

Cabinet

15 May 2019

**Bishop Auckland Regeneration – Town
Centre Masterplan and Heritage Action
Zone**



Ordinary Decision

Report of Corporate Management Team

**Ian Thompson, Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local
Services**

**Councillor Carl Marshall, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economic
Regeneration**

Electoral division(s) affected:

Bishop Auckland Town ward

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report provides an update on regeneration activity in Bishop Auckland. The report seeks approval of the final town centre masterplan and provides an update of activity in the Bishop Auckland Heritage Action Zone.

Executive summary

- 2 The potential for regeneration of Bishop Auckland town centre significantly changed in 2012 with the establishment of Auckland Castle Trust (now rebranded as The Auckland Project). This opportunity for change was further identified by Historic England's Urban Panel visit to Bishop Auckland in November 2014.
- 3 The work on the preparation of the masterplan commenced in 2017. Subsequently, there have been two rounds of public consultation with the local community with a high level of engagement on both occasions. We have considered how the key spaces in the town are used; how people access, connect and orientate themselves in the centre; and how people will develop their knowledge and skill to access the new job opportunities. We have also considered the infrastructure needs of the centre as the town develops its visitor attractions.

- 4 The masterplan is an ambitious long term strategic framework for the town centre which balances the needs of resident, business, visitor and investor alike, to enable the town and its community to capitalise on the opportunity presented by current and emerging developments. The masterplan aligns closely with the Council's Towns and Villages programme in actively seeking and supporting the re-use of town centre premises in the face of significant pressures on the traditional high street.
- 5 Bishop Auckland's Heritage Action Zone has been established to help revitalise the town's historic centre and to help realise its potential to be a vibrant market town for both locals and visitors.
- 6 Working in partnership, Durham County Council, Historic England and the Brighter Bishop Auckland Regeneration Partnership Board are seeking to strengthen the town's economic, social and cultural regeneration through a toolbox of measures including grant aid, specialist support, guidance, public engagement and the improvement to essential infrastructure such as coach and car parking and town centre wifi.
- 7 The Heritage Action Zone will tackle heritage at risk, including the conservation area, and will look at buildings that have suffered from years of retail decline. A range of other projects are planned to help bring neglected buildings back in to use, rejuvenate public spaces, involve local people and deliver stronger planning. A programme of research, repair and regeneration is coordinated by the Heritage Action Zone Project Manager. The Project Manager will work with the partnership and local community to deliver around 50 projects.
- 8 The masterplan sets a clear strategic direction for the future of the town centre. The projects contained in the masterplan will be delivered over the next 10-15 years. Funding bids to support the delivery of the Masterplan have already commenced, such as the bid recently submitted to the Government's Future High Streets Fund focussed on developing coach and car parking capacity to meet the needs of both resident and visitor populations. The masterplan has been developed with a high level of engagement with the local community throughout its preparation. As we move into the delivery phase, we will continue to engage with the local community as well as working in partnership with other bodies, such as the local NHS Trust.
- 9 Whilst the Heritage Action Zone was only established in May last year, it has made significant progress in implementing its Delivery Plan. Work is currently being undertaken to gain more understanding of key buildings within the centre. This increased understanding of buildings should enable the Heritage Action Zone to develop a new funding

package for building owners and tenants to improve the appearance of their property. Work is underway to restore the West Mural Tower which will bring this Grade 1 listed building back into use and remove it from the Historic England at risk register.

Recommendation

10 Cabinet is recommended to:

- a) Approve the Bishop Auckland Town Centre Masterplan;
- b) Note progress being made on the Bishop Auckland Heritage Action Zone.

Background

- 11 Within the North East context, Bishop Auckland town centre is ranked as a sub-regional centre which serves the wider communities of south and west Durham.
- 12 The potential for renewal of Bishop Auckland town centre significantly changed in 2012 with the establishment of Auckland Castle Trust. Since this time, it has acquired a number of properties across the town to help deliver its heritage focused visitor attraction. The organisation has also gone through a re-branding and is now known as The Auckland Project.
- 13 It has now opened the Auckland Tower and the Mining Art Gallery, both located in the Market Place. It is currently restoring Auckland Castle and the West Mural Tower. It is also constructing the new Faith Gallery, Spanish Art Gallery and Walled Garden. Collectively, these projects represent a significant capital investment in Bishop Auckland.
- 14 To help enable the construction of the Auckland Tower, the Council successfully applied to the North East Local Enterprise Partnership for £2.1 million of funding to alter the public highway in the Market Place. These works provide high quality level access between the Market Place and the entrance to Auckland Castle, where the Auckland Tower is located. The quality of this project has recently been recognised by the Royal Town Planning Institute, which has shortlisted Auckland Tower in the national Planning for Excellence Awards 2019.
- 15 In 2017, the Council helped establish the Brighter Bishop Auckland Regeneration Partnership whose purpose is to contribute positively to the social, economic and physical regeneration of Bishop Auckland and its environs, by enabling its member agencies to submit joint funding bids and procure tenders for projects that further their own objectives and to which they can contribute effectively as well as supporting greater collaborative working.
- 16 The Brighter Bishop Auckland Board is led by an independent chair, Paul Butler the Bishop of Durham. The current Board is comprised of:
 - The Chief Executive of The Auckland Project;
 - The Chief Executive of Eleven Arches;
 - The Pro Vice Chancellor of Durham University;
 - The Regional Director of Historic England;
 - The Clerk to Bishop Auckland Town Council;

- The Chair of Bishop Auckland Civic Society;
- The Principal of Bishop Auckland College;
- The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration; and,
- The Chief Executive of the South Durham Enterprise Agency

Masterplan

- 17 In 2017, the Council commissioned a consultancy team to prepare a regeneration masterplan for Bishop Auckland town centre. We undertook the procurement exercise, in association with a senior officer from Historic England and students from Bishop Auckland College.
- 18 The initial element of this commission was to prepare a baseline report and undertake public consultation to ascertain views from residents, local businesses and community groups about how they currently view the town centre and what they would like to see improved. We received 774 responses to the consultation exercise with the vast majority of these being provided through digital communication (661 responses). The Baseline Analysis and Consultation Report forms part of the final masterplan but it is summarised below.
- 19 The Baseline Analysis considers the historic context to how Bishop Auckland developed; the physical environment of the Town, and the quality of the built environment. The baseline analysis goes onto consider how people move through the town centre and how different areas of the town centre are connected.
- 20 With regard to the community consultation, the following key messages came through. People use the town centre for traditional town centre purposes such as visiting the bank or going shopping but they also visit the centre to go to cafes and go out for food. This mirrors national trends across the UK and has driven the new approach to Towns and Village regeneration agreed by Cabinet in December 2018.
- 21 In order to encourage more people to use the town centre throughout the day and evening, there is a need to provide a greater variety of and better shops, increase the number of cafes, restaurants and bars (including live music entertainment). There was also a view that we should provide additional car parking spaces & free car parking. There was also a significant view that the public spaces in the centre could be better used through the introduction of events and use by markets. Whilst there were a lot of positive comment about what works well in the town centre for local people, businesses and visitors, there was some negative views received about the lack of facilities in the town.

22 With regard to jobs and training, there was a clear view that the local colleges should look to improve the skills of their students to access the job opportunities but that also there needs to be apprenticeships created. The consultation questions finished by asking people what were the three most important issues for the town centre. The three key issues were:

- Fill empty shops;
- Attractions;
- Food & Beverage - Bars, Cafés & Restaurants.

23 Over last summer, we undertook another round of public consultation to obtain community views on the emerging options. There was a significant level of community interest (646 responses) and again, the majority of responses were made through digital communications. Most of the responses were made by people living close to the town centre although 34% of responses were made by people living over two miles away from the centre. This consultation highlighted a lack of response from young people. To address this, we have subsequently undertaken a round of consultation with focus groups in the local secondary schools and Bishop Auckland College.

24 Opportunities were presented for three distinct areas of the town, namely the Market Place, Fore Bondgate, North Bondgate and the bus station; Newgate Street (North) and Kingsway; and, Newgate Street (South) and the train station. The three priorities for the community in these areas are summarised below.

Market Place, Fore Bondgate, North Bondgate and the bus station	Newgate Street (North) and Kingsway	Newgate Street (South) and the train station
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New retail on Newgate Street; • Improved Newgate Shopping Centre; • Encourage activity throughout Market Place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shopfront improvements; • Modern shops with nearby car parking; • Reinvigorate historic buildings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shopfront improvements; • Improved public spaces and crossings; • Improve safety/appearance of walking routes.

Town Centre Health Check

- 25 As part of the Masterplan commission, we have been provided with a Town Centre Health Check. This document confirms that there are some significant issues within the town centre, such as the high level of vacant properties (in concentrated areas) which is affecting the vitality and viability of the centre and the influence of the retail development at Tindale Crescent. However, this Health Check also confirms that the Town Centre remains a Sub-Regional Centre based on the Javelin Venuescore ranking and ranked second to Durham City across the county towns.
- 26 The mix of uses within town centre is broadly similar to the national average. It is notable that the proportions of comparison retail, financial services and leisure service uses are around or above the national average, particularly in the context of increased competition in other locations. However, the proportion of convenience retail uses, retail services (e.g. hairdressers, travel agents, etc.), cafes/restaurants, pubs/bars/clubs and hot food takeaways are all lower than the national average.
- 27 The proportion of cafes/restaurants within Bishop Auckland town centre, which is less than half the national average for such uses within town centres, is particularly revealing and appears to jar with the centre's emerging focus as an arts and cultural destination, where food and beverage facilities will play an important role in the overall visitor experience and in extending dwell time. This does however provide a commercial opportunity for investors, developers and entrepreneurs to open up new food and beverage establishments within the town to take advantage of this gap in the market.
- 28 The Health Check identifies that whilst there is a clear need to reduce the overall vacancy rate in the centre, it will be important to focus on the cluster of vacant property in the northern part of Newgate Street (43 Market Place – 18 Newgate Street) and the middle part of Newgate Street (57-101 Newgate Street), including the former Beales department store. These clusters are having a disproportionate impact on the vitality and viability of the centre, and the general perception of the centre.
- 29 The vacant properties in the centre vary in terms of their size, frontage, configuration and servicing arrangement but are generally small in scale. Commercial agents have advised that none of the units available are ideal for the modern occupier with the preference being for modern, regular shaped units, with good frontage and convenient service arrangements. In this context, they are aware of prospective occupiers having rejected units currently on offer for the above reasons, and this

is having an impact on the ability to improve the retail offer in the town centre more generally.

- 30 We have provided information in relation to current and recent levels of rent and yields in Bishop Auckland town centre. Whilst historic prime Zone A rental levels were in excess of £60 per ft² in the pre-recession period, these have fallen to around £20 to £25 per ft² since in the best parts of Newgate Street. Outside the prime areas of Newgate Street, rental levels decline further but are generally between £10 and £20 for Zone A depending upon pitch. This can be compared with the out of town rental rates which are typically around £20 per ft² on an overall basis, and therefore significantly higher.
- 31 Under the Towns and Villages programme a package of measures to incentivise the conversion or re-use of premises is proposed, extending beyond the Targeted Business Support currently available. This could also include the purchase of buildings to enable the Council to proactively encourage the re-use of those buildings by new businesses which will drive footfall into the centre. Where improvement cannot be achieved through these means, a proactive approach to acquisition demolition and reuse is advocated to ensure vacant units do not become long term blight issues.
- 32 The Council has also recently completed work looking at visitor accommodation in Bishop Auckland. This work has considered the demand and supply of overnight accommodation in the town and the surrounding settlements. Due to the anticipated significant increase in visitors to the town, the work concludes that there is a need for further hotel, B&B and serviced accommodation in the town.

Masterplan – key areas

- 33 Through working with the consultancy team and taking advice from the Partnership Board, we have broken down the town centre into a number of different character areas. These character areas are:
1. Auckland Castle & Market Place
 2. Fore Bondgate
 3. North Newgate Street and Kingsway
 4. Central Newgate Street and Kingsway
 5. South Newgate Street
 6. Rail Station

A plan of these character areas is provided in Appendix 2.

- 34 The Masterplan sets out what the key short, medium and long term projects are for the town centre and where resources (including the Council) should be targeted. New infrastructure in the town centre costs significant sums, such as a replacement bus station or the provision of new car parking, and they would need to be subject to new capital programme bids. Commercial opportunities are currently being considered and proposals will be developed over the coming months.
- 35 Other projects will be delivered solely by regeneration partners (e.g. The Auckland Project delivering the new Spanish Art Gallery in the Market Place) and some projects will be delivered through a mixture of different funders (e.g. the Heritage Action Zone). As a result, the Council's role moving forward will be a mixture of delivery, facilitation and liaison.

Auckland Castle & Market Place

- 36 The masterplan recognises that there are significant monies being expended by The Auckland Project at Auckland Castle and on specific buildings in and around the Market Place in order to establish their visitor attractions. The Masterplan does not propose any significant intervention in this area apart from trying to encourage more footfall in the area. This could be achieved by encouraging buses/coaches to drop people off in this area and by increasing the use of the Market Place for events and markets. The proposed programme of alterations to the Town Hall and an increased events programme within the Town Hall could help facilitate increased footfall in the Market Place.

Fore Bondgate

- 37 The area is characterised by a range of small properties, serving a wide variety of independent retail stores. Improvements continue to be made to the premises through the Targeted Building Improvement scheme operated by the Council. However, there is an issue at the entrance to Fore Bondgate from the Market Place as the properties on both sides of the street have blank facades. This does not encourage people to wander up Fore Bondgate and explore the range of independent stores. We need to encourage these building owners to bring back active frontages to their properties, which will help drive footfall along Fore Bondgate.
- 38 This area is bounded by surface level car parking to the north and by the bus station to the south but there are connectivity issues for people to properly use the Fore Bondgate area. There is the potential to increase surface car parking in the bus station area, if the bus station is

relocated to the edge of the Newgate Centre. The relocation of the bus station and the provision of additional car parking forms the core aspect of our bid to the Future High Streets Fund in Bishop Auckland. These connectivity issues could be overcome through a mixture of public realm improvements and the acquisition and demolition of a small number of properties, which would enable people to make a visual connection to Fore Bondgate.

North Newgate Street and Kingsway

- 39 The masterplan identifies that there is a lower than expected level of footfall in the northern part of Newgate Street, as it has been observed that when people come out of the Newgate Centre they predominantly turn right and walk down the street. This may in part be due to the high level of vacancy in this part of Newgate Street. The masterplan also identifies that the Council land at 9-11 Newgate Street provides a key opportunity to regenerate this area through its redevelopment. It has also been noted that whilst Kingsway is a major highway route through the town, this area is dominated by back of house and service yards.
- 40 There is a need to consider how we actively use our land holding in the area and how the vacant property can be brought back into economic use to improve the vitality and viability of the area. A separate report is being prepared by our Assets team which will consider the future of the Council's land holding at no. 9-11 Newgate Street.
- 41 Furthermore, there is a need to understand how Kingsway can function better either through improvements to car parking and/or improvements to the public realm. Whilst it may be more appropriate in the longer term for some of the gap sites to become residential sites, it is likely that they should become new car parking areas in the short to medium term to support and benefit the new visitor attraction and the town centre. The provision of additional physical infrastructure, such as new car parking is a major capital expenditure for the Council.

Centre Newgate Street and Kingsway

- 42 The central part of Newgate Street should be a key performing area of the town centre, which links with the Market Place to the north and the rail station to the south. However, this area has lost its key anchor of the Beales department store and there is a concentrated area of vacant property, some of which is in very poor condition. In a similar vein to the character area above, the masterplan notes that whilst Kingsway is a major highway route through the town, this area is dominated by back of house and service yards.

- 43 This is a key area of the town and there is a need to drive footfall within this area to increase the potential for bringing vacant property back into use. This could be achieved by working with the owners of the vacant buildings to bring that property back into use; through the creation of new/improved car parking along Kingsway; a new leisure focused anchor and improvements to the public realm.
- 44 The provision of new car parking in this area could help underpin new economic activity in this part of Newgate Street but as previously described it would be a major capital expenditure for the Council.

South Newgate Street

- 45 The southern part of Newgate Street is dominated by local, independent retailers but there are some national chain stores near Princes Street. Some of these properties have benefited from the TBI scheme but there are many more properties that could be improved. This would offer a short term win for the town centre. It would improve the physical appearance of the properties and the initial perception of the town from visitors as they walk from the train station to the Market Place and the visitor attraction at the Castle.

Rail Station

- 46 The key issue in this area of the town centre is the lack of orientation on arrival at the train station. The large retail boxes obscure the physical and visual connection to Newgate Street. The busy road network in this area also inhibits the movement of pedestrians in this location. There is a need to put in place low cost measures to the public realm that will enable visitors to make the connection to Newgate Street. Again, this could be undertaken quickly and provide a quick win for the delivery of the programme of projects resulting from the masterplan.

Car parking infrastructure

- 47 One of the key elements of the masterplan has been to understand how the town will seek to accommodate both the infrastructure needs of residents and visitors. A review of car parking has been undertaken to assess the capacity of the existing provision in and around the town centre and the impact of an increase in the demand associated with increased visitor numbers associated with The Auckland Project attractions.
- 48 It should be noted that we have been informed that The Auckland Project is proposing to direct its visitors to the North Bondgate car park, which it manages. This proposed management change to North Bondgate car park will increase the use of other car parks in the town

by residents. The Council is looking to provide some additional town centre car parking capacity on Kingsway and a planning application has been submitted for this. A further important aspect of this will be the increasing use and importance of the capacity of the Newgate Centre Multi Storey Car Park. However, it is acknowledged that there are issues relating to the ramp access and signage to this facility.

- 49 As the new visitor attraction at Auckland Castle has not yet opened to the public, we have used other North East attractions such as Beamish Museum and Alnwick Gardens as a proxy to assess potential parking demand associated with the increase in visitors. This indicates that the existing car parking infrastructure at North Bondgate can accommodate up to 170,000 visitors. However, The Auckland Project's projected visitors for the attractions will exceed this figure by 2020/21.
- 50 It will be important that in partnership with The Auckland Project we monitor the actual impact of the influx of visitors in the town and that new car parking capacity is developed once the quantum of visitors necessitates the need for it. The Council will continue to work together with The Auckland Project to look at opportunities to provide further parking in line with their aspirations to grow visitor numbers.

Priority of Projects

- 51 The masterplan will look to deliver a wide range of projects, some of which can be delivered quickly whilst others will take time to come to fruition. It is expected that some of the projects could take over 10 years to deliver. There also needs to be a reality check that the Council cannot be solely responsible for the delivery of these projects. There may be a role for the Council to facilitate or support other regeneration partners to deliver some of these projects.

Heritage Action Zone

- 52 In April 2018, Historic England awarded Heritage Action Zone status to Bishop Auckland. The aim of a Heritage Action Zone is to achieve economic growth by using the historic environment as a catalyst. A Heritage Action Zone will provide a targeted response to the economic, social and environmental needs of a particular area. A Heritage Action Zone delivery plan sets out what will be achieved over the 5 year implementation period. Historic England resources are focused on these areas.
- 53 Our programme is focused on the town centre and will seek to address Heritage at Risk of both the Conservation Area and two individual buildings. There will be a co-ordinated programme of condition surveys, feasibility work and grants. We believe that the Heritage Action Zone designation will lead to a vibrant town centre through increased visitors,

more employment opportunities, greater occupancy of space, increased events and increased housing.

- 54 Bishop Auckland is one of 18 Heritage Action Zones approved nationally and one of three in the North East (the other two are in Sunderland and the Stockton-Darlington Railway).
- 55 The delivery of the Heritage Action Zone is being overseen by an Advisory Group, which is led by an independent chair, Dr Robert McManners chair of Bishop Auckland Civic Society. The Advisory Group is comprised of representatives from:
- Durham County Council (officers, AAP and a local ward member);
 - Historic England;
 - Bishop Auckland Town Council;
 - The Auckland Project; and;
 - Bishop Auckland Town Team.
- 56 With regard to the implementation of Year 1 projects in the Heritage Action Zone Delivery Plan, we have:
- started historic research of key buildings in the town centre;
 - procured consultants to undertake an economic study which will identify the capacity for change in buildings (and upper floors) being brought back into economic use;
 - we have undertaken planning enforcement on 71-73 Newgate Street;
 - we have participated in the Heritage Open Days programme 2018, funded workshop for local schools attending the Experience Bishop Auckland Exhibition; and
 - we have helped the Grade I listed West Mural Tower to undergo a programme of repairs. This completion of this programme of repair works later this year will enable the West Mural Tower to be taken off the national Heritage at Risk register.

Main implications

Economic Implications

- 57 The delivery of the masterplan should lead to an increased economic performance in the town centre. The establishment of the new visitor

attractions by The Auckland Project should lead to a significant amount of new visitors (and expenditure) in the town centre, which in turn should lead to new businesses being attracted to the town centre and an increased number of job opportunities for local people to access.

- 58 To help address the skills agenda, The Auckland Project is working with Bishop Auckland College on the establishment of the Auckland Academy, aligned to the towns and villages approach, where opportunities for a retail hub focussed on supporting new town centre business formation and the upskilling of existing businesses

Environmental Implications

- 59 The majority of the town centre is contained within the boundary of the Conservation Area and is now contained within the boundary of the Heritage Action Zone. There is a significant number of listed buildings within the town centre, two of which are currently on the national Heritage at Risk register. The Conservation Area itself is also on the national Heritage at Risk register. The implementation of the Heritage Action Zone Delivery Plan will seek to address these matters and lead to the removal of the Conservation Area and the two listed buildings from the Heritage at Risk register.

Equalities Implications

- 60 We have also prepared an Equality Impact Assessment, which accompanies the masterplan. This document identifies that the masterplan work will not lead to any negative impact upon those with a protected characteristic. The impact of the masterplan is likely to be positive for equalities groups who will benefit from the new jobs, new infrastructure and new public realm, which will make the town more accessible and inclusive. This will lead to positive impact for all but may be particularly beneficial in terms of disability, age and sex.

Financial Implications

- 61 The range of potential projects range from small scale improvements to the public realm, wayfinding and signage to large scale improvements to the infrastructure of the town e.g. a new bus station and new car parking. Where projects will be delivered by the Council, there will be a need for the capital programme to allocate resources to achieve this. Funding bids will be made through the Medium Term Financial Planning process.

Conclusion

- 62 The masterplan has provided an understanding of how the town centre currently operates and how it performs for local residents, businesses

and visitors. It identifies a range of opportunities to improve the economic performance of the centre, including the identification of gaps in the current provision of town centre uses.

- 63 There has been significant local interest in the preparation of the masterplan through the responses to the engagement sessions. It will be important that the Council and partners deliver on the ambitions of the masterplan, recognising that there will be financial constraints when delivering these. Some projects will take time to deliver and it will be important that we keep people informed of our progress.

Background papers

- Bishop Auckland Town Centre Masterplan
- Equality Impact Assessment
- Heritage Action Zone Delivery Plan
- Historic England Urban Panel report
- Cabinet Report (December 2018) Towns and Villages Regeneration – Way Forward
- Bishop Auckland Area Visitor Accommodation Development Strategy

Other useful documents

- None.

Contact:	Stuart Timmiss	Tel: 03000 267334
	Peter Coe	Tel: 03000 262042

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

There may be legal implications associated with the delivery of the projects within the masterplan. For example, there may be the need for a Compulsory Purchase Order to assemble land to enable a project to be implemented. However, at this stage, there is no specific project where Compulsory Purchase is being considered.

Finance

Council led projects are being delivered through the Medium Term Financial Plan's capital programme. Funding bids will continue to be made to future Medium Term Financial Plans to enable the delivery of projects identified in the masterplan.

Consultation

The preparation of the masterplan has involved two rounds of public consultation. The initial round of consultation took place during July and August 2017 which involved public exhibitions and an online survey. The second round of consultation took place between July and November 2018 which involved public exhibitions, focused workshops with young people and an online survey. The outcome of these engagement sessions have been identified in the main body of the report.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

As paragraph 58 states, an Equality Impact Assessment has been prepared and is appended to this report.

Human Rights

No implication.

Crime and Disorder

No implication.

Staffing

The Heritage Action Zone is being managed by a dedicated Project Manager.

Accommodation

No implication.

Risk

Risk assessments will be prepared for individual projects within the masterplan when they are being developed.

Procurement

The consultant team that has prepared the masterplan was procured through the Council's standard processes. To help achieve the Council's social value, we undertook the procurement exercise in conjunction with Historic England and students from Bishop Auckland College.

Appendix 2: Masterplan Character Areas

