

Minutes of The Bishop Auckland Stronger Towns Board Meeting

Monday 9 August 2021, 15.30 – 16.30, Microsoft Teams

Attendees:		
David Land	DL	Chair
Liz Fisher	LF	The Auckland Project, Place & Purpose Director (representing Jonathan Ruffer)
Rob Yorke	RY	Teescraft, Private Sector Representative
Graham Wood	GW	Durham County Council, Economic Development Manager
Natalie Davison-Terranova	ND-T	Bishop Auckland College, Principal/Chief Executive
Cllr Katie Eliot	KE	Mayor, Bishop Auckland Town Council
Helen Golightly not here	HG	North East LEP, Executive Director
Bishop Paul Butler	PB	Bishop of Durham
Katy Severs	KS	Department for Work and Pensions
Jonathan Gilroy	JG	Cities and Local Growth
Geoff Paul	GP	Durham County Council, Interim Head of Development & Housing
Dave Wafer	DW	Durham County Council, Head of Transport & Contract Services
Apologies:		
Amy Harhoff	AH	Durham County Council, Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth
David Madden	DM	The Auckland Project, CEO
Jonathan Ruffer	JR	The Auckland Project, Founder
Nik Turner	NT	Believe Housing
Rachel Edmunds	RE	Believe Housing
Cllr Elizabeth Scott	ES	Councillor
Mike Matthews	MM	Private Sector Member
Dehenna Davison	DD	Member of Parliament for Bishop Auckland
Item	Action	
1.0 Welcome/Introductions DL/ALL		
	Board Members were welcomed by DL	
1.1	GW informed the Board that Bishop Auckland AAP have selected a new Chair, Rachel Edmunds, who it was hoped would join the next meeting.	
2.0 Minutes of 25 January meeting /Matters Arising (DL)		
2.1	DL informed the Board that there was a meeting held on 24 June but that the minutes were incorrectly set up and dated 24 July, this need amending DL highlighted two additional project focussed sessions that had been held recently Officers and Amy Harhoff, met with Private Sector Board members on 15 July discussion around progressing projects.	
	GW / AGlass	

A small group of Board members met in Town Hall (with Helen Golightly via video), had met to review the status of projects, where we need to be and what we need to look at.

Action: Notes from Workshop held on 29 July to be circulated.

GW

Challenges– NDT highlighted just 3 weeks left to send formal paperwork back and advise MHCLG. The meeting 28 July was good, had provided revisions.

DL Confirmed that throughout the prioritisation process he has been taking wide ranging soundings on the programme, speaking to council members, held several conversations with Bob MacManners, met a few board members.

Another board meeting will be held on 23 August – by end of today's session we will have a consensus of where we are, so officers know what to complete. The Board confirmed they are keen to not lose any of the project and try and find a way of resourcing / progressing all of them..

An open item remained relating to merging of Future High Streets / Stronger Town funding. JG undertook to provide a more defined answer. JG confirmed it would be complicated and would have potential implication for the BCR rate and value for money aspects of the programmes. As such it wouldn't be advisable. He also confirmed there is a variation process for FHSF projects but it is a very completed and protracted process.

DL sought confirmation on the variation process as the wrong thing to do or complicated. JG it could have implications for future High Street Fund grants and would need to speak to GW outside of this meeting. DL requested information be made available to all Board members.

ND-T asked about saving and would we lose any money by making savings.

DL talked about the subgroups and said as we go forward these sub groups will become more defined.

5.2 how we could find other moneys and move other projects on – ES and AH were looking at horizon scanning work what funding is coming online and being prepared. GP advised that DCC are working towards not constantly reacting to government announcements, instead scoping good quality projects, developed into a pipeline of projects, with capacity provided to develop them.

DL said it would be good to see those projects shovel ready and requested Board be kept advised of this work.

Action: GW to provide an update on the status of this work for next meeting.

DL advised that actions from minutes of the meeting held on 24 June taken as read apart from amendment of date on minutes.

3.0	Declarations of Interest – if any	
3.1	<p>ND-T issued declaration of interest on behalf of Bishop Auckland College as a delivery partner and co-funder on a number of the skills projects.</p> <p>DL noted continuation of the previous declarations from Board members/ project sponsors.</p>	
4.0	Programme development update (GW)	
4.1	<p>GW provided an update to Board, building on the prioritisation process presentation previously delivered:</p> <p>Main issues highlighted included:</p> <p>August Submission Requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritised programme drawing upon £33.2 mill of Stronger Town Funding - against £46.8 mill bid. • Action plan for addressing conditions / clarifications • Develop financial profile 2022 – March 2026 • Draft Monitoring and Evaluation Plan setting out high level outcomes and project outputs <p>Prioritisation Process Agreed with Board</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliverability • Funding – costs / match • Scalability • Alternative Funding Opportunities • Strategic Fit <p>Criteria – looked at funding issues and high level costs review – detailed discussion with planning and conservation. Work undertaken regarding stakeholder views including local members and the Heritage Action Zone Advisory Group. A Board workshop have also been held to help inform this position.</p> <p>An important aspect was to try and keep balance of programme – looking to maintain leverage and value for money and keep high level outcomes. Providing a step change and visitor economy –while delivering inclusive growth</p> <p>An initial planning / deliverability assessment of projects had been undertaken that had identified issues as follows:</p> <p>ESAC - the whole bid flows from opening access corridor which constitutes a major and complex planning application. Significant work still to be done but unlocking the opportunities of the various attractions for visitor increase and GVA growth is central to the TIP along with the stated match.</p>	

Diversification Project – canopy, atrium, green wall, artist’s studio/ gallery space and funding to bring forward Beales in line with planning consents. Presents a number of issues to consider. Work is ongoing.

The proposed Newgate Street Canopy has an impact on traffic and servicing retail premises, FHSF impacts. Deliverability of the project remains a significant issue.

Durham Dales Gateway relatively straightforward in planning terms – set near more recent functional buildings – land in third party ownership needs to be clarified. Overall, the project provides a clear fit with vision and what we are trying to achieve

South Church Enterprise Park – no immediate planning impediments to bringing that project forward.

Springboard to employment – set out strands which have been clarified by colleagues – project in with zero match, any adult education budget – match potential - AEB costs for Unemployed participants - work not in programme that has been sighted.

Heritage Transport Museum– recognition that condition of building might cause issue in terms of costs and planning raised concerns in proximity to residential properties – planning would have to be mindful on visitor numbers , poor parking for 100,000 visitors per annum. Strong project in terms of offer but location possibly wrong to achieve what they want.

Ultra-fast broadband – Project has been scaled back twice already from £7.5 mill concept to 2.5M. No current identified match. Small scope scheme may not be able to deliver wider community digital exclusion benefits. Installation of additional dark fibre leg around town may be difficult with some of the improvements undertaken in recent times.

Heritage Walking & Cycling Routes – Provides good user benefits; Strong support from Board and local members as joins outlying communities with the town centre; Recent cycleway specification change may necessitate less length of improved route; Links with Northern Saint Trail and S&DR element

Tindale Triangle Infrastructure - Recent design work highlights opportunity for £1.5 mill budget saving; Good user benefits; Strong support for addressing local problem area; Needs careful definition over linked investments – focus on accelerating new homes at Woodhouse Close

Previous Workshop discussion had highlighted the Eastern Sustainable Access Corridor allocation; as a key driver of benefits across the programme. Along with a Board ambition not to abandon projects not funded through STF.

- Significant remodelling of Durham Dales Gateway (heritage railway) project –look to Restoring Your Railway Fund to articulate aspirations – business case + other funding opportunities;

- Rework elements of Town Centre Diversification project to ensure clear benefits seen in the retail core;
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Discussions had highlighted the need for clear comms to articulate the strategy for the town.

GW confirmed significant progress in reducing the programme budget and that the town centre diversification project required further attention. DL indicated the Board is clear on what they want to see resolved and looking to see how we can balance that ambition with deliverability.

The Board reviewed the possible funding scenario for the programme to meet the £33.2 mill Heads of Term offer.

DL asked for comments or concerns:

RY – Queried the precise focus for the Heritage walking route – £2.5mill for Binchester to Escombe route and is there some funding for SNDR Witton Park to Shildon and reflected on recent press speculation surrounding the Newgate Centre.

GW confirmed the recent levelling up fund submission was seeking to deliver the Stockton Darlington route improvement and Stronger Town funding is looking to address number of breaks in existing network.

Action: GW to confirm routing with RY outside of this meeting.

GW

Further opportunities to bring the Beales Building back use were keenly supported by DCC and in doing so the Council would be guided by subsidy control and what is appropriate. With all such projects linking private development and public funds, the council has taken legal advice in respect of state aid / subsidy control.

DL said the number needed to be agreed before the end of August and sought views from across the Board:

KE hadn't been able to attend the workshop but was feeding back to the Town Council. As a new Board member KE supported the Board's actions with slimming down with projects.

DL wants to ensure communication with stakeholders remains a priority. KE confirmed she has heard a lot of negativity and questioning why the Board are proposing spending so much money on the canopy.

PB had attended the workshop – and queried whether a development allocation should be retained for the Heritage Transport Museum to give us scope to move on for another form of funding. PB also urged caution on how much we spend on canopy.

NDT felt a compromise position had been reached in terms of the skills and employment opportunities. While the position regarding broadband was disappointed the programme shape appears to be a reasonable

LF reflected on figures for town centre diversification, expressing concerns that reducing the budget by £3M will lose momentum and that the ambition might be lost. With regards to the canopy, the priority needs to be a centre that supports visitors 12 months of the year. Not immediately progressing the digital side needs to be considered from

	<p>competitive point of view, we need to have broadband as not future proofing town but feels fair compromises have been made.</p> <p>DL confirmed that for ultrafast Broadband the ambitious programme may help in securing a private investor.</p> <p>GP indicated Board members comments were useful. The funding table GW has set out represents a reasonable attempt to take account of criteria, equally important workshop was useful for specific individual areas of projects.</p> <p>Next steps include a detailed report to come to next board, analyse projects against criteria summaries work of workshop. Specifically, in respect of Town Centre diversification the Board are keen to explore works allowing the High Street to be better used all year round.</p> <p>RY – wanted to drill down some projects and now would like to see an executive project on what we are spending £8M on.</p> <p>DL Highlighted to ongoing communication challenges, the need to provide strong and timely communications and clarify what the plans are for the next 30 years.</p> <p>Action: GW/GP to provide a further report on the forward Communications programme.</p> <p>.</p> <p>KE – noted the forthcoming Bishop Auckland horticultural show at number 42 and quired if is there is any scope to use that as a way of pushing out messaging.</p> <p>Summary -Town Centre Diversification – Canopy DW set out some of the identified deliverability issues and clarified the board’s ambitions, noting government timescales, and a range of public highway issues - , the council can’t put foundations in highway would need to go through a process, get planning consent, get that highway stopped, will then need to acquire the land.</p> <p>DL suggested we have detailed discussion on £8.1M, put a workshop in place between now and 23 August, find out what we can have not what we can’t have, what makes it work,– put something in diary for next week and get that presented on 23 August to get Board concurrence.</p> <p>GP stressed the importance of as many Board members as possible participating in the next phase of discussion as we approach the defining the final programme.</p>	GW / GP
5.0	Any Other Business	
5.1	There was no other business	
	Meeting Closed.	