

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Bishop Auckland Stronger Town Board** held in The Elgar Room - Bishop Auckland Town Hall on **Monday 11 December 2023 at 3.30 pm**

Present:

Councillor

Members of the Committee:

Councillors

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Bishop Paul Butler, Mike Matthews, Natalie Davison-Terranova and A Harhoff.

2 Declarations of interest

R Yorke declared that he was the Chair of The Auckland Project (TAP).
D Maddan declared TAP's interest DDG, Kingsway Square, Market Place Hotel, ESAC and Artists' Hub.

J Layfield declared an interest in the Springboard to Employment Project as employees of Bishop Auckland College, a delivery partner in the initiative.

R Yorke declared that he was the Chair of The Auckland Project (TAP).

3 Minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

4 Programme Update DCC / Project Sponsors

The Board received a presentation which updates on the following items (see slides for details).

- a) ESAC
- b) Town Centre Diversification
- c) Durham Dales Gateway
- d) South Church Enterprise Park
- e) Springboard to Employment

- f) Heritage Walking and Cycling
- g) Tindale Triangle

The Board were advised that risk assessments had been carried out and estimates were reviewed at various phases of each scheme, the latest for ESAC was at the submission stage in the spring. The main risks were associated with the site but until surveys had been carried out they were unable to be identified. It was not envisaged that the scheme would impact on residents and they had been consulted as part of the planning process.

With regards to South Church Enterprise Park, G Wood advised that cost escalations had slowed down and funding had been secured. A condition of the funding was for Businesses to have wraparound support which would be managed by Business Durham. The project was currently in design and build stages with ongoing consultation with contractors. Once in place, the timeline would be reviewed and updated.

Moving on to Springboard to employment J Layfield provided an update to confirm that the original plan to include a rooftop and outdoor space could no longer be attained due to budget constraints. The internal work would not change and there were ongoing discussions with Discover Durham regarding use of the indoor space. She advised that the completion date could slightly change but would share further details once confirmed.

C MacLennan referred to one of the key risks on utilities on site at Tindale Triangle however he had received confirmation from one organisation that they were not affected. He was awaiting confirmation from another organisation that shared the same space and it was therefore anticipated that contractors could be on site in February and it would take three to four months to complete the project.

G Wood added that 300-400 jobs would be created and the Chair suggested that it would be a positive message to share with members of the public.

Resolved

That the presentation be noted.

5 Town Centre Diversification

The Board received a presentation on Town Centre Diversification public realm proposals, including plans and visuals.

S Harris advised that it was a legal requirement for the Town Council to have a noticeboard and requested it was included in the proposals. She continued that the biggest concern which had been generated by the consultation was the installation of bollards and the traffic regulation order on (insert street). C MacLennan confirmed that the public consultation would begin at the end of January and reminded the Board that one an enquiry could be triggered by an objection.

Councillor Zair was unsure whether outdoor seating would be popular in an area that was predominantly shaded. In relation to Finkle Street, C MacLennan confirmed that this was a vehicle dominated area but consideration was being given to improving the area.

In relation to the Artist's Hub, D Madden suggested that in addition to an adequate event schedule it was equally important to promote them and therefore TAP were requesting a slight adjustment to the programme to ensure that events continued to be sustainable and achieve desired visitor numbers. The Chair advised that the project had been outlined to himself, with Local Members and the Town Council however G Wood advised that any changes to the programme would need approval. As long as the outcomes remained the same, it may be that the adjustments could be approved by Officers.

Councillor Zair was concerned that visitor numbers would no longer be attainable when funding had depleted and asked how they could continue to be achieved. The Chair advised that the events programme should be monitored and reviewed throughout to consider how it would work going forward.

Resolved

That the presentation be noted.

6 Governance Review

The Board received a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which provided background information on the Bishop Auckland Stronger Town Board from its established in March 2020 and its purpose and work to date.

The Board considered the changing role of the Board from programme development to monitoring delivery and ensuring any change requests remain aligned to the Town Investment Plan.

D Madden suggested that the Board needed to be sustainable beyond March 2026. The Chair confirmed that he did not think it was appropriate to spend a significant amount of money on a governance review and that Membership could be tweaked if required to ensure structure and solidarity. The role of the Strategic Advisory Panel was very different, and he suggested that it continued with its role outside of the Board.

Councillor Scott strongly supported an external led governance review which was best practice and which would ensure that terms of reference remained appropriate, whilst remaining independent and removing any criticism from members of the public or traders. Whilst she accepted that there were no costs to consider, it was likely to be a relatively light touch review and would not impact heavily on the budget. She would prefer that rather than waiting until the next meeting to receive cost implications, the Board vote on their preference subject to costs. In her experience this would cost no more than £5k.

Councillor Zair agreed that in this phase of the programme, the membership potentially required changes and would support an independent governance review.

N Turner advised that as a member of this Board Member she sat on the periphery, however she did have experience on other Boards and saw this as an opportunity to ensure that Members were meeting their own personal requirements whilst the Board was maintaining its own objectives. She saw it as a health check and despite not having the associated costs, she would agree in principle to undertake an external review.

J Gilroy advised that the Board had to ensure that they were continuing to meet objectives and confirmed that different approaches had been taken by other Boards, some had tweaked their composition but others had done a full review.

Councillor Yorke was not comfortable determining the item without information on the financial implications.

J Layfield advised that in addition to annual self-assessment, the College undertook governance reviews every three years and she acknowledged that an external review should be undertaken.

It was acknowledged that a minority had not recently attended any meetings and therefore it made sense that the composition was changed.

The Chair was concerned that not all Members were in attendance and further details could be circulated and agreed by email if necessary.

Resolved

That the formal change in role for the Town Deal Board as the programme moves to its implementation phase be noted; and that further details be provided in relation to proposals for an externally led Governance review.

7 Date of Next Meeting

The meeting cycle for 2024 was being agreed in conjunction with the Chair, details of which would be circulated after the meeting.