networks of green spaces are more valuable than isolated patches. Linking a decentralized network of smaller green spaces will enable residents to feel connected to nature. In addition, visual access to nature has been shown to have important physical and mental health benefits in itself.

Increasing the width of pavements and reducing vehicle movements provides an opportunity to introduce more green corridors for people to travel along to access pockets of green space interspersed across a city.

In terms of more commercial activity the ability to use outdoor space not only safely but effectively will play a key role in economic recovery. Eighteen of Lithuania's public spaces including its central Cathedral Square have been reopened to the public allowing the relocation of cafe and restaurant outdoor seating to a more spatial environment.

Providing more spaces which allow for outdoor eating and drinking could improve consumer confidence and encourage people to return to urban centres.

During the lockdown, many Councils have reduced the amount of street clutter, e.g. signs, A Boards, railings etc. to allow for social distancing measures. Post COVID, consideration should be given to whether this should be a permanent change.

Finally, the adaptability or multifunctionality of public space has proved beneficial in dealing with the pandemic; with public spaces used as Coronavirus test centres or as in the case of Central Park New York, a temporary field hospital. The possibilities of multifunctional use should not be overlooked. This use of space does not need to be confined to ground level and could include for example, new green spaces on the roof areas of public buildings especially where land is at a premium in town and city centres.

1.6 Movement

It is evident that safety measures will mean that public transport is likely to operate at significantly reduced capacity. This has led to fears of a flight back to the use of private vehicles. However, with many continuing to work from home; local, shorter journeys will be far more prevalent. For those who do need public transport to travel; walking, cycling and other micro-mobility modes will prove most efficient for making journeys.

In early May Grant Shapps, the Transport Minister, announced the first stage of a £2 billion cycling and walking investment programme, worth £250 million. As discussed above part of the challenge will be how to re-design the public realm to allow for more and safer cycling and walking opportunities. This will require the development of active travel strategies; ensuring individual schemes are designed as part of a cohesive network of routes that support more walking and cycling. Along with the infrastructure changes will be the challenge of developing and delivering behaviour change programmes so that local people can understand and embrace the changes as they are delivered.

Revisiting the Lichfield City Centre Masterplan

2.1 Introduction

In considering the many potential issues arising from a post COVID situation a number of potential opportunities exist in terms of the City Centre Masterplan. In particular there is a chance to assess and undertake a number of early actions which do not compromise long-term delivery of the masterplan but can be undertaken in the meantime to assist in laying foundations for taking the Masterplan forward. It is worth remembering that the Masterplan was written not as a rigid blueprint but as a flexible framework within which different opportunities, where they arise, can be considered within the overall vision and objectives that are an integral part of Masterplan.

The masterplan's overarching approach is, therefore, still relevant and appropriate and the District Council is thus able to make changes where necessary to reflect changing patterns of use and demand in the city centre.

All local authorities will be reassessing and monitoring the impacts of the pandemic not least the changing patterns of use and performance of their centres. Given that the masterplan has not yet entered the delivery phase, Lichfield is well placed to be ahead of the curve as the flexibility of the masterplan framework can be used to underpin the recovery action plan.

Lichfield is also well positioned as a smaller city to take advantage of the trend to remain local as more people who may travel to Birmingham and other larger employment will continue to work from home at least part time.

2.2 Public Realm

Adapting Lichfield City centre to manage social distancing, as many historic centres in the UK are finding, is a particular challenge. Many of the pedestrianised areas are narrow and cluttered with street furniture and on trafficked streets there is little opportunity to remove parking or traffic lanes due to the historic street pattern resulting in disruptive measures should any changes to the road network be introduced.

The City Council has been awarded £92,501 from the Reopening High Streets Safely Fund which provides councils with additional funding to support their business communities through four main strands of activity. One of these strands focuses on the public realm and the temporary changes to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely.

However, the Institute of Place Management recognises that there is perhaps greater potential to make transformative change in smaller centres, through the permanent adoption of some temporary measures to create more usable public space. The masterplan has outlined opportunities for improvements to appearance, walkability, recreational space, and place experience and such interventions will support the work that the District Council is progressing to safely reopen the City Centre

Information from the footfall counters in the City Centre will be invaluable to the work that the council is already doing with Three Spires shopping centre, the Lichfield BID and Staffordshire County Council to monitor the use of streets, pavements and footpaths as lockdown regulations are relaxed. This information will be used to determine if the measures introduced to support safe access and movement are satisfactory or whether additional interventions are needed.

As discussed in the introduction, the lockdown has led to less use of the car with people opting to walk and cycle to their local centre. Accelerating the plans to make Lichfield more pedestrian friendly and introducing more cycle lanes and cycle storage will support the vision of Lichfield as a destination, where locals and visitors might wish to dwell and linger, other than simply drive to, park and drive away.

During the recovery stage of the pandemic progressing the following public realm projects in the masterplan will support the business and visitor economy:

- Pedestrian priority streets,
- Pedestrian walkways and linkages,
- Signage and wayfinding.

2.3 Car Parking Strategy

The changes anticipated in the way that the City will be used in future and the real potential of a drop in the numbers of people using their cars to visit Lichfield centre highlights the need for the reconsideration of the City's parking needs and a review of provision.

What could this mean for the masterplan?

- Looking again at the plans for Bird Street Car Park,
- Reviewing the size of the planned multi storey car park adjacent to Birmingham Road and the potential for a multi-use building which includes public green space at ground or roof top levels,
- A consideration of pick up and drop off arrangements for businesses and residences within the City Centre to reflect the acceleration in on-line purchasing activity.

2.4 Masterplan Development Proposals

The future is uncertain in relation to how the property market will respond to the crisis. It is evident that investment decisions will be delayed and more cautious attitude to risk will be adopted by both investors and developers. Notwithstanding this, the recovery period represents a golden opportunity to revisit the masterplan and deliver buildings which respond to the demands of the 'new normal'. The earlier part of this briefing note has outlined what some of the changes might be. In summary these are:

- A reduction in the demand for retail floorspace;
- A potential for non-speculative prime office space i.e. bespoke commissions for occupiers; wanting offices designed for new ways of working with fresh air circulation;
- More green space/open areas around buildings allowing for safe circulation route and places to sit;
- Bespoke live/work dwellings with internal courtyards and large balconies to allow private access to the outside;
- More outdoor activity space with a corresponding possible reduction in indoor leisure activity demand;
- More outdoor space for bars, cafes and restaurants with the potential built in weather proofing;
- Revised layouts for public transport interchanges to manage circulation and queuing to allow safer operation and
- A reduction in the number of parking spaces.

How do these potential changes affect the development proposals in the masterplan?

Initially there will need to be a period of monitoring how things progress with the economy and the virus i.e. whether a vaccine becomes available or will the world remain in a management phase for the foreseeable future? As discussed above, the answer to this question will affect confidence levels and the long-term viability of projects.

However, in terms of the Masterplan projects this is a good opportunity to consider the options for potential reconfiguration of the developments

1. Birmingham Road Gateway

- New Bus station – transport interchanges may require larger footprints in future to allow for some degree of social distancing for queues, greater circulation space, segregated WC provision and more cycle parking and storage.
- Cinema/Hotel – it is difficult to predict how cinemas and city centre hotels will perform financially in future and therefore these sectors need to be kept under scrutiny.
- Restaurant/café uses – the introduction of ample outside space is likely to be a requirement for these operators in future
- Convenience retail – there has been a strong resurgence in the use local food stores serving their adjacent communities during the pandemic and this trend may be here to stay.
- Residential apartments and houses – Lichfield is well placed to provide an attractive walkable city centre living environment. However, any new development will need to include private outdoor space and access to safe communal, green areas. This will necessarily take up larger footprints but will be essential to the marketability of a development and thus its viability. Recent examples of award winning, sustainable urban residential development of relevance to the Lichfield context include Goldsmith Street in Norwich, winner of the 2019 RIBA Stirling Prize, and Trent Basin in Nottingham. Both schemes include a mix of town houses and apartments each with private open space in the form of small gardens, generous balconies or roof terraces. Both also incorporate areas of shared open space. These new post COVID developments will also no doubt respond to the needs of those working frequently from home.
- Small scale commercial development – it remains to be seen whether there will still be a demand for this type of accommodation, but any development is likely to be bespoke and therefore non speculative. Should this demand not be apparent the space will most likely become residential.
- Multi Storey Car Park – this has already been referenced in the section on Car Parking Strategy but there is potential to reduce the number of spaces.

Note: the opportunity to increase the amount of residential accommodation in this area may allow for the delivery of high quality affordable homes for key workers who prefer to be within walking distance of their employment e.g. health and care workers and public sector workers.

2. District Council Offices

At the time of writing the masterplan, plans were being developed for the reconfiguration of the Council House. New ways of working that are likely to be introduced post COVID will require these plans to be revisited.

No conclusions regarding the future of the District Offices and any vacant space therein can be drawn at this time, however as with other parts of the Birmingham Road site once a review of the revised space requirements has been undertaken there is potential to consider the future redevelopment.

3. Bird Street Courtyard

It has been recognised by members and officers that combining the car park with other LDC and public sector owned property in the vicinity and the opening up of the site to Market Street provides greater scope for a more comprehensive scheme. There is an opportunity to provide a high-quality continental style adaptable public space with green areas and open-air places to eat and drink benefitting from views of the cathedral, whilst still retaining parking spaces to serve this part of the City centre. In the long term this would add value to the City centre and provide an active area close to the cathedral for both visitors and residents.

4. University West Car park

A mix of Use was proposed for this site

- Small-scale offices, suitable for SMEs and start-up businesses at the northern end – as with Birmingham Road the level of demand for this type of use remains to be seen. Residential development with green space may prove an attractive alternative.
- Coach parking spaces and car parking on the central part of the site – the need for this will be addressed in the Car Park Strategy.

2.5 Delivery Implications

Changes in the operation of the property market and the likelihood of a deep recession indicates that development viability will remain challenging for some years ahead. This could lead to the masterplan delivery period moving out or to a reordering of the delivery of the development proposals.

However, small towns and cities with green spaces and attractive centres are predicted to bounce back quicker from the effects of pandemic than city centres in the larger conurbations. Investors and developers will still be looking for opportunities and on the face of it, Lichfield will be well placed to take advantage of this interest. As discussed above, there will be a requirement for the public sector to take more of a lead role in development and access to funding and borrowing will drive public sector activity.

Monitoring footfall, gathering evidence on economic performance and any gaps in the market will be a crucial part of the District Council's push to deliver the masterplan. This information will provide the bedrock for developing businesses cases to access any new funding initiatives announced as part of the Government COVID-19 Recovery Plan. Accessing funding will help to bring forward phases of the masterplan which may otherwise be pushed back.