

Connected Places

Our vision for a better-connected city centre



Creating the **buzz**

“A high-quality public environment can have a significant impact on the economic life of urban centres and should be an essential part of any successful regeneration strategy. As towns increasingly compete with one another to attract investment, the presence of good parks, squares, gardens and other public spaces becomes a vital business and marketing tool: companies are attracted to locations that offer well-designed, well-managed public places and these in turn attract customers, employees and services. A pleasant and well-maintained environment increases the number of people visiting retail areas.” (2003, The Value of Public Spaces, Cabi Space)

With changing consumer habits, a thriving city centre is one that offers a wider experience than shopping. It has attractive cultural venues, restaurants and cafes, live events and streets. To create a dynamic 24-hour economy, a city centre needs to be a place where people chose to live, as well as visit.

The City of Wolverhampton Council is in dialogue with an increasing number of developers and investors who want to bring forward this type of offer. They all reinforce the need for a well-designed public realm in the city centre.

This Connected Places Strategy, outlines the vision, strategy and priorities for a people centred approach to improving Wolverhampton's city centre's streets and public spaces. Creating a public realm that is pleasant, cleaner and feels safer not only has a sound economic rationale, but also fosters civic pride and provides a range of social and the health benefits for local residents.

More broadly, the Connected Places Strategy will make significant contribution to the delivery of the City of Wolverhampton's 2030 vision by contributing to the creation of:

“A city centre we are all proud of, with outstanding, vibrant, connected public spaces encouraging healthier lifestyles through walking and cycling, and further boosting growth and investment”.



Who needs to be involved in Connected Places?

The regeneration of a city is a complex process, involving many actors. The Connected Places Strategy is supported by a substantial evidence base and a delivery programme that has been put together with the help and support of a wide range of private and public sector partners with a stake in the city.

The City of Wolverhampton Council has a key role in ensuring a coherent approach that results in a high-quality experience from arrival to departure for everyone who lives, works and visits the centre of the City of Wolverhampton.

“The city centre is undergoing massive change. All told, there is £1 billion pounds worth of investment on site of in the pipeline. This will transform the city centre experience for residents, visitors and office workers. We want the city centre to become a destination of choice for those who want a day out to enjoy Wolverhampton’s growing and distinct cultural, leisure, retail and hospitality offer. We want to create a buzz and vibrancy - the place to meet and greet business contacts, enjoy a drink and a meal before going to the theatre or a concert at the newly re-furbished Civic Halls. We also aspire to be a city of learning – and recognise the need for students to feel both inspired and safe as they walk between the University Campus, the City Centre Learning Quarter and the new Springfield Brewery Built Environment Campus and the bus and railway station.”

Cabinet Member for City Economy



Connected Places **objectives and themes**

There are seven key objectives that drive the Connected Places Strategy.

The City of Wolverhampton want a city centre that is:

- a celebration of our rich heritage and cultural assets, as well as enhancing it with more trees and shrubs on streets and open spaces
- enjoyable and fun to spend time in
- a better experience for pedestrians and cyclists
- accessible for all, by all forms of transport
- Safe, and feels safe, at all times
- clean, tidy and well cared for
- embracing innovation through the intelligent use of digital and smart technologies

To deliver these objectives the Connected Places delivery framework consists of seven themes:

- Identity
- Events
- Way-finding
- Car-parking
- Safety
- Management and maintenance
- Digital and smart

These themes will be delivered through a range of mechanisms, including:

- **Major development schemes** e.g. Interchange, Westside, City Learning Quarter, Canalside Quarter, Molineux Quarter
- **Cross cutting projects rolled out across the whole city centre** e.g. the City of Wolverhampton Council's approach to way finding, the "leaves and light" initiatives
- **Campaigns and partnerships** e.g. a partnership approach to events
- **The planning process and guidance** e.g. new developments being brought forward by independent investors, developers, businesses and individuals
- **Maintenance and management regimes** e.g. the city centre public realm design guide

The remainder of this strategy sets out the details of each theme, the assets and opportunities that can be built upon, as well what the City of Wolverhampton Council and its partners plan to do next.

The Connect Places Framework for Implementation

Connected Places Vision

“to create a city centre we are all proud of, with outstanding, vibrant, connected public spaces encouraging healthier lifestyles through walking and cycling, and further boosting growth and investment.”

Objectives

The City of Wolverhampton wants a city centre that is:

- A celebration of our heritage and culture
- Enjoyable and fun
- A better experience for pedestrians and cyclists
- Safe and accessible for all
- Clean and tidy and
- Embracing innovation

Spatial Plan- Clear Hierarchy of Streets and Spaces

City Core

Key Connections

The Ring Road

City Centre Streets

Small Spaces

Cross Cutting Themes

Identity

Events

Wayfinding

Safety

Car Parking

Management and Maintenance

Digital technology

How we will deliver

- Major Development Schemes
- Cross cutting projects
- Campaigns and partnerships
- The planning process and guidance
- Maintenance and management regimes

Hierarchy of Streets



The Spatial Hierarchy is comprised of three district space elements. These are, in order of importance:

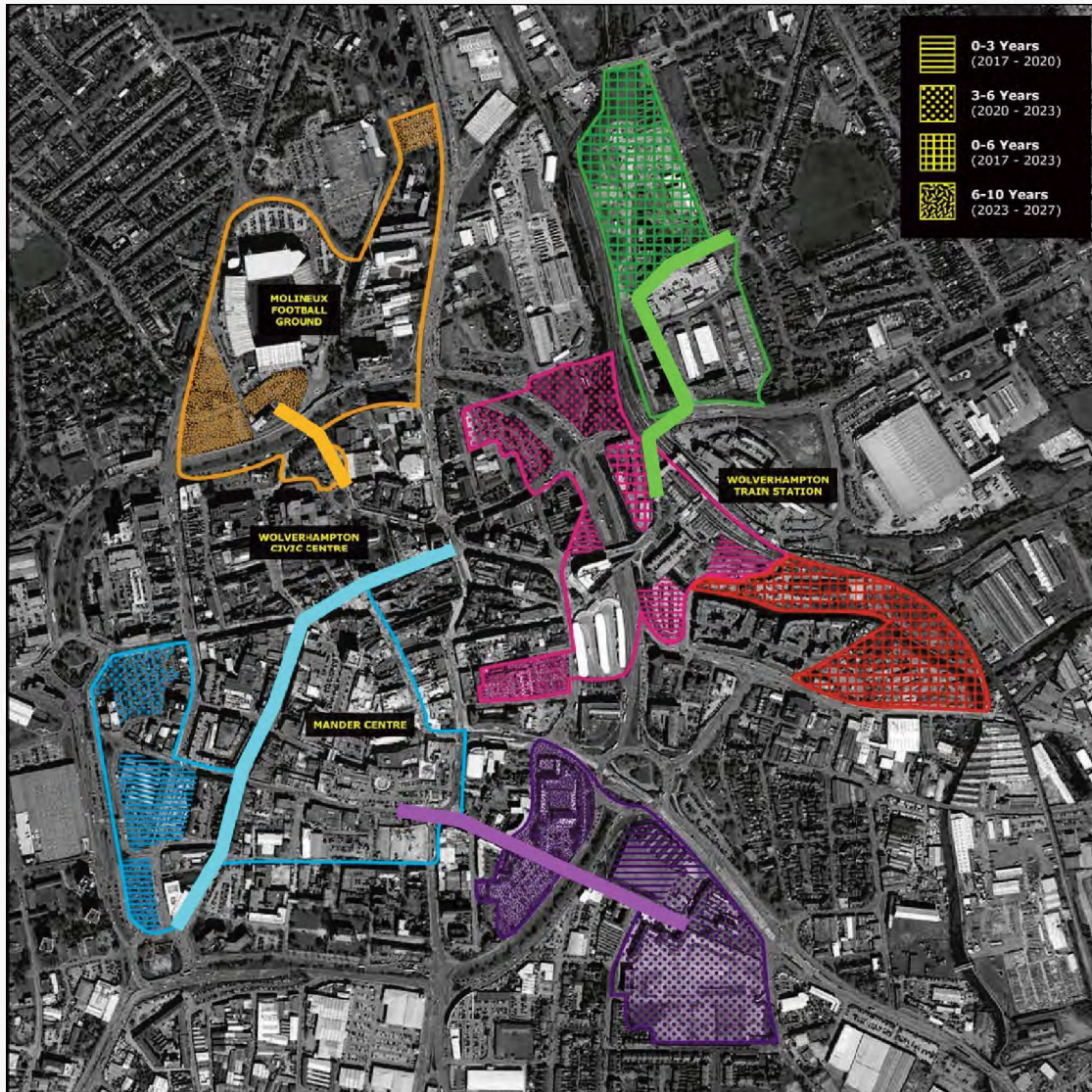
 **City Core and Key Connections**

 **City Centre Streets**

 **Ring Road**

Source: Invest in Wolverhampton Prospectus, CBRE

Connected Places Projects



Source: Invest in Wolverhampton Prospectus, CBRE

A number of projects are already emerging as priorities in the delivery of the strategy, these include:

Springfield Campus Link
Creating a safe and accessible walking and cycling route between the Springfield Campus, the Interchange and the city centre.

Timescale: 0-3 years

Westside Link
Creating and improved pedestrian experience between the new Westside development and the city centre core, by removing traffic and upgrading the public realm.

Timescale: 0-3 years

Molineux Quarter Link
The ambition is to realise a unique opportunity to connect the football club and university to the city centre through improved ring road crossings.

Timescale: 0-3 years

Royal Hospital and St George's Link
Strengthening the connectivity between the new city centre residential developments and the improved retail and markets offer.

Timescale: 3-6 years

Identity

Why this theme?

Understanding local distinctiveness is key to creating successful places. Visitors are often surprised by the quality of Wolverhampton's historic buildings, structures and other heritage features that enrich the urban landscape. The many small streets, such as Blossom's Fold and Farmer's Fold, are a reminder of Wolverhampton's proud past as a "staple town" of the wool trade. There are prominent landmarks, such as the Chubb Building and Sunbeam Factory, converted for other uses, but providing a strong visual reminder of Wolverhampton's prominence during the industrial revolution.

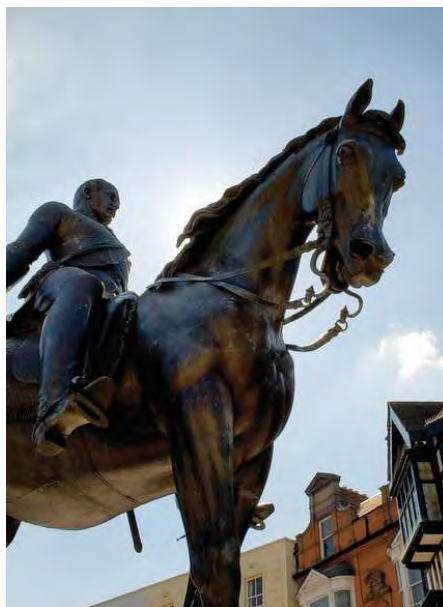
Our place narrative continues to evolve. The City of Wolverhampton has ambitious plans for the future, particularly in the city centre, with over £1 billion of development on site of in the pipeline. There is a new-found confidence in fostering enterprise, creativity, innovation and learning.

The assets and opportunities we will build on.

- **Heritage:** Within the ring road there are four Conservation Areas, at the heart of which is the distinctive St Peter's Church, situated in an elevated position, that marks the very beginning of Wolverhampton as a place. A valued cultural asset, St Peter's is surrounded by historic gardens and a high concentration of listed buildings.
- **Meeting places:** The city centre has a number of established places where people congregate, such as like Queen's Square with the renowned "Man on a Horse" statue.



- **Linkages:** Wolverhampton benefits from a significant number of cultural and leisure destinations, all of which are in easy walking distance of each other. Opportunities exist to improve the main routes between key destinations, both old and new. For example, Victoria Street, at 18 metres wide, has sufficient space to become an attractive boulevard linking the Manders retail core with the new Westside Leisure Scheme.
- **Public Art:** We believe that public art works best when embedded in the narrative and physical urban fabric of the place itself. There are many subtle, small scale, examples already, such as the historically significant Saxon cross in St Peter's gardens, the carvings at the top of the Art and the Lady Wulfruna stature at the entrance to St Peter's Church.
- **Illumination:** The 2013 "Enchanted City – Out of Darkness Event" was initially a one-off public art and event programme designed to enable local people to literally see the beauty of their city in a new, and different, light. It demonstrated how landmark buildings can be highlighted in unusual and creative ways, and, when supported by events and live performance, illumination can act as a magnet for local people and local visitors.



What next?

We will:

- Ensure that Connected Places Strategy forms a central component of the single investment plan for the city centre.
- Work with English Heritage to bring forward an enhancement scheme for the historic heart of the city centre around St Peter's Church and Gardens.
- Enhance the views and physical connections between key landmarks e.g. the Grand Theatre, Art Gallery, St Peter's Church and Civic Halls.
- Use major development schemes such as Interchange, Westside Leisure Area and the Learning Quarter to create new squares, focal points and meeting places.
- Bring forward key schemes that strengthen pedestrian links between key regeneration projects. For example, a scheme called the Westside Link to connect the £5million refurbished Mander's shopping centre with the Urban and Civic led £55million cinema, restaurant and leisure centre. The proposals include wider and attractive boulevards softened with new trees and appropriate urban planting.
- Use "Leaves and Light" to campaign for creative and playful illumination and greening across the city exploiting the many opportunities that exist for the city's landmark buildings and public art features. The campaign will also promote the installation of living green walls and well-placed pocket parks.
- Work with the Canal and River Trust to open up access and visibility for the canal, effectively creating new urban parkland and bringing the associated heritage buildings back to life.

Events

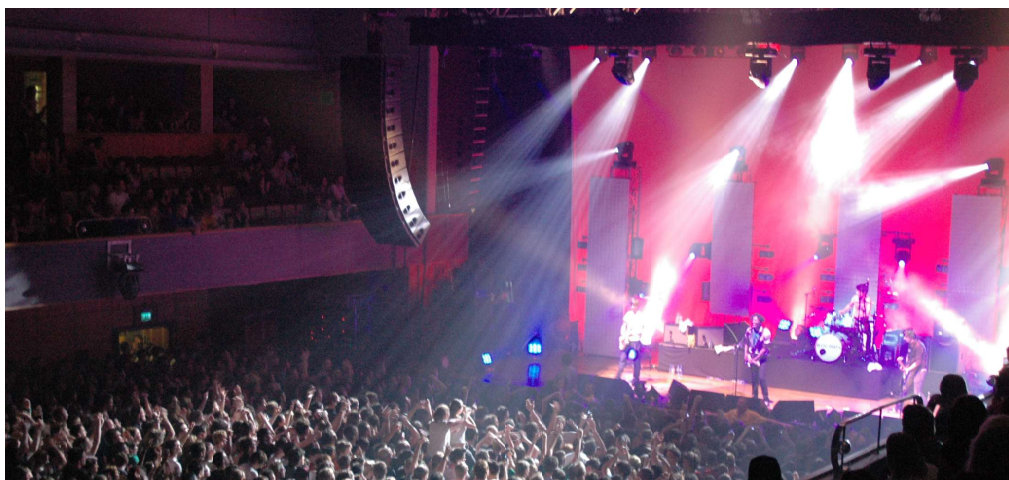
Why this theme?

Public consultation has made it clear that local people want a city centre that is fun and interesting, with unexpected areas of delight and places to play for people of all ages. This includes city centre festivals and events that the whole city can participate in.

The assets and opportunities we will build on.

- **Animation:** The established City Centre Christmas Light Switch On, held in Queen's Square attracted 5,000 people in 2016. Alongside this, the Wolverhampton BID company's first Fun Fest in June 2016 provided free daytime activities for children and an evening 80's themed festival with major headline artists, again attracting thousands of people.
- **Design:** Whilst there are already some central spaces for events in areas of high footfall, there is not enough open, flat, clutter free, space. This means the ability to deliver large scale events is limited. There is the opportunity to address this through new development schemes.
- **Evening and night time:** Fundamental to a strong night time economy is a safe and attractive environment that reflects people's mode of arrival and departure on route to the key night-time attractions. Particularly important are the routes between the key evening and night time venues, carparks, the station and hotels.





What next?

We will:

- Create safe and attractive environments that encourage people to stay longer in the evening and visit the city at night, starting with schemes for the immediate surrounds of each of our cultural and learning venues. This will include allowing cultural events, art exhibitions and the hospitality offer to spill out into the outside public domain.
- Work with the developers, Urban and Civic, to create a high quality public realm in the Westside leisure area, with additional events space and providing pedestrian safety and comfort that will enhance both the day and the new evening and night-time offer.
- Consideration will be given to improving the routes people take at the end of the working day, or arrival in the evening. This includes the sighting of activities that will encourage them to stop and dwell longer on route.
- Attention will be given to addressing the practical barriers to hosting outdoor events in new regeneration schemes. This includes installing utilities such as electricity and water, making it easier for pop up festivals and live events to take place.

Way finding

Why this theme?

Whilst the city centre benefits from being compact and walk-able, the design of the public realm has not kept pace with change. Even, where change has occurred, the design of the public realm has often been overly deterministic. In particular, the ring road, in its current configuration, creates a visual and mental barrier for many pedestrians. The aim of the Connected Places way-finding theme, is to encourage innovative ways to build connections between the central area and the outer quarters and zones.

The assets and opportunities we will build on.

- **A design led approach:** There is an opportunity to reinforce the city's identity and image through a co-ordinated approach to way-finding. The style should reinforce local character, reference the city's unique heritage and cultural offer, as well as embrace a more contemporary feel.
- **Sign placement:** We now have an in-depth understanding of pedestrian movement and flows across the city centre and the places where new visitors need guidance on the route to take. We have also identified where new connections need to be created, and where barriers to movement are the greatest, and need to be addressed.
- **Gateways:** Important gateway projects, such as the Interchange, are already being implemented for those travelling by rail, bus or metro. Accurate and clear road signage and electronic information is an important tool to ensure legibility by motorists and visitors to the city, not just in the city centre but also on approach roads further afield.





What next?

We will:

- Implement a co-ordinated, phased approach to improving way finding across the city, improving signage, the visual appearance, the quality and accuracy of information. The design will take account of the need to have distinct identity for the city centre.
- We will use our detailed research to design the new routes that are needed, as new development comes forward. This includes exploring options for better connectivity across the ring road at critical points, such as the housing led Royal Hospital site, the Westside link to Chapel Ash and a new northern ring road crossing between the City Centre and the Molineux Quarter.
- Opportunities will be explored for removing visual clutter and a more strategic approach to planting and landscaping around the ring road.

Car parking

Why this theme?

The Council and its partners want to ensure that the city centre is served by the right type and standards of car parks, in the right place and at the right price. Affordable and good quality parking is a key competitive advantage when seeking to attract business occupiers in a city centre location, and we already know that the availability of parking and active travel incentives have influenced recent business decision on whether a company chooses to locate within the city centre. To get to that position needs and flexible and phased approach as new developments come forward. We need to find new ways in which the parking offered can be adequately aligned to the needs of all stakeholders, as they change over time.


The assets and opportunities we will build on.

- **Car park supply:** Currently the city centre is over supplied with poor quality, surface level car parks and a significant amount of on street parking. This is set to change with the development and refurbishment of a select number of premium city centre multi-storeys within the ring road and further opportunities on the periphery of the ring road. This will reduce vehicle movements in the core of the city centre and enable us to transform unnecessary road space and creating new boulevards.

- **Improved car parking facilities:** The newly refurbished Civic Centre car park is an exemplar of the style and scale of multi-story parking that should be delivered and street bays will continue to be provided within the ring road. At Interchange, the extended and refurbished carpark nearly doubles the capacity of previous carpark. At Westside, the proposal is to bring forward a 600 space multi storey carpark to replace the inefficient surface level carparking currently situated across each of the development parcels. This quality and density of parking is required to underpin the type of leisure led mixed use development being delivered.
- **Car park design:** We have researched and produce technical documents for the on the important design changes required to improve and modernise car parking facilities in the city centre.
- **Long and short stay:** The scale of city centre development planned for the future presents an opportunity over the longer-term to rationalise the offer. Short stay parking will tend to be located within the ring road to service shoppers and leisure visitors. More of the long stay will be on the fringe of the city, with good quality pedestrian connections or public transport links park and ride sites.
- **Payment:** The Council has committed to a more customer focused approach for the car parks it owns and manages. This includes, offering a better choice to people about how they pay for parking, including by card, on-line reservations and payment and payment on departure not arrival.

What next?

We will:

- Plan and provide provision in a flexible and responsive way, as major development plans are firmed up and start to be implemented. Proposals will be informed by a robust evidence base we have been compiling.
 - Firm up on proposals for new multi-storey car parks, based on the location of key strategic regeneration sites and new traffic management in the city centre.
 - Encourage proposals to come forward for 4-5 multi-storey car parks on the fringe of the ring road, in the longer-term. These should be managed to accommodate the high demand for office and commuter parking during the week, and lower demand evenings and weekend.
 - Work with event organisers and the business community to co-ordinate and manage car parking demand, including providing better quality information for visitors planning their stay in the city.
 - Ensure that new parking facilities are designed in line with best practice and Council standards. This includes the Council's own car park provide adequate cycle storage and clear signage.
 - Give attention to the design and provision for specialist needs such as taxis and disabled spaces.
 - Use new technology to offer "frictionless parking provision" which will give motorists complete confidence of the ease of parking through the provision of real time information. This includes capitalising on new technology to advise drivers where vacant spaces are located as they drive through key gateways.
- 
- Consult in the benefits of setting up a "parking association" for the city centre to assist in co-ordinating the offer to the public cross private and public car parking operations.
 - Consider payment regimes that support the demand for people working in the city and visiting the city in the evening.

Safety

Why this theme?

Whilst levels of crime in public spaces can often be exaggerated, the fear of crime is a significant issue in many urban areas. When a place gains a poor reputation for safety, it can be difficult to reclaim a good reputation once branded. Currently, the number of people in Wolverhampton's centre dwindles outside daylight trading hours which contributes to a belief it is not a safe place to be.

The assets and opportunities we will build on.

- **Lighting:** Good lighting is essential for a city and can also be used to aid way-finding and add visual interest. New regenerations schemes coming forward provide opportunities to significantly improve on current standards around design and luminosity.
- **City centre living:** Our regeneration schemes include opportunities to create strong residential communities that will help to generate vitality in the evening and help with passive surveillance. New leisure, eating and entertainment uses, such as those planned for Westside will also help to add vibrancy and footfall during the evening.
- **Crossing the ring road:** The ring road creates a significant physical and psychological barrier around the town. Improving crossing opportunities and facilities for pedestrians and cyclists is seen as a priority.



What next?

We will:

- Develop a cohesive approach for replacement and new lighting as part of the regeneration process, ensuring that visual clutter is reduced.
- Encourage development that includes active frontages, including uses that can spill out into the street.
- Ensure there are strong and attractive pedestrian connections between new city centre housing and the heart of the city centre, such as those planned for the Royal Hospital site, the converted Sunbeam Factory, the Canalside Quarter and Chapel Ash.
- Improve crossings on the northern section of the ring road to better connect West Park, Stafford Street, the University Northern Campus and the Molineux Stadium.
- Explore opportunities to soften the harsh environment of the ring road.

Maintenance and Management

Why this theme?

Realising the full economic and social benefit from a good, well designed public realm also relies heavily on how it is managed and maintained. A well maintained, high quality public realm pays a key part in attracting investment into the city.

The assets and opportunities we will build on.

- **Surveys:** Highways maintenance is safety led and undertaken in compliance with statutory guidance, with all carriageways and footways being inspected frequently, to ensure that they are safe and attractive and that repairs are undertaken quickly to reduce worsening of the situation.
- **Street cleaning:** Street cleaning ensures the city is tidy and ready for business, it also provides the opportunity to identify any defects. The Wolverhampton Bid has supported the council the services by providing additional street washing and gum clearance mainly undertaken at night.
- **Materials:** The City of Wolverhampton Council has produced a Public Realm Design and Materials Guide setting our standards for materials and street furniture. This includes a complementary mix of unit sizes and advocates the use of hazard paving materials at pedestrian crossing points, whilst also emphasising that these should take account of the specific context. The design guide covers a visually comprehensive range of street furniture to use in the city centre.



What next?

We will:

- Undertake regular inspections to identify and address defects at the earliest opportunity.
- Endeavour to maintain quality by avoiding repairs that patch with tarmac, where other materials have been used.
- Ensure that in sensitive historic areas the highest quality materials are used.
- Ensure public realm design will support effective cleaning and litter-free streets, and the ease at which replacements can be sourced will influence the design decisions.
- Where possible, remove pedestrian guardrails to reduce visual clutter and create a more inclusive environment.
- Give meticulous attention to Council led maintenance schemes, and also encouraged in private led schemes, in line with the Public Realm and Materials Design Guide.

Digital and smart

Why this theme?

Wolverhampton aims to be a Smart City. In order to remain competitive in the digital age, Wolverhampton must champion for modern digital infrastructure to be regarded as having the same criticality for investment as transport infrastructure. Our concept of a truly connected smart city includes digital, as well as physical, social and economic connections.

The assets and opportunities we will build on.

- **digital connectivity:** A priority for the council and partners alike is to secure the necessary investment in broadband, WI-FI and other digital networks
- A three year programme is being developed for the introduction of **Ultra Low emission vehicle (ULEV) charging points** for both taxi and public charging with a view to a longer term programme covering other parts of the city. Charging points will be located on street and within Council and selected private car parks. Smart technology will be incorporated into the infrastructure to allow easy booking and payment.

What next?

We will:

- Commission an independent study to set out how we can achieve a full fibre solution for the city centre area action plan area, as well as improving wifi connectivity.
- Encourage take up and demand from residents, business, visitors and learners.
- Identify other opportunities to capitalise on smart technology in city centre development projects and public services in the city centre.



Wider Implications

The intention is that the principles themes set out in this strategy have a strong influence on our city development plans and also the service plans across visitor, cultural, enterprise and environment services.

We also recognise the limitations of the Connected Places strategy. It is impossible to bring about transformational change of any scale without simplification of traffic management within the city centre. As well as the construction of a railway station and extension to the Metro line, further work with partners including Transport for West Midlands, National Express and taxi drivers will need to determine the best approach about changes to traffic management and vehicle access should be phased.





For more information on our work visit:

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