

## COUNTY COUNCIL

23 JANUARY 2019

### QUESTIONS FROM AREA ACTION PARTNERSHIPS

#### CHESTER-LE-STREET AAP

The Chester-le-Street and District AAP has adopted Town Centre issues as a priority for the AAP and as such the AAP welcomes the recent cabinet report 'Town and Village Centres – Way Forward'. In the report it outlines a number of potential themes that the Council could focus on to reinvigorate a modern functioning Town Centre.

One particular theme that the AAP has discussed is the prospect of encouraging more residential units within the Town Centre. We have seen recent examples of this on an ad-hoc basis in the Town as commercial office space is converted to residential flats.

How could the current Chester-le-Street Master Plan be used to encourage more residential development opportunities to encourage people to use local shops and services and could the new 'Future High Street Fund' announcement by central government in October 2018 be used to support this type of investment?

#### RESPONSE

Thank you for this question.

As part of the approach to towns and villages set out in the December Cabinet report, we've been clear that to remain vibrant our town centres need to provide a diverse mix of uses including residential, leisure and retail.

This same diversity of use was a feature of the Chester le Street town centre masterplan, which was consulted upon last year. In line with the masterplan we've already seen the start of the £6 million flood prevention scheme which will also provide significant environmental benefits to the town. In addition, vacant retail premises are being re-occupied and as you indicate some commercial space in the town has recently received planning consent for conversion to residential use.

The masterplan identified clear opportunity areas where we believe that new development can readily come forward and more residential opportunities are an important part of our aspirations for the town. The recently announced Future High Streets fund mirrors this approach looking to identify opportunities to consolidate retail use, introduce residential schemes and ensure access to community facilities and transport improvements. We are currently reviewing our plans and the opportunities across all our main centres before drafting an outline submission and hope that we can secure further resources from this fund to accelerate delivery against this agenda.

## **EAST DURHAM RURAL CORRIDOR AAP**

The AAP have invested funding in various cycle and walkway networks over the years. Given that the Strategic Cycling and Walking Delivery Plan for County Durham 2019-2029 was presented to Cabinet on the 16<sup>th</sup> January, how can the AAP contribute to this plan and how can the plan ensure that the routes the AAP have contributed to are utilised?

### **RESPONSE**

I would like to thank the East Durham Rural Corridor AAP for their question.

The Strategic Cycling and Walking Delivery Plan for County Durham has a strong emphasis on a partnership approach to delivery. We worked closely with partner organisations in the production of the plan and will continue to ensure that partners are included in the delivery of the Action Plan.

A key aspiration of the plan is that walking and cycling become part of everyday community life. The AAPs operate at the heart of our communities and can help deliver that success by promoting walking and cycling for travel at a local level.

We recognise that the East Durham Rural Corridor Cycle Route has been a significant investment for the AAP; and on completion will provide a good opportunity for further engagement with local communities. We would be happy to work with the AAP on the production of a route plan and interpretative material for the route to ensure that the infrastructure is used responsibly and by an increasing number of people.

It is a shame that the AAP's and Council's enthusiasm and commitment has so far not been matched by central government in terms of the funding required to fully deliver this transformational plan. However, at a local level there are many actions within the plan that the AAPs can contribute towards, and we welcome the opportunity to work together to help deliver them.