

Whitefield Town Centre Plan



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Contributors

This document has been prepared on behalf of Bury Council by Planit-IE.

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Introduction

1.1 The Whitefield Town Centre Plan

The Whitefield Town Centre Plan sets out Bury Council's and the Whitefield community's vision for their town centre – identifying the short, medium and long-term proposals and priorities.

Defining the centre of Whitefield is difficult, which in itself highlights the need for a plan. Bury New Road is dominant, its wide carriageways and heavy traffic dictating the form, function, and experience of the historic high street. The impact is undeniable.

Informed by the community, this plan aims to create a heart – a more vibrant, liveable and walkable place which puts people first. We want to create a place where people can engage in activities that support a vibrant place, whilst allowing the communities and the natural environment to thrive.

Critical to any long-term success are the people of Whitefield. Without their leadership, guidance and knowledge, the project risks becoming another report gathering dust on the shelf.

Through a series of engagement events, we will be encouraging local residents and community organisations to take a central role in developing the plan – based on a deep understanding of place, and the processes, flows and patterns that exist within it.

We hope this process will act as a conduit for bringing local people together, allowing communities to self organise and evolve in an interdependent relationship with place and the natural environment... For the most part, 'success' will be measured on this basis.



1.2 Purpose and Scope

This document acts as Stage 1 of the Whitefield Town Centre Plan, providing a holistic long-term vision for the future of the town centre, but focusing on short and medium-term deliverables to move the place forward towards that vision. The plan is iterative and adaptable, and should develop over time in response to feedback from community prototype projects.

It is intended that Stage 2 will be focussed on the long term, and will address the future strategic transport proposals along the A56 Corridor.



Slattery independent bakery and patisserie

The Whitefield Town Centre Plan will create a vision and framework to steer future development priorities in Whitefield Town Centre. Alongside the Whitefield community, the document will **define a vision for the future, to generate momentum and motivate action.**

Part of this process is distilling the aims and objectives of various Bury Council strategies, including the 'Bury: Let's Do It! Strategy' and the emerging 'Bury Boroughwide Transport Strategy', and applying them at the local scale. It is important these strategic objectives align with those identified by the local community as the town centre plan develops, and, the outcomes of the project are clear, tangible, and most importantly, deliverable. Such an objective will require deep **collaboration between community, the council and business.**

Whilst this document begins to consider long-term opportunities and interventions required to create meaningful change in Whitefield Town Centre, it is acknowledged that some of these must be considered strategically. For example, **Bury New Road is classified as a Priority 2 Corridor as part of the Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) radial corridors project**, focused on achieving a modal shift from car-based trips, to more sustainable forms of movement. As such the document provides only recommendations and best practice possibilities to inform the study as it comes to fruition over the next 24 months. In this respect, suggested improvements to this strategic road corridor can only be assessed through a consideration of wider traffic movement and modelling impacts along the corridor and within the wider strategic road network.

The Whitefield Town Centre Plan will provide:

- A holistic vision for the future of the town centre to facilitate regeneration, and ensure future investment in the town is considered;
- A desktop review and summary of existing strategies and policy;
- A baseline analysis of the town centre's current conditions, challenges, context and opportunities;
- A breakdown of short, medium and long-term opportunities to improve the town, including a list of potential projects and potential delivery mechanisms. This document places greater focus on short to medium term;
- A spatial design framework for the town centre;
- A breakdown of opportunities for community ownership and leadership; and
- A proposed governance model for a partnership between the council and the community, outlining high-level roles, responsibilities, and processes.

1.3 The Challenge and Opportunity

Why change now?

Whitefield is not the only town centre whose economy has suffered as a result of macro-scale shifts in the retail economy, the COVID-19 pandemic – and more recent economic turmoil amidst unrest in the global supply chain – and the resultant cost of living crisis. These issues are universally felt by urban centres across the UK, many of which, alongside Whitefield, are searching for a new way forward.

What does the town centre of tomorrow look like, and how do we make that happen?

Whilst there is no one panacea to this question, instilling resilience is unquestionably a key element. This means supporting self-sufficient and sustainable local economic development, creating policies and an environment where local businesses and people can exchange skills and knowledge, and retain and reinvest wealth locally.

To do this in Whitefield, we must look both *internally* – understanding the place, its specific challenges, its unique opportunities and listening to its people – as well as looking *externally* at the wider picture, including Bury Council's long-term aspirations and ambitions to create sustainable places and communities – and the role that Whitefield can play within that context.

The town centre plan seeks to provide a basis for the place to evolve and develop a new purpose, led by its citizens, which in turn will have a positive impact on the local and wider economy, and allow people and nature to thrive at the heart of Whitefield.

An Alternative Lens

Whitefield faces obvious challenges, many of which are driven by the presence of Bury New Road, severing the high street and communities to its east and west.

The environment along the road is poor for every user – businesses are crammed in, pedestrians have no space, and experience high levels of noise and air pollution. There is limited planting along the road corridor, and traffic congestion has a clear and negative impact on both sense of place and public health.

Whilst incremental, and potentially community-led, improvements to the high street and surrounding areas will have a positive impact on the street environment, the long-term strategy for Whitefield has to be to rethink Bury New Road, and indeed the town centre more broadly, through an alternative lens, that of people, place (including its economy), and the environment. The plan should support a transition from a place where people pass through in car, to all be it only visiting for singular trips to key destinations, a place where all life can thrive.

This alternative lens is the starting point as we rethink Whitefield Town Centre, and will guide us in creating a more sustainable, self-sufficient and resilient place with a new function and purpose.



People

Understanding people means two things. It means listening to the people of Whitefield, understanding their wants and needs and encouraging them to take ownership of the plan. This is fundamental to success.

Second is understanding how people use places, and how design decisions can be shaped by the community to enhance their quality of life. **Proposals in Whitefield must enhance people's quality of life, providing them with the opportunities to thrive by creating healthy human ecosystems in balance with the natural ecosystems. And calling forth a collective vocation.**



Place

The plan and future proposals will be place-led, underpinned by a thorough understanding of Whitefield, its challenges and assets – its patterns and processes but ultimately the value-enhancing role it can form for itself within the wider regional context.

We want to create a legible town centre, which celebrates Whitefield's heritage and story.



Nature

To achieve Bury Council's ambition of becoming carbon neutral by 2038, the plan must recognise the value of ecosystems – the processes that exist and the ecosystem services they provide to the community – whilst integrating, enhancing, and enriching them through the plan. The natural environment should also evolve in symbiotic relationship with the place. **Whitefield is surrounded by green space, so let's draw it in.**



A Circular Economy

We want to achieve a town centre economy where wealth is retained and reinvested locally, where local resources are used (and re-used) wisely, and a place where local skillsets and knowledge are shared and developed for the betterment of Whitefield's people. **We want to foster a local economy that benefits local people, and develops based on circular principles.**

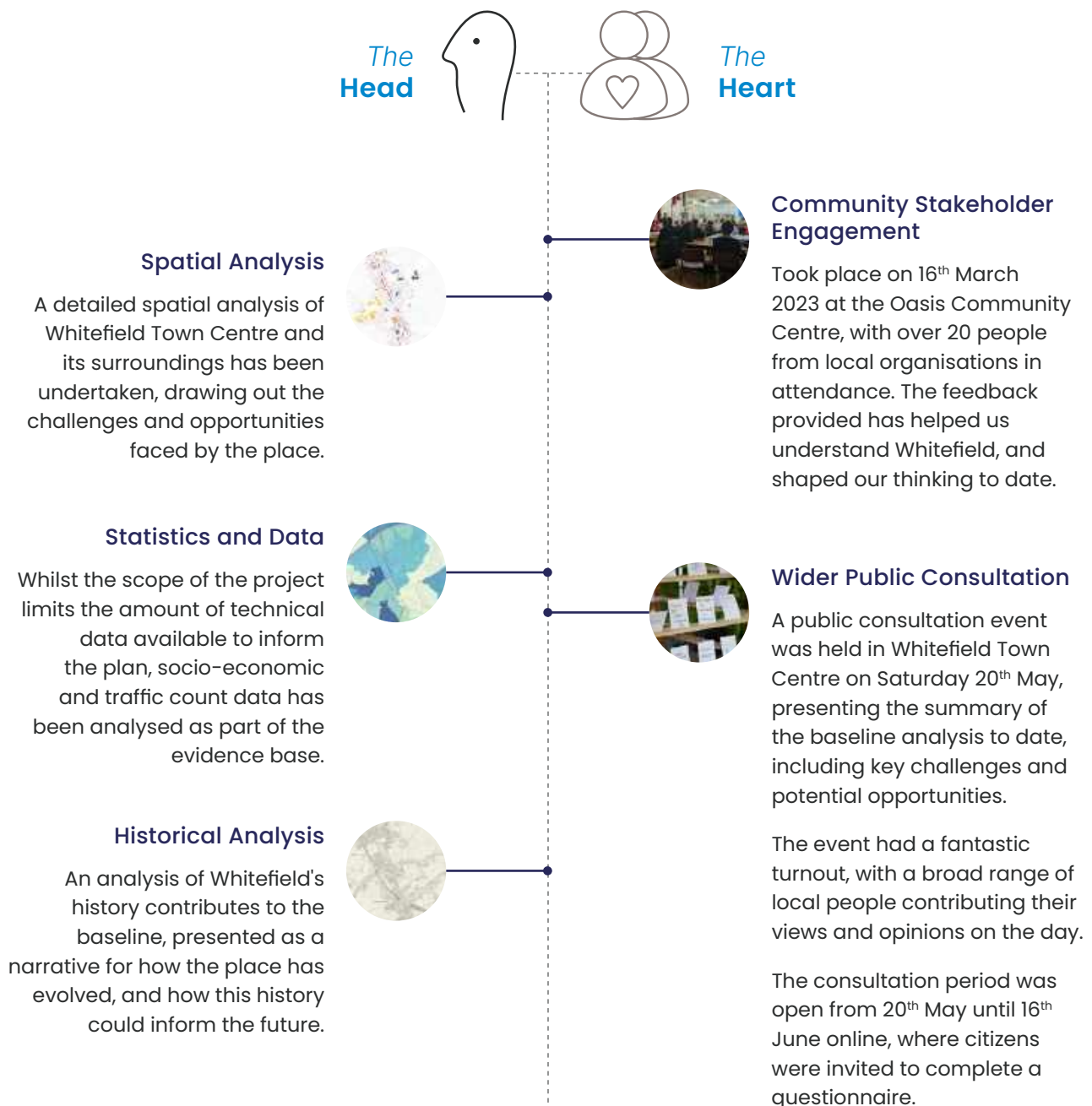
1.4 Our Approach

The Head and Heart of Whitefield

Alongside the Whitefield community, we will explore the 'Head and Heart' of Whitefield in equal measure – developing an understanding of the place, the lived experience of it, and the wants and needs of its people.

It is important to connect to the heart to:

- Utilise the inherent design intelligence of the community as a source for future evolution; and
- Stimulate collaboration and future enablers to grow the value generating capacity of the community to create cultural and economic wealth.



Big Ideas for Whitefield

Considering the overarching challenges for Whitefield, a series of key opportunities have been identified providing an overview of the possibilities for the town centre.



An Emerging Vision for Whitefield Town Centre

Informed by the long list of opportunities, the findings of the baseline analysis, and engagement work undertaken, a vision for Whitefield will be presented.



The vision will be considered through the 'alternative lens', presented earlier in the document, ensuring people, place, and the environment are embedded within proposals.

The vision will be accompanied by a spatial framework, highlighting how the vision can be realised in across Whitefield Town Centre.

Short, Medium, Long-Term Priorities

A series of proposals will be outlined in the latter stages of the plan, with specific focus on shorter-term interventions

Recommendations will be presented as to which projects should be prioritised, considering their contribution to achieving the objectives of the plan, as well as their deliverability.



Stage 2

Long-term transport and places opportunities - the hardware in place to allow the software to flourish.

Wider Public Consultation Feedback (from 16th June)

Feedback from the consultation events and online feedback has been collated, and used to test the emerging opportunities, vision and design principles.

The feedback has been used to refine the vision where necessary, to ensure it aligns with the wants and needs of local people.



Formal Public Consultation Period

A formal public consultation on the draft plan will begin in early 2024.



The vision for Whitefield Town Centre will be informed by its 'head' and 'heart' in equal measure, aligning the wants and needs of its people with the wider ambitions of Bury Council.

1.5 Strategic Backdrop

The Whitefield Town Centre Plan exists within a broader strategic context, which emphasises investment.

Greater Manchester Strategy 2021 – 2031

Sets out a route over the next decade to make Greater Manchester greener, fairer, and more prosperous. The strategy sets out a commitment to drive investment into growth locations and create opportunities in adjacent town and local centres.

Greater Manchester Culture Strategy

Provides a cultural vision for the region and promotes regeneration projects which are connected to culture

Greater Manchester Transportation Strategy 2040

Outlines how TfGM will deliver the long – term goal of 50% of travel within Greater Manchester to be made by walking, cycling and public transport.

5 Year Environment Plan for Greater Manchester 2019 – 2024

Sets out Greater Manchester's vision to be a clean, carbon neutral, climate resilient city region with a thriving natural environment and circular, zero-waste economy where:

- Infrastructure will be smart and fit for the future;
- There will be an integrated, clean and affordable public transport system, resource efficient buildings, greater local community renewable energy, cleaner air, water and green space for all;
- Access to green space in every community, more trees including in urban areas, active travel networks, environmental education and healthy and locally-produced food; and
- Citizens and businesses will adopt sustainable living and businesses practices, focusing on local solutions to deliver a prosperous economy.

Let's Do It – Bury 2030

Provides overarching strategic direction to the Council, and outlines how Bury can achieve faster economic growth than the national average, with lower than national average levels of deprivation. The strategy sets out to deliver an economic recovery strategy including regeneration plans, and broader investment within in the borough's towns, including Whitefield.

The strategy is underpinned by the guiding principles of:

- Local Neighbourhoods – empowered residents, families and local communities within our townships at the heart of decision making to make a difference to people's lives.
- An Enterprising Spirit – raising aspirations, removing barriers, and maximising opportunities to grow and develop our people and businesses.
- Delivering Together – the creation of a new relationship between public services, communities and businesses which is based on co-design, accountability and shared decision making.
- A Strength's-based Approach – a borough in which people are helped to make the best of themselves, by recognising and building on our strengths.

Bury Physical Activity Strategy

Outlines the Council's aspirations to increase the rates of physical activity through the Borough, working collaboratively with community and neighbourhood groups.

Bury Transport Strategy (emerging)

Sets out the vision that by 2040, Bury will be an attractive, well-connected and innovative Borough where people aspire to live, work and visit. The Borough's townships will be connected by a modern and efficient transport network, providing attractive, sustainable transport links both within and beyond the Borough.

Regarding Whitefield, the strategy proposes:

- The introduction of better crossing facilities for the A56;
- Improve access to Whitefield and Besses tram stops;
- Improve wayfinding in the town centre;
- Install a cycle hub at the Metrolink stop to support users travelling by bike;
- Increase high frequency bus routes, including on the 135; and
- Implementation of School Streets.

Bury Council Economic Strategy

Mitigates local impacts relating to Covid-19, risks associated with EU exit, and inflation, whilst setting out a clear framework for inclusive growth, community wealth building, and greening the economy.

Bury Council Culture Strategy 2022–2027

Sets out a strategic vision based on Stories, Skills, Strength, Space and Support to the development of Bury's culture.

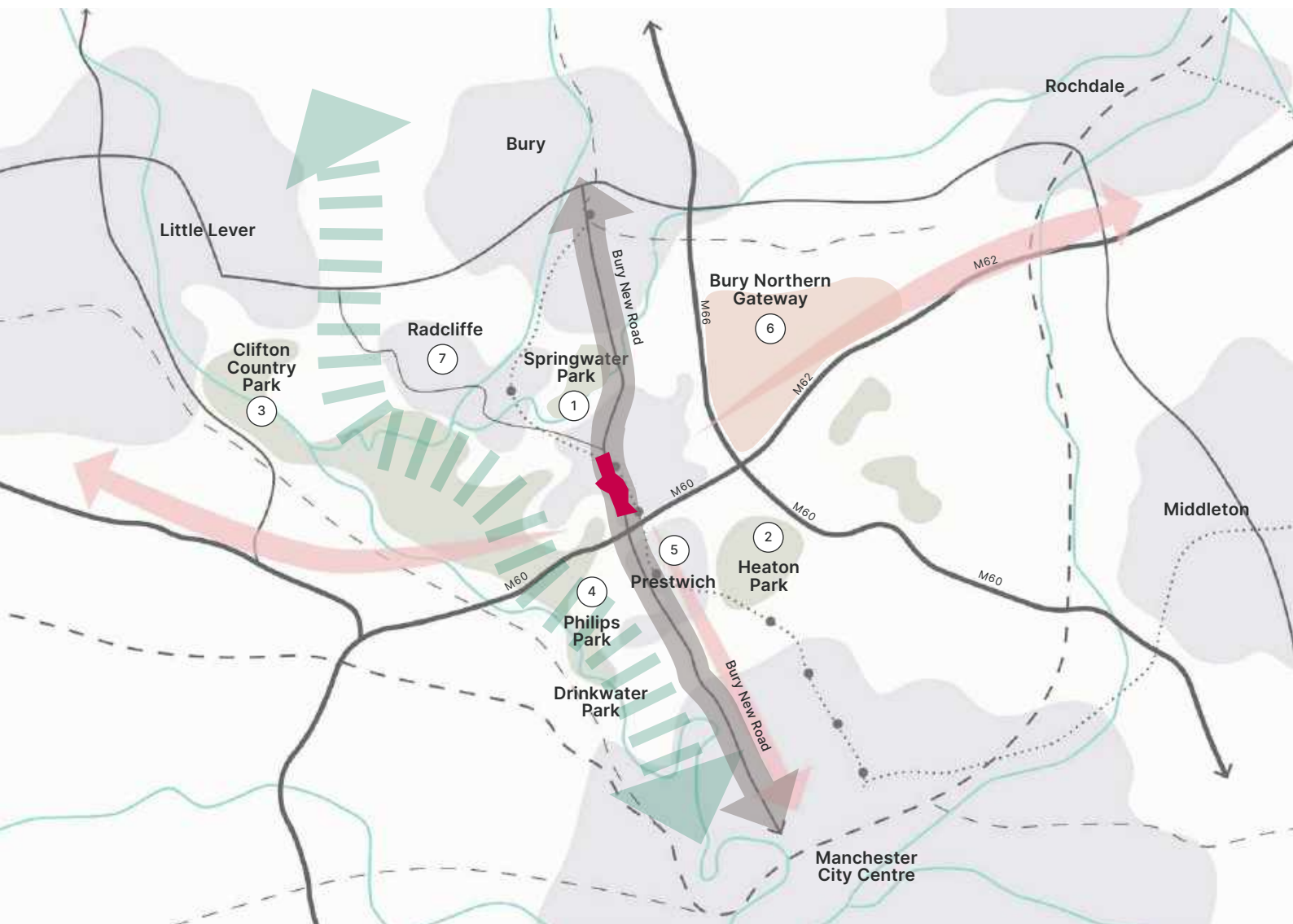
1.6 Strategic Context

Whitefield is one of a series of towns located along the Bury New Road Corridor, linking Manchester City Centre to the south with Bury Town Centre to the north.

The town centre is surrounded by several strategic green spaces, many associated with the River Irwell corridor, creating active linkages between Whitefield and Manchester City Centre.

This strategic relationship and proximity to the City Centre is major asset for Whitefield, with a central tram stop serving the town centre and a 15-minute commute to Victoria Train Station.

Access to the wider strategic green network is another key asset, despite the active travel network breaking down in residential neighbourhoods surrounding the town centre.



1. **Springwater Park** is the nearest strategic green space to the town centre, and provides access to the paths along the River Irwell corridor.
2. **Heaton Park** is Manchester's largest park, and sits in close proximity to the town centre study area to the south-east.
3. **Clifton Country Park** hugs the River Irwell, and is connected to Whitefield and Radcliffe via a network of long distance walking routes and trails.
4. **Philips Park** sits in close proximity to Whitefield, and is accessible via a bridge across the motorway.
5. Whitefield's relationship with **Prestwich** is of interest, with Prestwich having been subject to recent regeneration and road improvement schemes, as well as live regeneration proposals.
6. **The Northern Gateway** is Bury Council's largest allocation within the Places for Everyone regional development plan, and would support up to 2750 new homes and 20,000 future jobs. Strategic transport proposals will impact Whitefield as the scheme progresses, with major road and bus route proposals potentially easing congestion along the A56.
7. **Radcliffe** has also been subject to significant regeneration focus - with a strategic regeneration framework adopted in 2020 outlining the long-term vision for the town.