

Bishop Auckland Stronger Towns Board

At a Meeting of **Bishop Auckland Stronger Towns Board** held in The Elgar Room - Bishop Auckland Town Hall and via Microsoft Teams on **Tuesday 21 June 2022** at **2.30 pm**

Present:

David Land (Chair)

Board Members:

Jonathan Ruffer	The Auckland Project (Founder)
David Maddan	The Auckland Project
Dehenna Davison MP	Conservative MP for Bishop Auckland
Councillor Michael Siddle	Chair, Bishop Auckland Town Council
Natalie Davison-Terranova	Bishop Auckland College
Nik Turner	Believe Housing
Rob Yorke	SDEA and Teescraft (Private Sector Representative)
Katy Severs	Job Centre Plus
Councillor Elizabeth Scott	Cabinet Member for Economy and Partnerships, DCC

Officers/Also Present

Geoff Paul	Interim Director of Economy, Regeneration and Growth, DCC
Susan Robinson	Head of Corporate Property and Land, DCC
Sarah Harris	Town Clerk, Bishop Auckland Town Council
Jonathan Gilroy	BEIS North East
Alex Jarvis (for Tom Smyth)	BEIS North East
Judith Layfield	Bishop Auckland College

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Bishop Paul Butler, Mike Matthews, Tom Smyth and Graham Wood.

2 Declarations of Interest

Members were reminded of the requirement to review their declarations of interest prior to each meeting of the Board with any revisions reported at the start of the meeting.

3 Minutes of the Meeting held on 4 May 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 May 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

4 Advance Funding Project - Update

The Board considered a report of the Interim Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which set out progress with the 'Quick Win' projects previously supported through the Advance Funding round of the Stronger Town Fund to a value of £750,000:

Variable Message Signage (VMS)

Geoff Paul advised that full expenditure had been achieved in installing the foundations and connections on VMS signs identified on the plan attached to the report.

Following questions from Board members Geoff Paul agreed to provide an update on the installations and also to confirm whether there was a deadline for expenditure.

Canny Hill Statue

The proposal for public art located on the roundabout at one of the key gateways to the town was about to go to procurement to clarify final project costs, with an application to the Arts Council to address an anticipated funding gap.

It was hoped that the statue would be on-site by the end of the year.

Market Place – Re-use

14 Newgate Street had now been secured with a social enterprise established to manage a pop-up retail facility which would host five small businesses in the initial project phase following a soft launch later in 2022.

Skills for Digital Growth

This project was complete with a 300% increase in enrolments. A press release would be issued during June 2022.

AGREED:

That the progress in developing and implementing the four advance funding projects, be noted.

5 Business Case Assurance Process

The Board considered the report of the Interim Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which provided details of the process of Business Case development and assurance.

The Board was informed that Business Cases were being developed with a target completion date of 29 July 2022. The Business Cases would be presented to the Board for sign-off at its meeting on 28 July 2022.

AGREED:

That

- a) the process established for Business Case assurance be noted;
- b) the sign-off process for the first Business Cases to be assured be agreed;
- c) the progress in developing the current project Business Cases be noted;
- d) the revised request for a four-month extension to the Durham Dales Gateway project be endorsed.

6 Business Case Development

Geoff Paul gave a presentation to the Board which included a Business Case update in respect of each project, identified risks and delivery timelines. The following projects were highlighted:

ESAC

Full assurance of this project would not be possible until the Summer of 2023. A third-party Consultant had been appointed to support the process given the complex planning nature of the scheme with a view to the submission of a hybrid planning application next year.

In terms of risks associated with the scheme, it was suggested that a Board meeting be arranged to consider identified risks in due course.

The Chair noted that an identified risk was that the 'methodology was unclear'. Geoff Paul confirmed that this related to the process for achieving project delivery, rather than the details of the corridor which had been agreed and were unchanged.

Town Centre Diversification

A four-month extension for the submission of the Business Case had been agreed and submitted to Government.

Geoff Paul reported on a development with the Beales Hotel scheme. An indication had been received from the developer that £2m allocated for the project would be insufficient.

Springboard to Employment

Cost estimates were challenging but the project was on target for the submission of a Business Case in July 2022.

South Church Enterprise Park

As with Springboard to Employment, cost estimates were challenging but the project was on target for the submission of a Business Case in July 2022.

Heritage Walking and Cycling Routes

Geoff Paul presented a map which showed nine individual walking and cycling routes. The focus was on building a network of walking and cycling routes around

the town, encouraging a modal shift. These routes also connected to wider routes, including the Northern Saints Trails.

Rob Yorke and David Maddan made reference to an alternative proposal to the Escomb Loop which had been considered by the thematic group but had not been put forward by the group. The route which was from Binchester to Witton Park and would offer benefits in connectivity and overnight stay opportunities.

The Board discussed at length whether consideration should be given to the alternative proposal before a decision was made on a preferred option.

Geoff Paul informed the Board that this would impact upon the preparation of a Business Case within the agreed timeframe.

The views of BEIS were sought and Jonathan Gilroy explained that at this stage project changes and/or a request for an extension would be considered in terms of whether the changes were of greater benefit.

Tindale Triangle

Geoff Paul expected that the Town Investment Plan Business Case would be completed by 29 July. The project aimed to alleviate congestion and facilitate 306 dwellings of mixed owner-occupier and affordable housing on infill sites identified on the presentation plan.

The Chair raised the alternative proposal offered by a developer which would create a retail development offering 460 jobs, and sought the views of the Board on this.

Councillor Elizabeth Scott was of the view that out-of-town retail and leisure facilities detracted from the town centre, the primary purpose of Stronger Towns.

Rob Yorke was of the opinion that the alternative proposal would compliment the town. The north end of town was culture and heritage driven. The original planning permission for Tindale had been granted on the basis that the road network was sufficient. The proposed alternative development would be located on the by-pass. This was an opportunity to create jobs and to increase land value which would in turn attract further development. It would also attract people from Shildon to the town.

Jonathan Ruffer and Brian Sutton both agreed that the creation of jobs was a major advantage in favour of the alternative proposal which would also bring leisure facilities to the town. Nik Turner stated that she would like to see the pros and cons of each proposal before making a decision.

Natalie Davison-Terranova agreed that more information was required. She had been involved in the Masterplan development for the town which included in and around Tindale. Out of town retail development was very much a 90's concept.

The Chair noted that shops had left the High Street already and the north end of the town would become a community value.

Geoff Paul stated that consideration of a new proposal would require detailed financial consideration around Subsidy Control. There may also be planning implications to consider. Any change in the Board's position would also require a further extension request to Government.

Jonathan Gilroy and Alex Jarvis advised the Board that because of the change in scope a different process would be required which would include ministerial input. If the alternative proposal delivered improved outputs then it would be viewed favourably but it would also be considered along with the broader schemes.

Following discussion it was **AGREED** that

- a) the progress updates be noted;
- b) a 'pros and cons' study of proposals in respect of the Heritage Walking and Cycling Routes and Tindale Triangle be completed and presented to a Special meeting of the Board in mid-July;
- c) the completed Business Cases be shared with the Board before being considered at the meeting on 28 July 2022.

7 Any Other Business

Newsletter

The Board discussed the need to inform residents of proposals as soon as possible. Geoff Paul informed the Board that a newsletter had been drafted and once finalised would be circulated widely, which he hoped would be in the next few weeks.

8 Date of Next Meeting

Thursday 28 July 2022 at 1.00pm with a Special meeting to be arranged mid-July.