

Bishop Auckland Masterplan Update



Durham County Council

December 2016

Context for Masterplan Update

Masterplan updates are being developed for the majority of the largest towns in County Durham. This document for Bishop Auckland is an update to the 2012 Masterplan. It provides an update on what has been delivered across Council services in the recent past and sets out key activities for the future, including in the town centre, in housing, in retail, in leisure and tourism, and in infrastructure.

Key Priorities:

- Encourage business start-ups along with supporting the growth of local businesses;
- Capitalise on the economic potential provided by Auckland Castle Trust and Eleven Arches;
- Support private sector investment in the town;
- Encourage new housing delivery;
- Contribute to making the market place the heart of the town; and
- Encourage adaption of the town centre to develop its function in a changing retail context.

Profile

Bishop Auckland lies close to the southern boundary of County Durham. The town is adjoined to West Auckland to the south-west and Auckland Park to the east. Bishop Auckland is a key, major centre within County Durham and the settlement is the second largest town within the County behind Durham City. The town is a gateway to the west of the county, the Durham Dales, Hamsterley Forest and a staging point to Barnard Castle. Bishop Auckland has a population of 24,262, with 15,326 within the working age and serving a wider catchment area of over 150,000 residents.

The town is a major employment, commercial and residential centre in South Durham, providing important links into the dales. The town has excellent connections to the strategic road network, with the A689 forming a direct link to the A1(M) and the “A” road network creates strong connections into Durham City.

South Durham is closely connected to Tees Valley and forms part of a wider employment, housing and travel to learn market supported through transport infrastructure. The main commercial centres of Bishop Auckland, Newton Aycliffe, Spennymoor and Shildon form an important southern gateway to the County. The area has strong labour, housing and transport connections with Darlington, affording opportunities for complementary economic growth, to widen labour market catchments and extend the benefits of growth on Tees Valley.

Bishop Auckland is an ancient historic market town and it has been the official home of the Bishop of Durham since the 12th century. The town is also home to Auckland Castle which has many significant pieces of art including the paintings of Jacob and his twelve sons by the Spanish master Francisco de Zurbarán.

A number of exciting initiatives are currently planned for the castle to enhance its cultural and tourist offer which will create a range of exciting, complementary investment and development opportunities. The development potential and opportunities within the town are across a range of sectors. Binchester Roman Fort which has a preserved Roman bath house and is situated approximately a mile from the town helps to expand the growing historical and cultural offer of the town.

Bishop Auckland is currently experiencing significant levels of investment. The Council is carrying out major improvements in the Market Place and is supporting the Auckland Castle Trust’s developments, with a range of projects and initiatives which include the development of Auckland Castle, creation of the Welcome Tower and art gallery, Eleven Arches and the delivery of season two of Kynren. The projects will create local, regional, national and international visitor interest.

What has been delivered?

Bishop Auckland has undergone a significant change over the last few years supported by private and public sector investments. These include:

- Establishment of the Auckland Castle Trust and their ongoing programme of regeneration;
- Sale of Auckland Castle and safeguarding of the Zurbarán paintings;
- A new football ground and stadium for Bishop Auckland Football Club;
- Delivery of the first season of Kynren;
- The establishment of a new retail park at an out-of-centre location in Tindale;
- Rebuilding and refurbishment of King James I Academy;
- Sale and safeguarding of Binchester Roman Fort;
- Reintroduction of the towns Firework show;
- Delivery of phase 2 of Tindale retail park;
- New purpose built medical facility for the Auckland Medical Group;
- Planning approval for a cinema and associated retail and leisure at Tindale;
- Improvements to Bishop Auckland train station;
- Successful delivery of the annual Bishop Auckland Food Festival, Wannasee and Velo29 cycle races; and
- Delivery of major programme of improvements to public realm in and around the Market Place.

Housing

- In and around the area of Bishop Auckland 45 new homes have been completed between 2014-2016, with 178 homes delivered in the three years prior to this.
- A total of 301 units are still to be delivered across a number of sites which are currently under construction or nearing completion. This includes Bracks Farm, a scheme of 300 units which was recently implemented with 273 homes still to be built.

- An additional 778 new homes are expected to come forward in the future including the following sites with planning permission:
 - Land south of Douglas Crescent (500 units);
 - Land east of South Church Road (28 units);
 - Former Cemex site (100 units);
 - Former BBH Windings site (66 units); and
 - Former St Anne's School (18 units).
- The Homes and Communities Agency in partnership with the Council have invested £2.98 million on the renovation of Green Lane gypsy and Roma travellers site.

Business

- The trustees of the King James Foundation Trust, Durham County Council and the South Durham Enterprise Agency are working in partnership to seek Heritage Lottery funding and European funding to restore the King James Lower School. The aim is to turn the building into an enterprise centre which will act as a base for new and established local businesses and offer in-house help to make sure they can thrive.
- Business Durham supports local businesses who are looking to grow and are based at Innovation House at South Church Enterprise Park on a weekly basis.
- Since 2014, Durham County Council has successfully supported 92 residents, who were previously unemployed, to move back into employment by securing them apprenticeship opportunities with local businesses.

Retail Offer

- Bishop Auckland is the second highest ranked town in the County behind Durham City;
- The town centre benefits from good representation of national retailers (such as Argos, Top Shop, Burtons, Boots, Holland and Barrett, Peacocks, Halfords, B&Q and Sports Direct);
- The town has 374 outlets and over 42,000 sqm of convenience and comparison floor space; and
- Supermarket retail provision in the town centre is served by ASDA and Morrisons.



Town Centre Regeneration

The centre of Bishop Auckland has had a number of public realm interventions over the years. The most recent scheme is presently being delivered:

- In excess of £2 million has been invested in refurbishing Bishop Auckland Market Place;
- Works have included, realignment of the public highway, creation of new parking spaces, events space and improved space for the market;
- £200,000 has been spent as part of targeting specific properties in the Market Place and Fore Bondgate to deliver external improvements and business support;
- £400,000 of private sector investment is being levered in;
- There is a rolling programme of town centre improvements through the Targeted Business Improvement initiative; and
- Durham County Council received a grant from the North East Local Enterprise Partnership in 2016 to undertake improvements to the public highway in the market place to enable the construction of the Welcome Building and Observation Tower.

Out of Town Retail

Over the last five years there has been significant out of town shopping and leisure growth at Tindale Crescent.

- There is a mix of food retails, fast food chains and comparison retailers, including Sainsburys, Tesco, Aldi, Iceland, Lidl, Next, Boots, JD Sports, Home Bargains, Marks and Spencer, Screwfix, McDonalds, KFC, Dominos, Marstons Inns, Brewsters, Costa and Starbucks; and
- Planning consent was recently approved for a cinema development with associated retail and leisure provision.

Auckland Castle Trust

Auckland Castle Trust was established in 2012 and the Trust has a number of property interests including Auckland Castle and various buildings in and around the market place area (such as the former Barclays Bank, The Queens Head Hotel and Postchaise Hotel) Binchester Roman Fort and recently acquired the land where Bishop Auckland Golf Club is based.

Auckland Castle is specifically identified as an attraction of potential national significance which will assist in growing the profile of the County regionally and nationally. Furthermore, Auckland Park is acknowledged as an important natural asset.

It is estimated that the Castle has the following potential catchment:

- 579,745 people living within a 30 minute drive;
- 2,520,899 people living within an hour drive;
- 6,270,847 people living within 2 hours drive; and
- 16,895,899 people living within 3 hours drive, extending into Scotland and the East Midlands.



The Castle Complex

The Grade I Listed Castle, with adjoining Grade II and II* buildings, is of great historical, religious and architectural significance and was home to the Prince Bishops of Durham for 800 years. The Castle was also the main Bishop's Residence for 250 years until 2012 and remains his on-going professional base. It occupies a commanding position on a plateau, with the parkland falling sharply to the north and east towards the valleys of the Rivers Wear and Gaunless.

The Castle itself is understood to have originated as a Manor House but has been successively enlarged, with substantial rebuilding taking place in 1660-5 for Bishop Cosin and between 1767-72 for Bishops Trevor and Egerton. These included alterations to the Castle to accommodate the world renowned collection of paintings by Spanish artist Francisco de Zurbaran of 'Jacob and his Twelve Sons'. The oldest standing fabric on the site is St Peters Chapel, erected around 1200 as a great hall, and later transformed by Bishop Cosin into a chapel.

- *Restoration of the Castle and New Scotland Wing* - the restoration of the Castle and the development of the new Scotland Wing is being supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant. The buildings will house space for new permanent and temporary exhibitions, which will tell the Auckland story and articulate the history of religion in Britain.
- *Walled Garden* - the Walled Garden lies to the south of Auckland Castle, on a steeply sloped site. It is thought that the garden was established by Bishop Cosin (1661-1667). The Walled Garden will provide a complementary offer to the Castle and will ensure that visitors stay longer in Bishop Auckland. The Trust is in the process of bringing the garden back into use and has commissioned architects and landscape architects to bring forward proposals for development, which will include a restaurant facility.
- *Auckland Castle Park* - the Park provides free public access during daylight hours, with the Deer House within the Park under the guardianship of English Heritage.

Market Place

The Auckland Castle Trust has acquired a number of properties in the Market Place to provide:

- New hotel accommodation;
- Art gallery;
- Welcome Building & Observation Tower; and
- Office accommodation.



Working in partnership with the Council, which owns a number of properties such as the Town Hall in the Market Place, there is an opportunity to establish a cultural centre with enhanced hotel accommodation in the heart of the town that will complement core retail activity and generate other spin-off investment opportunities.

- *Welcome Building and Observation Tower* - the Welcome Building and Observation Tower will be located at the gap site next to Kings Lodge in the Market Place. The building will provide information, ticketing, toilets and orientation for visitors prior to entering the main Castle grounds. In addition, there will be the establishment of an Observation Tower with various viewing platforms for visitors to appreciate the Castle and Town Centre. This bespoke piece of architecture will provide a new focal point in the Market Place.
- *Queens Head Hotel & Postchaise Hotel* – the properties have been acquired by the Trust to provide hotel accommodation within the Market Place to encourage overnight stays and extension to visitor stays. The Trust is currently working on proposals to bring these buildings back into economic use and will contribute towards improving the vibrancy of the Town Centre.
- *Backhouse Gallery (former Barclays Bank Building)* - this building has been acquired by the Trust to establish a new art gallery in the Market Place. The Grade II listed building was designed by the local architect George Gordon Hoskins of Darlington in the Gothic Revival style for the Backhouse Bank in 1870. The proposals will bring an important building in the Market Place back into economic use and will substantially increase the cultural offer in the area.

Eleven Arches (Location for Kynren)

Eleven Arches is a registered charity with the objective to produce a world class night show, underpinned by a bold, innovative and engaging arts, education and community development programme.

The Eleven Arches site is the location for Kynren which is an exciting family show telling an epic tale of England. The show is a spellbinding journey through British history which takes place on a landscaped open air stage (equivalent to five football pitches with a large lake at its centre) against the backdrop of Auckland Castle. The show immerses the audience in 2,000 years of history, with a movie-like, fast-paced and action-packed journey from Roman times to the Second World War, through the Viking invasions, the splendour of the Tudors, the Industrial Revolution and the Roaring Twenties. As the story unfolds the audience is treated to ships and a steam train, mass choreography, combat, dance, dazzling pyrotechnics and grandiose lighting and water effects.



- The show has more than 1,000 volunteers involved as cast and crew; and
- All volunteers having been professionally trained by top performance experts, including teams who have delivered the mass choreography of London 2012 Opening Ceremony.

The 2016 season of Kynren commenced with the premiere show on 2nd July with another 14 shows, with the finale on 17th September. Kynren has welcomed up to 8,000 visitors per show sat in the purpose made tribunes. It has won 'Performance of the Year' at the Living North Awards. Planning is already underway for the second season in 2017.

Binchester Roman Fort

- A seven year programme of major excavation fieldwork at Binchester Roman Fort was completed in 2015;
- The project involved working in partnership with Durham University, Stanford University and the Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland;
- In the area of excavation outside the fort to the south-east, 2015 saw the removal of the remaining deposits within the amazingly well-preserved bath-building; and
- A longer-term strategy for the site is currently being discussed with the Auckland Castle Trust.

Leisure & Recreation

The Woodhouse Close Leisure Centre comprises of a 25m swimming pool, two training pools, a gym, exercise room and café. The centre offers a range of facilities and programmes to residents including learn to swim programmes, exercise classes and specific programmes of activities children and young people.

The town benefits from two libraries, one based at Woodhouse Close and the other in the Town Hall. Both libraries offer a range of services supporting literacy, learning, wellbeing and fun.

The Town Hall also delivers a cultural programme to residents of Bishop Auckland and the surrounding area. In addition to housing the library, it also offers a café and cinema, as well as space for functions and visual arts.

The town hosts a key County Council calendar event, the Bishop Auckland Food Festival, attracting over 40,000 visitors each year.

Bishop Auckland Town Recreation Ground includes tennis courts, bowls green/pavilion, football pitch, skate and play areas. The Town recreation ground was awarded the prestigious Green Flag in July 2016. In addition to the recreation ground, there is also Cockton Hill Park which includes bowls green and a football pitch with shared changing/pavilion.

The wild flower planting schemes at West Auckland bypass and the Town Recreation ground are part of a wider scheme across the County that has attracted huge amount of positive feedback from the public.

Recent sport and leisure investments in the town have included:

- A 3G artificial turf pitch has been developed at St John's School;
- Significant infrastructure improvements have been made into cycle paths located at Bracks Road, Bishop Auckland, including provision of an improved surface and drainage;
- £44,000 investment in two public tennis courts at Bishop Town Recreation Ground; and
- £15,000 Local member investment in improvements to bowling facilities in Bishop Auckland town recreation ground (includes security shutters, irrigation system, backboards).

The Council's Culture and Sport service offers support to local clubs, societies and communities to enhance engagement and participation in such amenities. For example, we have recently supported Etherly Cricket Club with a grant of £8,000 to enhance their community cricket programme.

Public Transport

The rail station has an ongoing programme of improvements which has seen improvements around the platform area completed. The next stage is to improve access which will see 760m of pathway converted into shared-use path for walking and cycling.

The Council has invested around £50,000 in improving signage and information in around the town for visitors. The wayfinding project has seen five map signs, one finger post and two poster cases installed between the rail station and Auckland Castle / Market Place.

Roads

The Council has secured circa £2.2 million from the North East Local Enterprise Partnership to deliver a programme of improvements in and around the market place. The project includes realigning the highway, diverting public utilities and enhancing the public realm between Bishop Auckland Market Place and Auckland Castle to facilitate the construction of Auckland Castle Trust's Welcome Building.

The Council has supported the development of additional car parking within the town, which has seen the parking provision at North Bondgate doubled. Investment has also been provided to improve the public realm in and around the car park to improve and enhance the visitor experience to the town.

The Council has introduced part-time 20mph speed limits or zones around some of our schools in County Durham where it has been identified that child accident rates are twice that of the national average. The schemes reduce speed limits during school drop off and pick up times on the roads outside and around schools. In addition they provide road safety education for children including road awareness and safe cycling programmes and offer healthy lifestyle initiatives to encourage walking and cycling by the school children and the wider community.

Etherley Lane Primary School, Etherley Lane Nursery, King James I Academy, Bishop Barrington School, St Anne's C of E Primary, St John's Catholic School and sixth form, Bishop Auckland College and Woodhouse Community Primary School are part of the new initiative.

Flood Mitigation

A number of flood mitigation projects have been carried out within the Bishop Auckland area with around £250,000 invested in the last two years. The projects include:

- Woodhouse Lane - lining Works, highway drain improvements in 2014;
- A688 (Park Head) - highway drainage improvements in 2014; and
- Etherley Lane - major flood mitigation scheme in 2015.

Broadband

As a result of the Digital Durham project supported by the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport, British Telecom and the Council most areas in and around Bishop Auckland should experience an improvement in the quality and speed of broadband services through the roll out of fibre services.

GP Surgeries

A new purpose built medical facility has recently been opened for the Auckland Medical Group which has assisted in providing some additional GP provision within the town.

Schools

There have been a number of investments in the schools in the area over the last two years, these include:

- Part new build and part remodelling of King James 1 Academy under the Priority Schools Building Programme;
- Roof replacement at St. Helen Auckland Primary School (£428,000);
- Window replacement at Aclet Close Nursery School (£90,000); and
- Replacement of heating distribution system at St. Anne's CE Primary School (£213,000).

Bishop Auckland and Shildon AAP (BASH) Initiatives

Each year AAPs get an allocation of £120,000 through the Council's Area Budget to support projects and initiatives in the area. Projects and initiatives are developed through the work of the Task and Finish Groups and are approved by the Board. The following projects and initiatives have been supported in the Bishop Auckland area:

- Bishop Auckland Fireworks;
- Bishop Auckland Markets Initiative;
- Bishop Auckland and Toronto Road Safety Initiatives;
- Stepping Stones to Employment;
- Bishop Auckland Cricket Club - Facilities for Inclusion for all;
- Bishop Auckland Table Tennis Centre;
- Velo29 Town Centre Cycle Race;
- Bishop Auckland in Bloom;
- Disability aids for Bishop Auckland Bowling Club;
- Crawford Close Verge Hardening Scheme;
- Crisis Intervention Woodhouse Close Church; and
- Butterwick Hospice Garden.

In addition, the AAP has received £43,333 (£33,333 from Durham Dales, Easington and Sedgfield Clinical Commissioning Group and £10,000 from DCC Public Health)

for health initiatives in 2015 / 2016. The funding has supported projects across the Bishop Auckland and Shildon AAP area, including:

- **Communiteam – If U Care Share**, which aimed to improve awareness of emotional health and wellbeing and help with suicide prevention amongst young people; and
- **Parklife Outreach**, delivery of weekly outreach physical activity and wellbeing sessions for children and adults in both indoor and outdoor provision.

The AAP has facilitated further visits from the F&P Scotto Charitable Trust by introducing projects for potential funding. As a result of this unique and ongoing relationship and the support of the BASH AAP an additional £420,954 has been invested into 46 projects in the area by the F&P Scotto Charitable Trust with grants ranging from £600 to £48,000.

The Gaunless Gateway Big Local Partnership is a community-based organisation made up of the communities of Cockton Hill, Henknowle, Woodhouse Close/Tindale Crescent, St Helen and West Auckland. The Area was chosen to develop and deliver a ten-year programme called the Big Local. To help with this the area has £1 million of resources from the Big Local fund which is administered by the Local Trust.

What will be delivered in the future?

- 1,083 new homes with planning approval;
- Continuation of the growing programme of events;
- Second season of Kynren in 2017;
- Finalise the renovation of the Market Place to support Auckland Castle Trust;
- Completion of Auckland Castle projects such as Walled Garden, Welcome Tower, Scotland Wing, restaurant and hotels;
- Continue to improve access to the town and parking provision to support Auckland Castle Trust, Kynren and the wider town;
- Delivery of new business space at King James Lower School;
- Support the regeneration of the town and refocusing of the roll of the town centre;
- Enable further developments at Tindale such as the cinema to come forward;
- Continue to attract investment into the town to support further regeneration; and
- Feasibility work is underway to re-imagine the Bishop Auckland Town Hall programme and space as a true cultural hub.

Bishop Auckland and Shildon AAP Initiatives

- The priorities for 2016/17 have been set and BASH AAP will be looking at three key areas.
 - Children and Young People
 - Crime and Community Safety
 - Raising Aspirations through Employment, Education and Training