

Scrutiny Board:	Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board
Report Title	Levelling Up Partnership
Date of Meeting	Wednesday, 15 October 2025
Report Author	Rebecca Jenkins Levelling Up Partnership Programme Manager
Lead Officer	Rebecca Jenkins Levelling Up Partnership Programme Manager Tammy Stokes Service Director – Regeneration and Economy
Wards Affected	Wednesbury North Wednesbury South Friar Park
Identify exempt information and exemption category	N/a
Appendices (if any)	1. LUP Projects

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides a summary of the progress of the Levelling Up Partnership Programme and provides information around delivery, governance, achievements and impact, communications and engagement, and legacy.

2. Recommendation

That the Board considers and comments upon the information presented and determines whether it wishes to make any recommendations to the Executive.

3. Background and Context

Levelling Up Partnership (LUP) Context

- 3.1 In March 2023, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that Sandwell was one of 20 places to be invited to form a Levelling Up Partnership (LUP). LUPs were part of the previous Conservative Government's 'levelling up' agenda which included a number of grant funded programmes including

Towns Fund, Levelling Up Fund and Plan for Neighbourhoods. LUPs were designed as targeted interventions to identify practical, tangible actions to support priority places to 'level up' and to help government develop a more holistic understanding of place. The government's intention was to work closely with each of the selected places in partnership around levelling up challenges. Sandwell and Hull were the first of 20 areas selected to form a Levelling Up Partnership. LUPs have since been re-named as 'Community Regeneration Partnerships'. In Sandwell, the programme continues to be referred to as the Levelling Up Partnership as the name was already well-established.

- 3.2 The development of a LUP between Government and Sandwell was led by the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) (now Ministry for Housing and Local Communities MHCLG). An initial deep dive activity was conducted including place engagement, field work and developing priority actions.
- 3.3 This initial deep dive activity included joint exploration between DLUHC and Cabinet Members of the target geographical area for Sandwell's LUP taking into account a range of factors including the indicators used to select Sandwell as a priority location and major opportunities for capital spend to deliver against the levelling up missions.
- 3.4 In September 2023, details of Sandwell's LUP (£20.4m) were formally announced by Government. This followed a set of Cabinet approvals in September 2023 to establish governance arrangements, approve the target geography as Wednesbury, and to agree the set of projects as follows:
 - Friar Park Urban Village
 - Preparing the land at Friar Park Urban Village ready to build new homes
 - Wednesbury Community Safety Scheme
 - helping partners tackle crime and antisocial behaviour with new and improved CCTV, engaging with residents and businesses and making changes in green spaces to tackle nuisance bike activity
 - Wednesbury Town Centre Improvements
 - Making it greener with new trees and planting, and create a long-term vision through a masterplan to tackle derelict sites and keep the town thriving
 - Wednesbury Greenspaces Improvements
 - Improving green spaces at Hydes Road Playing Fields, Balls Hill Open Space, Wyntor Lane Open Space, Lakeside and Norbury Open Space
 - Friar Park Millennium Centre expansion
 - Expanding the Friar Park Millennium Centre to accommodate a wider range of services enabling people to improve skills and access better jobs.

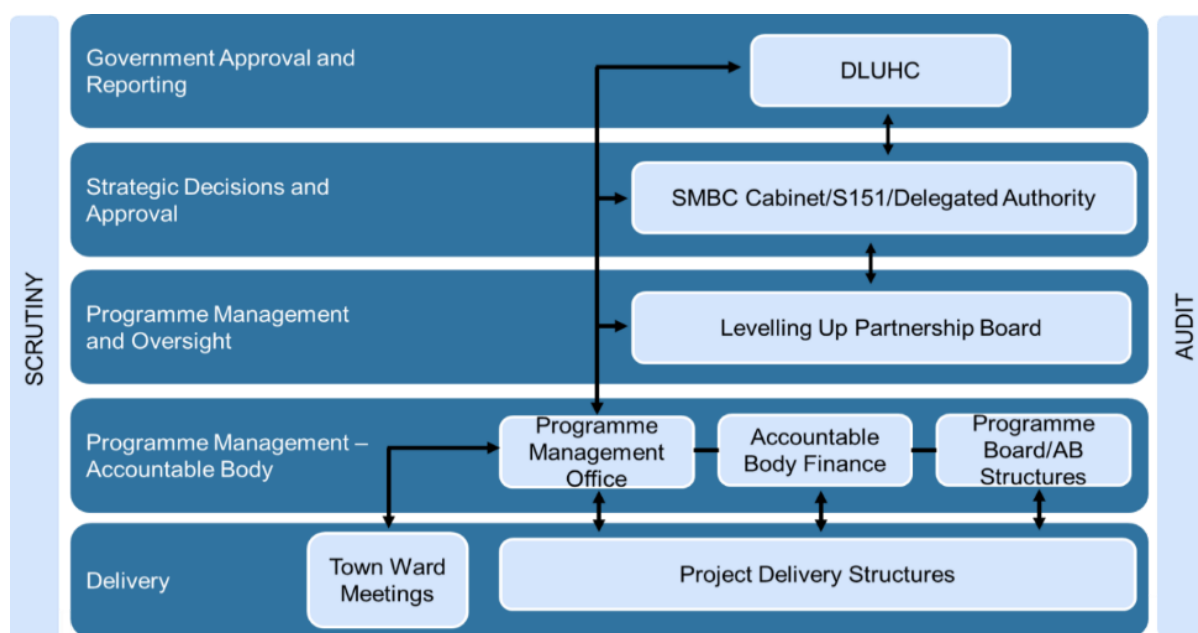
3.5 The interventions will enable:

- Around 630 new homes
- Site improvement to enable future housing/regeneration opportunities
- New and upgraded CCTV and environmental cameras
- Nuisance bike inhibitors
- Improvements to 4 green spaces and 10ha new public open space for sport and recreational use
- An extended community centre in Friar Park
- Improved public realm

3.6 An ambitious two-year delivery timetable was initially set out in the Chancellor's 2023 announcement. To acknowledge that project delivery would need to exceed the initial programme end date of March 2025, MHCLG gave agreement for the council to manage the capital grant flexibly with the council's overall capital programme.

Governance and Assurance

3.7 The governance model and scheme of delegation for the programme was agreed by Cabinet in September 2023. It is modelled on the Towns Fund governance model and is set out below:



3.8 The Wednesbury Levelling Up Partnership Board has been in place since December 2023 and was established to oversee the programme. It brings together Councillors, MPs, representatives of the voluntary sector, the business community, faith group representatives, and partners. The Board has met every other month with sub-group, working group meetings, and site visits as required.

Key Achievements to date and Impact

- 3.9 Major achievements to date in the programme include:
- Appointment of Development Partner for Friar Park Urban Village Project
 - Completion of capital spend within community safety project and impact in reducing crime
 - Completion and launch of main phase of public realm work
 - Completion of work in 3 green spaces
 - Start on site of Millennium Centre project

Delivery summary

- 3.10 Details of project delivery progress, risks and issue are reported to the WLUP Board at each meeting and included in reports to Cabinet. A summary of project progress is provided below.

Project	LUP Capital	Progress Summary	Next steps
Masterplan – Wednesbury Town Centre	(£250K revenue)	Masterplan agreed Summer 2024	Project evaluation and closure
Community Safety	£382K (£100K revenue)	Capital spend completed	Sustainability arrangements Project evaluation and closure
Public Realm	£4.35m	Main phase completed and launched June 2025	Completion of Building Improvement Scheme, Site Remediation and other schemes.
Friar Park Urban Village	£11.5m	Development Partner agreed July 2025	Submission for EA permits and remediation planning application
Millennium Centre	£2.09m	Start on site	Publicity on start on site
Greenspaces	£1.65m	Work in 3 green spaces completed and launched July 2025	Hydes Road Pavilion start on site

- 3.11 Over the period up to end August 2025, there are two projects with a significant level of risk, slippage and/or issues.

3.11.1 Friar Park Urban Village Land Remediation Project.

Delivery progress is broadly in line with agreed milestones but there is a significant level of risk relating to delivery including risks around delays / issues in obtaining a licence from the Environment Agency, planning challenges and risk of increased costs. This is also raised as a programme level risk.

3.11.2 Green spaces: Hydes Road

The project is highlighted due to the level of slippage on the Hydes Road project and budget risk. Slippage has occurred due to seasonal timing of ecological surveys, revisions to designs as a result of locations of mineshafts (impacting on planning permission submission date), and timescales for treatment of mineshafts. This has led to delays in commencing procurement for the pavilion building contractor. The current programme indicates a start on site date of October 2025 and completion in July 2026.

The project budget risk relates to the risk that contractor prices and/or unforeseen costs on the site exceed the available project budget. Project budget estimates are based on market values for construction. A contingency amount of 6% is included in the project budget and the WLUP Board have agreed the retention of any programme level underspend to provide further contingency. Once prices are available from contractors, a review of the project budget will be undertaken. If contractor prices for demolition and pavilion construction exceed the available budget and contingency sums, options will be developed for WLUP Board consideration.

- 3.12 In February 2023, the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board considered the masterplan for the Friar Park Urban Village project as pre-decision scrutiny. This pre-dated the LUP programme. An update on the scrutiny recommendations is provided below:

3.12.1 That the use of a Local Lettings Policy be explored

Determination of a Local Lettings policy will be undertaken as nominations are secured and will be required to demonstrate that such provision will not undermine efforts to meet the wider housing needs of the Borough. This remains an item for further consideration in due course.

3.12.2 That regular air quality monitoring is undertaken as the development progresses and once it is complete

Before any works to remediate the site starts, planning permission and a permit from the Environment Agency will be required. The work will be subject to a Construction Environment Management Plan, which sets out details as to how issues such as dust, dirt, noise and other disturbing activities will be managed to limit the impacts on neighbours. This will include air quality monitoring. Failure to comply with the requirements of the plan can lead to enforcement action.

3.12.3 That different options to utilise appropriate vegetation to help address air pollution is considered for the site.

The appointed development partner included vegetation options to address air pollution and other ecological and environmental considerations in their tender submission. The developer is now developing firmer plans. These will be subject to planning permission and the permit requirements from the Environment Agency.

Impact, Evaluation and Learning

- 3.13 To monitor the impact of the LUP programme, a [monitoring and evaluation framework](#) is in place, which includes a set of activity indicators and outcome measures to track the success of individual projects and the programme overall. It outlines how progress will be assessed using both quantitative and qualitative data, across all projects of the LUP programme. The framework sets out expectations for regular reporting, stakeholder engagement, lessons learned, and post-project evaluation, ensuring accountability and continuous improvement throughout the delivery of the Wednesbury LUP.
- 3.14 An interim evaluation of the LUP community safety project was received by the WLUP Board in June 2025 drawing on mixed evaluation methods. This identified early indications of positive changes including a reduction in shoplifting in the town centre and a reduction in nuisance bike reports:

			
26 new or upgraded CCTV cameras	8 deployable cameras	11 locations with measures to prevent nuisance bikes	New radio scheme in Town Centre and business partnership

				
38% reduction in shoplifting 60% reduction in drug-related offences 59% reduction in public order offences	50% reduction in nuisance bike reports	Improved detection, deterrence, and real-time response to crime and ASB incidents	Improved intelligence sharing between businesses and enforcement teams	Improved reporting in town centre area

- 3.15 In Summer 2025, consultation and engagement took place to seek views on the public realm works completed to date. This indicated that residents widely recognise the improvements as making the town centre cleaner, greener and easier to use and satisfaction is generally positive. Wider town centre issues were raised including retail mix, anti-social behaviour, lack of facilities and these continue to shape residents' perceptions of the town centre.

Communications and Engagement

- 3.16 A programme level communication and engagement strategy was agreed by the WLUP Board in February 2024, and individual project communication and engagement plans received and updated as required. The WLUP Board have established a Communication and Engagement Sub-Group to provide regular input to communication and engagement activities across the programme.
- 3.17 Programme updates are provided to Wednesbury Elected Members through Ward Member participation in the WLUP Board, updates at each of the quarterly Wednesbury Members' meetings, circulation of key information and briefings, as required.
- 3.18 Some of the recent communication and engagement activity across the programme has included:
- [Video release of the Community Safety project including the launch of Business Scheme](#)
 - [Public Realm launch of main phase with planting in Ethelfleda Square with St Johns Primary School children](#)
 - [Announcement of development partner for Friar Park Urban Village Remediation](#)
 - [Consultation around completed public realm works](#)
- 3.19 Youth voice has been integral to key areas of the LUP, facilitated by the young people's representatives on the WLUP Board. This has included reviewing and disseminating communication information, input to selecting a name for the town centre square, driving the process to name the Hydes Road pavilion building and involving young people in consultation and communication activity.

Legacy

- 3.20 The LUP programme has reached many key delivery milestones and a number of projects are due to be completed by March 2026. Programme governance arrangements will start to transition into business as usual at this point.
- 3.21 In addition to their role overseeing the LUP programme, the WLUP Board have provided additional benefits to Wednesbury through bringing partners together to provide collective ownership and understanding of delivery challenges and shared resolution to any issues encountered. The Board have mapped community activities and assets, shaped communication and engagement approaches, extended reach into the community, assisted in identifying issues and harnessing a collective voice. Other strengths of the Board have been the inclusion of young people's voice throughout the programme through the active representation in the Board and participation of young people.
- 3.22 To recognise the value that the WLUP Board has brought as a place-based multi-agency space, consideration is being given to legacy arrangements for the Board beyond the life of the LUP programme. Current Board Members have expressed their desire to continue with partnership arrangements.

Options are being considered linked to the council's new neighbourhood working model and existing governance in place at town level. This will also consider interaction with the recently announced Pride In Place Programme

Pride In Place Programme

- 3.23 In late September 2025, the Pride In Place Strategy and Programme were announced. This is a newly announced initiative to empower local communities, particularly in more deprived areas, to take control of local regeneration, high streets, public spaces and community assets. It is part of a broader ambition to shift more power from central government to local neighbourhoods, give communities more say in how money is spent and what interventions are prioritised. Key goals include building stronger communities, creating thriving places, and empowering people to have more control over local decision-making.
- 3.24 The Pride In Place programme is long-term (10 years), with up to £5 billion planned over that period to support up to 250 places across Great Britain. There are two strands:
- 3.24.1 **Pride in Place Programme:** longer-term investment (up to £20 million per place over 10 years) in selected deprived neighbourhoods.
- 3.24.2 **Pride in Place Impact Fund:** a shorter-term capital fund providing £1.5 million over two years to selected places for visible, immediate works like improving high streets, public spaces etc.
- 3.25 Friar Park has been selected in the Pride in Place Programme. Initial guidance suggests a Neighbourhood Board will be required which includes residents, local organisations, elected representatives, and partners. These Boards will be required to co-produce regeneration/vision plans for their area, decide priorities locally, and oversee delivery (similar to the requirements of the Plan for Neighbourhoods Programme in Smethwick).
- 3.26 As a beneficiary area, Friar Park should be eligible for the c. £20 million investment over 10 years under the main Pride in Place Programme strand. No details have been released around the proposed boundary.
- 3.27 In addition, Sandwell is listed as one of the 95 places identified for the Pride in Place Impact Fund (PiPIF) as mentioned above this is a capital programme to be delivered over two years (2025/26 and 2026/27) with a value of circa £1.5m.
- 3.28 Further guidance is expected in due course.

4. Consultation

- 4.1 Consultation and engagement has been carried out as part of LUP project development and delivery. The communication and engagement sub-group of the WLUP Board has shaped details of this activity.
- 4.2 Recent consultation activity across the LUP programme has included consultation and engagement to identify perceptions of the impact of work in the Town Centre area.
- 4.3 Youth voice has been integral to key areas of the LUP, facilitated by the young people's representatives on the WLUP Board.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 The full LUP grant of £20.05m capital and £0.35m revenue has been received by the Council.
- 5.2 Agreement is in place with MHCLG (formerly DLUHC) for the council to manage the grant within the council's overall capital programme to acknowledge that spend would be required beyond the initial March 2025 grant deadline. The availability of capital funding to meet all of the LUP requirements was confirmed in the 2024/2025 capital programme outturn.
- 5.3 Financial performance of the programme continues to be monitored through the Council's capital programme and a financial report is provided to the Wednesbury Levelling Up Partnership Board at each of their meetings.
- 5.4 Across the LUP programme, actual spend to date at Quarter 1 was £3.9m capital and £306K revenue. All projects are forecasting spend within their budgets or with a small amount of underspend. With the endorsement of the WLUP Board, this is being held to provide additional risk contingency across the programme.

6. Legal and Governance Implications

- 6.1 The governance model and scheme of delegation for the LUP programme was agreed by Cabinet in September 2023. The Council is the lead delivery organisation for all LUP projects. Delivery of projects is overseen by the Wednesbury Levelling Up Partnership Board. An internal LUP Project Group is in place as a mechanism for ensuring the council is fulfilling its role as Accountable Body and for resolving issues. Spend is monitored through the Council's Corporate Asset Management Board.
- 6.2 Monthly monitoring conversations are in place with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Internal governance consists of a LUP Project Group and progress reporting to the council's Leadership Team. Cabinet requested to receive 6-monthly progress updates and four reports have been considered with the most recent report due in October 2025.

7. Risks

- 7.1 A programme level risk register and individual project risk registers are in place as part of risk management arrangements. Key risks are reported to the WLUP Board at each meeting and the full programme level risk register provided.
- 7.2 At programme level there is 1 red risk, 3 amber risks and 7 green risks. There is currently 1 programme level red risk relating to the delivery of the Friar Park Urban Village project as follows:

Risk Title and Description	Delivery of Friar Park Urban Village Project – Time and Cost Risk relates to delays in delivery of the project related to obtaining EA licenses and/or planning permissions and/or project cost increases
Controls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early engagement with EA has been undertaken and consultants (technical experts) procured to support the engagement process • Legal review of proposed approach has been undertaken • Full risk assessment conducted • Arrangements in place to manage capital spend beyond Mar 25 • Ongoing joint work with WMCA through Joint Venture Agreement • Revised cost estimates received • Capital appraisal review complete • Procurement of developer partner complete • Consultant in place to assist with sports pitch mitigation strategy • Escalation of matters concerning EA permit through MHCLG and positive direction of travel.
Risk expected to reduce	When EA permitting process concluded and planning permission granted.

8. **Equality and Diversity Implications (including the public sector equality duty)**

- 8.1 Through the project development process, consideration has been given to the impact on and improvements that can be made for residents with protected characteristics.
- 8.2 Equality Impact screenings and assessments have been conducted, as appropriate. No adverse impacts have been identified. Equality implications are included in reporting to the WLUP Board as part of any decisions.

9. **Other Relevant Implications**

- 9.1 **Corporate parenting** – The voice of the child is incorporated within the LUP governance arrangements through the inclusion of young people's representatives on the WLUP Board. Where consultation has been undertaken as part of the LUP Programme, young people's views and opinions have been sought.
- 9.2 **Social Value** – The LUP projects are being delivered in accordance with the council's Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules and will deliver social value in line with the council's requirements. Social Value achievements to date have included: works experience placement, improvements to fencing

and shelving at a community venue, a community clean up event, a career talk at a school, a contractor funding road closures for Christmas Light switch on, a contractor funding the movement of historic troughs (planters) from the Town Centre to Brunswick Park, and maintenance of planting. A sizeable social value contribution is expected from the Friar Park Urban Village project. Social value is included in reporting to the WLUP Board.

- 9.3 **Health and Wellbeing** – The underpinning objective of the LUP is to ‘level up’ and reduce inequalities. The LUP interventions focus on tackling health inequalities in a multi-faceted way and compliment public health programmes.
- 9.4 **Climate Change** - The LUP interventions include a range of improvements to the quality of green spaces and public spaces in Wednesbury, contributing to biodiversity. Proposals will also enable the delivery of a significant number of new homes and a range of construction work. Options for energy efficiency measures and reducing carbon through the construction process are being considered as part of the detailed design phase and procurement.
- 9.5 **Crime and Disorder Act 1998** – The early findings from the LUP community safety project are set out previously in this report

10. Background Documents

None – all in public domain

11. How does this deliver the Outcomes in the Council Plan?

- 11.1 The LUP supports the delivery of all Strategic Themes:
- Growing up in Sandwell
 - Living in Sandwell
 - Healthy in Sandwell
 - Thriving Economy in Sandwell
 - One Council One Team Approach.
- 11.2 The formation of a Levelling Up Partnership and delivery of the interventions within the LUP will contribute to all strategic themes of the council plan through improving the quality and safety of public and green spaces, expanding a community centre and preparing land for housebuilding. The delivery of the LUP requires cross-Council working including input from key enabling services including finance, legal and procurement

Appendix 1 – LUP Projects



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Wednesbury Town Centre – Making it greener with new trees and planting, and create a long-term vision through a masterplan to tackle derelict sites and keep the town thriving.



Friar Park Urban Village – Preparing the land at Friar Park Urban Village ready to build 630 new homes.



Community Safety – Helping partners tackle crime and antisocial behaviour with new and improved CCTV, engaging with residents and businesses to help tackle crime and anti-social behaviour and making changes in green spaces to discourage nuisance bike activity.



Greenspaces – Improving greenspaces at Hydes Road Playing Fields, Balls Hill Open Space, Wyntor Lane Open Space, Lakeside and Norbury Road Open Space.



Millennium Centre – Expanding the Friar Park Millennium Centre to accommodate a wider range of services enabling people to improve skills and access better jobs.



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