



TOWN INVESTMENT PLAN

ROWLEY REGIS SUMMARY

OCTOBER 2020

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FOREWORD

1. FOREWORD

Towns Fund presents a unique and unprecedented opportunity for Rowley Regis, somewhere previously overlooked for regeneration funding that is proven to bring lasting and tangible benefits to towns and communities in need. We know that parts of Rowley Regis are in genuine need of additional help and extra investment. Towns Fund can deliver this.

Unique amongst the ‘six towns’ of Sandwell, Rowley Regis is not one town but several, each with its special character, distinct heritage, fierce local loyalty and pride. The three centres of Cradley Heath, Blackheath and Old Hill, along with neighbourhoods such as Brickhouse, Springfield and Grace Mary are joined by Oldbury town centre and Tividale to form an extensive and complex mosaic of communities that make up the Towns Fund area. Making these communities better connected by improving people’s access to shops, jobs, education and green space is at the heart of the Rowley Regis Town Investment Plan.

The lack of previous regeneration schemes in Rowley Regis is a source of strength. The proposals are mostly new and the extensive engagement that has taken place has been a rich source of inspiration and show local people have a passion for the future of their towns and neighbourhoods.

Breaking down barriers to enable people to move easily and more sustainably underpins all our interventions. Applying the idea of the ‘15-minute town’, where people live within a 15 minute walk of a range of everyday needs, is at the heart of our thinking. Rowley Regis, with its intricate network of communities and centres, offers an ideal template to apply this idea.

Our Town Investment Plan for Rowley Regis will invest £25 million into six projects, each quite distinct yet complementary across this wide and diverse area. Connectivity is the common thread. Connecting our communities through safe and useable cycling and walking routes; connecting people to thriving town centres that offer a safe, enjoyable environment in which to shop and meet up; connecting people to well-equipped, safe and beautiful parks or green spaces; connecting everyone to opportunities for education, training and skill development.

Since March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented additional - and unprecedented - challenges to us all, through short term disruption to all aspects of normal civilised life, along with longer term consequences that are only just beginning to emerge.

The central themes of the TIP – connecting people to town centres, transport hubs and quality green spaces in a localised and sustainable manner; improving skills and opportunities; lifting people out of fuel poverty and nurturing a clean growth low-carbon economy – offer, we believe, a workable blueprint for surviving the impact of COVID-19 and for emerging stronger when normality resumes. These are our ambitions for our Town Investment Plan for Rowley Regis.



Adrian Eggington
Chair of Rowley Regis
Local Board



Jude Thompson
Chair of Town Deal Board
(Sandwell Superboard)



Councillor Maria Crompton
Deputy Leader, Sandwell
Council

INTRODUCTION

2. INTRODUCTION

In 2030, Sandwell is a thriving, optimistic and resilient community.

It's where we call home and where we're proud to belong - where we choose to bring up our families, where we feel safe and cared for, enjoying good health, rewarding work, feeling connected and valued in our neighbourhoods and communities, confident in the future, and benefiting fully from a revitalised West Midlands.

Sandwell Vision 2030

The distinct nature of Rowley Regis and characteristics of each of the town centres, residential areas and communities provides a unique opportunity to put the ambition of creating connected and resilient communities at the heart of the Town Investment Plan (TIP).

This bid, together with the Towns Fund bids for Smethwick and West Bromwich, represent a £75m opportunity for Sandwell and its residents.

Sandwell Vision 2030 was co-designed with partners and residents in 2017 and sets out our overall vision for Sandwell's six towns. In 2019, we launched our Inclusive Economy deal. The deal is an informal agreement between the council and everyone who lives or works here, to work together to create a better Sandwell and deliver wealth for all.

Our three Towns Fund Towns: Rowley Regis, Smethwick and West Bromwich are joined by Oldbury, Tipton and Wednesbury to form Sandwell. With a population of over 327,000, it is the third largest borough in the West Midlands, itself the largest Combined Authority outside London. Levelling up Sandwell's towns is a priority of national significance - Sandwell is the 34th biggest local authority by population in Great Britain (out of 317), but it doesn't punch its weight, ranked as the 8th most deprived local authority and 72nd largest by GVA.

The borough is almost the same size in population as Nottingham and is bigger than Newcastle, Oxford, and Milton Keynes, and yet, they all have larger economies than Sandwell.

For too long there has been a disconnect in Sandwell generally and Rowley Regis specifically

between the jobs and our residents, with employment centres often corresponding with the areas containing the highest deprivation. The West Bromwich and Smethwick TIPs focus on these employment centres, developing a programme of projects aimed at turning around the trajectories of these towns for residents, communities and businesses.

In Rowley Regis we are breaking down barriers between communities and estates through strengthening connections to local transport hubs, creating stronger local town centres and green spaces for Blackheath, Cradley Heath and Oldbury, and bringing a localised skill offer to Rowley Regis.

Rowley Regis had a population of 51,482 mid-2018 and is the 4th largest town within Sandwell. It accommodates a larger cohort of residents aged 40-65+ than any other age group within its boundary (31%). 17% of Rowley Regis' population are at retirement age while 26% are aged 0-19 years old, resulting in a total demographic at an age of dependency of 38.6%, the highest in the Borough.

Our vision
for Sandwell



VISION
2030
SANDWELL



INTRODUCTION

The Rowley Regis TIP

The Rowley Regis TIP sets out a series of transformational projects to address a variety of socio-economic issues within the boundary of Rowley Regis. The TIP sets out a programme of interventions that will stimulate long-term economic growth and prosperity within the town, improve the health and wellbeing of residents and increase the vitality of Rowley Regis within the context of Sandwell and the West Midlands.

The Town Investment Plan: Seizing Our Once-in-a-Generation Opportunity



Satellite Education
Hub



Air Source
Heat Pump
Implementation



Blackheath Bus
Interchange and
Public Realm



Britannia Park
Community Hub and
Green Space
Improvements



Rowley Regis
Travel Scheme



Canal Network
Connectivity



TOWN VISION

3. TOWN VISION

The vision for Rowley Regis

The Rowley Regis vision recognises that perceptions of towns and town centres is changing and is closely aligns with Sandwell's Vision 2030.

Town Vision

Rowley Regis is formed from several town centres and neighbourhoods, growing slowly with an older age profile, steady job growth and offering significant potential. The vision is for Rowley Regis to be a location which is fit for the future and home to resilient, connected communities, where all residents have access to local centres, to useable, good quality open spaces and to opportunities which will support their education, skills development and health needs.

Through our Town Investment Plan, the Sandwell Vision for 2030 and delivery of our pipeline projects, Rowley Regis will have: -

- A number of 15-minute towns - defined as residents having access to a range of day-to-day needs within a 15-minute walk (roughly 1 ¼ km / ¾ mile)
- A new satellite education facility that provides courses and opportunities for a range of age groups to further their education, re-train and upskill
- Students with higher levels of aspiration
- A higher skilled workforce, with specialisms in growth sectors
- More attractive green spaces with facilities that serve local communities
- Better connected communities, estates and town centres and transport hubs
- Safer transport routes for pedestrians and cyclists with less reliance on private vehicles
- Housing estates utilising renewable energy and with reduced fuel poverty
- Generated investment in employment and housing opportunities



TOWN VISION

Rowley Regis Needs

Rowley Regis Economic Assets



Local Town Centres that cater for everyday needs



Strong natural assets with a good number of green spaces and canal network

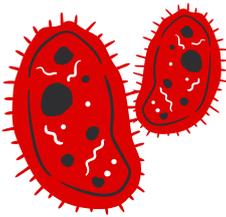


Train connections to Birmingham and beyond



Network of bus services

Rowley Regis Economic Challenges



COVID-19 Recovery



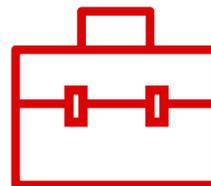
Declining town centres



Deprivation hotspots



Communities divided by poor connectivity



Low aspirations, low attainment and lower skilled jobs

OUR PRIORITIES

4. OUR PRIORITIES

Towns Fund Priorities for Rowley Regis

The Local Board and Superboard agreed five key areas of focus, identified through evidence and engagement, to maximise the £25m investment to bring about transformational change and catalyse economic prosperity and regeneration for Rowley Regis. These interventions reflect where need is greatest and key areas that will provide long-term benefits to residents over the next five years and beyond. The strategic priorities are: -



Connectivity within and between communities



Making town centres more inclusive



Raising education and skill aspirations



Improving asset base



Stalled sites

The projects developed bring together the Towns Fund objectives and the Rowley Regis vision. They focus on the first four of these strategic priorities to support the growth of Rowley Regis, which will enable the fifth alongside existing work that Sandwell is undertaking to help bring forward strategic sites.



1. Connectivity within and between communities. Opportunities for low carbon and active connectivity within and between communities is crucial to overcome deprivation, improve health and provide residents access to opportunity, jobs and skills. It will also provide access to green spaces and make town centres and future housing sites more attractive, creating value.



2. Making town centres more inclusive. Making town centres more inclusive will help to create and improve value and respond to local resident concerns and needs. It expedites the implementation of the '15-minute town' model that places town centres at the heart of the communities they serve by; reprioritising pedestrian mobility, increasing vibrancy and footfall and enhancing its strengths to become gateways for residents to services, education and leisure opportunities all of which are necessary for strong local economies.



3. Raising education and skill aspirations for residents is critical to reversing long-standing challenges of low attainment, low skilled workers and continuing to reduce unemployment. The objective is vital to generating prosperity for future generations and creating economically independent and active communities in areas of deprivation.



4. Improving asset base. Creating welcoming environments by improving the asset base and redesigning open spaces and town centres will provide leisure and recreational spaces for active engagement and improved wellbeing. These spaces, alongside efficient buildings that deliver clean energy, contribute significantly to better air quality, carbon reduction and improved financial health for residents.

OUR PROJECTS

5. OUR PROJECTS

Our total ask of the Towns Fund is **£24.9995m**

Project Location

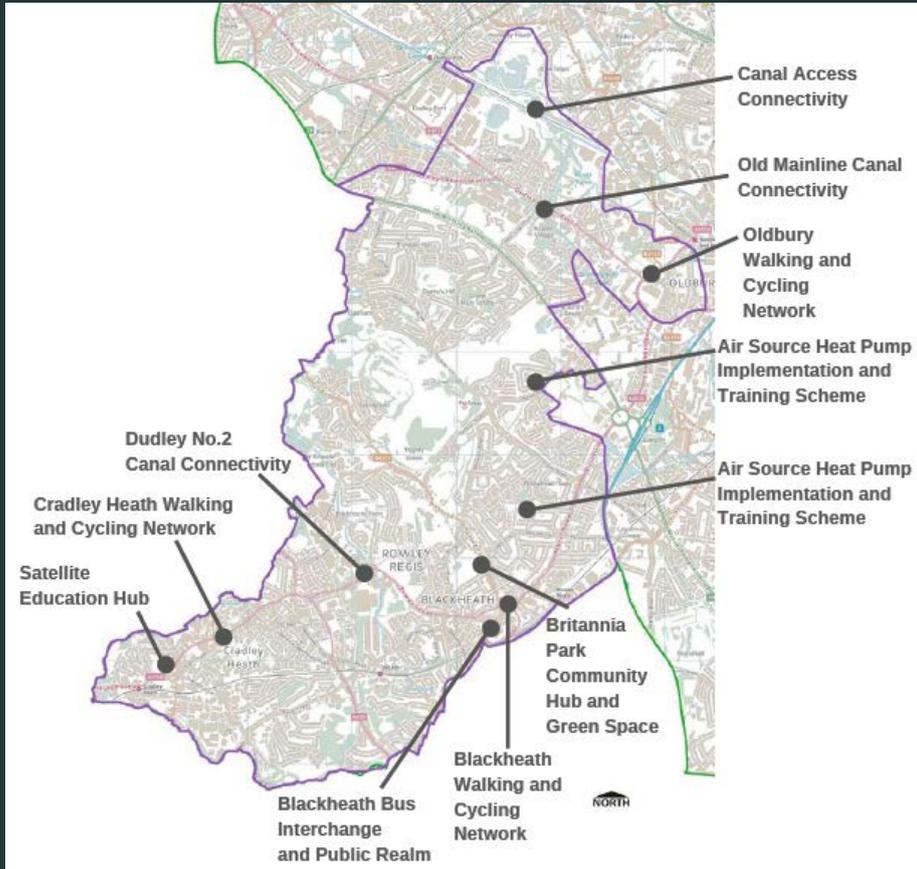


Fig 1. Rowley Regis TIP Spatial Map



OUR PROJECTS

Project Details



Priority: Raising Education and Skill Aspirations



Satellite Education Hub

In partnership with Sandwell College, Sandwell Council will construct a brand new satellite education facility that will provide options to three groups of learners: 16-18-year olds, 19-24-year-old NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and 25+ (un)employed adults, including those seeking to broaden their skillset and further their education. Sandwell College will deliver the education courses, which will be attuned to local needs and priorities, established through local business engagement and in accordance with national and emerging priorities. The preferred location is in Cradley Heath, close to the railway station and bus interchange. It is therefore conveniently located for students from Rowley Regis, as well as from nearby neighbourhoods in Dudley, places that are currently remote from Further Education campuses.



Air Source Heat Pump Implementation and Training Scheme

This ambitious project seeks to replace existing end-of-life domestic gas heating systems with Air Source Heat Pump-based district heating for 193 units at Darley Estate and a further 170 at St. Giles and Moorlands Courts. A first-of-its-kind project in Sandwell, this initiative aims to significantly reduce emissions and running costs per flat by adopting the energy principles of Be Lean, Be Clean and Be Green. This work will dovetail into existing contracts to renovate and update both low and high-rise blocks in these two areas, which include new thermal insulation.

The project will focus on building a resilient workforce through upskilling or retraining and will build towards an Inclusive Economy, introducing existing and new employees to an expanding skill sector.

OUR PROJECTS



Priority: Making Town Centres More Inclusive



Blackheath Bus Interchange and Public Realm

This project aims to build on the vibrancy and attractiveness of Blackheath town centre by investing in an ambitious and transformational project aimed at creating a public realm that is fit for the 21st century and prioritising pedestrians, cyclists and bus passengers over private cars. The project will redirect through traffic to the by-pass, freeing up space to construct a central bus interchange and associated Social Space in Market Place. Removing excess traffic will reduce congestion, make bus journeys more reliable, create more space for pedestrians, make cycling safer and improve air quality.



Britannia Park Community Hub and Green Space Improvements

The redevelopment of Britannia Park in Blackheath will focus around constructing a multi-purpose hub, including changing rooms, toilets, kitchen / café and community meeting rooms. The changing rooms will bring sports pitches back into use, promoting health and exercise and meeting unmet needs for women’s and junior football. A masterplan will be developed, in partnership with a new Friends Group, to co-ordinate a range of improvements, covering safer and more inviting entrances, better car parking, re-laid paths, additional play and fitness equipment, new allotments to meet local demand, new and additional tree planting and a biodiversity zone. The new building and wider park will offer a base and training facilities for the council’s horticultural apprentices.

OUR PROJECTS

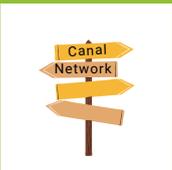


Priority: Connectivity Within and Between Communities



Rowley Regis Walking and Cycling Network

This project will bring together a host of connectivity improvements within Blackheath, Cradley Heath and Oldbury, to create new walking and cycling routes between neighbourhoods, town centres, transport hubs and green spaces. The improvements will reflect priorities in the adopted Sandwell Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (SCWIP), within and between town centres and build on the accelerated funding stream of interventions to create a well spread and seamless pedestrian network that integrates multi-modal forms of transport. The project aims to promote active travel via low-cost and sustainable means, reducing emissions from vehicle usage, and increasing the health and wellbeing of residents through a more active lifestyle.



Canal Network Connectivity

In partnership with the Canal & River Trust (CRT), this project will upgrade the surface of towpaths along the Dudley No.2 Canal and Birmingham to Wolverhampton Old Mainline Canal, to make them safer, more convenient and attractive to cyclists, walkers and runners, to encourage sustainable commuting and outdoor recreation. The improved towpaths will build on earlier schemes and add to the network of sustainable transport connections. Side-shoots from the two canals will extend the benefits into nearby estates and neighbouring communities by enhancing existing paths and links. The project will create routes through a major development site and will upgrade two dilapidated tunnels beneath a canal to provide strategic links to a nature reserve and rail / metro interchange.

OUR PROJECTS

Accelerated Funding Projects

Rowley Regis has been successful in securing a further £750,000 of government investment towards a programme of projects that can be delivered within this financial year, helping to kick-start economic recovery during the COVID-19 pandemic and initiate projects proposed within this TIP. The accelerated projects focus on connectivity and green space improvements in line with our Towns Fund priorities of making town centres more inclusive, connectivity within and between communities and improving the asset base.

Walking and Cycling Infrastructure:

Blackheath and Oldbury Town Centre walking and cycling infrastructure improvements.

Green Space Improvements:

Green space improvements to Tividale Park, Bearmore Open Space, Warrens Hall Park and Haden Hill Park.



ENGAGEMENT

6. ENGAGEMENT

Our Town Investment Plan builds on the engagement carried out with businesses, community organisations and residents across Rowley Regis for the TIP, as well as from previous engagement developed during Vision 2030, the Inclusive Economy Deal, and through local community surveys and interviews.

The Local Board and Superboard have been vital in shaping the vision, priorities and projects. The Superboard is chaired by the Chair of the Black Country Chamber of Commerce, and local MPs, the Leader of the Council, businesses and other stakeholders are all members.

The Local Board has been meeting monthly and forms a focal point of our engagement process. Chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive of the Black Country Housing Group, this has provided an external voice and oversight to the process.

In addition, we undertook specific consultation with young people around the Towns Fund priorities and projects and undertook two surveys, and workshops with stakeholders



NEXT STEPS

7. NEXT STEPS

The Town Investment Plan is currently with Government for their consideration of the proposals.

We will expect a response from them early in the new year with regards which projects they are willing to fund and how much the funding offer will be. Once agreed, we will continue to develop the projects further and develop full business cases that will enable the projects to be progressed to delivery stage.

