

BISHOP AUCKLAND STRONGER TOWN BOARD

At a Meeting of **Bishop Auckland Stronger Town Board** held in The Elgar Room
- Bishop Auckland Town Hall on **Thursday 20 October 2022 at 1.00 pm**

Present:

David Land (Chair)

Board Members:

Councillor Elizabeth Scott	Portfolio Holder for Economy and Partnerships
Natalie Davison-Terranova	Bishop Auckland College
David Maddan	The Auckland Project
Stephen Bowyer	The Auckland Project (for Jonathan Ruffer)
Chris Knights	(for Bishop Paul Butler)
Nik Turner	Believe Housing
Mike Matthews	Private Sector Representative
Geoff Paul	Strategic and Technical Support Consultant, DCC

Officers

Graham Wood	Economic Development Manager, DCC
Susan Robinson	Head of Corporate Property and Land, DCC
Mark Jackson	Head of Transport and Contract Services, DCC
Craig MacLennan	Transport and Infrastructure Manager, DCC
Tom Smyth	CLGU
Sarah Harris	Clerk to Bishop Auckland Town Council
Liz Fisher	The Auckland Project

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Rob Yorke, Katy Severs, Jonathan Gilroy, Jonathan Ruffer, Dehenna Davison MP and Councillor Michael Siddle.

2 Declarations of interest

David Maddan declared TAP's interest in Lightfoot House adjacent to the Kingsway Square area.

3 Minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

4 STF Project: Tindale Triangle

The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which sought to confirm allocations of Stronger Town Funding to the Tindale Triangle junction improvements and Leisure-Retail Park.

The Board had received updates at previous meetings in respect of the Tindale Triangle Project as set out in the Town Improvement Plan. These updates included the relationship between S278 highway proposals and the provision of a comprehensive long-term network solution for the Tindale Triangle area, ensuring the effective traffic flow across the local network, including trips associated with housing and tourism, and general background growth.

The report provided details of the traffic modelling work completed by Officers which concluded that whilst the S278 proposal for Maude Terrace/Greenfields Road Signals and Watling Road/A688 Roundabout was sufficient to enable progress towards the planning condition being discharged in respect of the Auckland Retail Park development, the design for the A688/Tindale Crescent junction was insufficient to deliver wider growth aspirations.

The report provided the financial implications of incorporating the junction improvements with the Leisure-Retail Park and noted a shortfall of £1.75m.

The Board would therefore need to consider how to re-allocate Funds to make up the £1.75m viability gap, and the options presented were:

- to review other project allocations across the whole programme

or

- to seek a corresponding reduction in the Town Centre Diversification budget given the project was currently at a development stage.

Tom Smyth reminded the Board that a change request to Government would be required if the scope of the Tindale Triangle project was broadened.

The Board discussed the options.

Natalie-Davison Terranova was disappointed at the prospect of public funds being diverted to an out-of-town retail park; a private development which she believed would undermine the town centre works.

Sarah Harris confirmed that Bishop Auckland Town Council were in agreement with the views expressed by Natalie Davison-Terranova, adding that the traffic modelling should be expressed in layman's terms and was disappointed that the Board had not been provided with some visual presentations.

David Land stated that increasing the scope of the Tindale Triangle proposal presented opportunities not just for Bishop Auckland but the surrounding area. Whilst there was a proposal to revise the Town Centre Diversification allocation, he assured the Board that the multi-scheme approach would continue to be progressed.

Chris Knights welcomed this re-assurance as he was also concerned about out-of-town development impacting upon the viability of the town centre.

Councillor Scott shared the concerns raised but noted that compared with out-of-town development, town centres were not doing very well. Careful thought should be given to the end users; those visiting out of town were unlikely to visit the town centre.

At the suggestion of Councillor Scott, the Board agreed to consider the recommendations in both reports after receiving the update in respect of Town Centre Diversification.

5 Town Centre Diversification - Update

The Board considered the report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which provided an update on the development of the projects collectively described as the Town Centre Diversification investment in the Stronger Towns Programme.

Geoff Paul advised that in May 2022, several schemes had been identified replacing the Canopy which was initially proposed in the Town Investment Plan. These projects were detailed in paragraph 5 of the report.

As the Board had expressed a desire to support a broader scope of works for Tindale Triangle, the Board was presented with options to address the budget shortfall in the Town Centre Diversification Project.

Working with the revised Town Centre Diversification budget of £6.35 million and recognising the outcome of the viability assessment, the following schemes had been identified:

Market Place Public

Realm/ Active mode
link

Property Reuse Fund
(Round 2)

Fore Bondgate Public
Realm improvements

Market Place Hotel

Artists Hub

Mechanics institute

The schemes had been assessed against the BCR gateway of 1.2 and at this stage it was felt that cumulatively this had been achieved. The schemes were £550k over programme but the detailed cost estimates were still under development so this may change.

Given the tight timescales the detailed scheme design was being accelerated with a proposal to use the 5% capital pre-payments (drawdown).

The Board discussed the proposals.

David Maddan noted that meeting the BCR gateway for the Market Place was a challenge, and asked if the proposals to improve the BCR for Fore Bondgate with improved pedestrian user benefits and reduced traffic flow could be explored in the Market Place.

He supported the proposals for the revised location of the Artists Hub, and suggested looking at re-naming the Mechanics Institute project, given it's wider scope.

Councillor Scott was in support of the suite of projects and asked if the proposal to return the Mechanics Institute building into 'economic use' should be more specific. Graham Wood agreed and confirmed that the process to secure ownership of the building was ongoing with a view to finding a tenant who would meet the requirements of the Trust, whilst also being mindful of other activities already being delivered.

Reference was made to the former Beales Store. Graham Wood advised that there was an integral link between the former Beales Store and the Kingsway car park area. The Kingsway improvements should make the property a more attractive proposition to hotel developers.

The report also provided details of the proposed consultation exercise on the new schemes which would run from 24 October to 18 November.

A Communications Plan had been developed with colleagues in Communications and Marketing, with a steer from the public meeting and the Strategic Advisory Panel.

The following was proposed:

Drop-in sessions
Display space at no. 43
Questionnaire – paper and on-line
Direct stakeholder consultation

It was important that the consultation exercise was as accessible as possible, in as many formats as possible and was clear about what was being consulted upon.

In discussing the consultation the Board expressed the importance of local Councillors and community representatives being informed in advance of what was being consulted upon, and it was suggested that the Strategic Advisory Panel be asked to cascade the information to their networks. It was also suggested that a public meeting be held during the consultation period but this would not be possible within the timescales and the Strategic Advisory Panel had agreed to a public meeting being held in January 2023.

In acknowledging that the timescales were tight, the consultation period could not be extended because of the December deadline for Business Case submission. There would be further specific consultation events on individual projects.

Following discussion the Chair asked the members present to consider the recommendations in both reports.

Natalie-Davison Terranova remained concerned; the re-allocation of funds would undermine the work to regenerate the town centre. She appreciated that the town centre was currently in a poor position but business owners may not be supportive of the revised proposals. She was against the recommendations.

Tindale Triangle:

AGREED that

- i. the analysis of the A688/Tindale Crescent junction design and scope for addressing increased capacity be noted;
- ii. proposals to enhance the S278 design to future proof capacity be agreed;
- iii. the proposals for Budget amendment to the Leisure-Retail Park (to be within the wider Tindale Triangle Business Case), reallocated from the Town Centre Diversification and Tindale Triangle STF allocations, to be contained within the agreed Heads of Terms limit, be confirmed. A legal agreement to be drawn up ensuring that the award of the STF funding to the private sector developer, and subsequent spend, is fully dependent upon the delivery of the full Leisure-Retail Park as planned; and
- iv. the submission of a change request to CLGU highlighting the broader scope of the planned project intervention be authorised.

Town Centre Diversification

AGREED that

- i. the revised Budget envelope for Town Centre Diversification schemes be agreed;
- ii. the progress in the development of the individual schemes supporting Town Centre Diversification be noted;
- iii. the proposals to utilise the 5% drawdown to accelerate the final phase of scheme design work be noted;
- iv. consultation proposals to ensure resident and business input to the progression of the Town Centre diversification schemes be progressed.

6 Date of Next Meeting

25 November 2022 1.00pm (provisional)