

## **Economy & Enterprise**

### **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**11 November 2021**

### **Managing change in County Durham's Towns and Villages**



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## **Report of Amy Harhoff, Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth**

### **Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide

### **Purpose of the Report**

- 1 To outline the process for managing change to the physical fabric of the County's Towns and Villages. This report will
  - (a) Set out the process for establishing planned interventions for place through Masterplans and Targeted Delivery Plans
  - (b) Demonstrate the development and alignment of funding programmes such as the Towns and Villages programme to facilitate change and improvement.

### **Executive summary**

- 2 The Council's established hierarchy of plans and strategies provides an opportunity to underpin the County Durham vision and set out clear priorities for service delivery.
- 3 The County Durham Plan as one such document provides a framework for delivering change and improvement at a local level. This is further supported by a suite of masterplans and more recently the development of Targeted Delivery Plans which translate strategic priorities into a localised vision for change, improvement and investment.
- 4 The process of identifying localised needs and priorities for intervention which form part of the masterplan process have also been utilised to assist in the development of the Council's Town and Villages programme with both masterplans and the Towns and Village programme also heavily reliant on ongoing programmes of consultation and engagement with residents and wider stakeholders.

- 5 Through this joined up approach to vision and priority setting at a local as well as county wide level a broad range of activity has been developed both directly under the Towns and village programme but also through aligned funding opportunities which have common themes or delivery priorities.
- 6 These projects vary in scale and complexity with many just beginning to deliver significant impacts in communities across the County. The structures developed to ensure effective co-ordination and delivery of these projects will also be utilised to track ongoing progress and the outcomes of this broad ranging work.

### **Recommendation(s)**

- 7 Members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note and comment upon the information provided in the report and accompanying presentation.

### **Background**

- 8 The Council Plan 2020-2023 is the primary corporate planning document for Durham County Council. The Council Plan reflects the County Durham Partnership Vision for County Durham and the following ambitions for the people of County Durham:
  - (a) More and better jobs;
  - (b) People live long and independent lives; and
  - (c) Connected communities.
- 9 Within the Council Plan, the connected communities ambition identifies an objective that our towns and villages will be vibrant, well-used, clean attractive and safe. Towns and Villages is noted as a key programme of work within this context in the Council Plan.
- 10 Towns and Villages is a long-standing priority of the Council. As an integrated approach to place-based regeneration, Towns and Villages has identified a significant investment programme currently underway across the county. Towns and Villages provides a clear program to support place-based priorities, such as the re-use of derelict buildings, walking and cycling improvements, public realm and leisure schemes for our towns and villages across our large and diverse county.
- 11 The Towns and Villages programme recognises that the Council has a pivotal role in shaping planning and development to underpin long term change especially in relation to town and city centres.

- 12 The Council can set out the vision and phased development framework for the future development of an area through documents such as the County Durham Plan. This assists in determining detailed decisions on planning applications and changes in the use of our towns and centres. For town centres to prosper, it is vital that decisions are made in the context of wider town centre impacts.
- 13 Long term masterplanning to rebalance the role and function of town and city centres and providing a broad range of functions remains central to this process. Utilising evidence masterplans reflect changing retail capacity and evolving shopping patterns as well as providing a starting point for addressing fragmented ownerships which are often a large obstacle to delivering change in town and city centres.
- 14 The Towns and Villages programme focusses on delivery and is accompanied by an Investment Plan 2021-2024. This Investment Plan notes where masterplans were in place at the time of its preparation and it also reflects the role of Housing Strategy, Targeted Delivery Plans in supporting housing and community objectives, as well as in improving the environment.

## **Masterplans**

- 15 The Council have previously prepared a number of masterplans and regeneration frameworks for the larger towns in the county, the most recent being the Chester-le-Street Masterplan adopted in 2019.
- 16 Although this has always been a rolling programme, we have accelerated a number of new masterplans to support potential Levelling Up Fund (LUF) bids currently in preparation.
- 17 Although a key driver for this round of masterplans is LUF they are being comprehensively prepared and therefore contain other projects and proposals that will either not be suitable for LUF or may ultimately be unsuccessful bids.
- 18 The masterplans identify current and future activities across the public and private sectors in order to provide a coordinated approach to delivery and maximise opportunities for funding.
- 19 Masterplans are developed drawing on published and primary data which provides an economic context for the study area along with primary surveys examining retail occupancy, car parking capacity, pedestrian routes /nodes as well as streetscape and environmental quality.
- 20 Potential solutions to improve the commercial or usable areas across the study area are developed and tested through dialogue with a range

of council services and external partners where appropriate. These solutions are then the subject of an initial design, costing and validation before being included within the masterplan.

21 Despite the Council's extensive powers and resources, it is recognised that widespread change at a local level can't be delivered without partner and property owner buy in. various levels of engagement are built into the development of masterplans dependent on the complexity of proposed interventions

22 The key issues for each of the currently emerging masterplan include:

#### Chester-le-Street

- Building on the success of the de-culverting project.
- Creating an enhanced leisure offer.
- Expanding and improving employment locations to support job creation and economic growth.
- Improving connectivity, accessibility and sustainable travel opportunities.

#### Durham City

- A new cultural hub at Millennium Place.
- Improved accessibility and public realm improvements on Durham Riverside.
- Improved transport infrastructure including new park and ride capacity and a number of active travel projects.
- Heritage improvements at Durham Miners at Redhills, Crook Hall, Belmont Viaduct, Old Fulling Mill, Cornmill.

#### Newton Aycliffe

- Improvements to the town centre in including demolition of the multi-storey car park and a new leisure quarter.
- Delivery of improved cycling and walking infrastructure including better links to the town centre from Aycliffe Business Park and the railway station.
- Supporting the delivery of Merchant Park and Forrest Park.

#### Peterlee

- Diversify uses and improve the quality of the public realm in the town centre, including on Yoden Way.
- Improved pedestrian and cycle infrastructure into and around the town centre.
- Improve Peterlee bus station as the focus for a Mobility Hub.

#### Stanley

- Improved transport capacity on A693 and enhancement of active mode routes.
- Refurbished bus station and enhancement of active mode routes including linking residential areas to the town centre.
- Repurposing and redeveloping key vacant buildings and sites.
- Consolidate the retail core and introduce new destination retail.

#### Three Towns

- Improve the quality of shopping in the three town centres including improvements to buildings and public realm.
- Provide additional vehicle charging infrastructure within the towns.
- Cycle and walking improvements including the Brandon to Bishop Auckland cycleway.

23 If agreed, consultation will be undertaken on the masterplans from 29 November 2021 to 14 January 2022. Following consultation amendments will be made in response to the comments made wherever possible.

24 The final masterplans will be used to bid for funds both within the Council and externally, including informing the business cases that will be prepared for rounds two and three Levelling Up Fund submissions.

### **Housing Strategy Targeted Delivery Plans**

25 Housing Strategy Targeted Delivery Plans (TDPs) are an integral part of the Housing Strategy and relate to maintaining and improving the existing housing stock and the wider housing environment. TDPs also form part of the Council's commitment to our disadvantaged communities through Towns and Villages and form part of the Towns and Villages Investment Plan. In this context, TDP are part of the

Council's approach of accelerating the delivery of projects to address issues in communities.

- 26 TDPs have been developed as an approach to deliver an intensive, focused and coordinated programme of activities by the Council and its partners in areas most in need across the county. The first phase of TDPs was approved by Cabinet in March 2021. The approved TDP areas are set out on the map at Appendix 2.

#### Targeted Delivery Plan Evidence Base

- 27 The Council has developed an evidence base to understand which communities are most in need of intervention. This evidence base has been developed to consider the types of issues that communities face and that the TDPs will look to address. It includes information on housing market indicators, low demand and stock condition as well as wider issues facing communities, such as crime. The evidence also includes contextual indicators which have an impact in determining people's housing options and ability to sustain a tenancy.
- 28 Data has been gathered at Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) level for the 324 LSOAs across County Durham. Whilst LSOAs vary in area, they are based on a broadly consistent population size. The use of LSOAs ensures that the TDPs represent a localised geography, comparable to a community or estate.
- 29 The individual datasets were ranked to understand which LSOAs performed poorly in respect of each data theme. These individual rankings were then brought together to create a cumulative ranking list, which provides an understanding of those areas across the county which rank relatively poorly across multiple housing issues and are most in need of intervention.
- 30 To note, in developing the cumulative ranking list, the process did not involve weighting of any of the data themes. A core intention of the TDPs is to coordinate actions in response to multiple issues in a locality. Therefore, it was considered important to understand those areas which performed poorly in respect of multiple indicators. Any approach to weighting specific sets of data may have elevated those locations performing relatively poorly against weighted single issues in the cumulative ranking list and potentially may have obscured those areas in greater need of intervention across a range of themes and which would benefit from a coordinated approach to delivery.

#### Overview of first phase of TDPs

- 31 The first phase of TDPs were approved by Cabinet in March 2021. TDPs are therefore in place for the following areas:

- New Kyo;
- Coundon Grange;
- Blackhall Colliery South;
- Thickey;
- Deneside East; and
- Stanley Hall West.

32 These TDP areas represented positions five to ten in the cumulative ranking list. Those locations ranked one to four in the cumulative ranking list were not considered to be appropriate for TDP on the basis that these areas already have existing large-scale interventions proposed or ongoing. It was considered that a TDP would not add further value beyond the ongoing or proposed strategic interventions, which have been developed to provide a comprehensive response to specific issues and opportunities for these areas. It is also in recognition of the respective stage of these projects which have either commenced or have recently been subject to public consultation. The areas ranked one to four in the cumulative ranking list are as follows:

- Horden Central;
- Easington Colliery North;
- Ferryhill Dene Bank North; and
- Horden East.

#### TDP Delivery, Monitoring and Future Programme

33 Delivery has commenced within the TDP areas. The actions undertaken respond to issues in each location and have been developed in line with the TDP action plan. To support delivery of the TDPs, discussions are ongoing with relevant Registered Housing Providers operating in the areas. Furthermore, as part of an ongoing programme, the approved TDPs are being taken to the relevant Area Action Partnership for discussion.

34 A TDP Governance Group has been established, consisting of officers from teams involved in the development and delivery of the TDPs. This Group meets to support the delivery of actions, in line with the TDPs. The Governance Group also monitors delivery against the TDPs.

- 35 Alongside the approval of the first six TDPs in March 2021, Cabinet agreed to the future expansion of the TDP programme. It was noted that the future programme of TDPs would build on the first six documents and scale up the number and coverage of TDPs across the county.

## **Towns and Villages Programme**

- 36 The Towns and Villages programme was established in 2018 in response to the pressures and rapid change being experienced in the towns and villages. This change was identified not only through the routine monitoring of town centre vacancy rates and empty residential property numbers but also issues raised through discussions with local members and the Area Action Partnerships.
- 37 The Towns and villages Programme from the outset has set out to complement a wide range of investments already underway and to provide a particular focus on Alignment of policies and programmes, addressing gaps in provision, focussing on areas of deprivation or low market intervention and rural areas.
- 38 Between 2019 and 2020 further engagement work was undertaken to ascertain the scale and scope of problems at a local level, both set out as challenges and opportunities in the Council's masterplans but also reported through Area Action Partnership Boards and theme groups. This led to the defined activity themes for the programme which were agreed by Cabinet in October 2020. These are
- Strategic Investments;
  - Housing and Community;
  - Environment and Health;
  - Built Environment; and
  - Transport and Connectivity
- 39 Alongside some pilot activity undertaken through the programme, the cabinet approval of the programme's five themes led to a further round of AAP engagement where the themes were tested and a further round of local issues identified.
- 40 This strategic priority setting led to the development of the more detailed investment plan approved by Cabinet in February 2021. By this point, the emerging evidence base which included direct member and AAP dialogue, Masterplans, and the first round of TDPs highlighted the scale of change and need exacerbated by the Covid pandemic and additional programme resources were made available increasing the

programme from the original £10 million concept to the current £20 million.

Investment mapping, alignment and sequencing of interventions.

- 41 Alongside and building on previous consultation on a range of strategies and initiatives, an evidence base has been developed to assist in the targeting of interventions through the Towns and Villages programme. It considers a range of people-based indicators including, employment, housing, health and crime with data considered for all of our communities at the Middle Super Output Area (MSOA) providing a rank of areas in most need of support. Whilst MSOAs are used to collate evidence to inform consultation, this will be translated and presented as places that communities recognise.
- 42 The development of the Towns and Villages as a new approach to regeneration and aligned activity has been informed by previous consultations and alignment to the Council's Vision. This work has included the development of an interactive GIS mapping system which draws upon towns and villages interventions, mainstream service expenditure and partner and private development and investment information where available.
- 43 This system still subject to development and refinement does however provide a baseline position of the area and help sequence the delivery of planned investments as well as coordinate the opportunities for future projects.
- 44 Since the Towns and Villages projects commenced, additional funding opportunities have emerged which align with much of the activity identified in the programme. These funding streams include:
  - Reopening High Streets Safely /Welcome Back Fund – this central government funding has been provided through the Covid pandemic to support emergency measure to maintain town centre retail operations and to then encourage a return to more normal levels of footfall. Over £1 million has been allocated to County Durham under these two programmes and had been allocated against activities including Public information campaigns, business resource packs, covid retail support officers, temporary seating areas, deep cleaning of Town centre areas and events and attractions.
  - LAD programme – in July 2020 the Chancellor announced a £2 billion Green Homes Grant. Under this 3500 million has been allocated to local authorities under the Local Authority Delivery 9 (LAD) programme. Closely aligned to established aspirations for

improving energy efficiency of homes across the County, the Towns and Villages allocation has been aligned to provide match funding to draw down LAD monies

- Levelling Up Fund. Announced by Government in March 2021, the Levelling up programme provides the opportunity to submit applications for funding based on parliamentary constituency boundaries. These applications of up to £20 million each can focus on Transport Investments, Regeneration and Town Centre Investment or Cultural investments. As such projects selected or under development for submission under the levelling up programme have a close alignment to the aims of the Towns and Villages programme and delivery of these schemes will contribute to achieving the programme's outcomes

45 Additional and aligned funding opportunities are routinely reviewed by the multi service Towns and Villages co-ordination group to both add value to and extend delivery opportunities from the established Towns and Villages budget.

#### Consultation and engagement

46 In line with the development of masterplans and TDPs the Towns and Villages programme is heavily grounded in consultation. Successive rounds of AAP consultation have tested the concept, themes and begun to identify issues of concern at a local level which are directly fed into scheme development and prioritisation and shared internally to as part of the development and monitoring of masterplan activity.

47 The allocation of funds directly to an AAP level has heightened the local area involvement in the roll out of the Towns and Villages programme and aligned regeneration interventions, with most AAPs now operating task and finish groups to identify local priorities, allocate devolved funds and raise awareness of local regeneration priorities.

48 The towns and village programme has from the outset sought to ensure a regular dialogue with AAP Boards to ensure alignment of activity and priority at both a strategic and local level.

#### Delivering Change

49 Commencing in 2019 and 2020 several pilot projects were commenced through the Towns and Villages programme, initially dealing with the immediate pressures faced in town centres. These included.

- Retail Hub – providing a package of training and support to existing and emerging businesses in the town centre alongside

working with property owners / agents to bring forward temporary / meanwhile uses to maintain town centre vibrancy

- Digital High Street – developing a network of town centre Wi-Fi to improve user experience and provide data on town centre usage. Digital High Street also includes a training programme for retailers to maximise digital marketing / sales
- Property Reuse and Conversion – working with property owners and agents to facilitate appropriate reuse of town centre properties
- Vulnerable land and Buildings. – securing / demolishing properties with a negative community impact where enforcement / repairs notices haven't resolved issues.

50 Alongside the development and early delivery of these town centred programmes a number of Housing and neighbourhood related initiatives were also commenced such as.

- Neighbourhood Retail support – supporting retailers through physical improvement packages in villages and neighbourhood retail parades
- Environmental enhancements – addressing local environmental concerns and linking with improvements to neighbourhood retail areas
- Community Housing – working with community groups to bring forward small scale development- schemes often focussed on groups with particular needs – Elderly / disabled residents, veterans etc.
- Green homes – building on a key priority strand of the Housing Strategy, the Green Homes project has sought to improve the energy efficiency of the poorest performing properties in the County. Utilising the £850,000 Towns and Villages funding a s match, a further £8.5 million of funding has been secured and defrayed through the LAD and other funds.

51 The Towns and Villages programme continue to develop and with additional resources aligned to them linked to the Covid pandemic., Some project strands are however still to fully define and programme improvement works, while work on the development of AAP based activity has only recently commenced.

52 The programme continues to develop with significant work undertaken to identify areas for intervention and to scope and design interventions.

As a result, around a quarter of the allocation has been defrayed or is currently scheduled for imminent delivery with over £18 million allocated against individual schemes pending detailed design and delivery. Details of allocations for each of the projects is set out in table 1 below.

Theme	Project	Programme Allocation(£)	Pilot Phase Expenditure(£)	Currently In Delivery(£)	To Allocate / deploy(£)
Strategic Investments	Digital High Street	775,000		425,000	350,000
	Retail Hub	300,000		100,000	200,000
	Neighbourhood Retail Improvements	2,750,000	675,000	172,000	1,903,000
	Town and Village Vibrancy	200,000			200,000
Housing and Community	Community Housing	700,000		400,000	300,000
	Housing Opportunities fund	150,000		150,000	
	Improving Community Resilience	2,000,000		300,000	1,700,000
	Green Homes Fuel Efficiency Programme	850,000		850,000	
	Hornden Regeneration Programme	4,500,000			4,500,000
	Allotment Improvement Programme	75,000			75,000
Environment & Health	Enhanced Environmental Maintenance	500,000	75,000	275,000	150,000
Built Environment	Vulnerable Buildings	1,300,000	305,000	300,000	695,000
	Property Reuse and Conversion	500,000		350,000	150,000
	Dean Bank Clearance and Improvement	150,000	150,000		
	Easington Colliery Programme	1,050,000		1,050,000	
	South Moor Improvement Programme	200,000		200,000	
	Sacriston Workshop Conversion	200,000	24,050	175,950	
Transport & Connectivity	Walking and Cycling Routes	3,750,000			£3,750,000
	Neighbourhood Parking and Circulation	850,000		350,000	500,000
Local Programme	AAP Area Improvement Fund	4,200,000			£4,200,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>25,000,000</b>	<b>1,229,050</b>	<b>5,097,950</b>	<b>18,673,000</b>

Table 1 Towns and Villages allocation status

- 53 Future delivery remains under review against other emerging external funding opportunities and Council mainstream expenditure.

#### Monitoring impact and utilising performance information

- 54 Projects delivered through the Towns and villages programme are predominantly capital in nature. As such they conform with the routine expenditure and output monitoring undertaken across the division. Given the nature of the projects, performance is also highlighted in Service plans with some aspects reported in divisional and corporate performance plans.
- 55 Additionally, progress in delivering Towns and Villages work is reported through the monthly Towns and Villages co-ordinators meetings and formally recorded through the major projects board.

- 56 Given the recent delivery of pilot projects and some elements of the programme yet to commence, outcome monitoring has not yet been comprehensively recorded.

## **Conclusion**

- 57 The committee will be aware of the process of developing and delivering investment against the established suite of masterplans for the main towns, which provide a vision for place shaping and regeneration efforts in a local area.
- 58 Recently this planned /aligned approach to interventions at a local level has been supplemented by the development of TDPs which provide a similar focus for smaller / residential areas, but still ensuring major issues are identified, prioritised and scheduled for intervention through a range of budgets and programmes
- 59 The Towns and Villages strategy, developed from a concept agreed in December 2018 provides further resources to address these issues focussing on both strategic issues associated with the economic functions of our main centres through to local community priorities which impact on residents' quality of life.
- 60 Some Towns and Villages projects have been delivering benefits to communities since emerging as pilot initiatives during 2019. Other activities identified as the programme budget increased remain under development and will be delivered to address identified need and to align with other funding sources which have emerged in the intervening period.
- 61 The processes established to support the development and delivery of the Towns and villages programme provide a further source of evidence and intelligence which is utilised in regeneration plans to improve effectiveness, timeliness and impact. Information gathered through this process feeds into service plan reporting, performance boards and corporate reports to scrutiny committees.

## **Background papers**

- None

## **Other useful documents**

- County Durham Plan -Local Development Scheme (Adopted October 2020) - [County Durham Plan](#)



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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

None associated with this report.

### **Finance**

The Towns and Villages programme has been established with a budget of £25 million as set out in the investment plan approved by Cabinet in February 2021.

Other external funding in addition to wide ranging existing council funding continues to support place shaping and improvement activities across County Durham.

### **Consultation**

Consultation remains a key aspect of the development of masterplans, Targeted Delivery Plans and the Towns and Villages programme.

Several rounds of consultation have been undertaken in conjunction with the area Action Partnerships with a current programme of task and finish groups meetings in operation to help determine local priorities for utilising designated area programme budgets.

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

None associated with this report.

### **Climate Change**

Previous consultation rounds undertaken to support the development of the Towns and Villages programme highlighted the importance of climate change activities within the programme. Initially, this is being addressed through significant allocations to support walking and cycling, improving the energy efficiency of the worst performing households countywide and in ensuring the improvement and effective reuse of vacant and underutilised property.

### **Human Rights**

None associated with this report.

### **Crime and Disorder**

None associated with this report.

### **Staffing**

None associated with this report.

**Accommodation**

None associated with this report

**Risk**

Risk is determined at a project level for interventions supported by Towns and Village Funding.

**Procurement**

None associated with this report.

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## **Appendix 2: Map of County Durham TDP areas**

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