

**Cabinet**

**13 March 2024**

**Spennymoor – Long Term Plan for Towns**

**Key Decision No. REG/2024/002**



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## **Report of Corporate Management Team**

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

**Councillor Elizabeth Scott, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economy, and Partnerships**

**Councillor James Rowlandson, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources, Investment and Assets**

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

Spennymoor, Tudhoe, Coxhoe, Ferryhill.

### **Purpose of the Report**

- 1 To provide an update on the Government's Long-Term Plan for Towns programme which was announced in October 2023 and seeks to target funding to 55 towns across England including Spennymoor.
- 2 The report includes details of the further guidance received in December 2023 together with the proposals for developing a Town Board and the development of a town plan.

### **Executive summary**

- 3 In October 2023, the Government announced a £1.1 billion programme to assist with the regeneration of 55 towns across the United Kingdom (UK) through the new Long-Term Plan for Towns (LTPT) programme.
- 4 Spennymoor was identified as one of the beneficiaries of the programme and is set to access £20 million of government funding over the next 10 years. This funding must be used in line with a vision and investment plan for the town covering three themes:
  - (a) High street heritage and regeneration;
  - (b) Transport and connectivity; and

(c) Safety & security.

- 5 To draw down this funding, the LTPT programme requires a Town Board to be formed, led by an independent chair. The board, supported by the council acting as accountable body are required to undertake a programme of engagement with local people and stakeholders, using co-design principles to establish the interventions which will make most difference to the long-term success of Spennymoor.
- 6 Government guidance provides specific requirements in connection with the composition, formation and role of the Town Board and clear timescales through to the submission of the vision and investment plan by August 2024.
- 7 Recognising the alignment with current council programmes such as the Towns and Villages work as well as clear similarities with the Stronger Towns programme operating in Bishop Auckland, an initial mobilisation plan has been developed to ensure the required activity can be undertaken to inform the LTPT development and submission.

### **Recommendation(s)**

- 8 Cabinet is recommended to:
  - (a) note the inclusion of Spennymoor within the Government's Long Term Plan for Towns Programme;
  - (b) endorse the process of seeking a chair for the Town Board through open recruitment; and
  - (c) delegate approval of the submission of the Vision and Town Investment Plan to the Corporate Director of Regeneration Economy and Growth in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holders for Economy & Partnerships and Resources, Investments & Assets.

## Background

- 9 The UK Government's Long-Term Plan for Towns is a £1.1 billion initiative aimed at revitalising and enhancing the vitality of towns across the country. Launched in October 2023 as a response to evolving economic, social, and environmental challenges, the programme is designed to support sustainable growth, improve infrastructure, and create thriving communities in towns of various sizes across the United Kingdom. Spennymoor has been identified by government as one of the 55 beneficiaries of the programme.
- 10 The LTPT programme aims to bring together community leaders, business people and local bodies to agree the future direction for their town and alongside developing this vision an investment plan will help unlock £20 million of new funding available across the next 10 years.
- 11 The programme area includes the built-up area of Spennymoor, extending from Thinford and Durham Gate in the North to Middlestone Moor in the South. It also includes the Tudhoe area and the more recent housing development at Merrington Lane. The boundary for the programme area is set out at Appendix 2
- 12 Building on the support developed through the High Street Task Force, the government is also establishing a Towns Taskforce which will report directly to the Prime Minister and Levelling Up secretary and will help local Town Boards to:
  - (a) Develop their plans;
  - (b) advise on taking advantage of government policies;
  - (c) unlocking private / philanthropic investment; and
  - (d) engaging their communities.
- 13 From a national programme perspective, the LTPT shares many characteristics with the Stronger Towns programme already operating in Bishop Auckland. However, it also draws from the experiences of other current Levelling Up programmes including the Levelling Up Fund, UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and the Community Ownership Fund.
- 14 The approach set out by government through the LTPT programme also aligns closely with the council's efforts to support the transformation of communities across County Durham through the Towns and Villages programme and more recently the approach to place-based regeneration set out in the Inclusive Economic Strategy (IES) and its accompanying Delivery Plan.

- 15 The additional investment identified for Spennymoor also provides an opportunity to accelerate regeneration efforts into town, building on £7.5million of recent council investments in the town including: support for the redevelopment of the former Festival Walk precinct; new shoppers car park facilities; marketplace public realm improvements; creation of public space on Cheapside and a programme of investment in the leisure centre including co-location of the library facility. These works build upon recent private investments at DurhamGate and Thinford Park as well as the Council's construction of the new £13 million Primary and Nursery school at Tudhoe.

## **Objectives & Outcomes**

- 16 The LTPT prospectus identifies a new approach to regenerate local towns across the United Kingdom, through mobilising local people to identify their needs and aspirations for their town.
- 17 Government have identified three key themes where current plans and priorities can link strongly with helping reshape a town. These are:
- (a) High Street Heritage and Regeneration;
  - (b) Transport and Connectivity; and
  - (c) Safety and Security.

## **High Street Heritage and Regeneration**

- 18 As we have seen and responded to through the existing Towns and Villages programme, the significant rate of change in all our town centres, including Spennymoor has wide ranging impacts. The LTPT programme seeks to ensure that town centres continue to offer opportunities to local people through a process of diversification and investment.
- 19 Support through this theme could continue the work in repurposing buildings for reuse or conversion, creating parks and green spaces, supporting high street cleaning projects, street markets, rental auctions and supporting skills developments to ensure local people can take up opportunities that emerge from business led regeneration.

## **Transport and Connectivity**

- 20 Feedback to the development of the Towns and Villages programme and the recent IES delivery plan have highlighted the importance of transport and connectivity solutions allowing local people to easily access high streets, jobs, and local centres. Increasingly this includes

sustainable travel options including safe ways that people can walk or cycle into the centre.

- 21 Interventions under this theme will have been to align with wider priorities – especially safety and security, but effective solutions will help to increase footfall and improve the vitality and viability of Spennymoor Town centre. This could include through the investment in roads, local cycling programmes and making the town centre more accessible.

## **Safety and Security**

- 22 Tackling crime and anti-social behaviour is a priority for turning around local areas and ensuring business can thrive. It is impossible to level up a town if people do not feel safe to go into the town centre. Towns that feel unsafe: drive away shoppers; deter investors and undermine the norms and behaviour that underpin a thriving society.
- 23 The increase in shop vacancy rate and decrease in footfall has resulted in high streets becoming prime locations for anti-social behaviour, diminishing pride in place.
- 24 Interventions and the use of powers could include new and improved security infrastructure, such as CCTV and streetlights; additional hotspot policing and local authority wardens.

## **Resources**

- 25 As a town selected to participate in the LTPT programme, Spennymoor is set to receive £20 million of funding support over the next 10 years. This funding linked to the Town's Investment plan can include 75% capital funding and up to 25% revenue funding.
- 26 Funding is available following assessment of the investment plan and is allocated across the first seven years of the programme with expenditure required across a 10year programme window. Funding is to be directed across the built up area of Spennymoor as agreed with Government.
- 27 In December 2023, to assist the process of setting up the boards and developing the vision/investment plan, the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) made an initial allocation of £50,000 to the council – as accountable body for the funding. A further £200,000 of capacity funding will be made available at the start of the 2024/25 financial year to support the development of the long-term plan.
- 28 The Minister for Levelling Up has also recently confirmed the terms of the endowment style funding referenced in the programme guidance along with the flexibilities attached to the use of the funding release,

alignment with the three year investment plan cycle and the indicative funding profile.

## **Governance**

- 29 Central to the implementation of the LTPT programme is the formation of a Town Board, tasked with overseeing the development of the vision for the town and helping to build civic capacity. The council will act as accountable funding body for the LTPT programme, with costs associated with this role covered through the programme management allocation wherever possible.
- 30 Town Boards are tasked with driving the priorities for investment, convening powers and responsibilities for making change and steering the long-term vision for their towns.
- 31 The guidance issued sets out clear expectations for the sorts of organisations which should be represented on boards including community partners; local business / key employers; cultural arts heritage and sports organisations; and public sector agencies. In total Boards may include upto 15 members
- 32 Most recently the further guidance makes specific reference to the need for the local Member of Parliament (MP) and the Police and Crime Commissioner to be invited to join the board. In unitary authorities it is recognised that boards can involve up to two elected members and invite representation from town and parish councils where they exist.
- 33 The most recent guidance from DLUHC confirms that in such circumstances no more than five of the potential 15 Board members should be elected officials of any type, ensuring significant opportunities for local residents and businesses to participate as Board members. The option of developing three thematic sub groups of the Board will be explored to provide further opportunities to widen the participation in the LTPT programme.
- 34 As with the Stronger Town programme, there is an expectation that the chair will be a local business person or community leader to ensure the board reflects the priorities of the town.
- 35 Chairs of the Town Board should be appointed in line with Nolan principles and are expected to work with the accountable body to recruit and form the Town Board.
- 36 Town Boards must be set up by 1 April 2024 at the latest, though government are encouraging the earlier establishment wherever possible, to allow the Town Board to hold its first meeting and start drawing up Long-Term Plan as quickly as possible including;

- (a) Identifying the issues and priorities to focus on for the Long-Term Plan, including supporting a process of ongoing community engagement;
  - (b) working with the local authority to develop the Long-Term Plan for their town, setting out how local partners will use their knowledge, powers, assets, and new funding to deliver for their communities;
  - (c) identifying opportunities for board members to utilise specific powers, such as neighbourhood planning, to drive forward their Long-Term Plans;
  - (d) identifying opportunities to bring in additional philanthropic or private investment to support the Long-Term Plan for their town; and
  - (e) overseeing the delivery of projects set out in their Long-Term Plan.
- 37 Board's membership and governance arrangements including agendas and minutes of meetings are required to be published on the council's website. As with existing arrangements for the Stronger Towns programme the Spennymoor Town Board should follow council governance arrangements, with all Board members signing up to a code of conduct and completing a Declaration of Interests
- 38 Utilising best practice from previous appointments including the chair of the County Durham Economic Partnership, the recruitment of the Town Board chair will be undertaken through an open and transparent recruitment process ensuring compliance with Nolan principles.

## **Implementation Timeline**

- 39 Government have indicated that they want to see Town Boards established as soon as possible and no later than 1 April 2024, in order that local capacity can be built, and local people can be engaged quickly in the process of discussing what they want from their town.
- 40 Following the announcement of additional guidance for LTPT programme in December 2023, there are four clear initial phases of activity to be undertaken.

Phase	Date	Key Tasks
1	December 2023 to April 2024	<p>DLUHC provide initial capacity building funding.</p> <p>DLUHC provide area data pack including a town insight profile.</p> <p>Town Board chair appointed.</p> <p>Town Board developed.</p> <p>Community Engagement / co design work commences.</p>
2	April 2024	<p>Town Boards established</p> <p>Further capacity building allocation</p> <p>Window for Town Plan submissions opens.</p>
3	3 April –1 August 2024	Town Boards conclude consultations and agree submission the long term plan.
4	Following plan submission	<p>DLUHC assessment of plans and release capital/ revenue funding in line with initial three year investment plan.</p> <p>Commence delivery of town priorities.</p>

## Stakeholder Engagement

- 41 The LTPT programme includes a focus ensuring priorities and interventions set for the town are 'owned' by local resident and through the widespread involvement of stakeholders and community organisations, building civic capacity within selected towns.
- 42 In identifying priorities and potential interventions for towns, government have identified co-design as a cross cutting principle. This aligns with the approach to the development of Place Plans agreed as part of the Inclusive Economic Strategy.



- 43     Assessment of the vision statement and accompanying investment plan will need to demonstrate significant engagement with residents. Early stage development of the LTPT will therefore focus on new and existing engagement and consultation activities across the town.

## **Submission Requirements**

- 44     The Long-Term Plan submission comprises of a 10-year vision, which clearly identifies the longer-term priorities for the town, and a three year investment plan as an annex.
- 45     The Town Board's 10-year vision is a long-term, strategic document. It will be developed with insights gained through engagement with local people, to ensure buy-in with the public. It should include:
- (a)     A 250-word vision statement that articulates, at a high level, the vision for the future of the town and how success will be judged.
  - (b)     The strategic case for change, building on the evidence in the data pack provided by the DLUHC supplemented by more granular local data and input.
  - (c)     The outcomes and objectives the town is trying to meet and how these align with the priorities of the local community, the opportunities the investment offers and priority outcomes for 2034 and beyond.
  - (d)     The planned direction of travel for the regeneration of the town, across the three investment themes and the interventions available to achieve this.
  - (e)     Clear evidence that the Town Board is community led, including through its membership, ways of working and distinction from the local authority, and evidence of buy-in from local businesses, civil society, and communities. It should describe how these stakeholders have been engaged to date, and how that engagement will continue going forward.
  - (f)     How the Town Board will attract and combine new and existing private, public, and philanthropic investment, setting out the existing commitments and ambitions to secure further support going forwards.
  - (g)     High level delivery milestones over the 10-year lifespan of the programme, with an overview of potential future interventions and how the powers in the policy toolkit will be used in a way that best suits the town across the three investment themes.

- 46 A supplementary three year investment plan annex is also required, setting out;
- (a) the interventions and powers the Town Board wishes to use over the 3 years for each investment theme;
  - (b) whether the interventions are from the list of interventions or are 'off-menu;'
  - (c) how the Town Board will use the interventions locally and how much they will cost; and
  - (d) how the interventions will address the outcomes set out in the 10-year vision, grounded in evidence and data.

## **Next steps**

- 47 The timeline through to the development of the LTPT submission is extremely challenging with the need to establish a new Town Board by April a precursor to the plan development.
- 48 Preparations for developing Spennymoor's LTPT began immediately after the initial announcement, including local member briefings and dialogue with key local stakeholders. Since the publication of the further guidance in December a full mobilisation plan has been developed including the following immediate actions:

January – February 2024

- (a) Commence recruitment of Town Board chair and project officer;
- (b) Appoint external support for co-design phase;
- (c) Undertake initial perceptions and priorities consultation;
- (d) Develop communications and engagement plan in conjunction with key stakeholders and board chair.

March 2024

- (a) Convene first Town Board meeting.
- (b) Commence targeted community / stakeholder sessions to determine priorities and interventions.

Summer 2024

- (a) Agreement of interventions and any aligned activity.

## **Conclusion**

- 49 Spennymoor's inclusion in the Government's new LTPT programme provides a significant opportunity to continue the regeneration efforts across the town, with the £20 million funding building on a range of recent council investments within the town.
- 50 The LTPT aligns with the council's identified process of developing a new suite of strategic place plans setting out the long-term visions for our towns based on a structured programme of engagement with residents and stakeholders.
- 51 The priority themes for the programme of high street, heritage and regeneration, transport, connectivity, safety, and security align well with priorities identified through the existing Towns and Villages programme and the priorities of the Inclusive Economic Strategy Place theme. The LTPT approach also seeks to use a mixture of new investment and the use of new and existing regulatory powers to achieve the long term aims for the town, as demonstrated through the Towns and Villages programme.
- 52 Central to the development and delivery of the long-term plan is the creation of a Town Board for Spennymoor. This process has clear similarities to the process undertaken in Bishop Auckland in support of the Stronger Towns programme and provides a clear framework from which to begin the process of board formation and development.

## **Background papers**

None

## **Other useful documents**

[Long-Term Plan for Towns - Guidance for Local Authorities and Town Boards](#)

[DLUHC December 2023](#)

## **Author(s)**

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

Guidance for the establishment of Town Boards includes clear governance requirements which the council as accountable Body for the programme will need to support.

The programme includes clear reference to the use of existing and emerging powers to support local regeneration efforts such as planning enforcement and anti-social behaviour powers along with legislation due to be considered to support compulsory auctions of long-term vacant properties.

The council must be engaged throughout the development of the plan, including discussing the list of interventions and powers to be used from the government toolkit. In many cases, the council will need to formally agree through its own structures to deploy powers or interventions where they interact with council responsibilities.

### **Finance**

£20 million has been allocated to Spennymoor through the LTPT programme. This funding includes a mix of both capital and a maximum of 25% revenue. Funding is allocated from the outset across all 10 years of the programme with flexibility for the Board to roll forward unspent allocations. Government are proposing a check-in process during financial year 2027/8 at the end of the first three year investment plan cycle.

Initial capacity funding of £50,000 was released in December 2023 to assist in the formation of the Spennymoor Town Board. A further £200,000 will be released early in 2024/5 to continue the process of developing and submitting the plan for the town.

Local authorities will receive the investment from the Long-Term Plan for towns to fund the Town Board's three year investment plan. Government is strongly encouraging Town Boards to work with the local authorities and other partners to consider how additional funding can be attracted from other sources. This could include new private investment, philanthropy, or other public funding, particularly where there is scope for partnership working between bodies or agencies.

Where a proposed board intervention would commit the council to future expenditure beyond long term plan for towns fund, Town Boards must engage with local authorities and ensure that this is agreed.

The council will act as accountable financial body for the LTPT programme, with specific responsibilities identified for the Section 151 officer including the

submission of Statements of Grant Usage and Assurance letters. Additionally further costs supporting the operation of the Board and wider programme will be recovered through programme administration costs wherever possible.

## **Consultation**

Community engagement is at the heart of the Long-Term Plan for towns, with plans reflecting local priorities and the vision and interventions should be co-designed with communities, businesses, and residents, drawing on available evidence and data.

In developing the plan, a process of meaningful engagement should help boards define the key issues to tackle, identify strengths and resources within the community and test potential projects. This might include engaging local people through events, community workshops, online consultations, and surveys.

Assessment of the Spennymoor vision and the accompanying investment plan will include the need to clearly demonstrate the active engagement of residents' communities and stakeholders.

This co-design process is in line with the approach to developing strategic Place Plans as set out in the County Durham Inclusive Economic Strategy and Delivery plan.

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

The LTPT programme needs to include reference to how activities align with the public sector equality duty.

## **Climate Change**

Interventions selected through the programme may make significant contributions to both national and local net zero plans including the programme focus on reuse of buildings, creation of new green spaces and improvements to town centre accessibility through enhanced walking and cycling opportunities.

## **Human Rights**

Any human rights issues will be considered for each of the proposals as they are developed, and decisions made to take this forward. There are no human right implications from the information within the report.

## **Crime and Disorder**

Safety and security are one of the three key themes for the LTPT programme with the opportunity of funding interventions over the next 10 years. Alongside

the additional investment, the programme seeks to ensure the full range of powers available at a local level are utilised in support of achieving the vision for Spennymoor including those related to addressing anti-social behaviour.

### **Staffing**

The LTPT programme includes initial capacity funding to establish the town board and prepare / submit the investment plan. A dedicated project officer post is proposed, funded through the programme, and aligned to the community economic development team.

### **Accommodation**

None identified.

### **Risk**

Programme and Project risks will be identified and mitigated through both the development and delivery phase with risks reported to the Major Programmes Board.

### **Procurement**

To ensure compliance with the required Statements of Grant Usage and Assurance letters, procurements through the LTPT programme will follow the council's financial regulations and Contract Procedure rules.

## Appendix 2 - Map of Spennymoor Built up Area

