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UK Government



LEVELLING UP FUND

TIPTON TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION

March 2024



Sandwell
Metropolitan Borough Council

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CONTACTS:

Planning Regeneration Team

Regeneration and
Growth Directorate
Sandwell MBC
Sandwell Council House
Freeth Street
Oldbury
B69 3DE

For further information contact:

Stefan Hemming

Principal Lead –
Commercial Property
0121 569 3917
stefan_hemming@sandwell.
gov.uk



INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTION

The Levelling Up Fund is an exciting opportunity for Tipton. It will provide the town with the investment it needs to help address long-standing issues and deliver a healthier and more prosperous town centre for residents and businesses. The communities in Tipton are proud of their town. It has a rich industrial heritage and was at the heart of the mining and manufacturing boom that fuelled the growth of the Black Country. That legacy can be seen in the wealth of manufacturing businesses that continue to thrive in the area and the extensive canal network that provides an attractive setting for the town. Nevertheless, Tipton town centre has not been immune to the social and economic changes that have impacted the UK over the last few decades, including the decline of manufacturing industry and increasing shop vacancies on high streets. Compounded by the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, competing retail opportunities nearby and a rise in online shopping which have further undermined the vitality of town centres, it is clear that significant investment is needed in Tipton now. The town's strengths include its close-knit community, its canal-side setting, and the fast connections to Wolverhampton and Birmingham provided by its railway station. Careful and targeted regeneration can nurture Tipton into a healthy, inclusive, and accessible town.

Our proposal for Tipton will use a £20 million grant from the Government's Levelling Up Fund, together with match-funding from Sandwell Council. The central aim is to regenerate three key underused sites within the town, by replacing obsolete flats and derelict buildings to deliver new affordable, low-energy, socially rented housing.

The Council will also secure frontage improvements to the properties along Owen Street and invest in further highway improvements throughout the centre to improve safety and security. The canal walkway will also be reinvigorated and upgraded, with other additional public realm upgrades and improvements.

Together, these initiatives will act as a catalyst for further regeneration, by offering the town a new heart and focus, and providing confidence that Tipton is a fantastic community to invest in.



LEVELLING UP FUND

2. LEVELLING UP FUND

The Levelling Up Fund is Government's flagship initiative to increase wealth and opportunity across the UK by investing in infrastructure that improves everyday life. Tipton meets the criteria for the Levelling Up Fund investment. Tipton is the twenty-fourth most deprived LSOA (Lower Super Output Area) in Sandwell and it ranks 2,426 out of 32,844 LSOAs in England (where 1 is the most deprived). Gross median weekly pay for full time workers is £502.50 compared to £551.70 for the West Midlands and £589.80 for England regions.

A survey carried out in January 2024 suggested over half of the retail units in the town centre were vacant. In 2021 the town lost its only supermarket, the Co-operative, though the unit has now been occupied by Poundland, which offers local people a value-based, retail anchor. The Government's Levelling Up Fund is supporting town centre and high street regeneration, local transport projects, and cultural and heritage assets. The proposals for Tipton align with the theme of regeneration and town centre investment.

The proposals will remove or upgrade eyesore buildings and dated infrastructure; acquire and regenerate brownfield sites; and invest in secure community infrastructure and crime reduction. This will contribute to the achievement of the Government's levelling up agenda.



THE VISION

3. THE VISION

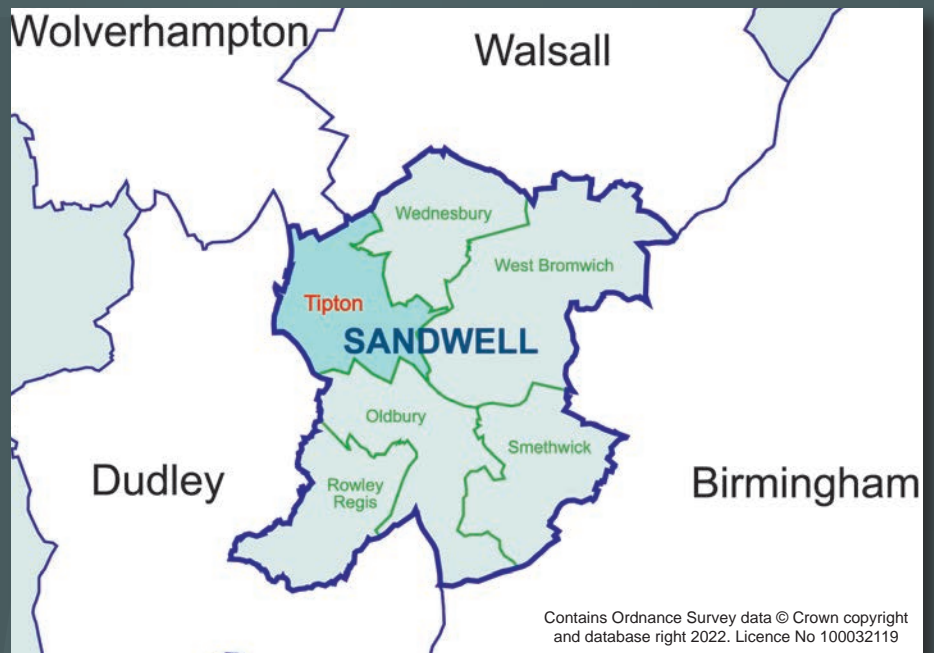
Sandwell Vision 2030

In 2030, Sandwell will be 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 proposals for Tipton will help to deliver the council's 2030 Vision for Sandwell. It will regenerate eyesore sites and deliver new affordable housing which will create a healthier and more prosperous town where people are proud to live and work.



**Our vision
for Sandwell**



**VISION
2030
SANDWELL**



Tipton

THE VISION

Tipton Area Action Plan (2008)

The Tipton Area Action Plan (which was adopted in 2008) has the vision that Tipton will be enhanced by “*new high quality residential neighbourhoods*”, close to local services and public transport, principally through redevelopment of older, poor quality industrial sites, ensuring new residential developments incorporate sustainable development principles, including affordable housing. The Action Plan seeks to improve access to the town centre and increase the local population that uses it. The proposals will increase the number of households living within and next to the town centre. Those households will be located close to the railway station which will provide fast public transport to Wolverhampton and Birmingham. The proposals will

deliver new affordable housing that is built to high sustainability credentials and beautiful design. The proposals will make the town centre a more attractive and welcoming place by regenerating eyesore sites.

Draft Sandwell Local Plan

The draft Sandwell Local Plan seeks to retain a strong retail offer in the Black Country centres whilst increasing the range of complementary uses such as leisure, offices and residential. This will enable the centres to make a key contribution to tackling climate change, fostering healthy communities, and creating pleasant, safe public spaces to increase social interaction and cohesion. The proposals in Tipton will grow the number of complementary uses in the town by delivering new

housing. It will help retain a diverse retail offer by consolidating the number of retail units in the centre to better match demand. The interventions will help create new healthy homes, increase the attractiveness and safety of the town centre, and help increase community interaction and cohesion.



THE OPPORTUNITY

4. THE OPPORTUNITY

There are several key reasons why regeneration is required now, including:

- The town centre appears run-down and tired, and there has been limited investment in recent years.
- There is a pressing need for new housing in Tipton (and indeed across Sandwell) but the cost of remediating land and delivering regeneration on brownfield sites with a legacy of contamination can be prohibitive and private developers often struggle to deliver new housing without financial support.
- Housing in the local area provided by the private sector is expensive, so more affordable housing options are required: this need can be met through council housing, which guarantees fair rents and secure tenancies.
- Existing council housing on Union Street is mostly vacant. It is cost-effective to demolish and redevelop the sites, as refurbishment of the existing buildings would only extend their safe, habitable lives for a short period of time.
- The former Conservative Club, recently acquired by the council after several years as a vacant eyesore, offers a further opportunity to add regenerative momentum by developing new social housing in Tipton town centre.
- A high proportion (over 50% in January 2024) of retail units in the town are empty or appear so: the Co-operative foodstore closed in 2021 and, while it has now re-opened as Poundland, opportunities to buy fresh produce in the town are limited.
- The public realm throughout the town centre is poor quality and car-dominated and would benefit from tactical renewal and upgrading.
- Although Tipton generally has good parks and green spaces, there is a shortfall of quality neighbourhood green space around the town centre, which is dominated by hard surfaces.
- Tipton town centre is felt by some to be unsafe and unwelcoming at times.

THE PROJECT

5. THE PROJECT

Sandwell prepared and submitted an initial bid for Tipton Town Centre, to redevelop four sites along Union Street and Owen Street, to provide a minimum of 65 new affordable rented homes. In the 2023 Chancellor's Spring Budget statement it was announced that Sandwell had been awarded £20m. In the meantime, costs had risen considerably, it became clear that one of the four original sites (Owen Street) was no longer practical to deliver. The project was therefore reviewed, and a revised scheme was approved by Sandwell Council's Cabinet in Autumn 2023. This focused development on three of the original four sites but increased the size of two of these sites, enabling the original target for new homes to be met.

The council owned blocks of flats located on Union Street are in need of urgent redevelopment for new housing, as they are of low quality, obsolete in design, dilapidated and/or vacant. Surveys of these buildings have confirmed that they are beyond economic repair or renovation.

The project involves building a number of affordable, one and two bedroomed apartments across these three sites, to help tackle Sandwell's housing waiting list and provide much-needed social-rented homes in Tipton. These new homes will be built to high standards of construction and energy efficiency, which will help to revitalise the town centre

and set a new benchmark for the quality of affordable housing in the borough.

The project will also focus on securing wider public realm improvements throughout Tipton Town Centre. The scheme will aim to create a greener, safer, and attractive environment. The Council will also secure frontage improvements to properties along Owen Street; reduce vehicle speeds and invest in better crossings; upgrade infrastructure

and paving; improve lighting and greening throughout the centre.

The redevelopment proposals for each site will be unique. They will be designed to respond to the characteristics and technical constraints and opportunities of each site but will demonstrate common design themes and styling coherence. The council's architects have sketched initial design proposals for each site. These proposals would be summarised as below:



Site 1 - Union Street East

- **Site 1** is on the eastern side of Union Street. It is a four-storey 1950s block, with 12 flats that had become hard to let and are now all vacant, plus ground floor shops. These include the Post Office which will be relocated in the town centre.
- Sandwell Council recently acquired the lease on the Albion Street public car park behind this block from Tipton Shopping Centre. There is enough car parking elsewhere to serve the town centre, so the land will be used to enlarge the development site.
- The enlarged site will be developed with social-rented apartments built to a similar height as now. These will overlook Union Street and Albion Street, with parking and amenity space to the rear.



Site 2- Union Street West

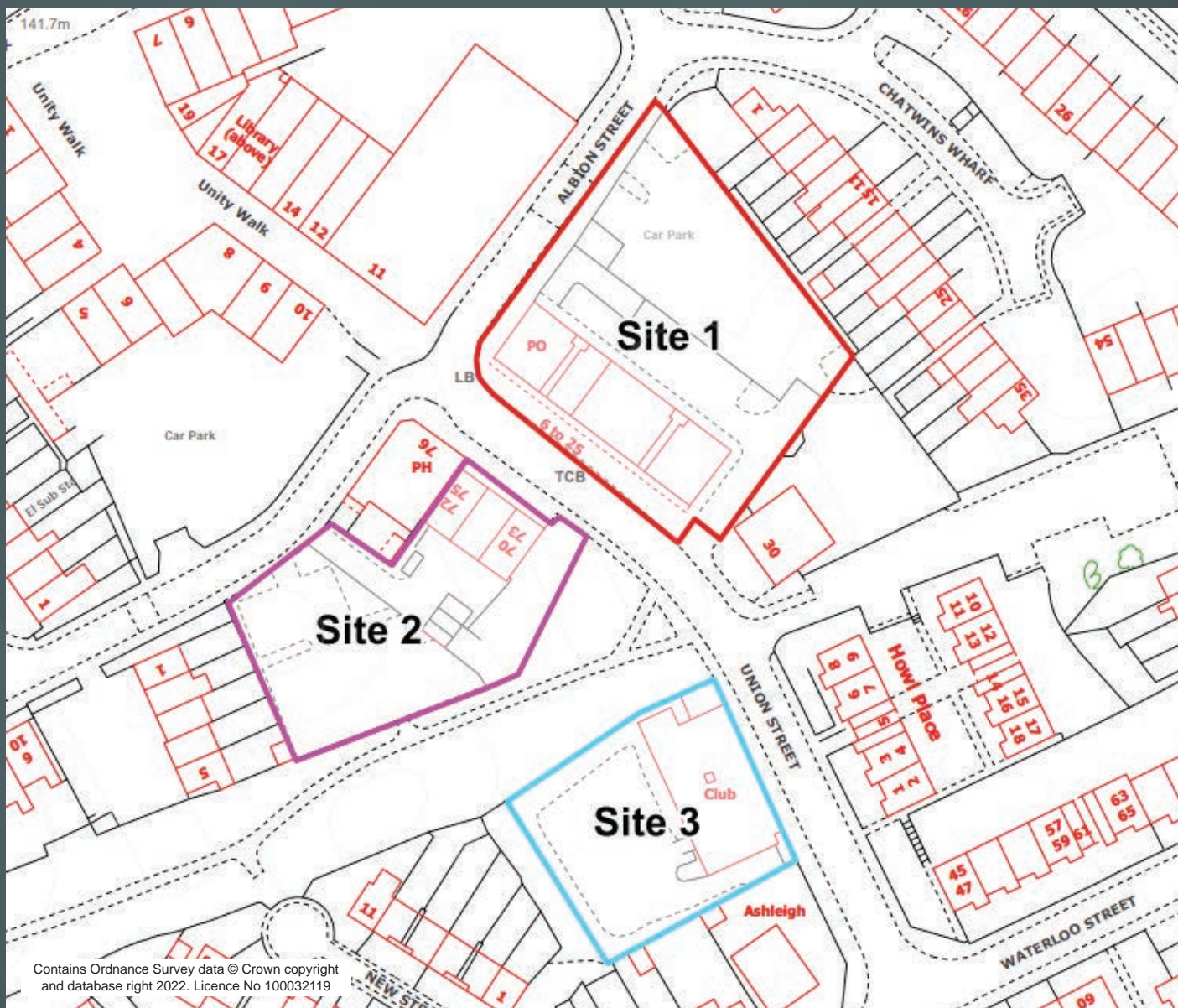
- **Site 2** is on the opposite side of Union Street and is a three-storey block of three maisonettes, with three shops at ground level, one of which has been vacant for some time.
- This is a very small site and hard to develop on its own, so the frontage is being extended into the end of the former canal line.
- The largely disused council car park at the rear, accessed off New Cross Street, will also be included as part of the development site.
- This will also be developed to a height of three/four storeys, and will overlook Union Street, New Cross Street and the canal walkway, bringing additional security to that green space.



Site 3- Conservative Club

- **Site 3** is the former Conservative Club, beyond the canal walkway, which the council recently purchased.
- The building is vacant, has been disused for some time, and is in a poor condition after a number of break-ins. A full structural and condition survey will be carried out of the club.
- The existing building is locally listed and lies within the Factory Locks Conservation Area. The council is exploring all options to bring the site back into beneficial use for housing and has engaged specialist heritage planning consultants to provide independent expert advice on the building's true heritage value.

THE PROJECT



Wider Public Realm Improvements

- This project also offers the opportunity to renew or upgrade vital public infrastructure and paved public spaces throughout Tipton Town Centre including along Owen Street.
- Create new social spaces in the town centre – building homes on Union Street will involve removing or thinning a number of trees. The council is committed to planting new trees to replace those that are lost. This also offers an opportunity to create a new landscape here, an attractive shared place where people can meet.
- Improving levels of urban green space – having trees and good quality green spaces close to where people live and work is an important factor in their health and well-being, as well as helping reduce the impacts of climate change.

- Making better connections – various proposals are being explored to improve connectivity, to calm traffic and make the town centre feel less car dominated and more welcoming for people.
- Celebrating the canal history – the former canal line was infilled in the 1960s and subsequently laid out as a walkway. The only relic of its former use is a lock chamber. We will work with the community to celebrate the town history through art.
- Zeppelin Memorial – we will be working with the community to co-create a community led public art project to commemorate 14 local people who lost their lives in a Zeppelin bombing raid in 1916.
- Improving the green walkway along the former canal line that runs between Union Street and Elliott's Road – this area would benefit from improvement to create a safer and more usable walkway and amenity space near the town centre.



OUTCOMES

6. OUTCOMES

The regeneration proposal will secure the following outcomes for the town centre:

- Replace low-quality, under-used, residential and retail units with a minimum of 65 high-quality, low-energy, affordable, socially rented, council apartments across three sites.
- Construct new homes in a sustainable location close to Tipton rail station, within reach of the Wednesbury to Dudley Midland Metro extension, and able to support the businesses in Tipton town centre.
- Facelift retail properties along Owen Street, to help improve the town's image from the main road.
- Invest in the public realm to upgrade assets, improve safety for pedestrians and enhance the town's image.
- Consolidate the number of shops, in line with planning policy, to help manage vacancies and better reflect demand for retail space.
- Remodel the canal walkway, with new tree planting, outdoor play provision and enhanced biodiversity.
- Develop and fund community public art initiatives along the canal walkway, to celebrate and commemorate Tipton's rich but untold heritage.
- Secure reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour for a more welcoming and safer-feeling town centre.
- Aim to increase land values in the town which will support further opportunities to deliver regeneration.

The outcomes will help meet the following Ambitions from the Sandwell Vision 2030:



Ambition 7 – “We now have many new homes to meet a full range of housing needs in attractive neighbourhoods and close to key transport routes”



Ambition 8 – “Our distinctive towns and neighbourhoods are successful centres of community life, leisure and entertainment where people increasingly choose to bring up their families”

ENGAGEMENT

7. ENGAGEMENT

The current Levelling Up proposals for Tipton build on the engagement with local residents and organisations undertaken to support the preparation of the Tipton Area Action Plan, prior to the adoption of that plan in 2008. The Action Plan vision envisaged Tipton being enhanced by new, high-quality, residential neighbourhoods, close to local services and public transport, principally through redevelopment of older, poor-quality industrial sites, ensuring new residential developments incorporate sustainable development principles, including affordable housing.

More recently, the council has engaged with tenants in the flats and maisonettes in Union Street that are to be redeveloped and has enabled people to relocate to other properties within the council's own housing stock. The council also began the process of speaking to affected businesses and shops on the ground floors of the two affected blocks. The purpose of this was to understand the aspirations of each business and, where necessary, to help them find alternative premises from which to trade, either in Tipton or in council shops elsewhere in Sandwell.

A wider process of community consultation took place in January – February 2024 to enable the council to engage with residents, local businesses, and other interested parties about its plans, also to seek people's input into influencing the way the public realm proposals will develop. This generated considerable local interest and included below is a consultation summary and a series of “you said; we replied” commitments.



CONSULTATION

8. CONSULTATION *“you said; we replied”.*

Although a good number of positive comments, ideas and suggestions were received, it is fair to say that a number were critical, negative, or pessimistic in tone – though most of these were not about the proposals we are putting forward, but other related town centre issues.

In part at least, this reflects the frustration of local people in having not previously had the chance to comment upon or contribute to the Levelling Up Fund proposals due to restrictive timescales associated with the funding announcement; it also reflects a wider view that Tipton has been left behind over many years, with the Council's regenerative activities being focused elsewhere within the borough.

Crucially, there were in fact very few negative or critical views expressed about the substance of our LUF proposals, and the intention to create new, affordable, socially rented low-energy housing in Tipton town centre was widely supported, though some had concerns about how the new properties would be allocated.

Summarising the main concerns beyond the immediate scheme, people wanted reassurance that the town centre's retail and commercial role would be protected and supported, to arrest the town's continued decline; there was also a wider group of concerns around

highway infrastructure; public transport connectivity; parking cost and availability; and community safety / security. Also, the imminent closure of the library which people felt had been forced upon them and which some objected to.



You said; we replied.

- **Residents feel that the town centre is run down, outdated and in need of improvement.** The aim of the scheme is to deliver high-quality affordable apartments and wider public realm improvements to the town centre, to create a safer and attractive centre.
- **Residents wanted to see more retail in the town centre.** The Regeneration Fund bid includes challenging targets for house completions. These targets will not be met if the council builds shops in the new development. Also, rents for the new shops would need to reflect the build costs of these units and so would be much higher than the rents currently paid by businesses in Union Street, where rents reflect the age and condition of the shops. The scheme aims to promote high-quality affordable town centre that will support a condensed but higher quality retail offer.
- **Residents want to see space for a traditional market in the town.** The Council will work with the owners of Tipton Shopping Centre, to identify and create opportunities to improve the outdoor market offer.
- **Residents want to see improved traffic and safe pedestrian movement around the centre.** The scheme will prioritise traffic calming measures and pedestrian safety measures in the town centre.
- **Residents raised concerns around safety and fear of crime.** The new apartment blocks will be designed in a way to overlook the canal walkway and enhance safety and security around Union Street. The scheme aims to improve the public realm with upgraded lighting throughout the town centre and infrastructure improvements to improve safety e.g., removing some overgrown vegetation.
- **Residents want a safer, tidier and attractive town centre.** The scheme will aim to create a greener, safer and attractive environment and town centre. The Council will also secure frontage improvements to properties along Owen Street; reduce vehicle speeds and invest in better crossings; upgrade infrastructure and paving; improve lighting and enhance greening throughout the centre.
- **Residents stated that the current provision for public transport (bus routes) to and from the town centre are inadequate.** The scheme will prioritise improved bus stops in the centre. The Council has requested the main bus operator to reinstate the through bus service between Dudley and Wednesbury, which was diverted from Owen Street due to delays at the level crossing but was never reinstated after the underpass was built in 2010.
- **Residents wanted to see improvements around the canal footpath/walkway to be safer and more accessible.** The Council will thin and manage trees and undergrowth along the whole of the walkway, as far as Elliott's Road and carry out further tree planting and improvements.

You said; we replied.

- **Residents want more greenery and trees in the town centre.** The scheme will look to deliver urban greening around the centre with trees and planting to create a greener and attractive environment.
- **Residents want to see improvements to Owen Street.** The scheme will prioritise improvements to Owen Street shop frontages and upgrade the paving.
- **Residents want to see provisions for children's play area.** The scheme will explore provisions for children's play facilities.
- **Residents want to see the town history celebrated.** The council are working with and supporting the local community group in exploring the planning and design of commemorative trees/memorial in the town centre.
- **Residents want a better cycling and walking experience.** The scheme will prioritise traffic calming measures and pedestrian safety measures in the town centre. The scheme will also secure lighting upgrades, refreshed road markings and the installation and refurbishment of benches, guard rails, poles.
- **Residents want high quality affordable homes in the town centre.** The scheme is designed to provide high-quality social-rented council-owned apartments.
- **Residents raised queries relating to the allocation of the new residential units.** All homes will be allocated to Sandwell residents on the housing waiting list.
- **Residents did not want the Tipton Library to be relocated from the precinct.** SMBC will be relocating Tipton Library from its current location in Unity Walk back to the Carnegie Building where it was previously based. Leasing the current building is expensive. Relocating the library back to its historic location at the Carnegie Building enables the council to protect a key frontline service at a time of great pressure on its finances, while also providing an excellent community use for this Grade II-listed building which is a key heritage landmark in Tipton.

"Be nice to see more planting and trees and more benches for sitting down and perhaps a play area for children."

"It looks run down and dead, it's not somewhere I go unless I have to."

"A definite improvement on the flats above the shops and seems more open spaces and walking areas. The facades of the buildings are a great improvement."

It's good to get more housing that's means more people that will shop local fingers crossed it more shops will be encouraged to open up."

"Terrible, run down, most shops closed."

We need shops and a public transport."



