

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

15 JANUARY 2020

NEWARK TOWN UPDATE

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide Members with proposals for the production of a 'Newark Regeneration Strategy' and opportunities relating the 'Towns Fund' and 'Heritage Action Zone' (HAZ).

2.0 Update

- 2.1 Members will be mindful of the verbal update provided to the last meeting, specifically around opportunities linked to the 'Towns Fund' and 'Heritage Action Zone' (HAZ). This report seeks to provide a further update on the timetable for the publication of what I shall term the Newark Regeneration Strategy and Town Investment Plan (TIP), which seek to incorporate into a holistic strategy the individual requirements of both the Towns Fund and HAZ, alongside and cognisant of other strategies of the Council and its partners (for example the emerging LEP-led Local Industrial Strategy).
- 2.2 As Members will be aware the Council's Community Plan, adopted in February 2019, identified a number of objectives up to 2023. This includes aspirations to improve infrastructure (in order to reduce congestion and facilitate growth), enhance and sustain town centres, address social mobility, increase visitors to tourist attractions (including by local residents), and accelerating the supply of new homes.
- 2.3 Newark is the largest Town within the District, operating as a sub-regional centre. Accordingly, within the Community Plan it was identified as an area of focus for a number of key interventions, notably around infrastructure, town centre regeneration, and addressing issues around social mobility. Such themes have also been identified and reflected in central government programmes and funding opportunities, notably via the 'Future High Streets Fund', 'Towns Fund', and 'Heritage Action Zone'. For the benefit of Members I have provided a brief summary below of each of these funds.
- 2.4 Members will note that the Council has not waited for central Government opportunities to progress town centre initiatives or lobbying. Work continues to transform the former Robin Hood Hotel to provide a new hotel and retail offer; new tenants will be operational within the Buttermarket from March 2020; and the recent purchase of the former and strategically important (in terms of location and size) M&S building means that the Council now has control of land assets. The Council, alongside its Midland Connect partners and local MP, were also influential in the much needed 2019 announcement of funding for the A46 Newark Northern Bypass.

Future High Streets Fund

- 2.5 In March 2019 the Council submitted responded to a 'Call for Proposals' from Government for a share of a £657m national Future High Streets Fund earmarked to support local areas in preparing long-term strategies for their high streets and town centres. Members will recall that Newark was not one of the 150 successful towns to progress to the next stage of the process for up to £25m.

High Street Heritage Action Zone (HAZ)

- 2.6 In May 2019 Historic England announced a high street HAZ fund of £95 million available nationally (grant to be match funded from the local authority and private sector) aimed at finding ways to revive and unlock the potential of historic high streets. The provision of a HAZ has already been successful in a number of places throughout the UK.
- 2.7 In September 2019 Historic England announced that Newark was one of 69 town centres nationally (and one of 13 in the midlands, including Leicester, Grantham, and Lincoln) to have been successful in its Expression of Interest (EoI). A further round of evidence was submitted in December 2019, with a final view on HAZ designation expected March 2020. The proposed Newark HAZ seeks to focus on the following areas, utilising £250,000 of HAZ grant, match funded on an even split by the Council and private sector (including the appointment of a full-time HAZ Officer for a 4 year fixed-term):
- Funding of condition surveys and feasibility studies for key heritage at risk buildings within the HAZ. This will inform any negotiations or enforcement considerations with landowners and prospective new occupiers or operators.
 - Production of a shop front and upper floors development guide. This will provide examples for repurposing, including costed solutions to demonstrate affordability
 - Public realm and way-finding: To focus on connecting and removing barriers/unwelcome desire lines between the different parts of the town centre, notably connecting the Potterdyke areas (at Beaumont Cross and Martindale Lane) with the remainder of the town. This strategy will feed into wider wayfinding, linked to legibility and movements for the town in its widest sense (e.g. connecting the rail stations, tourist offers, car parks, etc).
 - Exploring local business rate regime and potential ‘incentives’ to bring into use and/or repurpose heritage buildings.
 - Production of Landlord and Tenant Advice for leases. Issues surrounding lease and repair terms are often raised. Some guidance will be produced which seeks to strike a balance for all parties, including positives and pitfalls to be mindful of when (re)negotiating.

Towns Fund

- 2.8 In September 2019 the Government announced the £3.6bn Towns Fund, which invited 100 pre-selected Towns (Newark being one of them) to work with Government to develop plans for their area which focus on economic growth, regeneration, improved transport, better broadband connectivity, skills and culture. Grant of up to £25m is available to support such plans. The Towns Fund is focussed on an area much wider than the town centre, albeit the success and vibrancy of the town centre is clearly important to the overall success and vibrancy of Newark itself.
- 2.9 The milestones and timetable associated with the Towns Fund were published prior to last month’s General Election via the Towns Fund Prospectus¹. There are broadly three current pre-requisites to developing plans and accessing funding – the submission of a ‘readiness checklist’ (submitted last month), the formulation (or amalgamation of existing) of a ‘Town

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Deal Board' (the Board) made up of a largely prescribed attendance list, and the production (by 'summer 2020') of a Town Investment Plan, which captures an overall evidence base, strategy, and proposals for transformative spend. The governance process for development of any Town Deal would require sign-off by the Board, alongside wider public consultation.

Next Steps

- 2.10 The inaugural Newark Town Deal Board will be held at Castle House on the 17th January 2020. Those in attendance are drawn from all tiers of local government, business, infrastructure providers, and the FE, HE, and third sectors. The Council will be seeking to agree with the Board the challenges we consider we are collectively seeking to address (building upon the detailed suite of qualitative, quantitative, and pre-existing strategy evidence we already have available), moving to then consider initial proposals and how as partners, investors, and local Leaders we can collectively work with and seek the views of the community (including a community consultation process) to develop deliverable and transformational change for Newark. This 'Newark Regeneration Strategy' will be produced by a team of multi-disciplinary consultants via a formal tender process which is due to close on the 28th January 2020.

3.0 Financial Implications

- 3.1 As part of the Towns Fund Deal the Council has been awarded capacity funding of £162,019 to assist with the development of its Town Investment Plan. There are no additional financial implications at this time. It is noted that any Town Investment Plan will be presented to Members of this Committee and the Policy and Finance Committee in due course.

4.0 RECOMMENDATION

That Members note and support the proposed production (and associated timetable) of the Newark Town Regeneration Strategy and Town Investment Plan, the progress and details for which shall be presented to future meetings of the Economic Development Committee

Reason for Recommendation

To progress proposals for the transformative and ambitious regeneration of Newark Town, in accordance with the Council's adopted Community Plan and in order to maximise significant grant funding opportunities.

Background Papers

Nil

For further information please contact Matt Lamb on Ext. 5842

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