



Northumberland

County Council

Minutes

Blyth Town Deal Board

9am - 10am on Wednesday, 29 July 2020
(online)

Present:

Chair, Fergusons Transport
Advance Northumberland
Bede Academy
BEIS

Blyth Community Network
Blyth Town Council
Blyth Town Forum
Blyth Valley Constituency Office

NCC Cultural Development Manager
NCC Head of Housing and Public Protection
Energy Central Steering Group
JobCentre Plus
Northumberland Estates
Newcastle University
Northumberland County Councillors

ORE Catapult
Tharsus

Alan Ferguson (AF)
Ken Dunbar (KD)
Andrew Thelwell (AT)
Margaret Coates (MC)
Jonathan Gilroy
Thom Bradley (TB)
Cllr Warren Taylor (WT)
Greg Gavin (GG)
Rt Hon Ian Levy, MP (IL)
Paul Scott (PSc)
Wendy Scott (WS)
Phil Soderquest (PSo)
John Hildreth (JH)
Debbie Draper (DD)
Trevor Gyllenspetz (TG)
Jane Richardson (JR)
Cllr Peter Jackson, Leader (PJ)
Cllr Richard Wearmouth, Economic Dev (RW)
Cllr Kath Nisbet, Croft Ward (KN)
Tony Quinn (TQ)
Matthew Murray (MM)

In Attendance:

Economic Growth and Regeneration Team
(NCC):

Rob Strettle (RS)
Anne Lawson (AL)
Helyn Douglas (HD)

Apologies:

Active Northumberland
North of Tyne Combined Authority
Port of Blyth

Mark Warnes (MW)
Rob Hamilton (RH)
Martin Lawlor (ML)

1 Apologies

Apologies are listed above.

Alan Ferguson opened the meeting by noting his appreciation for being made Chair of this group. Mr Ferguson and his family have a long

association with and commitment to the town of Blyth, and he is very excited to learn more about the planned activities.

2 Declaration of Interests

Whilst noting that new forms to establish a register of interests are being developed, anyone with an interest can declare it now, or at a later point in the meeting if a relevant item arises. No declarations of interest were registered.

3 Previous Minutes & Matters Arising - [06 Mar 20](#)

These were agreed as accurate.

4 Current Situation Update

a) Energising Blyth

Rob Strettle (RS) gave a presentation giving an update on the activities so far. Both the Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) and Town Deal are being branded as “Energising Blyth”. The purpose of Energising Blyth is to support the economic growth and development of Blyth. The intention is to build on the work to date focused on the town centre for the FHSF application, this has produced a town centre regeneration framework which provides a good starting point for the Town Deal Town Investment Plan development going forward. The work for FHSF recognises that Blyth has a number assets such as renewables industry based economic growth on the Quayside, new opportunities for connectivity through the Northumberland Line proposals, and the fantastic amenities for people living in the town such as South Beach and Ridley Park; however there is a disconnect between these and the town centre where retail is failing which the FHSF application focuses on addressing.

b) Future High Street Fund

The FHSF bid is due to be submitted this week for c£11m of FHSF, to be matched by an equal amount of NCC capital funding. The four main projects in the ‘preferred option’ are: Creative Cinema Space, The Laurel Restaurant and Hotel, Energy Central Institute and the Link Highway Pedestrian and Cycling Improvements.

The bulk of the FHSF will be spent on the Creative Cinema Space development; the land is under the control of NCC also making it easier to progress. The delivery of the Laurel and Energy Central Institute projects both rely on reaching an agreement with Arriva to relocate and discussions are moving forward positively. This is a key programme risk

but discussions so far have been positive and these will continue over the Summer months to ensure this risk is mitigated effectively.

If MHCLG deem them viable then four further projects could be included in the FHSF package (taking the value up to c£40m in total) including: Westgate House leisure conversion, Town Centre living developments (2 projects), and a Quayside Gateway project.

A 'fly through' video was shown, giving an impression of the layout and size of the new buildings and their relationship to each other and the rest of the town. It was stressed that the designs are still at concept stage and there will be further opportunity to input to the detailed development of the projects subject to the success of the funding application.

Next Steps

The FHSF bid will be submitted by the end of the week, and an announcement is expected by Autumn 2020. Subject to this, delivery will then take place between 2021 - 2024, though the majority of the physical work will not start until the back end of this programme timescale following preparatory phases of work planning, design etc. There is a need to look at more than just the capital funding delivery through FHSF and the team will be working with Blyth Town Council and other partners on the development of a coordinated programme of animation activities in the meantime, which could particularly be linked to an overall culture programme to support the towns development.

Ian Levy, MP stated that he is very enthusiastic about these proposals, and is also promoting Blyth to his colleagues, and pressing home the need for all the current projects (FHSF, Town Deal, the Relief Road and the re-opening of the Northumberland Line) as well as supporting other initiatives such as free port status for Blyth. He is also talking more locally to partner organisations about the improvements to Bowes Street, and the possibility of turning the Port Commissioners Building into a maritime museum / heritage facility.

Peter Jackson, NCC Council Leader, is incredibly excited by the proposals, and reiterated that NCC is fully supportive of the bid and other planned initiatives. He did ask if the existing cultural facilities (such as the Phoenix Theatre) would be negatively affected by the new Creative Cinema space. Rob Strettle clarified that the Cinema space is a complementary offer, and would also act as a hub for helping other arts organisations to work together to maximize the opportunities available. He added that the Phoenix Theatre has been involved in discussions about the proposals, and that a letter of support has been received from

the Blyth Cultural Network, of which the Theatre are a member. The team will continue to liaise with the Phoenix and other culture partners in the town as the proposals develop.

Ian Levy, MP has a meeting with the Phoenix Theatre in the next couple of weeks so if anyone has any queries to raise please email his office.

Cllr Warren Taylor, Blyth Town Council queried when building work would actually start on the Market Place if the bid is successful. Rob Strettle replied this would likely not happen until 2023, as there is a large amount of preparatory work to be done first.

Finally, Rob Strettle acknowledged the support of those present and thanked those who had given their time and input during the development of the bid.

c) Town Deal - 2020/21 funding

Rob Strettle updated that Central Government has released additional funding for each Town Deal area; This needs to complement any Town Deal activities and is intended to support recovery plans post the Covid-19 lockdown. Blyth has received £750k that needs to be spent in this financial year 2020-21.

To deliver in the timescales above the Council has focused on identifying a project that is well established as a priority and ready to deliver coherently with impact on the town centre. The existing Bowes St Improvement Scheme which had been due to deliver in 2020-21 but had stalled due to costs in terms of design elements meets this requirement. As such the existing project scope has been expanded into a new 'Northern Gateway' programme for the towns entrance and the areas in between Morrison's and the Market Place retaining Bowes St improvements at the core of the project. This gives an opportunity to link up key retailers and give confidence to independent retailers, improve the movement of traffic and people around the town, and help to deal with areas of poor public realm which can attract anti-social behaviour. IDP Architects has been commissioned to provide initial concept designs - these will be available in a few weeks' time. This will link up and follow the same principles as those established for the new Market Place project in the FHSF application to ensure the town centre develops coherently in phases.

Rob Strettle noted that whilst formal Town Deal Board approval is not required its support and members advice on the proposal is very welcome. Rob also commented particularly to members of the Town

Council present at the meeting that he would be in touch to talk through the project and seek their input to the designs over the summer. Alan Ferguson was keen to see the 'Northern Gateway' ideas and wholeheartedly agreed that this is an opportunity to give a better impression of the town, make it look more interesting to visitors and encourage them to visit the town centre. Rob confirmed the next step will be for a letter to be returned to MHCLG confirming the project proposals to release the funding.

D) Town Deal - Town Investment Plan

Anne Lawson outlined the steps to developing a Town Investment Plan (TIP) to a value of £25m, to be submitted by 29 January 2021. A series of individual business cases will then be required, these need to be agreed by March 2022. The delivery phase will take place over a five year period between 2020 - 2026. This is not a competitive process like FHSF but an iterative one co-produced with Government, with support from Lisa Quinn of the Towns Hub which will be providing direct support to Town Deal locations.

The TIP will build upon the work done so far to develop the FSHF bid; the three activity streams will build on the work undertaken for the FHSF application encompassing:

1. Town centre renewal
2. Clean growth development
3. Sustainability and connectivity

£162k capacity funding from the Government is being retained by NCC to assist the development of the Town Deal and plans and an update on this will be provided at the next Board meeting. The [Town Deal guidance](#) will be circulated with the minutes¹.

Anne Lawson also highlighted that there is a dedicated webpage for both the FHSF and Town Deal activities, under the heading of "Energising Blyth". Basic information is currently on there but the site is being updated and will be improved over the next couple of months.

5 Guidance from BEIS Update

There is a need to establish transparent governance processes. Of key importance will be clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the Board, a Code of Conduct and a Conflict of Interest policy. Updated drafts of the

¹ Town Deal Guidance

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/892781/Towns_Fund_further_guidance_16_June_FINAL.pdf

required documents in light of revised guidance will follow in due course for the Board to review.

6 Governance Update

The next Town Deal Board meeting in September will cover governance issues, along with proposals for the £162k capacity funding and plans for workshops with both the Board and the wider community to inform the development of the TIP. The draft programme for development of the TIP includes workshops which will be held in October and November to support the development of the TIP, and the draft TIP will be reviewed by the Board in January. The degree to which the TIP engagement work is online and in person is likely to be a blend and to be confirmed and subject to Covid guidance re gatherings etc. Once the TIP is submitted the Government timetable is for Heads of Terms to be agreed in March 2021, then business cases and delivery plans will be worked up over 2021/22 prior to delivery. Rob Strettle also noted that a Communications Plan is under development.

Jane Robinson (Newcastle University) has already given some input to the FHSF development, specifically on the Energy Central Institute and is very excited by the continued developments. She wondered if there would be value in creating links with the Northern Powerhouse "Net Zero North" initiative involving the eight regional universities. This was welcomed and Jane agreed to circulate information about this to NCC who will circulate this to the Board.

Ian Levy, MP offered to take forward any issues as appropriate through his position on the Commons Select Committee for Environmental Audit, or through the Joint Select Committee on MHCLG that he is due to join shortly.

Tony Quinn, ORE Catapult, noted that the clean growth 'stream' is of particular interest to the ORE Catapult. The ORE Catapult is a national strategic asset and it has been talking directly to BEIS about its future needs to attract inward investment and build on applied research to create economic growth. There is the opportunity to combine the local Town Deal with national discussions to leverage support to the growth of the town and the energy sector.

7 Next Steps

Further information will be circulated on guidance and governance, as well as future dates.

The Chair rounded off by saying that the projects were very exciting and worthy of being taken forward. Whilst recognising that the Town Centre

is the catalyst for all of this, he was also very pleased that the plans looked beyond just the Town Centre.

8 Any Other Business

There were no items raised.

9 Future Meeting Dates:

September, November, January - dates to be confirmed