

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET DECISION

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting 12 March 2026

1. Title of Item/Report

Levelling Up Fund - Yarm Public Realm

2. Record of the Decision

Consideration was given to a report that provided a progress update on the Round 1 Levelling Up Fund programme of interventions along with a summary of the public engagement undertaken to inform whether the Council should proceed with the Yarm High Street public realm proposals as presented to the public in May 2025. In response to the majority 'no' vote that was received, the report sets out a series of options to inform a decision on next steps for use of the remaining approved budget for Yarm High Street.

The report provided a summary update of all Levelling Up Fund (LUF) interventions before focusing specifically upon the Yarm High Street public realm element of the programme.

The approved LUF programme was developed in response to the publication of LUF Round 1 application in 2021 with the objectives of delivering major proposals in Yarm and Eaglescliffe under the priority themes of Transport, Culture and Town Centre Regeneration.

The bid focussed on delivery of improvements to cultural facilities in, and enhancements to, Preston Park Museum and Grounds (PPMG), redevelopment of Yarm Town Hall and public realm enhancements on Yarm High Street and delivery of cycleway connections in Yarm and Eaglescliffe.

In March 2023, Cabinet noted that work had been underway to develop a greater level of understanding on the scope, cost and deliverability of the agreed interventions and approved a funding profile to reflect the proposed interventions across Yarm High Street, PPMG and Cycleway infrastructure.

Since then, work had been underway to deliver a range of interventions at PPMG, with completion of the Spence Building in September 2025, a remodelled cafe and new toilets, additional parking and improvements to the Aviary and playground. A planning application for the demolition and redevelopment of South Lodge was submitted in January 2026.

Work to create an improved cycle link along Durham Lane to connect key employment sites and surrounding residential areas commenced in January 2026 and were on programme to complete in September 2026. The route would be comprised of segregated cycle routes, shared route, and new crossing facilities between Elton Interchange and Cleasby Way junction, extending to the new western access to Eaglescliffe Station.

The programme of works for Yarm High Street, as set out in the LUF Round 1 bid was focussed on a public realm scheme and the redevelopment of Yarm Town Hall, in partnership with Yarm Town Council, to bring the building back into use as visitor attraction and to replace the public toilets that were displaced because of the works. The redevelopment of Yarm Town Hall was completed in September 2023 and new public toilets, located at Yarm Library opened in November 2022.

To help shape the public realm element of the High Street intervention and to gain insights into understand local priorities and opportunities, two periods of public consultation were undertaken in 2022.

The first period of consultation was undertaken in August 2022, for a period of three weeks. The consultation was promoted widely on social media and local media. Staffed engagement events were held in Yarm Library, and an online consultation form was available on the Council's website.

The results, published in October 2022, demonstrated that the top five improvements identified were: improving footpaths, reducing street clutter, adding more planting, improving connections and accessibility to the River Tees and providing more seating and places to rest. The findings from the initial public consultation were analysed and used to shape and develop a package of concept designs for Yarm High Street.

Concept designs were presented for a second round of consultation in December 2022 for a period of 4 weeks. Consultation provided the opportunity for members of the public to share their views through in-person consultation events held in Yarm Library and an online consultation form.

The proposals included new paving along the High Street, new landscaping, seating areas and improved public spaces, de-cluttering of pavements, new cycle parking as well as potential enhancements to the River Tees and Snaiths Field Playground.

The results published in January 2023 showed that 69 per cent of respondents agreed that the locations of proposed works were in the most appropriate places on the High Street, 64 per cent of respondents agreed that the proposals identified the right mix and type of improvements and 53 per cent of respondents said they would be accepting of the small loss of some parking spaces to deliver the scheme.

In response to public feedback received at this stage, which identified that enhancing spaces beyond Yarm High Street was a local priority, schemes to improve connections to and along the River Tees and upgrading the existing playground at Snaith's Field were developed.

The first phase of works focused on resurfacing the existing footpath and repairing root damage along True Lovers Walk, which were completed in September 2025, successfully improving access along walkways.

In response to feedback received, the scope of improvements to True Lovers Walk was broadened to consider two existing fishing pontoons located along the route.

A visual ground-level inspection of the pontoons was undertaken in autumn 2024, which found the pontoons to be in poor condition and their structural integrity compromised. Both structures were subsequently closed to the public.

Following the inspections an officer recommendation to remove the existing pontoons emerged, on the basis that their deteriorating condition, public safety concerns, ongoing maintenance and unknown structural defects below the water line made the pontoons a financial and legal liability to the Council. The cost for removing both pontoons was estimated at approximately £20,000.

Works to upgrade Snaith's Field playground were completed in October 2025. The installation of new play equipment, provision of new seating and resurfacing works to the existing footpath have made the location more accessible, which has been well received by users of the park.

In May 2025, proposals for a series of improvements to the public spaces on Yarm High Street, developed in response to the two periods of public consultation were presented.

Following publication of the scheme in May 2025 some concerns were raised regarding the appearance of the proposed planters and a revised design was undertaken to incorporate a more subtle and refined finish to the planter material, in keeping with the character of the High Street. Furthermore, a commitment was made at Cabinet in July 2025 to assess the cost of re-providing pontoons in the current locations.

Despite these refinements to the scheme, a variety of representations were made to the Council throughout summer and autumn of 2025 in opposition to the proposed scheme, culminating in an instruction to pause the planned start of works whilst further public engagement took place to make sure any interventions reflected local views.

Local people were invited to share their views on the proposed improvements to Yarm High Street over a 4-week period ending in early January 2026 under the banner of 'Yarm High Street - You Decide'. In-person engagement events were held in Yarm Library as well as an online form that was available on the Council's website.

The purpose of the engagement was to understand public views on whether the Council should proceed with the proposed scheme and from the 1,564 responses received, results showed that 225 (14 per cent) respondents agreed that Yes - the Council should proceed with the scheme as proposed whilst 1339 (86 per cent) people expressed a view that No – the Council should not proceed with the scheme as proposed.

A full summary of the engagement results was attached to the report.

As the recent engagement process produced an 86 per cent 'No' response as to whether the Council should proceed with the scheme as proposed, a decision was sought on next steps for use of the remaining approved budget.

As per the report to Cabinet in March 2023, the approved budget for the Yarm High Street element of the LUF programme was £4,600,000 to support interventions including a public realm scheme, redevelopment of Yarm Town Hall, relocation of public toilets, improvements to Snaiths Field and enhanced access to the River Tees.

The £4.6m was made up of £1m Council funding (from the previously approved £3million from the MTFP in 2020/21 for investment in interventions in Ingleby Barwick, Norton and Yarm), £3.5m LUF and £100k Yarm Town Council funding. To date c.£2.25m had been spent or committed leaving a balance of c.£2.35m made up of c.£950k Council co-funding and c.£1.4m LUF.

The Levelling Up Fund was administered opposite MHCLG under the Government's Regeneration Funding Simplification Programme – Local Regeneration Fund (LRF).

The Local Regeneration Fund simplified capital funding by consolidating the Levelling Up Fund, Town Deals, Future High Streets Fund and Pathfinders Pilot into a single funding pot. The LRF programme attempted to provide a greater flexibility and allow for more local control, enabling local authorities to make decisions about moving funding between projects, cancelling and creating new projects.

Taking the flexibilities afforded by the Local Regeneration Fund into account, alongside the remaining c.£2.35m budget, a range of uses for the funding could be considered. The make-up of the remaining budget (LUF and SBC funding)

allowed for potentially more than one alternative use as the remaining budget could be considered as a single sum or separate budget strands by funding source.

To aid deliberation on potential next steps, a range of alternative courses of action are set out below. The options were by no means exhaustive, rather an attempt to categorise the potential alternatives within the existing LRF remit, options outside of the LRF remit and potential to split the funding by source.

- Retain Funding in Yarm High Street / LUF Round 1 boundary
- Remove Council co-funding into Council reserves (£950k)
- Develop alternative scheme on Yarm High Street.
- Develop alternative scheme in Yarm and Eaglescliffe area.
- Utilise LUF to offset borrowing (approved at Council in February 2025) c£950k to deliver Aviary, Stockton & Darlington Railway heritage feature and Central Area.
- Explore increased scope of interventions in PPMG beyond planned programme.
- Retain LUF money (c£1.4m) for alternative scheme in Yarm and Eaglescliffe area (including High Street)

Reallocate some or all funding from Yarm / LUF Round 1 boundary to interventions across the Borough

- Remove Council co-funding into Council reserves
- Hold LUF funding for a period of time as contingency across LRF programme.
- Identify and develop a new project to allocate some or all LUF funding.
- Allocate to an existing project elsewhere in the Borough

Following the commitment to revisit the principle of removing the fishing pontoons, made at Cabinet in July 2025, further evaluation, including a dive inspection, had since been undertaken to establish the cost and deliverability of removing and replacing the two existing wooden pontoons.

The estimated cost of removing the existing pontoons and replacing with a modern standard, similar sized structure using composite and steel materials to provide improved durability and a longer service life would be approximately £135,000.

A decision on replacing the pontoons would be subject to securing the necessary permits and consents along with a detailed risk assessment to ensure they meet the Council's statutory duties and are safe for public use.

Cabinet was asked to consider whether to proceed with the removal of the pontoons only, or the removal and installation of new pontoons.

Given the condition of the pontoons, in either scenario they must be removed which was estimated at £20,000. The cost of removal and installation of the pontoons, if instructed, would be deducted from the remaining allocated funding of £2.35m as set out in paragraph 28 of the report.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The findings of the public engagement undertaken in relation to the Yarm High Street public realm scheme be noted.
2. With regard to the £2.35m remaining funds from the allocated budget for Yarm High Street:-
 - a) The £950,000 of SBC co-funding be returned to support the Council's MTFP and financial position.

- b) £950,000 of the remaining LUF funding be used to repay the borrowing associated with the additional expenditure at Preston Park Museum.
- c) The remaining £450,000 LUF funding be committed in the Yarm area.
- d) Delegated Authority be given to the Director of Regeneration and Inclusive Growth, in consultation with the Cabinet Member, to produce a shortlist of possible projects that could be achieved with the remaining budget of £450,000 and then engage with the residents and businesses of Yarm for their priorities. The list is to include the costs of each item on the list and to include the consideration of the replacement of the pontoons, to enable residents and businesses to consider the value for money and extent of the works available when providing their priorities.

3. Reasons for the Decision

To inform a decision on next steps for use of the remaining approved budget for Yarm High Street.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

None

6. Details of any Dispensations

None

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

Midnight, 20 March 2026

Proper Officer