

## Cabinet

20 June 2012

### Barnard Castle Regeneration Masterplan



Key Decision R&ED/08/12

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### Report of Corporate Management Team

Ian Thompson, Corporate Director of Regeneration and Economic Development

Councillor Neil Foster, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Economic Development

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#### Purpose of the Report

- 1 The Regeneration Masterplan provides the detailed programme of activity that is taking place or is planned in Barnard Castle by the Council and our partners. Significant private and public investment has taken place recently (such as the completion of Teesdale Hub) and is likely to continue to take place in the Town over the coming years, despite challenging economic conditions.
- 2 The Masterplan provides the strategic context to delivery and seeks to establish key principles to co-ordinate and guide this activity. The document is one of a series of similar Masterplans that are being established for the principal towns across the County.

#### Background

- 3 Barnard Castle has a resident population of 6,700 and serves the rural hinterland of Teesdale with a total population catchment of 24,500. The town has an excellent foundation on which to build and has great potential to develop further as a thriving market town and tourist destination.
- 4 It is a historically and architecturally important town and acts as a key rural service centre supporting local residents and businesses as well as smaller, surrounding villages and hamlets. Barnard Castle has an identified requirement for 400 new dwellings to meet the needs of projected population growth. The town has a diverse economy which includes:
  - The GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) pharmaceutical manufacturing plant on the outskirts of the town which employs around 1,000 people:

- A healthy independent retail sector with a particularly strong representation in antiques, arts and crafts that attracts creative businesses:
  - Public sector employment at Deerbolt Young Offenders' Institute and County Council office accommodation.
- 5 Tourism is important to the local economy, the town has several selling points to market to potential tourists and visitors and there are opportunities for growth in this sector. There is a clear heritage tourism corridor being established in the County which is anchored, in the south, by Barnard Castle. The corridor encompasses Barnard Castle (Bowes Museum & the castle) – Bishop Auckland (Auckland Palace) – Durham (Durham Castle & Cathedral) – Beamish (Living Museum of the North).
- 6 The core aims of the masterplan are to:
- Focus and co-ordinate the regeneration activities of partners and assist in the operation of existing delivery mechanisms for the various regeneration projects;
  - To input into the delivery of the emerging Local Plan and Community Infrastructure Plan and draw together the strategic and policy drivers for development and regeneration within Barnard Castle;
  - Assist in the consultation process with partners, stakeholders and the community;
  - Assist in taking proposals forward with investors, developers and landowners; and,
  - Raise the profile of Barnard Castle as a place to visit, live and invest in.
- 7 The regeneration masterplan seeks to stimulate regeneration activity and to guide investment and development in Barnard Castle, with a focus on enhancing the town centre, and to build upon the town's potential for further regeneration, visitor and investment activity. It is designed to secure the vibrancy of the town centre, respecting the town's history and heritage. The work which underlies the Masterplan has examined the specific needs of Barnard Castle, together with the range of potential development opportunities that exist in the town and has devised a delivery plan to make provision for a series of key, linked physical regeneration projects which have the potential to have a catalytic effect in raising Barnard Castle's profile and economic performance.
- 8 In recent years, the Council, Teesdale Area Action Partnership, Barnard Castle Vision Regeneration Partnership, the Town Council, Barney Retail Guild and other partners have continued to deliver the regeneration agenda for Barnard Castle. A further partnership, Heart of Teesdale, has recently been established to enhance the area's landscape environment.
- 9 Through the work of various partners, the retail activity in the Town Centre has improved significantly over the last 3-4 years and the vacancy rate

now stands at 4%. This vacancy rate has bucked the national trend of increasing levels of vacant premises, which currently stands at 15%.

10 The key drivers which underlie the Masterplan include:

- Providing a sustainable and vibrant town centre with a focus on deliverability, creating key opportunities for change by securing definitive proposals for redevelopment, development or refurbishment of land and premises;
- Establishing a clear set of priority projects together with a realistic delivery plan which reflects both market demand, investor appetite and availability of sources of finance;
- Promoting the diversification of the local economy and employment growth, led by the private sector;
- Developing the tourism and leisure offer and asset base, most notably in relation to The Bowes Museum, the town centre, restored Witham Hall, Castle, riverside walks and the proposed pedestrian suspension bridge project;
- Consolidating the population and expenditure base and improving the balance and mix of the housing offer to include market for sale, intermediate tenure and rented, which would in turn help to underpin a sustainable local economy, retaining young people whilst providing for a high proportion of elderly residents;
- Ensuring the sustainable future of the Town through the design and phasing of the developments and the implementation process; and,
- Ensuring that key stakeholders, in particular those using the town centre, are positively engaged in the process and that the final outcomes are ones which local residents and businesses have confidence and pride in.

11 To create a truly vibrant and sustainable town centre will require the assembly of the necessary “building blocks”, infrastructure and appropriate investment to attract shoppers, business and leisure visitors and their expenditure. In addition, the town centre is and will be home to numerous residents who live in and around the centre to take advantage of the services and facilities available to them. There is a range of development opportunities to be promoted in Barnard Castle and provide the necessary conditions for a sustainable and competitive town centre. These are as follows:

- The Council will work with regeneration partnerships and private sector partners to continue to **deliver a vibrant market town**;
- The Destination Plan prepared for Barnard Castle in April 2009 (and updated in August 2010) recognised that, in order to strengthen its offer to potential tourists and visitors, the town must improve its infrastructure (facilities and attractions) in order to make it work more effectively as a tourism destination. Parking, signposts, links, retail offer, food and drink and the range of activities are all key areas to be enhanced to increase visitor numbers, dwell time and spend. **The Council will continue to work with partners to**

**facilitate the growth of Barnard Castle as a tourist destination. There is a need to support the private sector and facilitate the delivery of hotel and B&B development in the town.**

- There are a number of sites (in the town, on the eastern side of the town and over the River Tees at Startforth) that could provide residential development for sale, intermediate tenure and rent.  
**Additional housing close to the centre will help the vitality and viability of the town and the Council will continue to work with the development industry, RSLs and other interested parties to deliver the new homes that Barnard Castle requires.**
- Barnard Castle has been successful in attracting and retaining numerous small and medium-sized businesses both within the town centre and at the employment sites at Harmire Enterprise Park and Stainton Grove. Additional development land for business users can be brought forward with the introduction of infrastructure at Shaw Bank and the removal of the proposed by-pass route from land at Harmire. In the context of greatly reduced public sector funding, it will however be challenging to stimulate speculative development given that market rents are insufficient to make development viable and SMEs require flexible terms of occupation.  
**The Council will endeavour to work with existing businesses, regeneration partners, potential funders, developers and prospective inward investment companies to ensure that Barnard Castle enhances its supply of business properties in order to provide for wealth and job creation.**

12 The Council is currently actively engaged with a range of private sector developers and public sector partners in order to influence the pace and scale of development in Barnard Castle and to lever in maximum private sector investment, design quality and opportunity for residents. Examples of such developments and projects include:

- Working with local employers who are looking to expand their businesses;
- Working with the private sector to develop a phased approach to the delivery of new homes across a range of values and tenure types to support the resident population;
- Supporting private property owners to improve premises in the town centre through a shop front improvement scheme targeting business premises;
- Working to identify development partners and deliverable development solutions for Shaw Bank;
- Working with Visit County Durham, Bowes Museum, other tourism partners and the private sector to improve Barnard Castle's tourism/visitor potential; and,
- Supporting and encouraging inward investment and local entrepreneurial activity via Business Durham, South Durham Enterprise Agency and private businesses.

- 13 In terms of leading regeneration opportunities in Barnard Castle, the Council is actively pursuing the following:
- The Witham project - construction begins June 2012, completion by June 2013;
  - Working in partnership with Digital City in order to provide support to creative businesses in the town;
  - Retail sector support through the Targeted Business Improvement project;
  - Working in partnership with The Bowes Museum;
  - Delivering landscape improvements to the Castle/Scar Top & Amen Corner;
  - Exploring options for the future use of Teesdale House and Woodleigh;
  - Undertaking a feasibility study in relation to a pedestrian suspension bridge with Teesdale Marketing Limited;
  - Assessing infrastructure and environmental requirements; and
  - Delivering the County Durham and TIBI Apprenticeship Programme to Barnard Castle.
- 14 The Council is also helping to support a range of regeneration projects across the town. Examples of these include:
- Working with the owners of Barnard Castle Auction Mart to understand their business needs and seek to help them deliver an appropriate solution for the continuation of the Barnard Castle Mart;
  - Notwithstanding GSK's recent decision to locate its new biopharmaceutical plant at Ulverston, the County Council and Business Durham continue to liaise with GSK to explore possibilities for further growth at Barnard Castle. Likewise, the partners are keen to encourage spin-out SME development from GSK in order to diversify the local business base;
  - Working with Teesdale Marketing Limited on the potential to provide a new pedestrian suspension bridge and viewing platform that would extend the experience of walkers and cyclists to the area and provide a circular riverside walk for the town.
- 15 The Masterplan is supported by a detailed delivery plan and project plans for each development site/proposal. These will be kept up-to-date.

### **Recommendations and Reasons**

- 16 The Regeneration Masterplan is the cornerstone document that will help plan, co-ordinate and deliver regeneration activity in Barnard Castle over the coming years.
- 17 It is recommended that the report be approved by Cabinet.

**Background Papers**  
Barnard Castle Masterplan 2012

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Finance**

The document contains a detailed delivery plan, with identified costs across Council services.

### **Staffing**

None

### **Risk**

We will regularly undertake a detailed risk assessment for each development project.

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

EIA completed.

### **Accommodation**

The document refers to the new Customer Access Point and back office accommodation at the Barnard Castle Library (Witham Project).

### **Crime and Disorder**

None

### **Human Rights**

None

### **Consultation**

A consultation log is attached to this report.

### **Procurement**

None

### **Disability Issues**

None

### **Legal Implications**

The document will provide evidence to support the County Durham Plan but it will not have any statutory weight in the planning process.