

**BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT OF:** Executive Director of Core services and  
Service Director for Regeneration and Culture

**TITLE:** Westgate Plaza and Smart Working

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	<b>18 May 2022</b>
<b>Cabinet Member Portfolio</b>	<b>Cabinet member for Core Services and Cabinet member for Regeneration and Culture</b>
<b>Key Decision</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Public or Private</b>	<b>Public</b>

**Purpose of report**

The purpose of this report is to inform members of improvements being made in Westgate Plaza and to seek approval for progressing the improvements identified in our Smart Working Programme.

**Council Plan priority**

Enabling Barnsley  
Growing Barnsley

**Recommendations**

That Cabinet:-

- a) Recognises that Westgate will become the main Town Centre office for the workforce;**
- b) Accept that to accommodate hybrid working the asset needs to be repurposed thus creating a modern working environment; and**
- c) Agrees that the Council spends the money outlined in this paper to improve the infrastructure of the asset.**

## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 In 2007, we moved into Westgate Plaza under a new lease agreement. The Corporate Asset Strategy 2017-2020 presented to Members identified the need to rationalise town centre accommodation. We bought Westgate Plaza from the Landlord for a sum of £18M and agreed to review the use of Gateway Plaza office space.
- 1.2 It has been agreed that Gateway Plaza will no longer be used by Council services as an office base, but that we will seek further rental income for the building as part of our wider commercial approach and the ambitions of the Growing Barnsley theme of the Barnsley 2030 strategy.
- 1.3 Since we occupied Westgate Plaza in 2007, we have spent a limited amount on the building for general lifecycle replacement of items including the refresh and refurbishment of office furniture, breakout spaces and carpets, as well as works to make the building inclusive and accessible.
- 1.4 This report is set against a backdrop of the ongoing and emerging national transformational policy change and best practices that began with the Government's 'Working without Walls' in 2004 and the subsequent 'Working Beyond Walls' in 2008.
- 1.5 As part of the 2022/23 budget setting process, on 24 February 2022, Full Council approved £5M from the council's capital programme to invest in the council's asset base.
- 1.6 The furniture in Westgate Plaza no longer meets our needs or our work styles. We have changed dramatically over the last 15 years. The rollout of digital, more agile technology such as laptops and Microsoft 365, and the adoption of paperless processes means people don't need to have the desks and equipment that they once needed.
- 1.7 In February 2022, Cabinet discussed 'Barnsley is our Office', a hybrid way of working that focuses on increasing our face-to-face contact and collaboration, rebuilding what has inevitably been lost in the culture of the organisation from people having to work from home for a long period of time. They agreed to a starting point to move forward from Monday 4 April 2022, where most staff and teams should work flexibly across Barnsley for three days a week (pro-rata for part-time staff).
- 1.8 The need to invest in Westgate Plaza was recognised and the pandemic has offered an opportunity to progress our Smart Working Programme with improvements to Level 1 and to begin the process of making improvements throughout the building. Level 1 at Westgate has undergone works to convert the previous floorplate arrangement to a collaboration hub, which offers a wide variety of drop-in workspaces to support for different types of working.

1.9 Our Barnsley is our office approach started from 4 April 2022, with a phased opening of levels 2 to 5. We're communicating regularly with managers and staff on this process.

## 2.0 Proposals

2.1 To facilitate our Barnsley is our office approach, work areas on levels 2 to 5 in Westgate Plaza need to be improved. We want the building space to be inclusive, accessible, modern, efficient, and effective with workspaces including project tables and quiet pods for confidential working, new carpet tiles and refreshed facilities in the kitchens and toilets.

2.2 It's proposed that this will be funded as part of the £5M allocated from the council's capital programme to invest in the council's asset base agreed by Full Council on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2022.

2.3 The table below provides an initial estimate of the key elements of the proposal:

Item	Expenditure
Workspaces (desks and booths)	£333k
Building facilities refresh (kitchens and toilets)	£200k
Floor coverings	£180k
Refresh of breakout spaces	£10k
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£723K</b>

2.4 Some electrical and soft furnishing works will also be required, although cost estimates for these have not yet been received.

2.5 In addition, the roof at Westgate will be replaced. This will involve removing the current membrane and been replaced with a higher specification to drive energy efficiency. Once this work has been completed solar panels will be installed to achieve optimal efficiency from the building , purchased through the Public Sector Decarbonisation scheme where the council has secured £5.6M.

## Benefits

2.6 This is a proposal that benefits our staff, our organisation, and the people who use our services. We can ensure our organisation maintains a substantial base in the Town Centre and allows us to connect more closely with our residents across the borough.

2.7 We have made use of the YPO office furniture framework to procure the new furniture at speed and for maximum value for money, with some additional discounts being negotiated as part of the process.

2.8 We have sourced local suppliers who can recycle and reuse the furniture removed from the building.

- 2.9 Further to the works outlined in 2.5, Energy-efficient LED lighting has been installed throughout the building which further supports a reduction in carbon emissions as part of our wider Zero-40 Strategy and Sustainable Energy Action Plan (SEAP).
- 2.10 A refreshed layout supports joint working between services, enhancing cohesion within the organisation and improving collaboration between colleagues, supporting the Barnsley is our office ethos.
- 2.11 The refreshed and repurposed spaces will be accessible and inclusive for all.
- 2.12 This approach provides better opportunity to generate income by letting high-quality surplus accommodation support our revenue budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy.
- 2.13 Associated works are also being progressed under the Localities Theme, with plans coming forward for further workspace improvements in our wider estate across Barnsley.

### **3. IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION**

#### **3.1 Financial and Risk**

The financial implications of the proposals have been discussed with representatives of the Service Director Finance (S151 Officer).

As highlighted in the introduction, the Council took occupation of Westgate Plaza in 2007 via a 25-year lease. A decision was subsequently made in 2018 to purchase the property from the then owner, which enabled the Council to benefit from annual cost savings on the lease due to the low interest rate environment at the time (in accordance with the agreed Treasury Management Strategy).

Over this period, while the building has been maintained, this has been to the minimum level required with no significant works being undertaken to date. It is therefore considered appropriate to invest in what is a significant council asset, bringing it up to date while also adhering to the requirements of relevant legislation e.g. The Equalities Act.

During 2019/20, and in line with our Digital First and Smart Working programmes, we took the decision to set aside £0.250M to undertake a proof-of-concept refurbishment programme on level 1 of Westgate Plaza. Although delayed by the COVID 19 pandemic, these works have now been completed, with level 1 being reimagined into a collaboration hub, offering a wide variety of drop-in workspaces to cater for different types of working.

As outlined in 2.2 the works will be funded from the £5M allocated from the council's capital programme to invest in the council's asset base agreed by Full Council on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2022.

Further to the works outlined in 2.3, to facilitate the installation of solar panels to the roof of Westgate to further improve the energy efficiency of the building, as well as future proofing the build to prevent damage from flooding etc, the roof covering will also be replaced and strengthened. It is estimated that this will cost in the region of £0.5M. These costs will be funded from the Council's planned maintenance budget.

Prompted by the pandemic, changes to workstyles, office use & other associated expenditure has enabled savings to be brought forwards to accelerate our wider plans. Initial proposed savings of £750k in 21/22 were realised, with future years savings being considered as part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

The table below provides a summary of the actual savings made against 21/22 budgets, the initial £750k plus additional savings of £65k, totalling £815k. The savings made range between 5%-20% of overall expenditure budgets shown below.

<b>Expenditure Type</b>	<b>Budget % Saving</b>	<b>Total Saving</b>
Conferences & Seminars	20%	<b>£147k</b>
Car Mileage	20%	<b>£159k</b>
Equipment, Furniture and Materials	10%	<b>£195k</b>
Office Expenses	5%	<b>£61k</b>
Stationary	20%	<b>£253k</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>£815k</b>

Full financial implications can be found in Appendix A attached to this report.

### **3.2 Legal**

None

### **3.3 Equality**

The Equality Impact Assessment identifies a range of actions and mitigations that are being undertaken within the overall programme, with the aim to create inclusive, accessible, modern workspaces.

### 3.4 Sustainability



There are no negative impacts, materials no longer required are being recycled and our new workstyles enable reductions in building and vehicle carbon emissions across our organisation.

### 3.5 Employee

There are many positive employee implications for our approach, including improved collaboration with colleagues and increased flexibility.

### 3.6 Communications

The Barnsley is our office approach is being supported by a comprehensive internal communications strategy with the aims of providing information and guidance for staff and supporting culture and behaviour change across the organisation.

Regular discussions are being held with the Trade Unions.

**4. CONSULTATION**

Colleagues and services across the Council have been consulted with, including Finance, Human Resources and Facilities Management

**5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

5.1 N/A

**6. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

6.1 It is felt that the recommended approach will provide the benefits that have been set out in this report.

**7. GLOSSARY**

N/A

**8. LIST OF APPENDICES**

Appendix A: Financial Implications

**9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

N/A

**10. REPORT SIGN OFF**

<b>Financial consultation &amp; sign off</b>	<i>Please see signed Appendix A which outlines the financial implications with required signature.</i>
<b>Legal consultation &amp; sign off</b>	No Legal Implications  <b>Jason Field</b> <b>11/04/22</b>

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**Post:** Service Director for Business Improvement, HR & Communications

**Date:** 18 May 2022