

Bishop Auckland Stronger Town Board

At a Meeting of **Bishop Auckland Stronger Town Board** held in The Elgar Room - Bishop Auckland Town Hall on **Monday 9 December 2024 at 3.30 pm**

Present:

Alan Boddy (Chair)

Board Members:

Andrew Taylor	The Auckland Project (TAP)
Sam Rushworth	Member of Parliament
Councillor Elizabeth Scott	Portfolio Holder for Economy and Partnerships, DCC
Councillor Sam Zair	Mayor, Bishop Auckland Town Council (BATC)
Revd. Dr Chris Knights	Brighter Bishop Partnership
Nik Turner	Believe Housing
Jonathan Ruffer	The Auckland Project
Shaun Hope	Bishop Auckland College
Mike Harker	Bishop Auckland Town Council

Officers:

Graham Wood	Economic Development Manager, DCC
Mark Jackson	Head of Transport and Contract Services, DCC
Jonathan Gilroy	CLGU
Andrew Walker	Programme Manager, DCC
Andrew Taylor	The Auckland Project
Anna Warnecke	11 Arches Trust

1 Welcome and Introductions

A Boddy introduced himself to the Board, having been appointed as Interim Chair. He was Chair of Spennymoor Town Board who were in the early stages of the same process. He invited all Members of the Board to introduce themselves before commencing with business.

2 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from R Yorke, D Land and A Harhoff.

3 Declarations of interest

A Taylor declared TAP's interest DDG, Kingsway Square, Market Place Hotel, ESAC and Artists' Hub.

S Hope declared an interest in the Springboard to Employment Project as Bishop Auckland College were a delivery partner in the initiative.

4 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 August 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

5 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from the previous minutes.

6 Governance Review

The Board received an update following the recent Bishop Auckland Town Board Governance Stocktake, a copy of which had been circulated.

The stocktake had been undertaken at this stage to ensure that the Board was well placed to oversee projects funded through the Towns Fund moving into their next phase of delivery with a focus on the realisation of benefits, coordination of activities, and strong external communication.

The objectives outlined were to set out the future roles and remit of the Board, consider how the governance structure, membership policies, and procedures of the Town Board could best evolve, assess how the operating principles for the Board could develop to support its future role, consider how best the Council could support the Board, including assessing the respective roles and responsibilities of the Board and the Council and provide practical recommendations to support the Board move into the next phase in championing the delivery of regeneration of the town.

The scope of the stocktake covered matters including Board representation, membership and skills; governance materials/documentation, stakeholder engagement and communications; and training, development and support for the Board.

Eleven recommendations structured around five themes were set out in the report.

N Turner suggested that the stocktake had been undertaken at a good time and was about ensuring the Board were performing at best for the next stage of the programme.

S Hope noted that a level of urgency was required and having recently taken over the as representative of Bishop Auckland College, he was aware of the interest as a beneficiary of the fund, however it was not always clear to him where the focus was and suggested that it would be useful to reflect each meeting on what the Board wanted to achieve.

The Interim Chair suggested that a RAG rated system could be used to identify priorities and G Wood advised that this could be achieved as the data was available.

S Rushworth MP advised that the recommendations were positive overall however concerns had been raised about inclusivity representation and the process of funding award. Councillor Scott confirmed that funding decisions had been made according to the merits of each project and not due to representation on the Board. M Harker acknowledged the rigorous grant funding process.

The Interim Chair noted that it would be useful to refresh Board members and ensure they had the right skillset.

One of the recommendations included amending the Terms of Reference to limit the terms of office however this would need slightly amending for elected representatives with a minimum term of office.

GW confirmed the intention to start the process immediately.

Resolved

That the content of the Bishop Auckland Town Board Governance Stocktake be noted and an implementation plan be prepared based on the eleven recommendations.

7 Communications

The Board received an update to confirm that Edition 8 of the Newsletter had been issued on 25 November 2024 and included information on the following schemes;

- Property Reuse Scheme
- Spring Into Employment – Bishop Auckland College
- Project update – Bus Station, Durham Dales Gateway, Kingsway Square

- What's on – Christmas events including Weardale Railway, BATH Panto Cinderella, Christmas Town and AGLOW
- Updated project timeline

A Walker confirmed that 14,650 copies distributed to homes and Businesses and 650 copies had been made available in public Buildings in the town centre.

In response to a question from the Interim Chair with regards to the use of social media, the Board were advised that where possible, the Council would share news, however due to the scope of the project and the pace in which it moved, it was not considered to be an appropriate means of communication. The Bishop Auckland Regeneration website contained details of all projects however this had poor visitor numbers.

Resolved

That the update be noted.

8 Programme Update - DCC/Project Sponsors

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

- a) Bishop Gateway (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 all schemes were progressing to final design and implementation and the Half Yearly claim had been submitted to DHLUC in November. Subsidy control work was ongoing alongside Grant Funding Agreements and the Programme/Project Risk Review was in the process of being updated.

With regards to Bishop Gateway (formerly ESAC) M Jackson confirmed that there had been some budgetary pressures, however ground investigations had started in November. A requirement of the planning process was to assess the benefits against the impact of the site. There were concerns with the way the application would be perceived and work was ongoing with statutory consultees to minimise any impact and ensure the proposal was fully compliant with planning policy.

A Taylor confirmed that valid quotes had been received with regards to the Art Hub and it was ready to progress, GFA were awaiting subsidy control clearance. In relation the Hotel, a Technical Team had been appointed and a planning application would be submitted in February. The proposal would include a hotel with 60 rooms and a ground floor food and drink establishment. The building had been delisted which would assist in the planning process.

G Wood advised that subject to the delegated approval agreed at the previous meeting £1.2m of funding would be moved to the property reuse fund for immediate release. It was believed the money would be reinvested quickly given the interest expressed beyond the initial 12 Future High Street Funded schemes.

Mark Jackson confirmed that a design proposal for the public realm scheme was expected early in the new year. The scheme had changed with the intention to reduce the amount of traffic on Newgate Street.

A Taylor advised that construction of the Durham Dales car park was nearing completion however there was a risk to the project as Northern Powergrid had not provided a date to install the required electrical cable which had been requested four months prior.

S Hope advised the Board that McIntyre's had officially opened on 5 December 2024. A series of soft openings had taken place before it would be open to the public in January 2025. A series of photographs of the building received positive feedback from the Board. Nine jobs had been created with more to follow.

In relation to Tindale Triangle, M Jackson confirmed that the development was open and operating however there was outstanding work on the roundabout which would account for future development.

Given feedback from the Board, the Interim Chair requested that if possible, a RAG rated system on progress be used for the next meeting.

Resolved

That the presentation be noted.

9 Date of Next Meeting

Dates were yet to be agreed for 2025 and would be circulated to Board Members in consultation with the Interim Chair.