

BISHOP AUCKLAND STRONGER TOWN BOARD

At a Meeting of **Bishop Auckland Stronger Town Board** held in The Spanish Gallery, Market Place, Bishop Auckland on **Wednesday 30 November 2022 at 2.00 pm**

Present:

David Land (Chair)

Board Members:

Natalie Davison-Terranova	Bishop Auckland College
Jonathan Ruffer	The Auckland Project
David Maddan	The Auckland Project
Rev Chris Knights	(for Bishop Paul Butler)
Councillor Michael Siddle	Mayor, Bishop Auckland Town Council
Rob Yorke	SDEA and Teescraft
Geoff Paul	Strategic and Technical Support Consultant, DCC

Officers

Graham Wood	Economic Development Manager, DCC
Craig MacLennan	Transport and Infrastructure Manager, DCC
Jonathan Gilroy	CLGU
Liz Fisher	The Auckland Project
Stephen Bowyer	The Auckland Project
Andrew Walker	AAP Project Co-ordinator

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Bishop Paul Butler, Mike Matthews, Councillor Elizabeth Scott and Tom Smyth.

2 Declarations of interest

David Maddan and Jonathan Ruffer declared TAP's interest in the DDG, Kingsway Square (where it relates to adjacent STF funded spend), Market Place hotel, ESAC and Artists' Hub.

3 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

4 Programme Update

The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which provided an update in relation to the development and implementation of projects set out in the Town Investment Plan.

The three Business Cases already approved; Springboard to Employment, SME Support (South Church Enterprise) and the Heritage Walking and Cycling projects were currently progressing according to the timelines.

With regard to the delivery of the Auckland Park Retail scheme alongside the proposed Tindale Triangle junction improvements, discussions with the developer and their contractors were ongoing, together with the development of a re-scoped Business Case.

As reported at the last meeting, a three-week public consultation exercise had recently concluded which made available information relating to the proposed Town Centre diversification projects, along with the re-scoped Tindale Triangle project. Given the Christmas event in the town the consultation timeline had been extended. Details of the consultation, which included an additional evening drop-in session were set out in the report.

Initial feedback from the on-line responses received to the Town Centre Diversification projects had been positive particularly in relation to the proposed offer and its appeal to residents and younger people in particular. A summary of consultation feedback including the wider regeneration priorities noted for the town would be provided at the next meeting alongside the Town Centre Diversification business case.

Given the changes in the scope of the Town Centre Diversification and Tindale Triangle projects, change requests forms must be submitted and approved by CLGU, meaning that Business Case submission would not be possible by the end of December, and would be presented to the Board in January 2023 for sign-off.

The report also provided an update in respect of the ESAC project and the Board was informed that the Outline Business Case would now be presented to the Board in January 2023.

Finally, there were some outstanding issues raised at previous Board meetings, including for example an undertaking to look at traffic modelling for the Tindale Triangle project. These matters would be presented to future Board meetings.

Jonathan Gilroy was pleased to note the extent of the consultation, adding that CLGU would welcome this being included as evidence in the Business Case submissions.

Councillor Siddle reminded the Board of the Public Meeting scheduled for 16 January 2023, and the importance of preparing for it.

Rob Yorke noted that the Newsletter was a very useful tool for keeping residents up to date with progress.

AGREED that:

progress with development and submission of business cases and the required change requests, be noted.

5 Stronger Towns Funding Project: Durham Dales Gateway

The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which provided a summary of the Stronger Town Funding Durham Dales Gateway Business Case within Bishop Auckland.

The project was part of the Town Investment Plan to undertake works to facilitate visitors to the Weardale Railway. The proposals were detailed in the report.

Currently the railway operated passenger trains, primarily for tourists. As well as previous issues on the line between Wolsingham and Bishop Auckland, a lack of parking infrastructure at Bishop Auckland meant that trains currently only travelled between Wolsingham and Stanhope.

With a predicted increase in the number of visitors the Durham Dales Gateway project would provide the required car parking infrastructure at Bishop Auckland to enable visitors to better access heritage rail services and to route the full distance of the line (Phase 1).

The Business Case established the case for investment of £900,000 funding from the STF Programme, towards a total £1.955m project, with the remainder of the funding provided/underwritten by The Auckland Project (TAP). As with all projects within the STF programme a funding agreement between DCC, TAP and the Weardale Railway would be required.

Future phases 2 and 3 would provide direct access to the railway, pedestrian movements in the first phase would be via the existing Etherley or Newgate Street bridges, from the Phase 1 Car Park to the Bishop Auckland West Platform.

The Weardale Railway attracted almost 7,000 visitors in 2019 and was the 20th most visited rail heritage attraction in the country. The anticipated increase in visitor numbers as a result of planned programmes and interventions by TAP should elevate the railway to the 8th most visited rail heritage attraction nationally.

The delivery of this project would coincide with other rail linked projects, including the bicentenary of the Stockton and Darlington Railway in 2025, and the expansion of the Locomotion Museum following a successful Levelling Up bid. Following a successful '*Restoring Your Railways*' Expression of Interest to the Department for Transport, a Strategic Outline Business Case had been submitted to the DfT. A decision as to whether the proposal would advance to an Outline Business Case stage was expected during the first half of 2023.

As outlined in the report the Phase 1 Car Park proposals would deliver a Core BCR of 2.1 because of economic benefits such as employment and training opportunities, and would deliver an Adjusted BCR of 5.5 because of land value uplift, GVA benefits distributional impacts.

The design proposals were set out in Appendix 2 of the report and a planning application would be required for the demolition of the building and conversion to the car park.

The Board discussed the proposals and commended Craig MacLennan for the report.

Following questions from Councillor Siddle regarding the existing car park and the potential impact on traffic along Escomb Road, Craig MacLennan confirmed that the car park would be reduced but would be compensated by the further car park to the west which would include measures to prevent indiscriminate use. The arrival times for many of the trains would be outside peak hours which should alleviate the traffic concerns.

Councillor Siddle added that careful consideration should be given to fare levels. If fares were too expensive residents would not use the railway.

Rob Yorke noted that TAP were providing/underwriting the remaining amount for Phase 1, and asked if there was any scope for additional STF support for the scheme. Geoff Paul confirmed that STF allocations remained under review but referenced previous discussions over construction cost pressures across the whole programme.

Following discussion it was **AGREED** that

- a) the Business Case be approved and submitted to Government for the Durham Dales Gateway proposals; and
- b) the funding profile of £900,000 STF and £1,095,138 provided/underwritten from TAP, be noted.

6 Date of Next Meeting

AGREED that the date of the next meeting be circulated to the Board.