

Public
Key Decision – No

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Ramsey Great Whyte Regeneration

Meeting/Date: Cabinet – 16th December 2025

Executive Portfolio: Executive Councillor for Economy, Regeneration & Housing

Report by: Regeneration & Housing Delivery Manager

Ward(s) affected: ☐ All

Executive Summary:

This report updates Cabinet on progress towards delivering the Ramsey Great Whyte town centre improvement scheme. It focuses on three core areas: 1) improvements to the Mews Close car park; 2) the development of 'shop in a box' semi-permanent units to enhance retail choice and the town market; and 3) enhancements to the public realm, with particular emphasis on the pedestrian environment.

A brief update is also provided on the delivery of a separate project in Ramsey town centre, focused on improving the Rivermill location through the provision of a new accessible path to the canal, alongside the reinstatement of original cast-iron handrails and improved surfaces that reuse block paving previously in situ at St Neots Market Square.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet is asked to:

- Note the contents of the report and the proposed approach to delivering improvements to Ramsey town centre,

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update on activity to date and the next stages of project development and delivery.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1. The Ramsey Great Whyte project aims to revitalise Ramsey's high street by strengthening the town's unique character, celebrating its heritage as the 'Gateway to the Fens', and enhancing public spaces through improvements such as pedestrianisation and the introduction of new retail facilities.

- 2.2. The project builds on previous investment by HDC and partners. This includes the development of the new Civic Centre within the Great Whyte area itself, Digital Information screens, launched in the Summer, to promote local businesses, as well as provide information on the town's heritage and culture. We have also provided funding to deliver community events and activities to Ramsey Town Council, and community organisations, with several activities for residents scheduled for Christmas this year.
- 2.3. This initiative continues HDC's approach to investing resources locally and aligns with the town's vision of becoming a prosperous market town with balanced growth, improved connectivity, and opportunities for residents and the wider community. Key benefits include economic uplift, better pedestrian safety, and more retail and service choice through the 'shop in a box' initiative.
- 2.4. HDC has worked closely with Ramsey Town Council to develop project proposals, which include the potential pedestrianisation of a small part of the Great Whyte. This may result in the loss of a small number of on-street parking spaces, necessitating measures to mitigate any potential impact.
- 2.5. It is important to emphasise that such changes are currently the suggested approach only and are subject to testing and approval by the Highways Authority. It is equally important to state that disabled parking is retained and in fact improved, regardless of the final approach to general on street parking.
- 2.6. In relation to off-street car parking, HDC owns and manages the Mews Close car park. HDC has developed proposals to improve this car park. It will be resurfaced and relined with additional parking bays created through a more efficient layout.
- 2.7. The Council also owns an adjacent undeveloped space, with potential for small-scale development. Ramsey Town Council (TC), a key project partner, has expressed interest in converting the undeveloped space into an additional car parking facility. This could mitigate on-street parking changes, improve local communications, and promote community empowerment. HDC is working with Ramsey Town Council to explore this and other options for the site. Any changes to the status and use of this site, however, would be subject to an options assessment, an appraisal and a decision making process independent of the Great Whyte project.

3. PROJECT CONTEXT

- 3.1. The Ramsey Great Whyte project delivers multiple benefits:
 - **Economic and Social Uplift:** By potentially pedestrianising a limited part of the Great Whyte and introducing new retail units in the form of 'Shop in a Box', the scheme creates safer, more inviting spaces for markets, events, retail and community gatherings, encouraging local trade and

tourism. This supports Ramsey's vision of a "prosperous market town" with pride in its rural Fens heritage.

- **Heritage Preservation:** Interventions celebrate the town's history, such as referencing the River and Fens landscape, fostering community pride and attracting visitors.
 - **Improved Connectivity and Accessibility:** Enhanced pedestrian walkways, cycle facilities, and public transport links will benefit young people, residents, and the wider community, promoting sustainable travel.
 - **Mitigation of Impacts:** Car park upgrades, and potential new spaces address the loss of on-street parking due to pedestrianisation, ensuring continued access for shoppers and businesses.
 - **Local Empowerment:** Partnering with Ramsey TC empowers the community to manage local assets, improving communications and aligning with devolution principles.
- 3.2. This project primarily focuses on enhancing the core Great Whyte area of the town centre. The project seeks to achieve this through improvements to the public realm, better landscaping, and pedestrian-friendly designs. As detailed in the 'Look and Feel Design Research Report' (dated 11 March 2025), the scheme draws on historical sketches and maps to inform modern interventions, such as highlighting the river's legacy and improving public realms.
- 3.3. A complementary element is the refurbishment of the Mews Close car park. This will include resurfacing of the car park, (approximately 1,940.8 m² of tarmac), which is currently in a poor state of repair and relining.
- 3.4. HDC is also currently working with CPCA to investigate the potential for creating a mobility hub in Ramsey town centre. This may include, for example, improvements to public transport facilities, alongside other innovative measures such as a Car Club for residents and businesses. HDC is keen to ensure that all learning from the St Neots town centre improvements, including improvements to public transport facilities and disabled car parking provision are applied to this project.

4. PUBLIC CONSULTATION

- 4.1. The Project has developed a range of designs covering all the aforementioned areas. These were subject to an extensive engagement process with residents, businesses, and Town Council members during autumn last year. Over 200 people attended project exhibitions, with more than 300 responses submitted via an online consultation
- 4.2. These responses have informed further development of the project proposals, particularly in relation to accessibility improvements, car parking, and measures to mitigate any loss or reduction in on-street parking availability.

- 4.3. HDC has been unable to publish a full response to the consultation to date, to allow the Highways Authority sufficient time to fully test and evaluate the proposed changes and improvements to the Great Whyte. Once this stage of the design and consultation process is complete, we will share updated proposals and designs with residents, businesses, and Town Council representatives, accompanied by a 'you said, we did' explanatory note. This information will be circulated early next year.

5. SHORT TERM OFF-STREET CAR PARKING IMPROVEMENTS

- 5.1. HDC will be proceeding with works in the Mews Close Car Park for the purpose of improving the facility. This will include resurfacing and relining parking bays. The improvements to be made include additional disabled parking bays. Several additional standard car parking bays will also be created to improve the efficiency of the car park layout.
- 5.2. Although several options were reviewed to improve the car park layout, the decision was ultimately made to retain the existing layout while optimising underutilised spaces for greater efficiency.
- 5.3. The resurfacing works are expected to be carried out and completed during January and February to minimise disruption to the town centre. Furthermore, the works will be phased so that half of the car park remains available for use throughout the duration.

6. DESIGN DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY

- 6.1. This scheme is being delivered in partnership with the Highways Authority, Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC). CCC officers have worked closely with HDC project staff on the scheme designs and delivery arrangements since the project's inception in 2023.
- 6.2. The original project concept included a much larger 'Market Produce Hub' structure in the Great Whyte area. CCC engineers collaborated with HDC to assess the deliverability of this concept, given its proposed location above the river culvert. Following this assessment, both HDC and CCC concluded that the concept was not feasible due to weight restrictions and the complexities of undertaking excavations directly above the culvert.
- 6.3. HDC therefore revised the project approach, focusing instead on developing a number of smaller semi-permanent structures within an improved pedestrian environment. This revised strategy delivers the original project objectives to enhance the attractiveness of Ramsey town centre while maximising deliverability.
- 6.4. As noted, these designs were consulted upon during autumn 2024. Since this point, project designers have engaged in a pre-application process with planners to refine the designs, incorporating consultation feedback and planners' views. In parallel with the highway approval process, a planning application will also be required.

- 6.5. To formalise HDC's partnership with CCC, HDC submitted a Privately Financed Highways Initiative (PFHI) application to CCC in June 2025. The PFHI process provides a structured mechanism for securing CCC input on design and obtaining the necessary approvals for works and improvements in the public highway.
- 6.6. The PFHI process is managed on a strict first-come, first-served basis, with schemes developed in order of submission. As of November, collaborative work between HDC and CCC has now formally commenced.
- 6.7. In the interim, HDC has been unable to submit a planning application for the scheme or publish a full response to the public consultation, owing to these critical highway dependencies.
- 6.8. While the delay in finalising the project designs has inevitably extended the overall timetable, work is now progressing at a pace. HDC is targeting the commencement of works during summer 2026, subject to securing the necessary highways and planning approvals, including completion of relevant statutory consultation processes.
- 6.9. HDC project staff will engage with the local community, including Ramsey Town Council, throughout this period to keep them updated and informed of progress. This will include regular updates to the Town Council and HDC ward members, alongside a dedicated newsletter to be produced ahead of the final scheme designs and the commencement of works.

7. PROJECT TIMELINE – INITIATION TO DELIVERY

- 7.1. The following table summarises project activities to the current point and anticipated target dates for completion, subject to planning and statutory consultation and approvals.

Ref:	Milestones / key activities	Date
1.	Ramsey Visioning document approved by HDC	November 2022
2.	Evidence base preparation - Ramsey car parking study produced, informed by survey data.	August 2023
3.	Ramsey Great Whyte public realm improvement project initiated, utilising CPCA Public Realm grant funding, allocated as part of Market Town's programme.	January 2024
4.	Stage 1 (preparation and briefing) undertaken stage and 2 concept design commissioned	January 2024
5.	Engineering assessment undertaken in liaison with Cambridgeshire County Council regarding river culvert and potential impact of the project (as based on original visioning concept) undertaken.	February to April 2024
6.	LGF grant funding awarded by CPCA (formerly Market Produce Hub), approved by CPCA and entered into by HDC	March 2024
7.	Stage 2 concept reports comprising outline designs and proposals completed	April 2024

8.	Ramsey retail support project initiated as a linked and complimentary project, funded by UKSPF. Ten retail businesses provided with support and training.	June 2024 to January 2025
9.	Stage 3 (spatial co-ordination) to Stage 6 (handover and closure) commissioned, as part of new contract procurement process	June 2024
10.	Stage 3 concept and spatial design proposals developed in detail in advance of consultation	July to September 2024
11.	Public engagement and consultation held for 6 weeks comprising in person exhibitions and online surveys. Over 300 responses were provided.	September to October 2024
12.	Planning pre-application consultation and discussion.	December 2024
13.	Detailed design work and scheme alterations to consider public and planning feedback undertaken. Designs submitted to Cambridgeshire County Council Highways for consideration.	March 2025
14.	Privately Financed Highways initiative application submitted to Cambridgeshire County Council. Purpose of application is to enable statutory consultation and required highway approval, a dependency to the submission of a planning application.	June 2025
15.	Project effectively paused until highways process commences in December 2025. Delay is due to schemes being processed in order of submission	July to November 2025
16.	Stage 3 spatial report completed	February 2026
17.	Stage 4 technical design completed	April 2026
18.	Planning and highways statutory consultation and approvals process completed.	February to June 2026
19.	Stage 5, (manufacturing and construction) undertaken and completed.	July to October 2026
20.	Stage 6, (handover and project closure)	November 2026
21.	Scheme components are in full use.	November 2026

8. RIVERMILL IMPROVEMENTS

- 8.1. Whilst not part of the Ramsey Great Whyte project, it should be noted that HDC is also working with Ramsey Town Council to deliver improvements to Ramsey Lode.
- 8.2. Ramsey Lode is located directly on the western edge of Ramsey's town centre at the edge of the Great Whyte. It is part of the 19th-century Fen drainage network, designed to manage flooding in the low-lying peatlands. This location is often referred to as the "Rivermill" due to the adjacent River

Mill (a Grade II-listed 18th-century tidal mill structure on the riverbank, used for grinding corn until the early 20th century). The canal endpoint forms a scenic, narrow waterway inlet that effectively "meets" the town at the historic core, blending urban and rural elements.

- 8.3. HDC is providing funding via the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to develop an accessible path from the main street to the Canal. HDC and Ramsey Town Council will also be reinstating the original cast iron handrails for the stepped access alongside other environmental improvements which will include 150 sqm of new block paving.
- 8.4. This project is a prime example of a sustainable approach to improvement works of this kind. Over 100 sqm of the blocks to be used are being recycled from the surface of the former St Neots Market Square. HDC is liaising with CCC on providing these blocks to the appointed contractor. The works schedule is currently to be confirmed; however, all works will be completed before March 2026.

7. FINANCE UPDATE

Funding source	Grant secured	Spend to date	Balance
3. Ramsey			
Local Growth Fund	£1,153,525	£0	£1,153,525
CPCA Accelerated Funding (legacy)	£295,000	£58,652	£236,347
Funding totals	£1,609,360	£185,821	£1,423,539

10. KEY RISKS

BUDGET MANAGEMENT RISK

- 10.1. This project has two primary funds sources, CPCA Accelerated Funding (AF) and Local Growth Fund (LGF). The CPCA AF allocation will be spent within the current financial year.
- 10.2. Most of the funding is via LGF. Whilst these funds were originally allocated to the current 2025/26 financial year, a change request has been submitted to CPCA to extend use of these funds into 2026/27. Whilst this is not yet confirmed, we do not consider this to be a critical risk.

11. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES, AND/OR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

- 11.1. The delivery of the Ramsey Great Whyte project and the proposed improvements to the Rivermill location are aligned with the principles and key objectives of the HDC Corporate Plan, specifically it links to:
- Priority 2: Creating a better Huntingdonshire for future generations, through Forward Thinking Economic Growth

12. CONSULTATION

- 12.1. Within the reporting period, no informal or formal consultations were undertaken. However, it should be noted that the project proposals will be subject to further statutory consultation in highways and planning terms before the final project designs and approach are confirmed. HDC will also seek to ensure that members of the local community, including Ramsey Town Council, are fully informed during this process.

13.LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1. Project Staff will liaise with the Legal Services Manager as required to ensure appropriate legal oversight and advice if provided when relevant.

14.RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1. The Regeneration Project team is currently fully resourced in staffing and budget terms to deliver this project as set out.

15.EQUALITIES

- 15.1. The Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
- 15.2. Good planning and effective regeneration can improve environments and opportunities for communities experiencing disadvantage. Planning which does not engage with or consider the needs of local communities is unlikely to improve their life chances and may further entrench area-based disadvantage.

16.ENVIRONMENTAL

- 16.1. The Council has a duty to deliver sustainable place making. In December 2021, the Council adopted a core set of environmental principles. In October 2022, the Council passed a Cost of Living and Climate Change motion that recognises that the current cost of living, and climate crises require joint attention to support the wellbeing of residents and businesses. In February 2023 Council formally recognised the Climate Crisis and Ecological Emergency, adopted the Council's Climate Strategy underlining the organisations commitment to:
- setting a positive example through its actions to be a net carbon zero Council by 2040
 - an enabler supporting action within our communities and across our partners.
 - an encourager to those that live, work, and visit Huntingdonshire to take climate action and reduce carbon emissions.
- 16.8. The Council has direct control of only a tiny proportion of all the carbon emissions within Huntingdonshire, but we can adopt a key role to influence the district, demonstrating good practice whilst setting policies and strategies to influence businesses and communities to tackle climate change whilst enabling sustainable living and growth. These principles are embedded within the MTP, of which the Ramsey Great Whyte project is a key element.

LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

Appendix 1: Look and Feel Report:

AOC 299 Ramsey Great Whyte Look and feel design research report 250311.pdf

BACKGROUND PAPERS

It should be noted that the reports listed below refer to the wider Market Town Programme of which Ramsey Great Whyte is a key component. This report is specific to this project.

- Report to Cabinet (FHSF (Future High Street Fund)) 13th February 2020 can be found [here](#)
- Report to Cabinet (FHSF) 28th July 2020 – EXEMPT.
- Report to Cabinet (Market Towns Accelerated Programme) 18th March 2020 can be found [here](#)
- Report to Cabinet (FHSF) 23rd. February 2021 can be found [here](#)
- Market Towns Programme Spring 2022 Update to Cabinet, 17 March 2022 can be found [here](#)
- Market Towns Programme Summer 2022 Update to Cabinet June 2022 can be found [here](#)
- Market Towns Programme Autumn 2022 Update to Cabinet September 2022 can be found [here](#)
- Market Towns Programme Winter 2022 Update to Cabinet December 2022 can be found [here](#)
- Market Towns Programme Spring 2023 Update to Cabinet March 2023 can be found [here](#)
- Market Towns Programme Autumn 2023 Update to Cabinet October 2023 can be found [here](#)
- Market Towns Programme Winter 2023 Update to Cabinet December 2023 can be found [here](#)
- Market Towns Programme Spring 2024 Update to Cabinet April 2024 can be found [here](#)
- Market Towns Programme Summer 2024 Update to Cabinet July 2024 can be found [here](#)
- Market Towns Programme Winter 2024 Update to Cabinet December 2024 can be found [here](#)

- Market Towns Programme Spring 2025 Update to Cabinet March 2025 can be found [here](#)

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