

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Bishop Auckland Stronger Town Board** held in The Elgar Room - Bishop Auckland Town Hall on **Wednesday 26 July 2023 at 3.00 pm**

Present:

D Land (Chair)

Members of the Board:

Councillors

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Bishop P Butler, H Golightly, J Ruffer, K severs, N Davison-Terranova and A Harhoff.

2 Declarations of interest

David Maddan declared TAP's interest DDG, Kingsway Square, Market Place hotel, ESAC and Artists' Hub.

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

Judith Layfield declared an interest in the Springboard to Employment Project as she was employed by Bishop Auckland College, a delivery partner in the initiative.

3 Minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2023

The minute of the meeting held on 20 March 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

4 Update Report

The Board received a verbal update in relation to all projects.

All Business Case Summaries had had been conditionally approved.

ESAC

With regards to ESAC, the conditional approval had been received earlier in the day but it was entering two phases of consultation in August and September before a final pre-planning public consultation in November. The planning application would be submitted in Spring with an expected date of determination September 2024.

It was subject to planning approval for roads carpark and tourism attractions. There was also a requirement for more detail regarding visitor numbers and there was a requirement to liaise with transport north east to deliver a bus service improvement plan. There were no expected issues in being able to meet the condition, especially given the Councils position on the Joint Transport Committee. A priority was to improve public transport provision on the A167 from Bishop Auckland to Durham.

In relation to a question about the timescales, C McLennan advised that fortnightly meetings were held with TAP and Eleven Arches to ensure decisions were made in a timely matter and avoid any impact on the timeline.

A more detailed timeline would be circulated after the meeting.

In response to a question from Councillor Scott regarding the budget and whether it would be impacted by the spiralling costs of materials and labour, C McLennan confirmed that the cost estimate had been updated and it remained within budget. An additional £4m had been allocated for risk management.

The Chair reminded the Board that ESAC was the biggest project and required planning approval and visitor number projections for 2027-29 onwards. Due to the progressive nature of the scheme there was a need to ensure visitors were activated at the earliest opportunity.

In relation to projected visitors, the numbers had been confirmed at 30k visitors per week over 50 weeks and there was a joint responsibility to meet targets between Eleven Arches, TAP and the Board.

R Yorke confirmed that the business case which had been put forward had been through vigorous checks and challenged when the town investment programme had been put together.

Town centre diversification

C McLennan confirmed that there were no outstanding issues to the public realm scheme aside from some potential Traffic Regulation Orders. The scheme was broken down into smaller projects such as the Artists Hub which would assist to promote the development and attract people for events.

With regards the future high street fund, there had been £700k of commitments which had increased to over £1m due to further commercial interest.

S Harris advised that the Town Council were keen to be involved in the Artist Hub project but had not yet received any engagement.

Durham Dales Gateway

D Madden advised that the cost and design had been brought forward, with an anticipated date in early September and project delivered by 2026. The railway would be fully operational this year, with final bridgeworks to complete.

South Church Enterprise Park

G Wood confirmed that recruitment was underway for a replacement project lead and the team were working towards planning level drawings which should be concluded in early autumn with the application approved in February 2024. Units would be available from June 2025.

In response to a question the Board were advised that there would be 40k square feet of floor space and with very little private workspace in the South Durham area, it was expected that the units would reach full capacity, as confirmed by Business Durham.

Springboard to Employment

J Layfield shared the plans and elevations for the three floors which was expected to be completed in February. A Steering group had established, which included interest from Raby Estate who would have a lot of demand for catering and front of house training.

A retail space had been included on the ground floor and there was also a training kitchen and restaurant space, with the flexibility to open out. On the second floor, there was space for three or four start-up businesses, which could be utilised before expanding into larger premises, however the focus remained on education and training which was the key selling point.

Age UK were interested in co-location to assist 50+ ages range in getting back into work.

With regards to the build cost, it had been estimated as £800k and three companies had already agreed to tender for the contract. The history of the building would be preserved as far as possible with the name McIntyres retained and shoe displays as part of the internal decor.

Heritage walking and Cycling Routes

C Mclennan confirmed that the route would be delivered in phases as some elements of the scheme would be more simple to install. The design did not require any TRO's apart from on Newgate Street, which was a six-month process.

In response to a suggestion from the Chair that projected images of the route be used to showcase the route, G Wood advised that the Bishop Auckland Regeneration Website contained an interactive map of the projects, which included descriptions of each project and images. It was still under construction but would be fully populated before the next Strategic Advisory Panel and provide updates to residents and visitors. Once completed it would be publicised.

Tindle Triangle

M Jackson advised that utility connection work would be completed by end of September to allow the work to commence in October.

R Yorke queried whether the Section 278 bond would be increased to future proof the junctions and it was confirmed that one of the junctions had been altered already to future proof. The

Kingsway Square

D madden confirmed that the programme aimed to deliver this project by March 2024. On site work had started with asbestos removal prior to demolition. The surrounding developments were underway and images would soon be installed on the panelling.

G Wood added that this was a significant development which had stimulated interest in other properties in the area.

M Jackson added that earlier in the week the bus station had been granted planning approval so work had started. Communications were being developed to advise people of the relocated bus stops and allow the site to develop as quickly as possible.

N Turner asked whether there were any risks going forward and how the Board would get assurance on cost pressures or be informed if there was going to be transition of budgets.

M Jackson advised that budgets had been set and depending on which project, the risks sat with different groups and whilst there was ultimately one overall programme, advice was to focus on the budget assigned to the relevant organisation. It was not the case that there was a syncing fund to mop up additional costs. If there was an overspend, it would be reported to board.

5 Governance Board Review

G Wood advised that initial programme guidance reflected the Stronger Town Board as operational for three years under the current membership

The Board had overseen preparation and submission of Town Investment Plan, project prioritisation and Business case development, through to submission.

DLUCH supplementary guidance issued in November 2022 highlighted the changing role for overseeing implementation and any change requests. The usual principles would keep the terms of reference and review the governance structure.

There had been various changes over the previous three years and overlap. The Bishop Auckland Strategic Advisory Panel had some key input however there were some duplicate discussion.

The options to consider were to continue as they were but strengthen links with the Strategic Advisory panel for a wider reach, initiate a governance review by Democratic Services or commission an external party to initiate a governance review.

A report would be brought to the Board to consider in September.

R Yorke suggested that key players were already around the table with the exception of retail, however Councillor Zair had a dual role as he was also a local business owner. His preference was option one and he also supported the work from the SAP which assisted with filtering information to the wider public.

Councillor Scott had some concerns regarding some of questions raised about overspends and the responsibility of reallocating funds. The Chair advised that it had taken more than two years to allocate the £33m and having gone through the rigorous process, he would not expect any significant changes, however if there were any deviations to the projects, the Board would have to approve them.

Councillor Scott added that there was no representation from developers and so she would be in favour of revising the Membership and terms of reference.

D Madden agreed that a light touch review was necessary and also recommended engagement with developers who were the key absent constituent and this could be facilitated by an advisory group.

The Chair appreciated the concerns raised regarding rising costs however he did not consider there to be any significant risks associated the projects aside from some potential minor modifications.

G wood advised that the responsibility for outcomes lay with project sponsors, cost overruns, good governance and review of terms of reference were the Boards responsibility. With regards to Councillor Zair's representation, he was attending on behalf of the Town Council in a position which changed annually, therefore the Board needed to consider consistent retail representation and ways to engage with developers.

Though public meetings had been challenging, they had broken down barriers and dealt with initial issues but there was a question over how to continue with SAP and reach full potential. Alongside SAP there were other advisory forums, which could be embraced and utilised review ways of engagement with sectors operators and partners.

The Chair added that the content of discussions would change over the next phase of the scheme. There was already a good dynamic across the Board which could improve with some tweaks to the membership. He considered SAP to be a good mechanism, however S Harris pointed out that it had changed significantly since its inception and should be reviewed to ensure it was working to its full potential. Despite talking about a business forum, there were issues with how this could be administered due to the number of businesses.

J Gilroy confirmed that DLUCH would investigate governance, check processes, terms of reference and board member profiles and also ensure that publishing timescales were being met.

R Yorke suggested that there could be benefit to adding a representative for information on the Future High Street Fund.

Chris felt that there should be some clarity about where brighter bishop sat as there was some duplication.

D land – needs to be reviewed – something might happen over next two years – need to keep interactive to ensure money attracts private investment

Anyone with particular interest – let me know

E scott – D land – BATC – TAP – chris on behalf of paul butler – will be acting bishop but lives in jarrow – she may not be able to take up the seat

AOB – none

S Harris – quick winds –

D Land – bring to next meeting –

Signage all bases have been installed – 13 places power and data connection, displays will go on simultaneous with ESAC

Judith – digital suites at college – recruitment through roof – prior had 9

Now 40 and 50 next year

Made such a difference – recruitment to college is depending on facilities, investing to ensure have got what should have

Quick wins given £250k – signage original plan 5 so used money to create 13 bases and commitment that LA would facilitate with right signage – college took £100k for training and computer room, incereaaas students

Bishop marras statue at canny hill – G wood – statue has planning consent in place until October 24 and all of the structural assessments complete – price of steel escalated so funding gap – continue to fundraise in background – exploring other contributions section 106 and AAP

Need to procure to see costs,

D land - £30k

S Zair – will DCC maintain costs of statue – G wood – they did agree –

CPAL and bridges and structures

Enterprise agency – were looking to get shop opposite mcintyres

Rob yorke – discussed options ongoing – know 110 food producers in County Durham wanted to bring into central hub to assist with sales in the town

E scott – discovering durham – are they interested

R yorke - costs escalated – small budget – section 106 funding to match it to trying to get more in

S zair –

Ry looking at options atm

6 Kingsway Car Park and Public Realm (FHSF)

7 Governance Board Review

8 Future Meeting Dates

Future Board Meetings were confirmed as 28 September and 11 December 2023.

9 Date of Next Meeting