

POWERING UP STOKE-ON-TRENT

City Prospectus Update – December 2021



Foreword

Nine months ago we set out our compelling case to the Government for strategic investment to enable us to deliver our plans to transform Stoke-on-Trent's economy and its role as a regional and national economic powerhouse. Our City Prospectus, Powering Up Stoke-on-Trent, declared our great city to be the national litmus test for the Government's Levelling Up ambitions, and provided ministers with a set of clear priorities and realistic, deliverable projects to enable the city to thrive. Following the launch of Powering Up, the City Council worked with our local MPs to prepare and submit a number of bids to the national Levelling Up Fund to deliver a raft of strategically significant projects.

We were clear in our ambitions and we set out credible plans to achieve them. We spoke with a clear, unified voice - and the Government heard us. In his October Budget, Chancellor Rishi Sunak allocated a total of £56 million in Levelling Up funding for Stoke-on-Trent. This is the largest single government investment in our city for more than 30 years, and represents a massive vote of confidence in our plans for the city and our ability to deliver them. However, even this historic settlement is not going to enable us to deliver all of the exciting priorities and projects that we set out in the Powering Up prospectus in February. On transport, in particular, we still have much work to do to reach agreement with the Government on securing the finance we need to unlock the vast economic potential of integrated transport connectivity. Similarly, we need additional government support to deliver key projects relating to children and families, and we continue to make our case to ministers regarding the investment needed to help our most vulnerable families and support children and young people to develop well and fulfil their potential.

Powering Up was about convincing government that our fantastic city deserved to be right at the forefront of the Levelling Up agenda – and it has done just that. Now I hope you will join me in making sure that Levelling Up Stoke-on-Trent can build on this success and transform our economic ambitions into actions.

Councillor Abi Brown
Leader of Stoke-on-Trent City Council



Priority 1 – Transport

We remain fully focussed on the need to reshape radically our local transport network to create a system that works for passengers, communities and businesses and which can help to transform intra-city connectivity. However, we will need to secure a comprehensive transport investment package from central government to make this possible. Our £17.5 million transport bid to the Levelling Up Fund was the only one that was not successful in securing government investment.

Improving our city's transport network would arguably be the single biggest catalyst in terms of delivering Levelling Up and we are more determined than ever to secure the necessary investment to ensure that Stoke-on-Trent has a fit-for-purpose transport system that can meet both its current and future needs. Our citywide Transport Strategy is taking shape and in November we submitted our brand new Bus Service Improvement Plan to central government. This has been developed jointly with local bus operators to transform the shape of bus travel in Stoke-on-Trent by reversing the trend of declining passenger numbers and improving service reliability. Our aim is to secure a proportionate share of the Government's £3 billion Bus Back Better scheme to strengthen local transport infrastructure as the nation recovers from the impacts of the pandemic.

Our submission to ministers comprises two phases:

- Phase One seeks additional funding to enable our local bus operators to maintain current levels of provision following the expiry of the current national Covid-19 Bus Recovery Grant in April.
- Phase Two will focus on a range of measures including: more frequent services; bus priority measures to cut journey times; simpler, cheaper, more integrated fares; safety and access improvements to buses and stops, and development of a new Bus Passenger Charter governing service quality.



Our ultimate ambition is to take advantage of devolved powers which can enable councils to establish local bus franchising schemes, bringing all local services under public control. This would give us far greater influence over fares, service provision and levels of customer service. The creation of a bus franchising scheme would enable us to deliver the changes required to make bus travel the most affordable and convenient way to get from A to B in Stoke-on-Trent. Securing government funding would enable the City Council to accelerate delivery of our bus service improvement proposals. Our bid makes it clear to government that good public transport is more than an aspiration - it is absolutely vital to our economic growth aspirations and our need for transport improvement is more acute than in most other areas that will be applying for investment funding.

The integration of bus and rail services with walking and cycling routes in the city is also a key element of our Levelling Up ambitions around transport. We have already received £29 million through the Transforming Cities Fund to deliver a range of improvements to boost intra-city connectivity and sustainable transport, including upgrades for Stoke and Longton rail stations and the City Centre bus station, improved bus corridors and enhanced cycling and walking routes to employment sites in Etruria Valley.



We remain focussed on achieving our Powering Up objective of securing government funding to conduct a feasibility study into light rail connectivity improvements. We are already making progress in this area, having secured £50,000 in funding from the Department for Transport to carry out a feasibility study into the restoration of the former Stoke to Leek railway line, which has been decommissioned for more than 30 years and ceased passenger journeys 65 years ago. Leek is an important commuter destination for Stoke-on-Trent and the reopening of this rail link would fulfil a key element of our plans to enhance local and regional connectivity while reducing road congestion and improving journey times. Another key infrastructure improvement that will reduce congestion at the city's main northern gateway and improve connectivity to strategic employment sites is the Etruria Valley Link Road. Work on this vitally important project has continued to be delivered on schedule, with completion expected in September 2022.

Our ongoing £35 million investment in the city's road transport network is also progressing, with work commencing in November on improvement work at the busy junction of Weston Coyney Road and Sutherland Road, in Longton. This follows the completion of recent improvements to the junction of Uttoxeter Road and Meir Hay Road. The improvement programme aims to reduce journey times and enhance traffic flow on key routes by easing congestion at strategic junctions. The works undertaken to date have included the installation of intelligent adaptive signal technology to reduce delays while improving pedestrian safety, as well as visibility and paving enhancements.



Priority 2 – Economic Development

The last four months have heralded significant progress with many of our landmark regeneration projects for the City Centre and individual town centres. All of our bids for regeneration investment through the Levelling Up Fund were successful, unlocking £56 million of government funding. £20 million will go towards accelerating the regeneration of the former East-West Precinct site in the City Centre. This funding allocation will enable the first phases of residential development to be built, along with the delivery of key infrastructure improvements, including preparing the ground for the development of the proposed city centre arena. As well as the 3,600 capacity arena, phased plans for the project also include provision of a 144-bedroom hotel, 292 apartments, seven townhouses, a 214-space underground car park and 65,520 sq ft of commercial space, of which about a quarter will house food and drink outlets.

A further £16 million of Levelling Up Fund money will pave the way for delivery of the showcase Goods Yard canalside development in Stoke. Plans for the Goods Yard were submitted in November by developers Capital & Centric, detailing how the existing warehouse site will be transformed into a striking £60 million urban quarter linking Stoke town to the railway station and nearby University Quarter. The mixed-use development will feature homes, work spaces, shops, bars, cafés and a new public square.

In addition, the Government has allocated a total of £20 million from the Levelling Up Fund to facilitate regeneration projects in Longton, Stoke and Tunstall. The funding will help to finance delivery of the Crown Works regeneration scheme in Longton, the Tunstall Library and Baths building, as well as new commercial spaces and almost 200 new homes on the former Spode site, in Stoke. Together, these developments will play an important role in repurposing and strengthening town centres through the provision of new housing and increased footfall to stimulate trade and economic prosperity.



September saw the official opening of the newly-completed Spitfire Gallery at the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery. A VIP launch event was held to unveil the restored Spitfire aircraft, which is displayed in the stunning £5.4 million gallery. The iconic warplane was painstakingly refurbished over the course of three years at a specialist restoration site in Kent before being returned to the city to take pride of place in the prestigious, glass walled gallery, which also houses an exhibition about the Spitfire's Stoke-on-Trent born designer, Reginald Mitchell.





Culture, heritage and creativity were identified in the Powering Up Prospectus as being key elements in our ambitious and exciting economic development plans for Stoke-on-Trent. We are keen to capitalise on the economic value of the city's creative industries and heritage assets, and have established the Creative City Partnership to bring businesses and stakeholders from the city's creative sector together to focus on maximising the economic and regeneration potential of Stoke-on-Trent's cultural offer. The fact that Stoke-on-Trent has been chosen to become one of Arts Council England's 'Priority Places' is a welcome endorsement of the work of the City Council and partners to promote and grow the city's cultural and creative offer. As one of 13 Priority Places for 2021-24 in the Midlands, Stoke-on-Trent will benefit from increased investment by the Arts Council, which will work closely with the City Council, the cultural sector and organisations which represent community interests to try to improve residents' engagement with culture and the arts locally. The aim of the project is to understand what communities and cultural organisations in these areas need from the Arts Council in order to achieve their cultural ambitions.

Heritage protection and regeneration also has a significant role to play in Stoke-on-Trent's economic development, and the City Council has been working with local and national partners to secure vital funding to restore historic buildings for future generations. In August the City Council launched a £600,000 funding initiative to support improvements to historic buildings in Longton town centre, having secured £300,000 from Historic England. This builds on the success of an existing Heritage Action Zone covering Stoke town centre. The initiative enables building owners to apply for grants to carry out improvement work to eligible premises. A similar approach was responsible for the recent restoration work at historic Ford Green Hall, which was formally completed in November. Previous successes include the £1.8 million restoration of Longton Town Hall and the ongoing delivery of the £3.8 million refurbishment of Grade II listed Tunstall Town Hall, as well as the City Council-led phased regeneration of the former Spode pottery works, in Stoke, to create a major hub for creative industries, leisure and tourism. Plans for the latest phase of the Spode project, involving the creation of a new business incubator unit on the historic site, were submitted in October, just a month after an exciting new 150-seat bar and entertainment venue, Factory Floor, opened its doors.

Our focus now will be on identifying other key heritage sites which would benefit from restoration funding and contribute to our economic development plans, and working with partners and stakeholders to safeguard these architectural and cultural treasures for future generations to use and enjoy.

Priority 3 – Education and Skills

This has been a very exciting year for education and skills improvement in Stoke-on-Trent. On the back of publishing our acclaimed Education Improvement Strategy, we have now established an Education Challenge Board which will oversee and shape improvements in our city's schools and academies to ensure that our children and young people can access the best teaching and learning. This innovative initiative builds on the achievements of the Opportunity Area programme and brings together leading figures from the City Council, the Department for Education, local academies, Ofsted and the regional schools commissioner to focus on improving educational outcomes in the city. The board's work will involve drawing on the expertise of the most successful trusts and schools already working in Stoke-on-Trent, bringing in expertise from outside the city, and working collaboratively with schools to understand their improvement needs and help to drive up standards of teaching and leadership.



November saw the announcement of more than £2.5 million of Levelling Up funding to deliver six innovative community projects across Stoke-on-Trent. The successful bids to the Government's Community Renewal Fund included Staffordshire University's Discover project, which aims to tackle digital exclusion in the city. The project secured £616,520 to provide equipment and training to help disadvantaged and digitally excluded people to access online services. There was also success for digital skills training provider Wavemaker, which was allocated £599,015 to help deliver a digital innovation and education hub in the city. Wavemaker, which is based at Hanley's Mitchell Arts Centre, will help small businesses to identify digital solutions and provide training for local people in the use of new technologies. A third funding bid, by the Sector Hub Action Research Project (SHARP) also focussed on improving skills. A grant for £516,787 will enable SHARP to procure a training provider to deliver a pilot to demonstrate how care sector providers can work together in more collaborative ways in order to address skills shortages across adults' and children's social care services and the domiciliary care sector. The Youth Employment and Skills (YES) Consortium also successfully bid for £527,466 from the Community Renewal Fund to enable YMCA North Staffordshire to work with local partners to help young people to overcome barriers to education and employment.



Developing digital skills across all age groups is a key Levelling Up objective for Stoke-on-Trent in order to ensure that young people and adults can capitalise on the higher-value employment opportunities provided by the digital and technology sectors. The prospectus has now been published for the Silicon Stoke programme, setting out how Stoke-on-Trent will build on its newly-developed citywide full-fibre gigabit network with a package of projects designed to make the city the most digitally advanced in the UK. Next generation communications are regarded as being one of the key drivers of the city's digital transformation to become a Smart City. Projects include the Digital Schoolhouse, based at the City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College, which uses play-based learning to engage primary school pupils across the city in learning about computing and to improve the teaching of digital skills. The potential benefits of delivering Silicon Stoke include expansion of the provision of digital vocational skills linked to employment opportunities, as well as enhancing the city's educational offer through improved digital connectivity and the development and delivery of the highest-quality digital education provision in the UK. The Silicon Stoke programme also aims to contribute up to £625 million to the local economy over the next 15 years by improving the productivity and competitiveness of local businesses, attracting inward investment, creating additional jobs and enabling local services to become more accessible, responsive and efficient.



Priority 4 – Health and Productivity

Our work with NHS partners to improve the integration of health and care services at community level continues to gather pace, earning Stoke-on-Trent increasing national recognition for its highly innovative and collaborative approach. Alongside the development of the sub-regional Integrated Care Partnership and Integrated Care System, we are also working closely with the National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi) to design and pioneer exciting and effective new ways of working across our local communities. One area where this approach is already making an impact is support for people with learning disabilities and autism. Stoke-on-Trent is participating in the NDTi's Small Supports programme, which enables local areas to identify, commission and nurture community-based providers which can deliver specialist, uniquely person-centred support services within smaller localities. The support provided by the programme is designed around each client's personal aspirations and needs, and remains constant regardless of changes in an individual's circumstances or the services they rely upon. Examples of this approach include the Burslem Community Led Support (CLS) Innovation Team, which was formed in January to design and implement solutions to local challenges. The team was initially council and NHS-led, but has already expanded voluntary and community sector involvement significantly and is on track to become fully community-led in the near future.





Delivery of another innovative support scheme for city residents is also rapidly gaining in both pace and profile. The Family By Family programme involves a partnership between the City Council, the Department for Education, the Shared Lives Plus charity and the Stoke-on-Trent Opportunity Area. The peer support pilot connects 'sharing families' which have emerged from significant challenges with 'seeking families' who are experiencing difficulties and looking to make changes to the way that they live their lives. Each of the 12 sharing families recruited in the city is working with several seeking families to get them through tough times and help to build kinder and stronger communities throughout Stoke-on-Trent. Participating families are supported by a dedicated coach who helps seeking families to identify and pursue the changes they need to make to overcome their problems and achieve their goals. The pilot has gained national recognition and is being used as a testbed to develop similar approaches in other parts of the UK.

The Levelling Up objective of supporting more long-term unemployed residents from the city into sustainable employment has received significant support through the Government's Community Renewal Fund. The Support to Work initiative was successful in securing £78,675 to deliver a new advocacy service to help negotiate work placement opportunities for people with disabilities and support participating employers to become disability confident. A separate funding bid also succeeded in securing £442,000 to deliver the SWITCH project to provide unemployed and economically inactive adults with mentoring and cognitive training to help improve their employability and enable them to find work. And the Restart programme, which was launched in Stoke-on-Trent in August, will help to get thousands more benefit claimants into work by 2025 as part of the city's Covid recovery effort. The DWP-run programme is being delivered by the City Council's JET (Jobs, Employment, Training) service in partnership with employment start-up Jobs 22 and Tunstall-based firm Acorn Training.



Implementation of the city's new Health and Wellbeing Strategy has progressed since July, with the introduction of the citywide Thrive at Five initiative to improve outcomes for children from disadvantaged families. The programme will work with children and families in the most deprived wards in Stoke-on-Trent to help ensure that most children are ready for school at the age of five in terms of their development. In 2019, 67 per cent of five-year-olds in Stoke-on-Trent were assessed as achieving a good level of development, more than four per cent below the national average. And just 56 per cent of children who are entitled to free school meals currently achieve their development targets. Evidence indicates that the school readiness development level is a significant indicator of a child's life chances in adolescence and adulthood, and that improving development at five is vital to enabling Stoke-on-Trent's children to go on to perform well at school and fulfil their potential in later life. This is why the City Council and partners the Hubb Foundation have invested in expanding the government-led Holiday Activities and Food fund to ensure that more children from across the city are able to access support through the programme. The scheme, which involved more than 10,000 children citywide during the summer holidays, will be active again during the Christmas break.

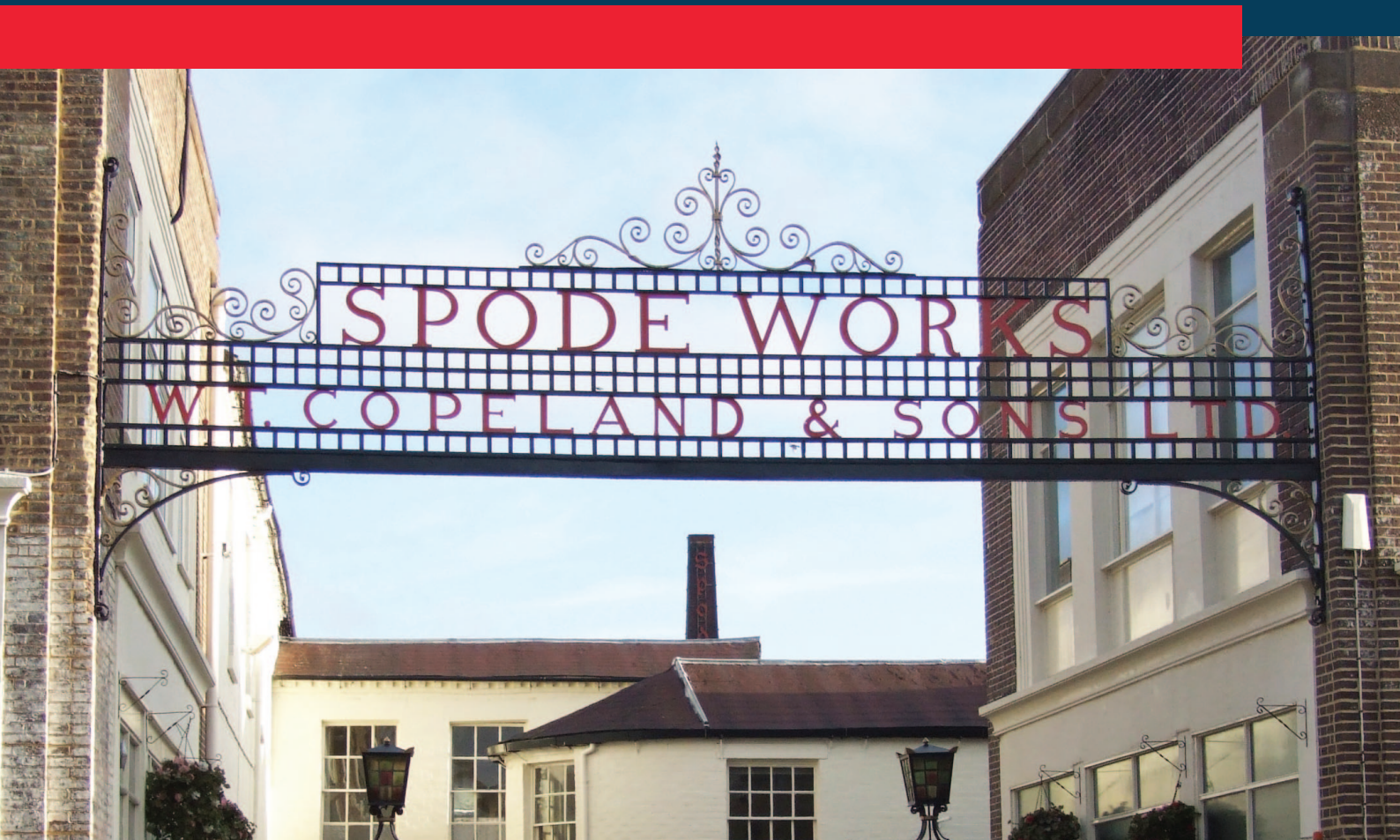
The City Council has also submitted a bid to the Department for Education for Stoke-on-Trent to be designated as one of five new partner areas for the delivery of the Family Hubs – Growing Up Well project. The initiative aims to facilitate data sharing between local and national partners to improve their understanding of the needs and circumstances of some of the city's most vulnerable children and families. Stoke-on-Trent's MPs have supported our bid, which would enable partners to deliver early intervention approaches and develop more tailored, accessible and responsive support services for local families.

Next Steps

The Stoke-on-Trent City Forum, which held its inaugural meeting in May, will reconvene in December to enable our diverse range of stakeholders to review the progress that has been made since the launch of the Powering Up Prospectus and discuss current and emerging opportunities to deliver the benefits of Levelling Up for people and businesses in Stoke-on-Trent. Delegates will hear from a range of keynote speakers at the event, which will be held online on 10th December.

Business leaders from the city and beyond will be invited to a prestigious event in the New Year to hear about the burgeoning opportunities for investment, development and employment in Stoke-on-Trent. Plans for the summit will be finalised shortly, but are expected to focus on the opportunities created by the £56 million allocation of Levelling Up Fund money announced in the October Budget, as well as the continuing expansion of the Ceramic Valley Enterprise Zone, Spode and other key regeneration sites in the city.

We are currently awaiting confirmation that the annual MIPIM international property and investment event will be taking place in 2022, following a hiatus due to Covid risks and restrictions. If it goes ahead in March, the conference in Cannes will provide an ideal opportunity to showcase to international investors the tremendous changes which are gathering pace in Stoke-on-Trent and the emerging opportunities for regeneration and inward investment as we deliver on our Levelling Up ambitions.



KEY CONTACT

Councillor Abi Brown - Leader
Stoke-on-Trent City Council
+44(0)1782 232468
abi.brown@stoke.gov.uk