

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

14 JULY 2022

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

Regeneration & Housing – Lead Cabinet Member - Councillor Nigel Cooke

TOWN CENTRES UPDATE

SUMMARY

This report provides an update on progress on investment and interventions across the Borough's six town centres and High Streets as well as interventions under the Levelling Up Fund. It recommends allocations from previously approved funds to enable interventions in Ingleby Barwick and Norton as well as onward delegations to enable the spend of previously approved funding and Levelling Up Fund grant.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)/DECISION(S)

Each of the recommendations in this report require Cabinet to consider an approval to enable progress on the delivery of the established investment programme in the Borough's six town centres.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Cabinet endorse submission of a bid for £20million into Levelling Up Fund to enable redevelopment in Billingham town centre and delegate approval for completion of the application process to Director of Finance, Development & Regeneration in consultation with Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing
2. Cabinet note the progress made on design for the new Council facilities alongside the recent announcement of potential Community Diagnostic NHS facilities in Stockton town centre
3. Cabinet note work undertaken to develop interventions in Norton as detailed in paragraphs 30-39 and approve the allocation £1.44million from the £3million approved within the MTFP in February 2020 to enable interventions and delegate approval of final design and delivery of interventions to Director of Finance, Development & Regeneration in consultation with Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing
4. Cabinet note work undertaken in Ingleby Barwick and the outcome of public consultation on potential interventions as detailed in paragraphs 10-29 and approve the allocation £500,000 from the £3million approved within the MTFP in February 2020 to enable delivery of greenspace and accessibility improvements at Romano Park extension and improvements to play facilities and equipment in the existing Romano Park; and delegate approval of final design and delivery of interventions to Director of Finance, Development & Regeneration in consultation with Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing

5. Cabinet note the progress made in Yarm and emerging work linked to Levelling Up Fund detailed in paragraph 55-59
6. Cabinet note progress on relocation of businesses from Castlegate Centre and progress on the ongoing Compulsory Purchase process as detailed in paragraph 41-44 and 61

DETAIL

Billingham

7. Building upon the long standing commitment and track record of investment in Billingham town centre and following the disappointment of the unsuccessful bid into Levelling Up Fund (LUF) in round 1, the Council remains committed to investment in Billingham to improve the town centre.
8. Following the announcement of a second bidding round for LUF, a refined application has been developed for Billingham under the priority theme of regeneration and town centre investment. The £20M bid has incorporated formal feedback from Round 1 to strengthen and enhance the proposals and following further refinements will be submitted once the online submission portal is live. The application will be submitted in consultation with the MP for Stockton North as per the requirements of the fund.
9. As part of the development of options the Council continues to explore the potential of acquisition and further work is underway updating valuations, condition surveys. A further report will be presented to agree the way forward once this work has been completed and the outcome of the LUF bid is confirmed.

Ingleby Barwick

10. Following the 'Let's Talk About Our Towns' consultation in 2020, the focus of development work has been on exploring opportunities for creating more high-quality spaces and open leisure facilities for both residents and visitors to enjoy in Ingleby Barwick.
11. Following the report to Cabinet in February 2021 work has focussed on Council owned land to the south of All Saints Academy alongside proposals for enhancements to the existing Romano Park.
12. In May 2021, all primary and secondary schools in Ingleby Barwick were invited to attend a series of consultation sessions with the design team to give views and ideas on improvements to Romano Park. Three primary schools accepted the opportunity and feedback from approximately 150 children was received. In addition, consultation with the Bright Minds Big Future programme was held via an online session to ensure young people have a genuine voice in the future of their local area.
13. In February 2022, public consultation was undertaken seeking views on preliminary proposals for the existing play park, which included a bespoke new play item, new benches, picnic tables and litter bins and improved drainage around the play area. The consultation also asked people to give thoughts and ideas on new uses for the extension to Romano Park that would benefit the area.
14. In-person consultation sessions were held in Ingleby Barwick and an online feedback form was available on the Council's website for two weeks. Both consultation methods were promoted widely on social media and were included in an invitation that was posted to all households in Ingleby Barwick.

15. Upon completion of the consultation, feedback was analysed giving a total of 267 respondents, 93% of which were residents of Ingleby Barwick.
16. The results, published in April, demonstrate positive support for improvements to the existing park and play area, with examples such as new CCTV, new play equipment, new trees / planting and repairs to the existing play equipment all scoring highly.
17. With regards to potential uses for the extension of Romano Park, this question was split into three themes of Activity, Green Space and Play/Sport, with a summary of responses below.
 - Suggested uses under the Activity theme (e.g. skate area, outdoor gym, cycle/BMX area) averaged a score of 4 out of 10,.
 - Suggested uses under the Play/Sport theme (e.g. teen shelter, improvements to Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) scored an average of 4.5 out of 10.
 - Suggested uses under the Green Space theme (e.g. new trees/planting, improved access to pond and nature reserve and dedicated dog walking area) scored an average of 6 out of 10.
18. When asked about whether investment should be focused on making improvements, to the existing park, MUGA and play area or on bringing forward new uses for the park's extension, 50% of respondents expressed a preference for improvements to the existing park, MUGA and play area whilst 32% of respondents expressed a preference for investment to be focused on new uses for the park's extension and the final 18% expressing no preference
19. However whilst investment in play equipment in the existing Romano Park received the highest score, concerns were raised around potential anti-social behaviour in the existing Romano Park as well as some assumptions that this may be increased if a cycle/BMX/scooter/skate area was developed.
20. Respondents were given the opportunity to put forward any ideas for improvements to the existing park and play area and from the 111 responses received, 31% of comments were in support of retaining green space. 15% of comments were specifically in support of a BMX / skate park whilst 27% of comments were specifically against this type of use.
21. Alongside the consultation described above, Ingleby Barwick East and Ingleby Barwick West Ward Councillors also carried out additional engagement on improvements to Romano Park and the extended site. Ingleby Barwick West Councillors collected approximately 250 letters from local residents in support of improvements to enhance the proposed extension for open green space within the park as well as presenting officers with options for a dedicated dog walking area, new planting and café facility on the extended site.
22. Ingleby Barwick East Councillors delivered a presentation to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Housing in November 2021 in support of a bike pump track development on the additional land. This was supplemented by a letter from the Leader of Hartlepool Borough Council outlining the positive impact this type of development has had within their area and clarifying that the facility does not create an anti-social behaviour issue. Furthermore, a petition in support of a bike pump track totalling 422 validated signatures was submitted for consideration in May 2022.
23. Taking the outcome of the consultation and all other representations into account, it is recommended that further detailed proposals are developed for the extended Romano Park which focus on greenspace and accessibility improvements alongside improvements and enhancements to play equipment in Romano Park including the addition of accessible play equipment.

24. Preliminary design work for the existing park and play area identified a provisional cost of circa 500,000. It is therefore recommended that £500,000 from the previously approved £3million in the 2020 MTFP be allocated to support the development and delivery of interventions as described in paragraph 25.
25. Subject to Cabinet approval, more detailed options for the extended site, building on the principles of greenspace enhancement will be developed and fully costed along with a further, focussed period of public engagement in advance of identifying a preferred scheme to take forward for delivery.
26. Work is also underway to ensure existing leasehold interests and restrictions on the land proposed for the Romano Park extension are resolved to facilitate development. Whilst the Council has freehold ownership of the proposed land, there are other leasehold interests on the land along with restrictions and obligations on its current and future use which remain unresolved.
27. The land is currently designated for educational use and the change to either leisure/community land or open space for recreation purposes is essential to the viability of any improvements to Romano Park.
28. Following legal advice, there are effectively two options available to the Council, namely internal reappropriation for the purpose of the Council's records under section 122 of the Local Government Act 1972 or via consent from the Secretary of State.
29. From the legal advice received, the facts and history of the land suggests that the risk appears low utilising the internal appropriation from education land to leisure land. Alongside this procedural process, discussions to vary the terms of the leasehold interest are ongoing with any cost to enable this being met within the allocated budget.

Norton

30. Following the report to Cabinet in February 2021, detailed design work has been underway to develop a package of improvements to Norton as a means of creating more high quality, safe and accessible spaces for both residents and visitors to enjoy.
31. With regards to the duck pond improvement scheme, detailed designs include a programme of repairs to the pond, perimeter path and steps, replacement of the fountain and surface improvements. The proposals have been developed with consideration to the Village Green designation and works will both improve accessibility to the duck pond and complement the natural beauty of the surrounding open space.
32. The first phase of the scheme consisted of the installation of a new fountain and deep cleaning of the duck pond, completed in September 2021. Phase two of the scheme consists of the public realm and surface improvements to the duck pond area. There has been an unavoidable delay in starting the works due to the availability and long lead in delivery timescales for materials, which are issues being experienced at a global level. A revised start on site date of September 2022 has now been programmed and all improvement works to the duck pond will be completed by the end of 2022.
33. Work has also been underway on progressing the preliminary design for improvements to the most southern section of Norton High Street. The proposed scheme includes a number of interventions including resurfacing the existing car park and improvements to the footpaths and public realm at the southern end of the High Street to create flexible spaces for events, car parking and leisure activities.

34. The proposed scheme will also improve traffic flow and both vehicular and pedestrian movement by introducing a northbound one-way system at the very southern end of the High Street and a change to the direction of the existing one way section of Leven Road, adjacent to the shopping parade. This will reduce the volume of traffic on the southern section of the High Street and improve road safety for pedestrians and vehicles.
35. A programme of stakeholder engagement has been undertaken throughout the design of the scheme. A series of in-person and online engagement sessions were held in December 2021 and residents, businesses, visitors, bus and taxi operators were invited to give their views on the proposed scheme.
36. Whilst broad support for the scheme was received, a number of comments and suggestions were raised around addressing some of the current pressures on car parking, taxi provision, traffic movement and congestion. A number of revisions to the scheme layout have therefore been incorporated into the final design, which will be subject to a statutory consultation throughout the summer.
37. Following this, the main highway works are scheduled to begin in early 2023, lasting for approximately 6 months.
38. The interventions described above will be subject to a detailed cost review to ensure that the package of improvements identified for Norton can be delivered within a £1.44m funding envelope. It is therefore recommended that Cabinet allocate £1.44m from the previously approved £3m in the 2020 MTFP to enable delivery.
39. Refurbishment of the existing public toilet block is also underway. This investment will further improve public facilities in Norton once completed at the end of summer 2022.

Stockton

40. The successful transition of business from Castlegate into Wellington Square and other units across the High Street has continued since the last update to Cabinet with a total of 29 businesses either relocated or in the final stages of legal agreements to relocate.
41. Wellington Square is now recording footfall at between 10-15% higher than the equivalent point in 2019 and following completion of relocations, vacancy rates in the primary retail area of north High Street and Wellington Square will be circa 10%, bringing Stockton in line with the national average from a point of being three times this figure in 2019.
42. To accommodate both relocating and new businesses, work has been underway on the former H&M unit, reconfiguring the store into six smaller retail units at ground floor and repurposing the first floor and former Goldsmiths unit for an Employment and Training Hub. The Hub will provide access to support with recruitment, employment and training needs for both businesses and residents. The facility is managed by a dedicated team who will provide information, advice and guidance and work collaboratively with partners to provide space that meets employment and training needs for businesses and organisations in a location that will help drive footfall into Stockton town centre's main retail area
43. The relocations have taken place under the shadow of a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO), with objections to the CPO received from B&M and Barclays. Alongside Heron, Barclays and B&M represent the final three tenants to agree relocations. Whilst negotiations have progressed at differing speeds, discussions are positive in respect of seeing all three relocate to Wellington Square.
44. A date has now been confirmed for the CPO Inquiry. The inquiry will be held on 17th/18th August. Again, it is envisaged that agreement on relocation will have been reached at that

point but full preparations are underway in the event the Inquiry will be held with objections still in place.

45. Work is underway on the phase one of the demolition of Castlegate Centre with initial activity focussing on strip out and asbestos removal in the multi storey car park and former Swallow Hotel. The demolition proper is scheduled to begin w/c 18th July and will be supplemented by a programme of ongoing business engagement and broader communications which is already underway and is aimed at minimising disruption, particularly for those businesses adjacent to the site and those who use Tower Street and Bridge Road.
46. Work is also underway on the two key components of the Stockton Waterfront site, namely design of the urban park land bridge and riverside alongside design of the leisure centre, library, customer service centre and NHS facilities to the south of the site
47. The first stage of design for the urban park started in earnest in early June, with the first part of the process focussing on revisiting the existing concept design with a view to undertaking a period of public and stakeholder engagement to help inform any amendments to the concept design before moving onto a period of refinement to the existing design with a view to presenting the final scheme layout in September 2022. From that point, there will be a period of much more detailed design leading into work beginning on site following completion of the demolition in Summer 2023.
48. Work has been underway throughout this year, assessing options and requirements from a spatial and operational perspective for the new leisure centre, library, customer service centre and registry office.
49. Following the recent announcement from the NHS in regard to the Stockton Waterfront site being selected as the preferred site in the Tees Valley for a new circa £30million Community Diagnostic Centre, design meetings have been held with the NHS team to ensure that the proposed NHS facilities on the site can be accommodated in the most effective and efficient way.
50. Officers continue to work alongside North Tees and Hartlepool Trust to explore opportunities for the addition of other facilities on the High Street under the Care Closer to Home initiative and have incorporated a location for this facility within emerging site options for the southern end of the site. Should all NHS facilities come forward, it is anticipated that there will be circa 15,000m² of new public and health facilities on the High Street creating a huge attraction for visitors to the town centre and helping drive footfall by locating key NHS services on the High Street.
51. As outlined in previous reports to Cabinet, £20m was earmarked to fund new facilities at the southern end of the Stockton Waterfront site. Final details of the scheme will be reported to Cabinet in future alongside emerging detail on NHS facilities. In order to progress the detailed design of the facilities, it is recommended that delegation is made for the Director of Finance Development & Regeneration in consultation with Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing to award of any relevant contracts or agreements that will enable the detailed design of the facilities and support securing the location of NHS facilities on the site
52. Officers are exploring funding via Sport England to enhance and support the delivery of the new leisure facility, as well as exploring opportunities to access National Heritage Lottery Funding for potential investment in enhancements to the Town Hall and Shambles. Both price with further updates to be brought back to Cabinet at an appropriate point in the future.

Thornaby

53. Following the report to Cabinet in April 2022, which approved the four priority interventions identified and endorsed by Thornaby Town Deal Board as part of its £23.9m Town Deal allocation, all Business Case documentation was submitted to Government in May 2022. Final approval of the Business Cases expected by autumn 2022.
54. Work is currently underway to refine and further develop the priority interventions in line with the funding allocations set out within the Business Cases, which form the basis for delivery of interventions across Thornaby under the Town Deal programme. This process will continue to be undertaken through collaboration with the Town Deal Board as well as engagement with the public and project stakeholders.

Yarm and Levelling Up Fund

55. Following recent planning approval for the redevelopment of Yarm Town Hall, the procurement process for the redevelopment work is now underway with a view to work beginning on site in late summer 2022. In advance of work beginning at the Town Hall, new toilets are currently being installed in Yarm Library to ensure continuity of public toilet provision on the High Street.
56. Initial design work for an exhibition space at Preston Park Museum as well as improvement to other amenities in the park is underway. The body of work will deliver a concept design for an exhibition space as well as detailed costing for improvements to parking, toilets, café and explore options for future use of the aviary and gatehouse.
57. Work is due to begin in late July on options for Yarm High Street exploring opportunities for improvements, in line with the successful Levelling Up Fund (LUF) bid. Consultation will be undertaken in late July/early August with a view to gauging priorities and sensitivities on the High Street that can be reflected in options for a further round of public consultation in late September.
58. Initial design work has also been undertaken on cycle routes identified within the LUF bid. Further refinement is needed to fully understand deliverability constraints and costs alongside the emerging work described above in order that a full understanding of overall costs can be made and any alterations to funding profiles and allocations be made should they be required given inflationary increases since initial estimates and reflecting a greater level of detailed work undertaken.
59. A report will be presented to Cabinet at an appropriate point in the future detailing progress across LUF initiatives

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

60. Throughout the journey to date and next steps on investment across the Borough's six town centres a programme of ongoing engagement is in place to ensure all areas of the community have access to the proposals as they develop so that all community needs are considered and understood as investment proposals are developed and delivered out
61. The impact of the compulsory acquisition of parts of the Castlegate Shopping Centre and its subsequent demolition on all residents and businesses, including an equality impact assessment, has been carefully considered throughout the development of the proposals for Stockton Town Centre and taken into account before final decisions are made

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

62. As part of the town centre investment programme there is an ongoing engagement process and one element of this is focused on young people and young adults to ensure that town centres remain fit for purpose for current and future generations. As a corporate parent the Council will exhaust all opportunities to engage with as many young people as possible.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

63. The sums outlined in this report complete the allocation of previously approved £3million from the MTFP in 2020 for investment in interventions in Ingleby Barwick, Norton and Yarm.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

64. There are no additional legal implications beyond what is described in this report

RISK ASSESSMENT

65. Project risk registers have been produced for each intervention and existing management systems and daily routine activities are deemed sufficient to control and reduce risk.

WARDS AFFECTED AND CONSULTATION WITH WARD/COUNCILLORS

66. Specific engagement with directly affected wards has taken place and in addition to this all Members' seminars are scheduled to keep Members up to date with specific interventions relating to town centres.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

67. Reference should be made to reports considered by the Council's Cabinet in February 2021 and MTFP in February 2020.

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