

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Bishop Auckland Stronger Town Board** held in The Elgar Room - Bishop Auckland Town Hall on **Monday 11 December 2023 at 3.30 pm**

Present:

D Land (Chair)

Board Members:

David Madden	The Auckland Project (TAP)
Councillor Elizabeth Scott	Portfolio Holder for Economy and Partnerships, DCC
Councillor Sam Zair	Mayor, Bishop Auckland Town Council (BATC)
Rob Yorke	SDEA and Teescraft
Revd. Dr Chris Knights	Brighter Bishop Partnership
Nik Turner	Believe Housing

Officers:

Graham Wood	Economic Development Manager, DCC
Mark Jackson	Head of Transport and Contract Services, DCC
Craig MacLennan	Transport Infrastructure Manager, DCC
Jonathan Gilroy	CLGU
Judith Layfield	Bishop Auckland College
Stephen Bowyer	The Auckland Project
Sarah Harris	Town Clerk, BATC

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Bp. Paul Butler, Mike Matthews, Natalie Davison-Terranova and Amy Harhoff.

2 Declarations of interest

R Yorke declared that he was the Chair of The Auckland Project (TAP).
D Maddan declared TAP's interest DDG, Kingsway Square, Market Place Hotel, ESAC and Artists' Hub.

J Layfield declared an interest in the Springboard to Employment Project as employees of Bishop Auckland College, a delivery partner in the initiative.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

4 Programme Update DCC / Project Sponsors

The Board received a presentation which updates on the following items (see slides for details).

- a) ESAC
- b) Town Centre Diversification
- c) Durham Dales Gateway
- d) South Church Enterprise Park
- e) Springboard to Employment
- f) Heritage Walking and Cycling
- g) Tindale Triangle

With regards to ESAC, the Board were advised that risk assessments had been carried out and estimates were reviewed at various phases of each scheme, the latest at submission stage. The main risks associated were with the site however until various surveys had been undertaken the risks were not able to be identified. In response to a question from Councillor Zair, the Board were advised that the scheme would not impact on residents who had been consulted as part of the planning process.

With regards to South Church Enterprise Park, G Wood advised that cost escalations had slowed down and additional funding was now secured. A condition of the funding was for businesses to have wraparound support which would be provided by South Durham Enterprise Agency. The project was currently in the design and build stage and contractors were being consulted. The timeline would be reviewed and updated when contractors had been appointed.

Moving on to Springboard to Employment J Layfield provided an update to confirm that the original plan to include a rooftop and outdoor space could no longer be attained due to budget constraints. There would be no changes to the internal work and discussions with Discover Durham were ongoing regarding use of the indoor space. The completion date could be slightly delayed but she would share further details once this had been confirmed with contractors.

C MacLennan referred to one of the key risks with utilities on site at Tindale Triangle. He had since received confirmation from one organisation that they were not affected and was awaiting confirmation from another organisation.

As they shared the same space underground it was anticipated that they would not be affected and contractors could be on site in February. The project would be complete in three to four months. G Wood acknowledged the creation of 300-400 jobs and the Chair suggested that it would be a positive message to share with the press and members of the public.

Resolved

That the presentation be noted.

5 Town Centre Diversification

The Board received a presentation on Town Centre Diversification public realm proposals, which included plans and visuals of the town centre.

S Harris advised that it was a legal requirement for the Town Council to have a noticeboard and requested that this was included in the proposals. She continued to acknowledge that the biggest concern generated by the consultation was the installation of bollards and traffic regulation order on Fore Bondgate. C MacLennan confirmed that the public consultation would begin at the end of January and reminded the Board that an enquiry could be triggered by one objection. Councillor Zair was unsure whether outdoor seating would be popular in an area that was predominantly shaded. In relation to Finkle Street, C MacLennan confirmed that this was a vehicle dominated area which included disabled parking bays and consideration was being given to improvements to the area.

In relation to the Artist's Hub, D Madden advised that in addition to having a satisfactory events schedule to attract visitors, it was equally as important to promote them. TAP were requesting a slight adjustment to the programme to ensure that events continued to be sustainable and achieved desired visitor numbers. The Chair advised that the project had been outlined in a meeting with himself and Local Members however G Wood advised that any changes to the programme would need approval. If the outcomes remained the same, he advised that it was possible for adjustments to be approved by the Board, however changes in scope would require dialogue with Government..

Councillor Zair was concerned that visitor numbers would no longer be attainable when funding had depleted and asked whether any thought had been given to achieving outcomes beyond 2026. The Chair advised that the events programme would be monitored and reviewed throughout and consideration would be given to the programme going forward.

Resolved

That the presentation be noted.

6 Governance Review

The Board received a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which provided background information on the Bishop Auckland Stronger Town Board from its established in March 2020 and its purpose and work to date. The report detailed the changing role from programme development to monitoring delivery and ensuring any change requests remain aligned to the Town Investment Plan.

The Chair confirmed that he did not think it was appropriate to spend a significant amount of money on a governance review and that Membership could be tweaked if required to ensure structure and solidarity. The role of the Strategic Advisory Panel was very different, and he suggested that it continued to operate separately.

Councillor Scott strongly supported an external led governance review which was best practice and would ensure that terms of reference remained appropriate, whilst remaining independent and eliminating any criticism from members of the public or traders. Whilst she accepted that no costs had been provided, it was likely to be a relatively light touch review and would not impact heavily on the budget. She would prefer that the Board vote on their preference, subject to costs. In her experience this would cost no more than £5k.

Councillor Zair agreed that in this phase of the programme, the membership potentially required changes and would support an independent governance review.

N Turner advised that she sat on the periphery as a member of this Board, however she did have experience on other Boards and saw this as an opportunity to ensure that Members were meeting their own personal requirements whilst maintaining the objectives. She saw it as a health check and despite not having the associated costs, she would agree in principle to undertake an external review.

Councillor Yorke was not comfortable determining an item with cost implications without having the full financial details.

J Layfield advised that in addition to annual self-assessment, the College undertook governance reviews every three years and acknowledged that an external review was best practice.

It was highlighted that due to the composition of the Board and changing roles, some Members had not attended any recent meetings.

The Chair was concerned that not all Members were in attendance and further details could be circulated and agreed by email if necessary. He suggested that the item could not be determined without further details being provided.

Resolved

That the formal change in role for the Town Deal Board as the programme moves to its implementation phase be noted; and that further details be provided in relation to proposals for an externally led Governance review.

7 Date of Next Meeting

The meeting cycle for 2024 was being agreed in conjunction with the Chair, details of which would be circulated after the meeting.