

POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

17 MARCH 2022

THE CULTURAL HEART OF NEWARK PROJECT

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 To update Members on the progress of the Cultural Heart of Newark project of the Newark Town Fund. Further, to seek approval for the Outline Business Case to be progressed into a Summary Document and, subject to assurance, submitted to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in order to draw down the funds and develop a Full Business Case (FBC) in 2022/2023.

2.0 Background Information and Update

2.1 The Cultural Heart of Newark is one of nine priority projects identified as part of the Town Investment Plan to be progressed by the Newark Towns Board. Through activity (using public spaces), infrastructure (to support this use) and where possible public realm enhancement the project intends to drive town centre regeneration through an enhanced and new events programme led by Newark Town Council and improvements to the public realm. This will need to demonstrate increased footfall, dwell time, spend, and therein create improved prosperity for local businesses and increased satisfaction of the town offer from residents and visitors. Subject to approval, it has been allocated a budget of £2.1M from the Newark Town Deal comprising £1.5M for capital investment and £0.6M for revenue costs distributed over three financial years 2022/23 to 2024/25 (see para 9.2 below).

2.2 During recent years, there has been a steady decline in footfall of town centres nationally, with online shopping, out of town retail developments and the COVID-19 pandemic contributing sharply to this. The Newark Town Investment Plan identified that there was an oversupply of retail floor space in Newark and that a different approach was required to increase the town centre's vibrancy. The Town Investment Plan further identified a need for events-based regeneration through a consultation exercise with more than 80% of respondents stating that more events would lead to the best improvement and impact for the town centre. The aim of the Cultural Heart of Newark project, therefore, is to build upon, coordinate, and enhance the current programme of public events and activities in Newark town centre in order to develop its vibrancy and cultural experience and support growth in footfall, dwell time and consumer expenditure on retail, hospitality, and other services in the town. As well as increasing town centre footfall, dwell time and expenditure, and improving vibrancy and civic pride, the project also presents an opportunity to drive environmental change, increase use of public spaces, provide enhanced green space and environmental improvements, creating improved paving and landscaping within the town, celebrate our architecture and create new spaces for events.,

2.3 Newark town centre is also considered a suitable place for this investment due to the following factors:

- Development potential of the key public realm areas such as the Market Place, Riverside Park, and Newark Castle gardens to provide flexible, multi-purpose, connected spaces
- Connectivity by road and public transport

- Notable attractions including Newark Castle and the National Civil War Centre/Palace Theatre
- A desire to enhance a wider and more accessible cultural offer in partnership with Newark Town Council and our Heritage Action Zone cultural programme
- The chance to experience an operational market in a historic market town
- Capitalising on and support the vision of all projects supported through the Newark Town Investment Plan and associated Newark Town Deal (2021) with Government

2.4 Crucially, the Newark Town Fund allocation should be seen as just the start of the project, providing the opportunity to develop a longer-term financial sustainability model in order that a perennial programme of public events and activities can continue to thrive and grow beyond the period of funding. To this end, success is identified as future proofing the longer-term financial stability of the initiative as well as increasing footfall, dwell time, expenditure and satisfaction.

2.5 The Cultural Heart of Newark project has been evaluated by our retained consultants, Hatch, to provide the following key outcomes that will be reported to Government within the submitted Summary Document.

- Land Value Uplift (due to increased town centre footfall/dwell time)
- Resident, Business and Visitor Satisfaction
- Overnight Visitor Numbers
- Reduction in crime and ASB
- Increased tree planting and biodiversity
- A positive Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR)

3.0 Developing the Proposals

3.1 The Outline Business Case will identify a likely and affordable delivery option for the public realm, alongside the development of the events and activities program. In the case of the latter the approach is focussed on a higher frequency of activities and events to encourage dwell time, local spend, and a general feelings of satisfaction and vibrancy.

The Stakeholder Group

3.2 An NSDC internal working group met regularly from April 2021 to contribute and coordinate the concept and key outcomes for the project. The group also developed a specification for the procurement of consultancy support to develop a vision and intent for public spaces, notably the Market Place. This will be developed post OBC via public engagement.

The Principles

3.3 The approach sets out a plan to:

1. Enhance existing public spaces to provide spaces to dwell
2. Explore wayfinding to better facilitate better movement and accessibility within the Town
3. Explore street tree planting, where appropriate
4. Encourage and promote events which align with the Towns aspirations (eg. cycling, sport, promoting local produce)
5. Consider use of art within the public realm

6. Create a network of public spaces that can be used for events
7. Ensure the spaces retain a sense of identity

- 3.4 An external engagement group, comprising key external partners and stakeholders, provides input to the development of options. In consultation with the principal landowners/managers, members of the internal group, and primary partners and stakeholders, our appointed consultants considered ways in which the role and potential of the key areas of public realm in Newark town centre (including the Market Place, Riverside Park, and Newark Castle gardens) and connections between them, could be appropriately developed and maximised to provide flexible, multi-purpose, connected spaces that are attractive to residents and visitors, encouraging greater, year-round use in support of the above key outcomes.
- 3.5 They also considered that improved linkages and wayfinding around Newark town centre was important, including to/from the key areas of public realm, to/from the public transport hubs and public facilities and to/from retail, hospitality and services in the town, building upon the wayfinding and signage already present.
- 3.6 Our appointed consultants and the stakeholder group are working, as part of the OBC, at providing a range of affordable parameters and options. The OBC will make assumptions on a preferred option for the purposes of costings and establishing overall principles. The development of the events calendar and spaces (additionally considering zoning of activity such as encouraging al fresco dining) to host them in a flexible way as possible (which will include the retention of the market, likely with more willingness to reconfigure it) will be worked up via public engagement and the FBC process. More will follow on this in reporting to the new system of governance and developing a post OBC sign-off yet further.
- 3.7 Complementary interventions could, subject to costs, include pedestrianisation measures and improvements to streets around the Market Place, improvements to the nearby Church Gardens, and a holistic wayfinding strategy with map totems to create a better-connected town centre. Cumulatively, these will help to create a more appealing, vibrant town centre and maximise the benefits of the above improvements to the Market Place
- 3.8 Any preferred option for development will fit well strategically with other Town Investment Plan projects, specifically the Castle Gate House and Newark Cycle Town. For example, the wayfinding strategy will link arrivals by public transport or private vehicle with connected routes to the Castle, as well as to the Market Place, National Civil War Centre/Palace Theatre and other attractions.
- 3.9 Other possible options considered for development can be held in reserve should further funding be secured through the project or through other funding sources.

Developing a New & Enhanced Events Programme

- 3.10 In creating a more attractive, multi-purpose, connected space that supports events-based regeneration, the preferred option for development allows for the planning of a new perennial programme of public events and activities for Newark town centre. Event organisers, partners and stakeholders will be facilitated in working together around a common understanding, vision and aspiration with shared goals and outputs.
- 3.11 This group will be led by Newark Town Council (NTC) who will lead an Event Board comprising different local stakeholders. In February 2022, Members of Newark Town Council approved a recommendation that the Town Council will become the Project Lead for the Cultural Heart of Newark project from April 2022. The Town Council have

committed £200k of expenditure to match fund the additional revenue funding secured through Town Fund. The two principle objectives of this resources are to 1) deliver new or enhanced events and activities that will increase footfall, dwell time and spend, and 2) to work towards driving a financially sustainable model of delivery from year 4 onward.

3.12 The Town Council have established a strong relationship with market traders, local event organisers and promotional acts. This has matured and gained strength over the last 12 months with additional resources secured by the Welcome Back Fund (WBF) creating new opportunities for the Town Council to deliver better events. The third quarter of 2021 evidenced a significant increase in footfall and dwell time due to the new offers, promotions and acts delivered. In discussion with NTC a new offer to further improve the town event programme will be established, overseen and governed by the proposed Event Board. This Board will utilise the Town Fund Revenue funding for 2022-2025 to deliver a dual approach of event programming and financial sustainability.

4.0 Next Steps

4.1 NSDC and Newark Town Council will work in partnership on the following steps towards delivery of the project:

- Recruitment to ‘Town Centre Events Manager’ and ‘Programme Development Officer (2 year fixed-term)’ positions
- Establishment of a Cultural Heart of Newark Project Delivery Board, to be led by Newark Town Council with membership including the Cultural Heart of Newark project sponsor.
- Implementation of the Year 1 2022/2023 Events Programme which identifies the enhanced aspects of the programme that are new and not previously resourced
- Commencement in Year 1 2022/2023 of the priority public realm developments
- ‘Programme Development Officer’ (2 year fixed-term) to undertake modelling of options for the financial sustainability of the programme including a Business Improvement District (BID) model and a Taxation Growth model.

5.0 Proposals

5.1 The report proposes that Members agree to the next steps for the delivery of the Cultural Heart of Newark project and provide delegated authority to the Section 151 Officer to agree to the Full Business Case (FBC) when completed and independently assured.

6.0 Equalities Implications

6.1 Delivery of the Cultural Heart of Newark project will benefit Newark’s diverse communities, visitors and businesses. The Project Delivery Board will always consider equalities to ensure that event attendees with protected characteristics are not disadvantaged in their experiences.

7.0 Digital Implications

7.1 There are no digital implications for this report and recommendations.

8.0 Financial Implications - FIN21-22/4020

- 8.1 The Cultural Heart of Newark is one of nine priority projects identified as part of the Town Investment Plan to be progressed by the Newark Town Board.
- 8.2 The funding is still subject to approval of the project’s business case. Current proposed funding and profiling is as per the table below:

Newark Heart Funding	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	TOTAL
Revenue Funding	200,000	200,000	200,000	600,000
Capital Funding	300,000	600,000	600,000	1,500,000
Total Funding - Newark Heart	500,000	800,000	800,000	2,100,000

- 8.3 The project will only be proposed to Policy & Finance Committee to be added to the capital programme once it has achieved Full business Case (FBC) status.

9.0 Community Plan – Alignment to Objectives

- 9.1 This project delivers directly to the vision in our Community Plan (“...encouraging more visitors to enjoy all that Newark & Sherwood has to offer”) and the key objective to “Deliver inclusive and sustainable economic growth”.

10.0 RECOMMENDATIONS that:

- (a) **delegated authority be given to the Council’s s151 Officer (informed by Quod Consulting) approval of the Outline Business Case and progression of a Summary Document for submission to DLUHC for the drawdown of funds; and**
- (b) **delegated authority be given to the Council’s s151 Officer Authority to assure the Full Business Case when completed.**

Reason for Recommendations

To progress the project towards Full Business Case (FBC) in 2022/2023.

Background Papers

Newark Town Investment Plan 2020
 Newark Cultural Heart Outline Business Case 2022

For further information please contact Richard Huthwaite, Tourism Manger on 07866 008748; richard.huthwaite@newark-sherwooddc.gov.uk

Matt Lamb
 Director – Planning & Growth