

**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:**

County wide.

**Purpose of the Report**

- 1 To provide Cabinet with an update on the delivery of the Towns and Villages Programme.
- 2 To seek approval of the Towns and Villages Investment Plan 2024/26.

**Executive summary**

- 3 The Towns and Villages programme was developed out of a desire to help manage the transformation of our main centres and beyond, recognising the pressures seen from successive rounds of retail closures, changing shopping habits and a rise in the number of leisure and hospitality operations opening in our towns.
- 4 Through rounds of consultations involving local members, Area Action Partnerships and key stakeholders, clear themes for the programme emerged and a wide-ranging suite of project opportunities which formed part of the Towns and Villages investment plan approved by Cabinet in February 2021.
- 5 The Towns and villages programme provided a new way of working in shaping the place agenda, with the council funding providing flexibility to bring together different strands of project activity to provide bespoke solutions to the needs and opportunities being identified.
- 6 This broad oversight of needs has also proved to be beneficial providing clear options which have been used to secure and deploy other place-based funding programmes often requiring an active pipeline of schemes to deliver within tight timescales. These other funding opportunities and the ongoing process of changes seen in our towns and villages has resulted in some elements of the core

programme being delivered quicker than anticipated while some projects have been impacted by external policy or funding changes or timelines realigned to secure other external resource.

- 7 On 1<sup>st</sup> September 2024, **£13.5 million** of the £25 million original Towns and Villages investment has been delivered which is part of the **£30.8 million** expended to date of a place based regeneration programme. A further **£15.8 million** has been committed; and **£2.7 million** remains in development aligning with the Investment Plan themes. As a result, there is now an opportunity to extend the delivery of the programme through to 2026 and to reallocate funds from some of the original project strands to continue to support some of the high demand interventions.
- 8 The county wide scale of delivery, the matched funding attracted and the other regeneration funds that have been aligned to the programme demonstrate the benefits of the co designed place based approach which has now been adopted through the Inclusive Economic Strategy as the way forward.
- 9 With a further commitment to the development of Strategic Place Plans and with a mayoral commitment to establishing a High Streets commission, our experience in delivering the Towns and Villages programme also provides case studies to help shape the regional policy agenda and accompanying resources.

## **Recommendation(s)**

- 10 Cabinet is recommended to:
  - (a) note the progress in delivering the Towns and Villages Programme;
  - (b) note the alignment of a further **£81.6 million** of additional funding to the delivery of place based regeneration;
  - (c) approve the Towns and Villages Investment Plan 2024/26;
  - (d) delegate any amendments in the allocation of Towns and Villages funding within the approved themes set out in the Investment Plan to the Director of Regeneration and Economy in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio holders for Economy and Partnerships and Resources, Investment and Assets.

## Background

- 11 The Towns and Villages programme has been developed through a series of reports to Cabinet since December 2018, establishing the principles, investment themes and subsequently in February 2021, confirming the detailed delivery programme.
- 12 Further reports and updates have been presented to Economy & Enterprise, Overview and Scrutiny Committee, (July 2023) to illustrate the programmes progress.
- 13 Additional funding has been attracted and secured during this timeframe both enhancing the scope and extent of the Towns and Villages delivery and providing a framework for securing and delivering new funding streams.
- 14 This is largely due to the Towns and Villages Programme being built upon involving communities in identifying the issues affecting them, which enabled the council to;
  - (a) Develop the T&V Themes and investment plans;
  - (b) Taking advantage of government policies and funding;
  - (c) Unlocking private / philanthropic investment and;
  - (d) Engaging their communities.
- 15 The approach set out by government through the LTPT programme and our most current co-design led programme as part of UKSPF, aligns closely with the council's efforts to support the transformation of communities across County Durham through the Towns and Villages programme and approach and is identified as the default method of place based design and delivery as set out in the Inclusive Economic Strategy.
- 16 This embedded approach puts the council in a strong position moving forward with future place-based programmes, developing, and shaping our towns and villages for the benefit of communities, visitors, and business.

## Towns and Villages Project Delivery Update 2023/24

- 17 The approval of the UKSPF Investment Plan and Funding has provided the opportunity to expand and extend some strands of activity initiated through the Towns and Villages programme. The ongoing review of external funding opportunities will be continued with a view to securing further resource to deliver beyond the Investment Plan.
- 18 Details of the wider investment aligned to the delivery of the Towns and Villages programme, including UKSPF, REPF, and other funds are set out at Appendix 2. Progress with the main delivery programme includes:

## Neighbourhood Retail Parade (NRP) Programme

- 19 This project has continued to deliver projects following the scoping exercises undertaken which are used to identify opportunities for potential improvements which link across the programme themes and to wider investments.
- 20 The scoping phase of the programme is beneficial in identifying a wide range of neighbourhood and village issues, whilst ensuring a cross service co-ordination to delivery, whilst maximising impact and the best use of available budgets.
- 21 Project opportunities identified have included continuing to invest and support the retail sector with grant support via the Targeted Business Improvement Scheme, where applicants are targeted in areas in addition to businesses making direct approaches for support. Support includes advice and guidance to new and existing businesses, grant support to improve premises, whilst also supporting economic growth and job opportunities.
- 22 Targeted Business Improvement scheme has continued with schemes developed and delivered in West Auckland, Seaham, Durham City, Tow Law, Shildon, Consett, Coxhoe, Chester le Street, Bishop Auckland, Wingate, Ferryhill, Crook, Stanley, Croxdale, Horden, Spennymoor, Wheatley Hill, Peterlee, Blackhill, Stanhope, Rookhope, Stanley, Leadgate, Fencehouses, Langley Moor, Great Lumley, Framwellgate Moor and Barnard Castle.
- 23 As a result, this area of the programme has continued to deliver strong support to local retailers with the following performance between April 2023 – March 2024:
  - a) 339 retail business enquiries – showing growth beyond previous years;
  - b) 49 businesses supported;
  - c) 301 FTE's created and FTE's safeguarded;
  - d) 25 vacant properties brought back into use;
  - e) 24 new businesses supported;
  - f) Total grants issued £405,326;
  - g) Private investment attracted £2,082,994 million.
- 24 Retail business enquiries remain high and demonstrate growth on previous years. Appendix 3 contains a detailed analysis of the extent and scope of business support offered through this program since its launch, up until 1<sup>st</sup> September 2024 including:
  - a) 1615 business enquiries;
  - b) 261 businesses supported;
  - c) 860 FTEs created and FTEs safeguarded;
  - d) 107 vacant properties brought back into use;
  - e) 84 New businesses supported;

- f) Total grants issued £1,750,743 million;
  - g) £9,791,947 million private investment attracted.
- 25 Retail business enquiries during the period of April 2024 to September 2024 has reached 227 in this six-month period. This further demonstrates growth on previous years and the benefit of the support in attracting new business and helping existing businesses to grow and develop.
- 26 The Targeted Business Improvement Scheme is delivered alongside the Public Realm Enhancements in our towns and villages to maximise improvements and deliver change in neighbourhood parade areas;
- 27 Areas improved have included Framwellgate Moor, Bearpark, Frosterley, Spennymoor, Crook, Wingate, West Cornforth, New Brancepeth, Newton Hall, Seaham, with works designed, programmed and or completed Examples of the type of improvements delivered include pedestrian footways with new paving, improved accessibility, protection for pedestrians with bollards, railings, traffic calming measures and interpretation boards, heritage features, public art. Some projects have also benefited from attracting S106 funding again following the approach of maximising the towns and villages funding where this is possible.

### **Enhanced Environmental Maintenance**

- 28 This project has linked closely to the NRP schemes and has delivered enhanced works in several locations, for example in Shildon refurbishment and repainting of bollards, railings, bus shelters and bins alongside street cleansing of footways in the Market Place, Church Street and Main Street.
- 29 Areas benefitting from this activity have included Haswell, Shildon, Framwellgate Moor, Sherburn Village, West Rainton, Brandon, Tow Law, Annfield Plain, Crook, Carrville, Thornley, Spennymoor, Seaham, Barnard Castle, Frosterley, Wheatley Hill, New Brancepeth, Chester le Street, Durham City, Consett. Interventions include new/refurbished benches, bollards, bins, soft landscaping, enhanced cleansing, bus stop cleaning and refurbishment and reconfiguring street furniture.

### **Neighbourhood Parking, Traffic and Circulation**

- 30 This project delivers against various types of neighbourhood parking, traffic and circulation issues, examples of delivery include new and improved layouts of shoppers' car parks including EV charging, the introduction of speed cushions and Traffic Regulation Orders to improve safety for pedestrians.
- 31 Areas have been identified through the initial round of consultations with local members and AAPs as well as through the identification of issues while scoping local works packages. Schemes delivered have included Shildon, Wheatley Hill, Framwellgate Moor, Newton Hall, Blackhall, Seaham. In some areas addressing long standing problem properties can create a solution for car park demand. Examples include the creation of a new car park at Annfield Plain to support the neighbourhood parade users, as well as improve drop off and collection for the local school. The building has been demolished and work is underway to create the new car park, linking the works across the programme of the problem commercial properties with the delivery of a new car park facility.

## **Property Reuse and Conversion**

- 32 Focussing on reducing vacancy and diversifying use in main centres. This repayable revolving loan scheme supports our retail, leisure and hospitality offer for our county to grow and supports the reconfiguration of our empty and derelict properties. This project will continue beyond the Investment Plan lifecycle due to the repayment of loans enabling the continued offer.
- 33 To-date this scheme has issued ten loans, supported 16 new businesses, attracted private sector investment of £3.5 million and helped to create 75 FTEs and bringing eight vacant buildings back into active use. Area's benefitted have included Spennymoor, Castle Eden, Seaham, Bishop Auckland, Durham City and Peterlee.

## **Improving Community Resilience**

- 34 The scheme designed to help improve and create community facilities to help provide services at a community level has so far resulted in 16 projects being awarded funding totalling over £1.4 million. Ten projects are now complete Alington House Durham, Lowes Barn Community, Peterlee and Horden Rugby Club, Woodhouse Close Church, and Community Centre, Cotherstone Chapel, Fishburn Community Resource Centre, Shotton Youth Hub, Spennymoor Youth and Community, Brandon Boxing Club and Framwellgate Moor Community Centre.
- 35 A further six projects have received grant offers and are underway. These are; Burnmoor Cricket Club, All Saints Muggleswick, Redhills Revealed, Brandon Community Hall, Watling Spaces CIC, and St Pauls Centre.
- 36 Interventions through the Community Resilience project include renovations and repurposing of buildings to safeguard the community assets, extensions to support delivery of community services, solar panels to support centres to be sustainable and keep running costs down.
- 37 Applications from a further nine community organisations are being supported through the development stages from the following areas: Belmont, Peterlee, Chilton, Cornforth, Esh Winning, Haswell, Nettlesworth, Shildon, Crook.
- 38 As detailed within this report this element of project activity is now being developed and delivered alongside the UKSPF Community Infrastructure Project to maximise available funding and support a greater number of schemes.

## **Walking and Cycling**

- 39 The project provides the additional resource to enhance the investments made through Local Travel Plans (LTP) and as part of the Local Cycling and Walking Improvement Plans. A particular priority being given to:
- a) Addressing breaks in the current walking and cycling network;
  - b) Connecting residential areas and employment sites with the main walking and cycling infrastructure.
- 40 Improvements have been made to National Cycle network (NCN) 1 with East Durham upgrades from Station Town to Wynyard complete, sections of the Hart to

Haswell railway path at South Hetton, Tuthill, Shotton and Wellfield completed. The C2C Consett (Blackhill) is complete. At Bishop Auckland - The Auckland Walk surface upgrade is complete and the Brandon to Bishop Auckland part complete, dependant on feasibility of Relly Bridge designs/ costs before completing. Waskerley Way to Whithall complete. Hownsgill Viaduct – feasibility. NCN14 to Hart ongoing. NCN1 Seaham town centre feasibility and finally NCN1 Seaham to Ryhope, NCN1 signage and Murton to Dalton Park link planned by March 2025.

- 41 Issues with land ownership identified at the feasibility stage and poor weather conditions have resulted in delays in delivering some of the improvements with the timescale for delivery now extended into the next investment plan window.

## **Community Housing**

- 42 Community led housing provides an additional source of supply of affordable or other specialist accommodation to meet local housing needs, focussing on small scale development for specific communities of interest such as veterans, disabled groups, or those with learning disabilities. The Towns and Villages funding provided a potential resource for schemes to access funding to progress schemes.
- 43 The very nature of community led housing is that schemes will have a longer lead in and will potentially face increased delivery challenges owing to a range of factors including availability of land and site viability considerations.
- 44 National funding has supported a specialist scheme which was originally identified through the programme. This has resulted in a scheme in the east of the county providing seven residential units for young homeless clients. Funded from S106 and COMF Covid Outbreak Management Fund bringing an empty building back into use. To date we have been unable to offer support for any further proposals due to issues identified with land ownership and the concern regards future management arrangements. Further dialogue continues to achieve appropriate small development through mainstream housing programmes as a result no further schemes are expected to be progressed under this strand and it is proposed to realign remaining funding to other areas of the programme.

## **Allotment Improvement Programme**

- 45 Allotments are a valuable community asset, but the external appearance can detract from the quality of local areas. A scheme to support the improvement of DCC owned allotments was launched in June 2023 with two yearly invites to apply for this funding 31<sup>st</sup> January and 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024. In total 20 applications have been approved in principle awarding grants just over £47,000 with match funding in excess of £32,000. Applications from around the County include East Stanley, Newton Hall, Shield Row, Bishop Middleham, Consett, Blackhall, Annfield Plain, South Moor, Dipton, Gilesgate and St Helen Auckland.
- 46 The next round of applications are being invited for submission 31 January 2025.

## **Vulnerable Buildings**

- 47 Part of the initial focus when creating the Towns and Villages programme was the high level of vacancy in many of our towns and the need to provide support and necessary resource to manage the reduction of void properties through

enforcement, reuse or if necessary, demolition. This approach was previously highlighted to Cabinet in March 2021 and reviewed by Environment Scrutiny Committee March 2023.

- 48 The approach adopted through the Towns and Villages programme provides a six-stage process - Identify, Establish, Engage, Educate, Encourage, and Enforce which guides the size, scope, and timescales for intervention.
- 49 Tracking of the various vulnerable buildings also includes a focus on the safety of buildings leading to enforcement action and the boarding up of properties when necessary.
- 50 Just under 50 properties were being monitored in March 2023, of which 16 properties have now been brought back into use/demolished. Examples of positive activity include four buildings that are being supported to bring them back into use in Consett, Stanley and Langley Moor. As well as the demolition, now completed, at Annfield Plain, leading to the creation of new car parking facilities.

### **Former Easington School Site**

- 51 The site of the former Easington School in Easington Colliery currently stands vacant following demolition in 2021. The plans for demolition included a requirement to repair and refurbish the existing perimeter walls, railings, and gates. It also proposed a pocket park. Whilst the demolition phase has been completed, the refurbishment of the walls, railings and gates have not been undertaken.
- 52 Since demolition, the listing of the site has been removed and with costs for the reinstatement of the wall, gates, and railings significantly higher than initially forecast the budget, the long term strategy for the site requires further consideration to ensure residents receive the benefits and improvements planned whilst the remaining budget is used most effectively.
- 53 Further feasibility and technical studies have been undertaken to guide future development and ensure the site provides a positive contribution to the local community.

### **Horden Regeneration**

- 54 The Towns and Villages Investment Plan has a £4.5 million allocation for the Horden regeneration programme. This is supplemented by £1.7 million from the council's capital programme. The £6.2 million has been approved as part of the Medium-Term Financial Plan in support of the Masterplan delivery Option for Horden which was approved by Cabinet in January 2024. The £6.2 million will allow a programme of regeneration to commence to address some of the long-standing issues of vacancy and deterioration, strengthen community confidence and stimulate the market to encourage wider private and public sector investment.
- 55 The first phase of the Masterplan is associated with the acquisition of 56 properties on Third Street. Housing Regeneration Officers are working to progress acquisitions alongside working closely with residents to identify their housing needs. At the current time the council has valuation instructions for 36 properties with Capita. The council successfully purchased and decommissioned its first property in Third Street in August 2024 and another 9 instructions are with legal and are planned to



complete March 2025. In addition, three tenants and two owner occupiers have been supported to relocate to new properties, with detailed support being provided to others in preparation for moving to their new homes.

- 56 The council has been successful in securing a further £4.5 million from the North East Combined Authority over the summer to expand the project to include Third, Fourth and Fifth Street, Horden. The council was notified at the start of the September 2024 that the application was successful, and a formal announcement was made towards the end of September 2024 by the North East Mayor. The expansion to the project will see the council seeking to acquire an additional 58 properties within Fifth Street. All owners and occupiers have been contacted in Fifth Street and work is now ongoing to support owner occupiers, landlords and tenants through the process, with a number already showing interest to enter sales negotiations with the Capita.
- 57 A hybrid planning application for demolition and reprovision within Third, Fourth and Fifth Streets this will be submitted within the first quarter of 2025. In line with the funding requirements of the North East Combined Authority funding, it is anticipated that reprovision works will commence in the first quarter of 2026.

## **Strategic Investments**

### **Digital Highstreet**

- 58 The Digital High Street Project provided free Wi-Fi coverage across the main town centres as part of the shift to leisure focussed uses in town centre, a desire to improve user experience, functionality and extend the dwell time and through the data capture aspect of the system to better understand user trends across the centres. Wi-Fi systems were installed in Bishop Auckland, Stanley, Seaham, Chester le Street and Barnard castle using Towns and Villages funding alongside AAP and Town and Parish Council contributions.
- 59 Data has now been evaluated despite the systems providing good coverage across the town, the number of authenticated users remains low limiting the data insight. Since the project commenced, advances in technology which includes the masking / randomising of devices identity, means the systems will not now accurately provide the data expected. As a result, we have concluded that these pilot schemes will not be extended with Seaham and Chester le Street ceasing in May and Barnard Castle in June 2024. Local members within the towns identified have received update reports and information regards the ceasing of the Wi Fi coverage.
- 60 Work with Shildon Parish Council also investigated the potential to install free Wi-Fi in their community park with additional funding attracted, however due to issues with the data systems as detailed below, this AAP Towns and Villages funding has been reinvested to the larger park project.
- 61 The original focus was to improve our understanding of the use of the individual centre along with improving user experience and encouraging businesses to embrace digital opportunities.
- 62 New town centre data opportunities are emerging and a contract has been issued to secure commercial data and helps us to understand our town centres users, impacts of events, and cross mapping of footfall over previous years to help focus

regeneration efforts. This data has been utilised in reports to demonstrate the footfall increase in towns resulting from activities and events in some towns and most recently as part of the UKSPF Specialist Markets.

## **Retail Hub**

63 The retail hub has focussed on providing several strands of support to the sector, aimed at supporting growth and resilience in both the retail, leisure, and the hospitality sector.

### **Retail Hub Strand 1**

64 The Retail skills project has continued with ongoing engagement with the retail, leisure and hospitality sectors offering free courses. This training offer provides training face to face. 17 courses have been delivered in the last financial year to-date covering digital media, emergency first aid and food safety training.

65 During the current financial year 24/25 150 employees have received training, with 14 courses delivered in Food Safety, First Aid, Manual Handling, Fire Safety and Dealing with Difficult Customers. The offer continues to be reviewed, this is to ensure it is fit for purpose to help grow the retail sectors skills and development.

### **Retail Hub Strand 2**

66 This strand is focussed upon supporting new business formation and growth, through shared retail space, temporary retail offerings and meanwhile uses of existing town centre property. This strand of work includes two types of intervention.

(a) Temporary Shop Wraps;

(b) A support programme encouraging test trading and meanwhile uses.

67 A contract was awarded to Shop Jacket, to work alongside DCC to help tackle long term empty units, enhancing the appearance of vacant units with two units benefiting from this approach including Bishop Auckland and Durham City.

68 However, due to a positive shift with units being brought back into active use in some areas where longstanding vacancy was an issue this has resulted in less shop jackets being designed and installed.

69 Significant interest exists over the Meanwhile Uses and Shared Retail Space with nine units benefiting across areas in Newton Aycliffe, Durham City, Spennymoor. This has helped to create eight FTE jobs. Out of the nine who have received support, seven have continued to trade and remain within the units. Further interest is being expressed and explored with clients. This offer of support helps us to achieve our aim of bringing the vacancy rates down as well as providing the opportunity for retail to test trade.

## **Towns and Villages Vibrancy**

70 Events and activities play a crucial part in the vibrancy of our towns, the project has continued to deliver a series of events to encourage footfall in our main centres including the expansion of Bishop Auckland food festival, the launch and growth of

Seaham Food Festivals and a programme of Town Centre Events and Activities developed and delivered Linking UKSPF funding (12 across main towns) plus 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of New Towns at Peterlee and Newton Aycliffe, as well as Spennymoor Family Fun Street Festival and Lunar New Year. The alignment of UKSPF resources will see a further 11 specialist markets/family fun events supported in 2024-2025.

- 71 Examples of success from these interventions can be demonstrated by footfall increases in Spennymoor during the Family Fun Event held 25<sup>th</sup> May 2024 which rose by 12%. Local businesses trading experiences are also collected with recent feedback including “We experienced a much higher volume of customers, cannot wait for further events to return to the town”
- 72 Specialist activity and events have continued linking with Funding from UKSPF to deliver a programme of 11 Specialist Markets across the County. The Consett Farmers Market, held on Saturday, September 14<sup>th</sup>, was a great success, with a 15% rise in footfall compared to the previous year which saw an additional 2,845 people visit. The market featured 17 vendors, operating alongside the current market stall holders, offering everything from fresh produce and honey to pet supplies, cheeses, and baked goods. With this catalyst local individuals have helped to support the current market provider to grow and develop this further, with a planned vibrant Christmas Market coming to Consett which will include approximately 80 stallholders ranging from food, gifts, crafts alongside entertainment.

## Funding summary and future programme

- 73 Appendix 4 Table details Towns and Villages Programme Budgets and spend of **£13.5 million** to 1<sup>st</sup> September 2024, with **£15.8 million** committed and the remaining delivery budget of **£2.7 million**. A total of **£30.8 million** including additional match has been expended.
- 74 Appendix 5 Table details the budgets invested across County Durham Towns and Villages. Note this table does not include additional investment attracted to the Towns and Villages programme.
- 75 Appendix 6 details the delivery completed and proposed revised investment plan, with much of the remaining £2.7 million already linked to scheme design or awaiting confirmed delivery. The revised investment plan ensures that the council maximises the external funding available to its towns and villages and extend delivery to 2026/27, subject to ensuring external sources of funding are maximised.
- 76 The table below details the Projects requiring realignment. As outlined within the report there a minor number of projects with risks or change requests identified. This also reflects the successful delivery across some interventions such as the Neighbourhood Retailing and Retail Hub which outstrip available budgets moving forward, and a change in Retail, Leisure, and Hospitality sector needs. Without this agreement continuation of council support to the retail, leisure and hospitality sector in our towns and villages, alongside public realm improvements, will be unable to continue. Table below summarises the requests:

Theme	Budget	Strategy	Realign to	Justification
Digital High Street	£445,075	Realign	Retail Hub & Neighbourhood Retailing	To enable the continuation Business Grants, Meanwhile Uses  Public realm improvements.
Community Housing	£647,973	Realign from 1/10/24	Retail Hub & Neighbourhood Retailing	Realignment due to lack of project progress with final extension provided 1/10/24
South Moor Improvements	£191,901	Realign	Retail Hub & Neighbourhood Retailing	Realignment due to lack of project progress. Considering a targeted approach to building improvement with property owner in South Moor.  To enable the continuation Business Grants, Meanwhile Uses

## Next Steps

- 77 The Towns and Villages programme has delivered significant improvements against its original aims of supporting the transformation of our main towns and residential areas.
- 78 The process of developing the programme through extensive consultations with local members, stakeholders and communities has not only identified a pipeline of schemes which have secured other sources of funding but has also shaped our approach to place based regeneration with the Inclusive Economic Strategy setting out a co-design approach to developing our future Strategic Place Plans.
- 79 This approach also aligns well with recent national programme guidance including the Long-Term Plan for Towns programme, through which Spennymoor will receive £20 million of regeneration funding over the next 10 years.
- 80 The pace of change and pressures on the operation of our main centres continues however, The North East Combined Authority is currently developing a suite of place based interventions alongside a mayoral commitment to establish a Town Centre commission. The experience of developing and implementing the Towns and Villages approach as a multi themed programme anchored in town centre regeneration will provide significant opportunities for learning and will help shape future strategy and funding.

## Background papers

[Towns and Villages Way Forward - DCC Cabinet December 2018](#)

[Towns and Villages Strategy- DCC Cabinet October 2020](#)

[Towns and Villages Investment Plan - DCC Cabinet February 2021](#)

[Towns and Villages Place Shaping – Approach to Regeneration of Buildings and Land– DCC Cabinet March 2021](#)

Towns and Villages Economy, Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny July 2023

## Towns and Village Environment Scrutiny Vulnerable Buildings Approach

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

Durham County Council as lead authority has received a Memorandum of Understanding setting out UKSPF requirements and obligations.

The council must comply with subsidy control rules for administering and awarding grants.

### **Finance**

The Towns and Villages budget was agreed alongside approval of the Investment Plan. This provides a core allocation of £20.8 million, and a £4.2 million allocation delivered by the Area Action Partnerships, in line with programme priorities.

There is no further request to the council for additional financial resource and this will see the council's commitment into activity extended beyond the expected programme lifecycle.

Developing cohesive packages of project activity at a local level has provided opportunities to secure additional external funding in line with programme objectives. During 2023/24 **£81.6 million** of public and external funding has been secured through programmes including UKSPF, REPF, Multiply, Long Term Plan for Towns.

### **Staffing**

Currently one project post within the Community Economic Development Team is funded through the Towns and Villages programme. Programme delivery is generally undertaken by existing staffing resource.

The UKSPF programme does include funding for dedicated support, this has attracted internal experienced officers to secure personal development opportunities to grow their skills and experience, which has resulted in gaps in teams. This will be monitored moving forward with a view to attract and develop new posts through apprenticeships or new posts.

### **Consultation and Engagement**

No identified implications at this stage. Independent project consultations are undertaken in line with established processes. The new co-design approach to be used is in line with the approach to developing strategic Place Plans as set out in the County Durham Inclusive Economic Strategy and Delivery plan.

The AAP investment plan was developed following several rounds of member and AAP discussions including full programmes of AAP engagement focusing on local needs and programme themes. Project teams continue regular engagement with AAP Boards and the Task and Finish groups.

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

Public realm works are routinely designed following accessibility reviews.

The implications of the Public Sector Equality Duty are identified as a cross cutting theme throughout the UKSPF and aligned activity.

## **Climate Change**

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

## **Human Rights**

There are no human right implications from the information within the report.

## **Crime and Disorder**

Safety and security in our towns and villages are a focus of the programme ensuring buildings are protected, safe and well-lit areas to help support and mitigate potential ASB. Elements of Neighbourhood Retailing Improvements and the focus on addressing vacant property across the County include specific reference to addressing / designing out Anti-Social Behaviour.

## **Accommodation**

None

## **Risk**

Programme and Project risks will be identified and mitigated through both the development and delivery phase in line with existing capital project monitoring requirements. The Programme risks are reported through established governance structures.

Capital improvement projects identified, developed, and delivered are undertaken with agreement for future maintenance. This does provide an ongoing revenue maintenance commitment, however this is mitigated as improvement works will be undertaken to adoptable standards and therefore reduce imminent revenue implications following the completion of works. The result of works largely reduces revenue maintenance requirement, saving in the shorter / medium term due to reduced repairs requirements.

## **Procurement**

All activity will follow the council's financial regulations and Contract Procedure rules.

## Appendix 2: Additional Funding

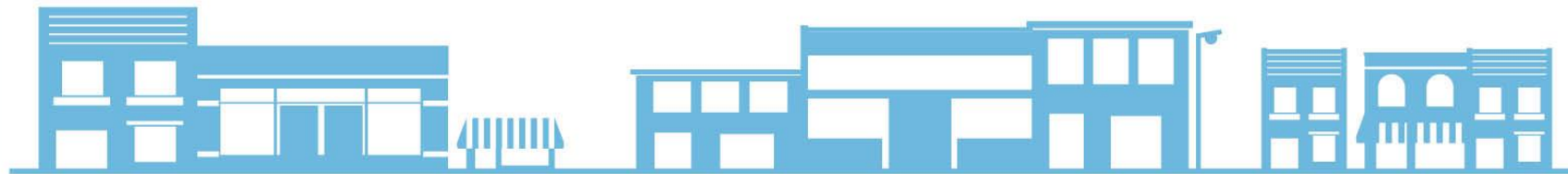
Table details funding from UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF), and Department for Levelling up Homes & Communities (DLUHC) Long Term Plan for Towns, S106, Cllrs Neighbourhood Budget, Area Action Partnerships, CYPS, Homes England, Chilton Green Energy Foundation CIC, Believe Housing, Livin, BEIS, NECA.

Funding Programme	Investment Priority	Total £
UKSPF	Supporting Local Business	13,750,000
	Communities and Place	7,430,618
	People and Skills	9,650,000
REPF		3,512,301
Multiply	Adult Numeracy Programme	2,800,000
DLUHC LTPT	Spennymoor	20,000,000
DCC		2,859,863
S106		175,031
Cllrs Neighbourhood Budget		37,897
AAP		72,469
CYPS		5,000
Homes England		300,000
Chilton Green Energy Foundation CIC		204,000
Believe		97,177
Livin		387,382
BEIS / Tees Valley Hub Dept Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy		15,828,589
NECA		4,500,000
<b>Total Match</b>		<b>£81,610,327</b>



## Appendix 3: Towns & Villages Investment Infographic

2018-2024 (1 April 2018 to 31 September 2024)

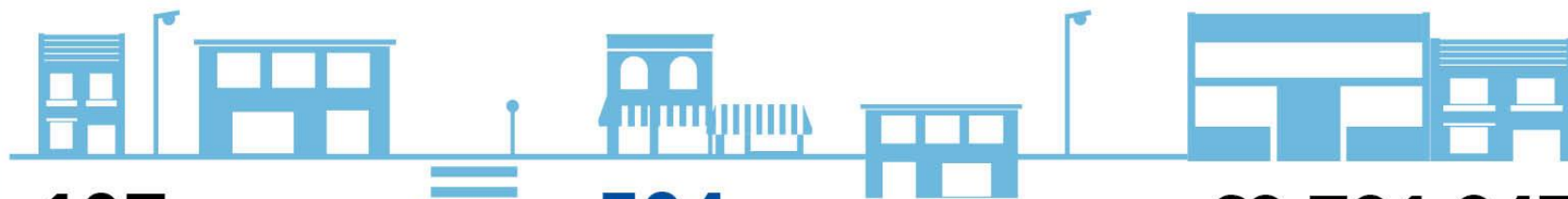


**1615**  
business enquiries

**261**  
businesses supported

**£1,750,743**  
in grants awarded

Supported  
**84** new  
businesses



**107**  
vacant properties brought into use

**504**  
FTE jobs created

plus **365**  
FTE jobs safeguarded

**£9,791,947**  
of private sector investment

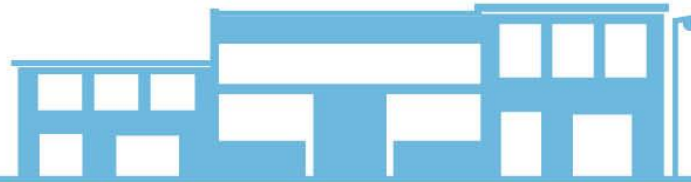
**towns & villages**



2023-2024 (1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024)

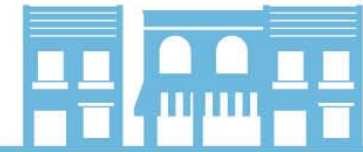


**339**  
business enquiries

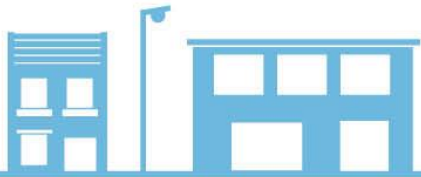


**49**  
businesses supported

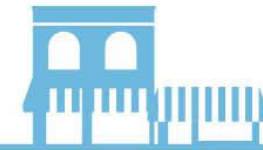
**£405,326**  
in grants awarded



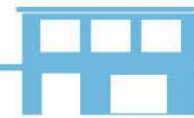
Supported  
**24** new  
businesses



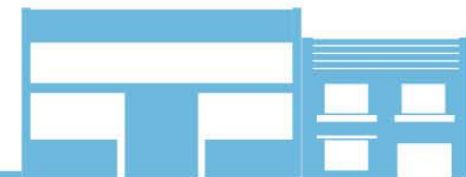
**25**  
vacant properties  
brought into use



**124**  
FTE jobs  
created



plus **177**  
FTE jobs  
safeguarded



**£2,082,994**  
of private sector investment

## Appendix 4: Towns & Villages Budget and Spend (as of August 2024)

Theme	Project	Towns & Villages Capital Allocation	Towns & Villages Revenue Allocation	Additional Match Funding	Total	Expended	Committed Budget	Remaining Delivery Budget
Strategic Investments	Digital High Street	575,000	200,000	20,920	795,920	274,510	76,335	445,075
	Retail Hub		300,000	0	300,000	134,379	165,621	0
	Neighbourhood Retail Improvements	2,750,000		70,106	2,820,106	1,837,540	TBI GOL 298,584 ITFA 420,141 Public Realm 263,841 = 982,566	0
	Towns and Villages Vibrancy		200,000	0	200,000	147,468	52,532	0
Housing and Community	Community Housing	650,000		0	650,000	2,027		647,973
	Housing Opportunities Fund	150,000		0	150,000	150,000	0	0
	Improving Community Resilience (inc. Redhills)	2,000,000		1,150,629	3,150,629	1,809,978	1,340,651	0
	Green Homes Fuel Efficiency	950,000		16,817,148	17,767,148	17,767,148	0	0
	Horden Regeneration	4,500,000		6,400,000	10,900,000	287,350	10,612,650	0
	Allotment Improvement	75,000		0	75,000	26,870	48,130	
Environment & Health	Enhanced Environmental Maintenance	500,000		0	500,000	476,836	23,164	0
Built Environment	Vulnerable Buildings	1,200,000	50,000	0	1,250,000	129,458	208,000	912,542
	Property Reuse and Conversion*	500,000		0	500,000	470,000	0	30,000
	Dean Bank Clearance and Improvement	150,000		-39,059	110,941	110,941		0
	Easington Colliery Programme	1,000,000	50,000		1,050,000	538,183	0	511,817
	South Moor Improvement	200,000		-371	199,629	7,728	0	191,901
	Sacriston Workshop Conversion	200,000		23,280	223,280	223,280	0	0
	Walking and Cycling Routes	3,750,000		6,500	3,756,500	1,718,581	2,037,919	0

<b>Transport &amp; Connectivity</b>	Neighbourhood Parking and Circulation	850,000		18,255	868,225	525,804	342,451	0
<b>Local Programme</b>	AAP Area Improvement Fund	4,200,000		0	4,200,000	4,200,000		
<b>Total</b>		<b>24,200,000</b>	<b>800,000</b>	<b>24,467,408</b>	<b>49,467,408</b>	<b>30,838,081</b>	<b>15,890,019</b>	<b>2,739,308</b>

## Appendix 5: Spend across County Durham Towns and Villages

Table shows the budget invested across County Durham Towns and Villages.

Approximate Geographical split of monies paid out (T&V)

Towns & Villages Programme	Total expenditure as of September 2024	3 Towns	4 Together	BASH	Chester-le-Street & District	Derwent Valley	Durham	East Durham	East Durham Rural	Mid Durham	Great Aycliffe & Midcliffe	Spennymoor	Stanley	Teesdale	Weardale
Digital High Street	£274,510			£55,358	£55,402		£4,632	£61,110					£45,458	£52,550	
Retail Hub	£134,379	£10,132	£6,783	£13,483	£18,835	£14,203	£13,862	£14,205		£9,288	£14,166	£9,287	£10,135		
Neighbourhood Retailing	£1,837,540	£252,862	£44,928	£73,403	£203,571	£233,239	£394,571	£249,113	£28,641	£76,986	£19,565	£130,775	£36,293	£42,150	£51,443
Towns & Villages Vibrancy*	£147,468	£6,405	£6,405	£21,406	£6,405	£6,405	£6,405	£32,278	£6,405	£6,405	£11,328	£18,406	£6,405	£6,405	£6,405
Vulnerable Buildings	£129,458				£3,795			£94,823		£10,840			£20,000		
Community Housing	£2,027			£2,027											
Property Reuse, Conversion & Improvement	£470,000			£150,000			£50,000	£170,000				£100,000			
Housing Opportunity Fund	£150,000			£150,000											
Enhanced Environmental Maintenance	£476,836	£28,206	£20,788	£34,459	£54,478	£33,617	£39,204	£105,369	£12,281	£45,717	£13,333	£39,217	£17,290	£15,268	£17,609
Allotment Improvement Programme	£26,870	£3,588	£1,838	£1,838		£5,340	£3,588	£1,839					£8,839		
T&V Walking & Cycling Routes	£1,718,581	£21,802		£206,625		£258,869	£91,598	£713,128	£32,742	£20,734		£206,625		£166,458	
Dean Bank Bernicia Environment Improvements	£110,942		£110,942												
Easington Colliery School	£538,183							£538,183							
Traffic Neighbourhood Parking & Circulation	£525,804	£37,959			£31,621		£80,255	£252,512					£123,457		
South Moor Development Site	£7,728												£7,728		
Sacriston Co-op Buildings Refurbishment Grants	£200,000				£200,000										
Improving Community Resilience (inc Redhills)	£1,323,699			£47,400	£53,250	£67,450	£515,098	£428,721	£60,000	£12,500		£19,280		£120,000	
Horden Housing Feasibility Plan	£287,350							£287,350							
Green Homes - Phase 1b & 2	£950,000	£12,825	£176,225	£163,400	£94,145	£110,675	£23,340	£135,565	£30,090	£18,555	£67,735	£21,090	£78,280	£27,075	
AAP Area Improvement Programme II**	£4,200,000	£300,000	£300,000	£300,000	£300,000	£300,000	£300,000	£300,000	£300,000	£300,000	£300,000	£300,000	£300,000	£300,000	£300,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£13,511,375</b>	<b>£673,779</b>	<b>£667,909</b>	<b>£1,219,399</b>	<b>£1,021,502</b>	<b>£1,029,798</b>	<b>£1,522,553</b>	<b>£3,384,196</b>	<b>£470,159</b>	<b>£501,025</b>	<b>£426,127</b>	<b>£844,680</b>	<b>£653,885</b>	<b>£729,906</b>	<b>£375,457</b>

Total payment split approximately across identified AAP areas

Spend across geographical areas

Committed places in development/designs/fees/publicly announced

\*Reduction in Vibrancy spend due to UKSPF intervention

\*\* AAP funding based on £210k investment & revenue

## Appendix 6: Towns and Villages Revised Investment Plan

### Programme Delivery & Planned Delivery

Theme	Project		21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25	25/26
Strategic Investments			Bishop Auckland Food Festival Seaham Food Festival Durham Book Festival S&DR community engagement Digital Library development	Bishop Auckland Food Festival, Seaham Food Festival Creative Economy Dev Digital Library Delivered Activities, Festivals and Events across all main towns "Winter Wonders" Oct – Dec Durham City Christmas Festival	Bishop Auckland & Seaham Food Festivals Programme of Town Centre Events and Activities developed and delivered Linking UKSPF (12 across main towns) plus 75 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of New Towns at Peterlee and Newton Aycliffe Spennymoor Family Fun Street Festival Luna New Year		Continue
	Project					24/25	25/26
	Town and Village Vibrancy High Street	Bishop Chester Castle				Bishop Auckland & Seaham Food Festival, 12 Main Towns Procure Analytics Winter Wonders 11 centres to provide Linker demographics Place Infomatics contracted.	Continued Programme Bishop Auckland & Seaham Food Festival, 12 Main Towns Winter Wonders Continued data contract Linked to UKSPF Funding
Housing and Community			Discussions took place with; Durham Action on Single Housing (DASH) Craghead Development Trust Oakenshaw Community Association Canney Communities	East Durham Community Initiatives (EDCI) completed.	Canney Hill Bishop Auckland  Further Community housing schemes being considered Crook		10 Training Courses to be delivered: Digital media Emergency First Aid Food Safety
	Community Housing	Digital Media Custom First Aid					
			Interventions in Targeted Delivery Plans areas	Shildon Peoples Centre converted to 4 x 1-bedroom Flats Coundon Grange 3 bungalows refurbished back into use	COMPLETE		
	Housing Opportunities Fund						
	Improving Community Resilience Our mood gements	Gilesgate Proudford Esh Wires South Shields New Shields Willington Silverdale Coundon Pelton	Houndsgill Viaduct Scheduled Monument Project feasibility. Peterlee & Horden Rugby Club Community Building	P&HRC Planning Approved, funding dev. Lowes Barn New Build Redhills Revealed GOL	Delivery; Peterlee, Alington House, Cotherstone Chapel, Woodhouse Close, All Saints, Brandon, Shotton Youth Club, St Pauls, Redhills Revealed	19 Schemes ref Thornley, Shildon, Common, Launfield, Rye, Brackley, West Auckland, Framwellgate Moor, Ushaw Moor, Sherburn Road,	Continue Easington, East Middleton in Teesdale, Nettleworth, Shildon, Stanhope, Upper Teasdale, Burnmoor  Continue implementation
Green Homes Programme (External Wall Insulation Installs)		300 Properties/ EWI's complete	1846 Properties benefitted including solar photovoltaic panels, renewable heating	COMPLETE			

Theme	Project	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25	25/26
Housing and Community	Horden Regeneration Programme	Identify investment priorities through masterplan. Commence acquisition and clearance of targets/problem properties	Undertake site assembly and marketing	Preparation and finalisation of Acquisition and Demolition Strategy and Decant Strategy.  Autumn 2023 Cabinet, which will seek approval for the proposed delivery approach, CPO approach and the acquisition and demolition of properties.	Planning application to be prepared and submitted.  Acquisition of properties by negotiation will continue. Subject to approval, demolition of properties can be expected in Q4 of 24/25 and Q1 25/26	Continue implementation
	Allotment Improvement Programme	/	/	Grant Scheme Launched 3 allotment improvement schemes supported (Shield Row, East Stanley, Newton Hall)	Support and implement 10 allotment improvement schemes	Support and implement 11 allotment improvement schemes
	AAP Small Area Improvement Fund	Engage with 28 AAPs and deliver 28 schemes, identifying Small Area Programme opportunities	Delivery of AAP Small Area improvement schemes	Delivery of AAP Small Area improvement schemes	Programme complete	Programme complete
Environmental and Health	Enhanced Environmental Maintenance	Deliver environmental improvement programme aligned to neighbourhood retail programme and targeted delivery plan areas	Delivered environmental improvements in 14 Areas	Delivered 15 environmental improvement programme aligned to neighbourhood retail programme and targeted delivery plan areas	Continue to deliver 11 environmental improvement projects	
Built Environment	Vulnerable Buildings	Address 3x priority buildings Stanley/Shildon, 2x buildings in Chester-le-Street	20 properties being brought back into use. 10 with Action Taken	3 priority properties underway	5 priority properties	5 priority properties Continue implementation
	Property Reuse and Conversion	5 Loans approved	3 Loans approved	1 Loan approved. 2 assessments underway	Continue to review repayment of loans and target 2 loan approvals	Continue to review repayment of loans and target 2 loan approvals
	Dean Bank Clearance and Improvement	Conclude landscaping of recent clearance sites.	Demolition of 36 properties, landscape solution completed	COMPLETE		





Theme	Project	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25	25/26
Built Environment	Easington Colliery Programme	Complete demolition programme at former Colliery School	Completed phased programme of clearance. Review End use ref pocket park see report	Develop end use solution underway	Delivery or facilitate end use solution	
	South Moor Improvement Programme	Improve key problem site and vulnerable property	DCC CCS developing design solution. Landowners' permissions now in place.	Costs and delivery delayed	Costs and delivery due to take place	Continue implementation
	Sacriston Workshop Conversion	Improvements to Sacriston Coop Buildings, Workshops 4,5 & 6 completed to Coop Buildings	2 further units brought back into use creating 5 independent spaces. CLLD Match funding attracted supporting 4 units	Support to CIC to attract external funding to complete empty units remaining potential UKSPF		
Transport and Connectivity	Walking and Cycling Routes	Audit of opportunities along the Weardale Way Enhanced walking and cycling linked to Stockton and Darlington Railway 200th anniversary.	Railway Paths upgrades commenced Auckland Walk (Spennymoor to Coundon). NCN1 East Durham to Pesspool Wood to Wingate and Hart.Waskerley Way	Feasibility/design and delivery continues: NCN 1 Haswell, Wingate, South Hetton Waskerley Way, Auckland Walk. Feasibility/design in progress: NCN1 Seaham Town Centre to Ryhope Murton to Dalton Park link. Relley Bridge, Barnard Castle to Bishop. C2C Consett	Delivery continues from programme feasibility outlined in 23/24: NCN1 upgrade; C2C Consett complete, Brandon to Bishop Auckland complete, Waskerley Way to Whithall complete. NCN14 to Hart ongoing, Hownsgill Viaduct feasibility, NCN1 Seaham town centre feasibility NCN1 Seaham to Ryhope, Murton to Dalton Park signage and link planned by March	Relley Bridge and Brandon subject to feasibility  East Durham rural corridor Trimdon to Coxhoe not feasible. Fishburn to Holdforth Bridge alternative creating new bridleway  Alternative schemes to be brought forward in line with budget.
	Neighbourhood Parking and Circulation	Easington Village Parking/Traffic project Identification and design of four parking and circulation schemes Parkside Traffic Improvement scheme	Delivered Willington Car Park, Sherburn Hill Hub, Sacriston, Crook	Delivery in Shildon, Shotten Colliery, Wheatley Hill, Framwellgate Moor, Annfield Plain. Ash Crescent Seaham legal, Blackhall Colliery in design.	Delivery in Ash Crescent Seaham, Blackhall Colliery, Annfield Plain, Newton Hall.	Continue implementation