

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a Meeting of **Bishop Auckland Stronger Town Board** held in The Elgar Room - Bishop Auckland Town Hall on **Wednesday 26 July 2023 at 3.00 pm**

### **Present:**

**D Land (Chair)**

### **Board Members:**

David Maddan  
Councillor Sam Zair

Nik Turner  
Rob Yorke  
Councillor Elizabeth Scott

The Auckland Project  
Chair, Bishop Auckland Town  
Council  
Bishop Auckland College  
SDEA  
Cabinet Member for Economy and  
Partnerships, DCC

### **Officers/Also Present:**

Sarah Harris

Judith Layfield  
Jonathan Gilroy  
Graham Wood  
Mark Jackson

Craig MacLennan

Town Clerk, Bishop Auckland Town  
Council  
Bishop Auckland College  
BEIS North East  
Economic Development Manager  
Head of Transport and Contract  
Services  
Transport and Infrastructure  
Manager

### **1 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Bishop P Butler, H Golightly, J Ruffer, K severs, N Davison-Terranova and A Harhoff.

### **2 Declarations of interest**

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

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

J Layfield declared an interest in the Springboard to Employment Project as she was employed by Bishop Auckland College, a delivery partner in the initiative.

### **3 Minutes**

The minute of the meeting held on 20 March 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

### **4 Update**

The Board received an update in relation to each of the following projects and confirmed that all of the Business Case Summaries had been conditionally approved.

#### **ESAC**

With regards to ESAC, conditional approval had been received earlier in the day however the project was entering two phases of consultation; the first in August and September, the second would consist of a pre-planning public consultation in November. The planning application would be submitted in the Spring with an expected date of determination in September 2024.

Planning approval was required for roads, carparks and tourist attractions. There was also a requirement for more detail with regards to visitor numbers and an obligation to liaise with transport north east and deliver a bus service improvement plan. There were no expected issues in meeting the condition, and the Council had representation position on the Joint Transport Committee. A priority was to improve public transport provision on the a167 from Bishop Auckland to Durham.

In response to a question about timescales, C MacLennan advised that fortnightly meetings were held with TAP and Eleven Arches to ensure decisions were made in a timely matter to avoid any impact on the timeline. A more detailed timeline would be circulated to the Board.

Councillor Scott referred to the potential impact by the spiralling costs of materials and labour, C MacLennan confirmed that the cost estimate had been updated and it remained within budget. An additional £4m had been allocated for risk management.

The Chair reminded the Board that ESAC was the biggest project and required planning approval and visitor number projections for 2027-29

onwards. Due to the progressive nature of the scheme there was a need to ensure visitors were activated at the earliest opportunity.

In relation to projected visitors, the numbers had been confirmed at 30k visitors per week over 50 weeks and there was a joint responsibility to meet targets between Eleven Arches, TAP and the Board.

R Yorke confirmed that the business case which had been put forward had been through vigorous checks and challenged when the town investment programme had been put together.

### **Town centre diversification**

C MacLennan confirmed that there were no outstanding issues to the public realm scheme aside from some potential Traffic Regulation Orders. The scheme was broken down into smaller projects such as the Artists Hub which would assist to promote the development and attract people for events.

With regards the future high street fund, there had been £700k of commitments which had increased to over £1m due to further commercial interest.

S Harris advised that the Town Council were keen to be involved in the Artist Hub project but had not yet received any engagement.

### **Durham Dales Gateway**

D Maddan advised that the cost and design had been brought forward, with an anticipated date in early September and project delivered by 2026. The railway would be fully operational this year, with final bridgeworks to complete.

### **South Church Enterprise Park**

G Wood confirmed that recruitment was underway for a replacement project lead and the team were working towards planning level drawings which should be concluded in early autumn with the application approved in February 2024. Units would be available from June 2025.

In response to a question the Board were advised that there would be 40k square feet of floor space and with very little private workspace in the South Durham area, it was expected that the units would reach full capacity, as confirmed by Business Durham.

## **Springboard to Employment**

J Layfield shared the plans and elevations for the three floors which was expected to be completed in February. A Steering group had established, which included interest from Raby Estate who would have a lot of demand for catering and front of house training.

A retail space had been included on the ground floor and there was also a training kitchen and restaurant space, with the flexibility to open out. On the second floor, there was space for three or four start-up businesses, which could be utilised before expanding into larger premises, however the focus remained on education and training which was the key selling point.

Age UK were interested in co-location to assist 50+ ages range in getting back into work.

With regards to the build cost, it had been estimated as £800k and three companies had already agreed to tender for the contract. The history of the building would be preserved as far as possible with the name McIntyres retained and shoe displays as part of the internal decor.

## **Heritage walking and Cycling Routes**

C MacLennan confirmed that the route would be delivered in phases as some elements of the scheme would be more simple to install. The design did not require any TRO's apart from on Newgate Street, which was a six-month process.

In response to a suggestion from the Chair that projected images of the route be used to showcase the route, G Wood advised that the Bishop Auckland Regeneration Website contained an interactive map of the projects, which included descriptions of each project and images. It was still under construction but would be fully populated before the next Strategic Advisory Panel and provide updates to residents and visitors. Once completed it would be publicised.

## **Tindle Triangle**

M Jackson advised that utility connection work would be completed by end of September to allow the work to commence in October.

R Yorke queried whether the Section 278 bond would be increased to future proof the junctions and it was confirmed that one of the junctions had been altered for this reason.

## **Kingsway Square**

D maddan confirmed that the programme aimed to deliver this project by March 2024. On site work had started with asbestos removal prior to demolition. The surrounding developments were underway and images would soon be installed on the panelling.

G Wood added that this was a significant development which had stimulated interest in other properties in the area.

M Jackson added that earlier in the week the bus station had been granted planning approval so work had started. Communications were being developed to advise people of the relocated bus stops and allow the site to develop as quickly as possible.

N Turner asked whether there were any risks going forward and how the Board would get assurance on cost pressures or be informed if there was going to be transition of budgets.

M Jackson advised that budgets had been set and depending on which project, the risks sat with different groups and whilst there was ultimately one overall programme, advice was to focus on the budget assigned to the relevant organisation. It was not the case that there was a syncing fund to mop up additional costs. If there was an overspend, it would be reported to board.

## **5 Governance Board Review**

G Wood advised that initial programme guidance reflected the Stronger Town Board as operational for three years under the current membership

The Board had overseen preparation and submission of Town Investment Plan, project prioritisation and Business case development, through to submission. DLUCH supplementary guidance issued in November 2022 highlighted the changing role for overseeing implementation and any change requests. The usual principles would keep the terms of reference and review the governance structure. There had been various changes over the previous three years and overlap. The Bishop Auckland Strategic Advisory Panel had some key input.

The options for the Board to consider were either to continue as they were, strengthening the links with the Strategic Advisory panel for a wider reach, to initiate a governance review by Democratic Services, or to commission an external party to initiate a governance review.

A report would be brought to the Board to consider in September.

R Yorke suggested that with the exception of retail, the Board was already made up of key players. Councillor Zair had a dual role as a local business owner and his preference was to therefore continue and support the work from SAP which in his opinion assisted with filtering information to the wider public.

Councillor Scott remained concerned about overspends and the Chair advised that there had been a rigorous allocation process to distribute the £33m investment and he did not envisage any significant changes to the projects, but there could be some minor modifications. He considered there to be low risk and any significant changes would require approval from the Board.

The Board acknowledged that they did not have any representation for developers and were therefore in favour of revising both the Membership and terms of reference. It was suggested that a light touch review and engagement with developers could be facilitated by an advisory group.

In response to a question G Wood confirmed that responsibility to ensure outcomes such as visitor numbers was that of organisations such as project sponsors, however cost overruns and good governance were the responsibility of the Board. He acknowledged Councillor Zair was a business owner but reminded the Board that he was attending on behalf of the Town Council in a position which changed annually, therefore he suggested they consider consistent retail representation. He referred to the role of SAP and confirmed that there may be other advisory forums that could be utilised in order to engage with private sectors, operators and partners.

The Chair confirmed that the content of discussions would change over the next phase of the scheme and he considered SAP a good sharing mechanism. S Harris confirmed that there had been significant changes to SAP since its inception and suggested that it should be reviewed to ensure it was working to its full potential.

J Gilroy confirmed that DLUCH would investigate governance, check processes, terms of reference and board member profiles and also ensure that publishing timescales were being met.

The Board considered the benefits of adding a representative with links to Future High Street Fund and agreed that there was some duplication which needed addressing.

J Layfield advised that the digital suites at Bishop Auckland College had made a significant increase in recruitment. They had increased the number

of stations from nine to forty and there were plans for an additional ten next year.

With regards to the Bishop Marra's statue at Canny Hill G Wood confirmed that planning consent was place until October 2024 and all of the structural assessments had been completed. There was a funding gap due to an increase in the cost of steel however fundraising continued and there were other funding avenues to consider such as Section 106 and AAP grants to secure costs.

## **6 Future Meeting Dates**

Future Board Meetings were confirmed as 28 September and 11 December 2023.