

### Wem “mini HSHAZ” Project

**Below is a draft report compiled by Shropshire Council officers that will be used as part of a submission of a Haz Lite application for Wem**

#### Background

From a positive meeting with Historic England, about a successor project to the Oswestry HSHAZ, the Wem “mini HSHAZ” was devised. It was felt that as Historic England had made a difference in Oswestry they would like to replicate a similar scheme in another market town in Shropshire. Wem was put forward as a candidate. The purpose of this document is to demonstrate why Wem is a good candidate for a legacy project and what can be achieved.

#### Indices of Deprivation

Overall Wem Town Centre, in 2019, was ranked 14,865 out of 32,844 LSOAs in England. This is amongst the 50% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country. However, within the employment deprivation Wem is 9,898 and in living environment it is 8,794 out of 32,844 LSOAs putting it in the top 40% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country.

Shropshire is classed as 2 in the Levelling Up Fund Index.

#### The Aim

To create a heritage led regeneration project in Wem which will have a transformative effect. It will repair/reinstate historic shop fronts that celebrates its unique characteristics. Through repurposing the White Horse and bringing it back into use we will create a gateway to the town that provides the visitor with a positive experience rather than seeing an empty derelict building.

The Wem Conservation Area encompasses the whole of the historic town centre, and a substantial number of the 84 listed buildings within it front onto the principal streets of High Street/ Aston Street and the southern end of New Street. 15% of Wem town centre outlets are vacant (13% of gross floor space). This is above average in comparison with comparable market towns in Shropshire. It is also higher than the vacancy rate nationally which stood at 13.9% in the third quarter of 2022 according to BRC (based on high street data only). Wem has traditionally had the highest vacancy rate of all Shropshire towns, but despite this the number has fallen by four since 2021. In 2022, just two new vacancies arose. In contrast, four previously vacant premises were filled. Of the 19 units which were vacant in 2020, 13 are still unoccupied. One previously vacant premise has been amalgamated with another unit, and another is being repurposed as a residential property.

Wem Town Hall, which is located on High Street, provides a vibrant arts venue, cinema and community space (see <http://www.wemtownhall.co.uk/>). Well used by residents, it also draws a significant number of visitors into the town and is run by Wem Town Hall Community Trust (see supporting document). The Town Hall and Jubilee Square also hosts a weekly market on Thursdays and a monthly farmers market on a Saturday.

#### The White Horse

The White Horse is grade II listed and is within the Wem Conservation Area. It has been closed for a number of years and has fallen into a very poor state of repair, which is causing a major blight to the amenity of the surrounding area. Shropshire Council taking emergency enforcement action to preserve it and make it safe however, it has recently been flipped via auction.

Shropshire Council have purchased the building due to its prominent location in the town centre, acting as the ‘gateway’ situated on a busy junction opposite the main route into the town from the south. It is envisaged through the regeneration of this building it can be a catalyst for further regeneration in the town, especially when carried out as the flagship for a “mini HSHAZ” in the town.

Initially SC will need to employ a Conservation Accredited Professional to carry out a Condition survey of the building. From this a RAG rated list of works can be set out.

Running in parallel to this a market assessment will be carried out to see gaps within the current market within the town, consultation will take place to see what the town council, members and the community would like to see. This will feed into an options appraisal. Although an SC building we would like to bring the community along with the journey to get this long term blight on the town back into use.

It is envisaged that the upper floors will be converted back into residential but options for the ground floor use will be looked at through the above.

### Morgan Library Building



The Morgan Library is Grade II listed. The list description notes:

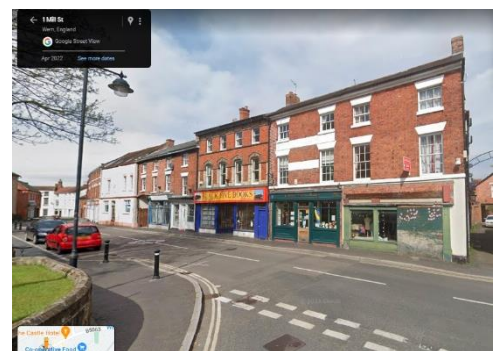
Circa 1900 library in Arts and Crafts style. Red brick with stone dressings. Tiled roof with stone coping to gable ends. Small single storey building. Asymmetrically gabled left and right. Left hand large canted stone bay window. Central porch with stone arch with relief carving depicting boys reading and inscription above. Brick chimney stacks with stone caps. Interior: has crown-part roof and inglenook fireplace.

The building is under the ownership of Shropshire Council but for the last few years has been empty. The redevelopment of this building has been a priority for the town council for a number of years and have voiced that to the council.

The opportunity to seek new uses for this building and bring back into use will regenerate this part of the town, the building sits at the end of the high street.

### Shop Front Scheme

Wem high street is still full of many of its original shop fronts however, many of these have inappropriate signage and have not been maintained. This creates a run down look within the town. The capital grant scheme would be available to businesses owners or tenants, with landowner permission, to repair/reinstate their historic shop fronts to bring back their special historical characteristics to create that unique high street.



Alongside this we would like to run a shop front (and repurposing?) scheme within the town centre. Many of the shops retain their historic shop fronts but later plastic hoardings, etc detract from these. Therefore, a series of capital grants will be available to businesses that will enable them to reinstate historic signage, repair, paint, etc their shop fronts. Will we do

this on the 60% intervention rate? With a cap of £12,000. This will cover additional items such as the reinstatement of traditional hanging signs.

A programme will also look at empty buildings. Although we may be unable to bring these buildings back into use as part of the scheme, this may be due to absentee landlords, etc we will carry out a programme of placing vinyls in the windows. This has worked well in other towns, such as Oswestry and Shrewsbury, where it looks as if the building is occupied as the eye sees something in the window rather than an empty

shop. Information on the vinyls can be information about the history of the town, the building, or even branding for the town. Text can be written by volunteers with editorial decisions by the Project Manager.

### Public Realm

If funding is available a street lighting project would benefit the town. Replacing outdated and tired lighting with heritage lighting with LED units will provide a better view of the town at night and bring a cohesion to the town which celebrates its heritage.

The Place Plan has identified that the people of Wem would like to see a one-way system in the town centre to alleviate traffic issues. This project would investigate and consult on this issue and implement an ETRO should all parties agree that a one-way system is the best outcome for the town centre.

### Cultural Programme

Through the town council and the Market Hall cultural activity will take place alongside the project linked to the ethos and outcomes of the scheme. It will push activity outside of the hall and into the town itself. It will increase footfall and connect people with the history of the town in which they live, work, visit.

Initially a mini cultural audit will take place to look at current activity and highlight opportunities. From this a cultural programme will be developed that will provide opportunities for people to get involved in events, as participants and volunteers.

### Costings

Initial ideas around costing are as follows:

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Project Manager P/T	33,707.84	c. 37,000	c.40,000
7 shop fronts delivered	12,000	48,000	24,000
Vinyls for windows	5,000		
Improved heritage lighting	Draw up scheme: 3k	Order units: 30k	Installation: 10k
Movement and connectivity work	30k design work		
White Horse			
Morgan Library	c.30k surveys	c.£100,000 repairs	c.£100,000 repurposing
Cultural Programme			

### Match Funding :

The White Horse is owned by Shropshire Council and therefore there will be considerable match from this project from SC on this. We are in the early stages and reports will inform budgets as we carry these out.

Movement and Connectivity Work will be covered by Shropshire Council under their highways programme 40% of the business grant to shop fronts will be match from business owners

### Questions still around funding:

Work was carried out on costings for the repairs of the Morgan Library by Shropshire Council. Initially this was in the region of £100,000. However, this work was carried out in 2020 and will need to be checked that this is still correct. There are no costs for repurposing the building.

Can Historic England fund a Project Officer

Wem is home to an active cultural programme within its town hall. Mediaactive.org is a CIC that puts on a programme throughout the year. Working with them and the newly established Cultural Compact, led by Shropshire Council, a series of events linked to HAZ projects and increase in footfall within the town will be

created. Discussions have not taken place on this yet and therefore costs have not been reached. However, there may be match available through current outputs or applications to cultural pots.

Discussions have not taken place with Wem Town Council yet until there are assurances from Historic England that the scheme is positive and something they wish to pursue further to ensure that hopes are not raised. Should we receive those assurances Shropshire Council will enter into discussions and ascertain if the Town Council are able to use a proportion of their precepts as match for public realm improvements and vinyls in the windows.

### Outputs

- 2 flagships delivered
- 3 new accommodation units delivered
- 7 new/restored shop fronts
- 1 new lighting project within the town centre
- Consultation work on one-way system carried out
- Etro process carried out if required
- Cultural Programme delivered

### Outcomes

- People will feel an increase pride of place (baseline data collected at start of project and again at the end)
- Businesses confidence will grow (baseline data collected at start of project and again at the end)
- Decrease in vacancy rate? Or increased occupancy?
- People will see a change in their town

### Town Clerk's comment

A meeting was held with the Town Clerk on 21.11.23 and representatives of Shropshire Council to progress this draft application. It was agreed that at this meeting the focus should be more on shop signs than shop fronts as these are a smaller capital outlay for building owners and match funding but the impact can be as effective.

The Town Clerk also suggested under public realm works the inclusion of the creation of an outdoor informal entertainment space so better use can be made of the Jubilee Square.

The Town Council will be asked to consider an allocation of match funding to this project possibly to help fund a shop sign grant scheme the amount is yet to be decided but it is hoped that this detail will be provided prior to the 2024-25 Budget meeting in January 2024.

The Council officer who headed up the Oswestry project has had her contract extended beyond 31.3.24 and this will enable her to focus on the Wem application

**The Town Council is asked to support in principle becoming a partner in this project and consider an allocation in the 2024- 25 budget towards a match funding element this project.**