

Bishop Auckland Stronger Town Board

At a Meeting of **Bishop Auckland Stronger Town Board** held in The Elgar Room - Bishop Auckland Town Hall on **Friday 30 August 2024 at 2.00 pm**

Present:

David Land (Chair)

Board Members:

Cllr Mike Harker	Mayor, Bishop Auckland Town Council (BATC)
Rob Yorke	SDEA and Teescraft
Edward Perry	The Auckland Project (TAP)
Jonathan Ruffer	The Auckland Project (TAP)
Jonathan Gilroy	Cities and Local Growth Unit
Sam Rushworth	MP for Bishop Auckland

Officers:

Mark Jackson	Head of Transport and Contract Services, DCC
Andrew Walker	Bishop Auckland Programme Manager, DCC

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from A Harhoff, G Wood, T Smyth, S Hope, Cllr E Scott and M Matthews.

2 Declarations of interest

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

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

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2024 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

M Jackson gave an overview of the programme including governance and subsidy control timescales. Subsidy Control was a mandatory requirement for accumulative for schemes of more than £10m and details were being finalised with TAP to be submitted by the end of June, however this had been delayed. After submission a notification would be published for 30 days in which it would be open to public scrutiny. It would take a further 10 working days to receive approval.

It was agreed that the Chair would be notified on submission of the Subsidy Control letter.

Bishop Gateway (Formally known as ESAC)

M Jackson gave a comprehensive update on Bishop Gateway. Design work complete and costs were higher than the budget available. Work was ongoing with the design team and partners to review the specification and cost. A second round of design work including a review of the car park, was almost complete with a view of bringing costs in line with the budget available.

In response to a question from S Rushworth, M Jackson confirmed that the planning submission should be submitted by November/December and determined in mid 2025, following which building would commence. M Jackson further advised on the grant timelines.

In response to a further question from S Rushworth, M Jackson confirmed that there were no ownership issues with the land affected.

Town Centre Diversification

Art Hub

E Perry updated the Board and reported that as with other TAP projects the Art Hub was subject to subsidy control. As reported at the last meeting the project had reverted back to the original business case. This included a hub for local artists, creation of creative space, makers markets. Ideas included the resurrection of the flower festival.

M Harker advised that he had recently met with Bacchanalia and financial support had been agreed by Bishop Auckland Town Council to support the Christmas event that was to be supported through the Artist Hub project.

Market Place Hotel

E Perry advised that RIBA Stage 2 designs would be submitted by mid September. TAP were working closely with the Councils Planning and Technical Officers with regard to design. A decision on the delisting was expected by the end of the following week. Stage 2 Designs would be shared with the Board at the next meeting. The hotel would be operated by TAP as a welcoming place offering limited service, breakfast and bar, rather than a destination hotel. TAP were looking at an opening date as early as January 2027.

S Rushworth asked if the design would be sympathetic to the architecture of the surrounding Market Place. E Perry confirmed that TAP was working with the Councils Conservation Officers and the design would complement the other buildings in the Market Place.

J Ruffer confirmed that he was very excited about the hotel and provided the Board with the background and need for a quality hotel.

Public Realm

M Jackson highlighted that work on the public realm element of the scheme was subject to the later tabled Town Centre Diversification report. Costs were currently above the allocated budget.

M Harker advised the board that the three questions he was regularly asked by residents related to Canny Hill roundabout, Queens Head Hotel and Vinovium House. He also praised the FHSF public realm funded works at Kingsway Square and North to Fore Bondgate.

Durham Dales Gateway

E Perry advised the Board that demolition was complete and planning for civil works had been submitted. The scheme was now on schedule for completion in December.

South Church

A Walker confirmed that the project was midway through procurement and a contractor would be appointed by the 12 September 2024. There would be a two stage process that would consider the design and re-evaluation of fees. RIBA 3 costs were higher than RIBA 2 and would be considered by the appointed contractor. Business Durham had confirmed that they were confident costs could be brought down.

It was agreed that communications be issued to share details of the scheme at an appropriate time during the programme.

Springboard to Employment

In the absence of S Hope, the Chair reported that McIntyres building would be handed over to Bishop Auckland College on the 3 September 2024 with a completion date of 28 October 2024. The project would be formally launched and activities would begin in November 2024. The project would employ a Centre Manager and create a further nine jobs.

Heritage Walking and Cycling Routes

M Jackson gave an update on the project. Concept design and Budget/estimate had been reviewed against LTN1/20. Design review was underway by Active Travel England and consultation plans were complete. Preliminary Design was underway and preliminary design for Kingsway interface complete. More details would be presented at the next Board meeting.

Tindale Triangle

M Jackson reported that the Tindale Triangle was up and running however there were some areas to finalise. With regards to junction designs, drains and highways were under review to see if costs could be reduced to offer better value for money.

Work would start in the new calendar year and take an estimated six months.

In response to a question from S Rushworth, T Yorke confirmed the new cinema would be opening in January 2025.

S Rushworth referred to the pedestrian crossing at Sainsburys and queried whether a footbridge crossing was being considered. M Jackson explained that any crossing would need to be in the correct place.

5 Town Centre Diversification - Public Realm and PRF2

The Board received a report of the Town Centre Diversification (TCD) Realignment of Funds. The report provided an update on the TCD project and set out proposals to seek board approval for the realignment of funding within the project between the public realm and Property Reuse Fund.

A Walker advised the board that considering the highlighted demand and need for the Property Reuse Fund, and the risks to the public realm project, it was proposed that the scope of the public realm work be scaled back and the savings from this scheme be reallocated to PRF 2.

It was suggested that an alternative solution for the public realm would be to trial a temporary Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) for 18 months, introduce a cycle lane, introduce an ANPR camera and remove the rising bollard, introduce planters and street furniture to soften the streetscape and public realm creating a gateway affect at Fore Bondgate, but not to repave the area at this stage. The temporary TRO would remove the possibility of triggering a Public Inquiry and would allow a deliverable programme within the funding dates and cost envelope. The project could be reviewed after 18 months to determine whether the changes should be made permanent. The Future High Street Fund element was committed, however underspend from Stronger Towns could potentially be recycled into PRF2.

It was estimated that making these changes would reduce the cost of the public realm scheme from £2,316,000 to £1,116,000. Subject to confirmation through a further PAR process, this saving could be realigned to PRF2 to provide an enlarged fund which could support the aspirations for the Hotel alongside a further £1.2 million of support for town centre businesses in Bishop Auckland to bring vacant buildings back into economic use.

The high level of vacant property in the Town Centre was one of the principal reasons why the Conservation Area remained on Historic England's national heritage at risk register. The ability to offer grants to bring vacant buildings back into economic use could also help ensure that the Conservation Area was taken off this national register.

Resolved

That the following recommendations be approved;

- a) That the report be noted
- b) That £1,200,000 funding from the public realm element be realigned to the Property Reuse Fund element of the Town Centre Diversification project
- c) That the Chair and Senior Responsible Officer be delegated the authority to liaise with Government on whether a Project Adjustment Request is required or whether this change was in line with the delegated authority of the Stronger Towns Board.

J Gilroy confirmed that although the decision was within the Boards delegated authority, a PAR would need to be submitted detailing the approved changes.

6 Governance Review

A Walker updated the Board on the progress of the Governance Review. A draft report would be considered by the Steering Group on 4 September 2024 with final raft circulated to Durham County Council by Friday 6 September.

A special meeting of the Board would be convened to consider the report and its recommendations. The final report will be produced by end of September 2024.

M Harker requested an invite to the Steering Group.

7 Recent Communications

A Walker provided an update on visits to the Bishop Auckland Regeneration website, and highest viewing figures.

The next newsletter was discussed and it was suggested that the focus of the edition should be on upcoming events.

8 Date of Next Meeting

The date and time of the next meeting was confirmed as 9 December 2024.