



Blyth Town Deal Board Meeting

Monday 23 May 2022 14.00
(Microsoft Teams video conference)

Present:

Alan Ferguson (AF) (CHAIR)	Fergusons Transport
Robin Earl (RE)	Advance Northumberland
Rev Ian Flintoft (IF)	Blyth Churches Together
Greg Gavin (GG)	Blyth Town Forum
Grant Glendinning (GGI)	Newcastle College
Ray Browning (RB)	North East LEP
Rob Hamilton (RH)	North of Tyne Combined Authority
John Hildreth (JH)	Energy Central Steering Group
Matthew Murray (MM)	Tharsus
Cllr Kath Nisbet (KN)	Northumberland County Council
Cllr Wojciech Ploszaj (WP)	Northumberland County Council
Jane Robinson (JR)	Newcastle University
Rob Strettle (RS)	Energising Blyth Programme Team
Cllr Warren Taylor (WT)	Blyth Town Council
Andrew Thelwell (AT)	Bede Academy
Cllr Richard Wearmouth (RW)	Northumberland County Council
Tony Quinn (TQ)	ORE Catapult

In Attendance:

Helyn Douglas (HD)	Project Officer, NCC
Fiona Ford (FF)	Project Manager, NCC
Jonathan Gilroy (JG)	Cities and Local Growth Unit, DLUHC
Helen Hampson (HH)	Senior Regeneration Investment Officer, NCC
Bev Harrison (BH)	Regeneration Finance & Performance Manager, NCC
Lee Paris (LP)	Senior Programme Officer, NCC
Steve Rutland (SR)	Public Value Ltd (Energy Central Campus Project Manager)
Taylor Sharp (TS)	Cities and Local Growth Unit, DLUHC

Notes of discussion:

1	<p>Welcome, introductions and apologies for absence</p> <p>AF welcomed everyone to the meeting, inc Fiona Ford and Lee Paris who have recently joined the Energising Blyth Programme Team</p> <p><u>Apologies</u></p> <p>Lara Baker, Programme Manager, NCC Thom Bradley, Blyth Community Network Kay Charlton, Jobcentre Plus Helen Golightly, North East LEP Carol Jameson, Regeneration Programmes Investment Manager, NCC Martin Lawlor, Port of Blyth Helen Swinburn, Projects Officer, NCC Jan Willis, Executive Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer), NCC</p>	Action:
2	<p>Declarations of Interest</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RS declared NCC's interest as project sponsor for Culture Centre / Market Place; and noted the interest of all founding partners in the Energy Central Campus project (NCC, Port of Blyth, ORE Catapult and Advance Northumberland). • RE noted the same interests for Advance Northumberland. 	
3	<p>Minutes of the last meeting - 27 April 2022</p> <p>These were accepted as true record.</p>	
4	<p>Programme Performance updates (RS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regarding the strategic sites workstream there are continued discussions with the key landowners. • As mentioned at previous meetings, programme wide contingency planning will also be subject to an update at a future board meeting, this includes reviewing the impact of any rising costs for capital projects which continue to be monitored closely. • A 'movement' strategy is being developed to inform the Programme's development and delivery considering key issues relating to transport and connectivity particularly in the town centre. This will be reported back to Board as it develops. • The NEP1 project in the EB Programme is progressing although subsidy control advice is currently being reviewed regarding the Town Deal contribution to the project, an update will be presented at a future meeting. <p><u>Questions</u></p> <p>RE – noted concern that it is not just the construction costs that may be affected by inflationary pressures, but also the viability of the projects once operational and asked if this is being factored in.</p>	

	RS - confirmed that future cost projections are fully taken into account as part of the five case business case process all projects are subject to.	
5	<p>Project Performance updates</p> <p>As LB has had to give apologies today, project performance updates listed below will be presented at a future meeting.</p> <p><u>Project Performance</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture Centre / Market Place and The Link • Culture and Placemaking Programme • Hotel and Restaurant • NEP1/Battleship Wharf • ECC (Learning Hub) Phase 1 • ECC (Institute) Phase 2 • OREC - Technology & Subcomponent Innovation Demonstration Centre (T&SIDC) • Northern Gateway Phase 1 • Northern Gateway Phase 2 • Bebside Blyth Connectivity 	
6	Project Presentations/Recommendations	
6a	<p>Culture Centre and Market Place</p> <p><u>Strategic Outline Business Case Internal Appraisal (RS)</u> (Report and Recommendation circulated prior to the meeting for discussion)</p> <p>RS presented an update on the project highlighting some key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noted that the project has already been assessed and approved by Government as part of the submitted FHSF Business Case. As an additional assurance process the project is also subject to the Energising Blyth assurance framework. This means the project, and all others supported by FHSF are developing a Business Case which is appraised by the same method to give assurance to the board and NCC as accountable body that the projects are robust. • Feedback from consultations right from the start of the FHSF process up to today show that one of the top five requests was to improve the town centre: make it more attractive, reduce litter, reduce ASB, and improve the leisure and entertainment offer. • The key objectives of the Cultural and Market Place project are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Low carbon building ○ Increase footfall day & night ○ Improve the culture offer ○ Improve health & wellbeing ○ Increase participation in cultural activities • The RIBA Stage 1 concept design process has been completed. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further in depth culture stakeholder engagement was undertaken in Mar-May and continues with positive results. Public and Business engagement planned this Summer. • Relocating the bus circular route into the Market Place is no longer planned given the change in position of Arriva sites and a review of the viability and benefits of introducing bus circulation in the Market Place. The team will be working with Arriva to look at ways to improve the bus interchange facilities in the longer term considering the current location in the town centre as part of wider strategic sites work. • The next steps include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Developing a RIBA Stage 2 designs ○ Finalising business plan and operational model ○ Further meetings of the Cultural Advisory group which met last week successfully and has now been expanded encompassing the Heart of Blyth agenda too given the close links regarding community engagement and positive health and well being outcomes through culture ○ Procurement Strategy development ○ Carry out drop-in consultation events with both the public and businesses this summer • Senior managers from NCC have met with a large number of cultural organisations via 1:1s. There have been concerns from existing groups operating in Blyth that this new development may affect them. The 1:1s alongside group meetings have helped to re-assure partners that the new centre, and the culture and placemaking programme alongside it is fully intended to be complementary, additional and to support the existing cultural offer already active in the town, including by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Providing new attractions as part of the overall offer ○ Offering something different in the centre of town ○ Actively supporting existing groups for example through joint programming, development of project pipelines, joint funding bids etc ○ Increasing capacity and resources in Blyth to undertake the work above e.g. additional staff through the CPP. • Evidence elsewhere has shown that increasing investment in cultural activities in the above way has benefits for all and helps to bring in more visitors and increase audiences. • Discussions will continue regularly with the sector to build the confidence of partners in the proposals and ensure they have input to development of the projects. • The new centre is intended to take up around 1/3 of the available space in the Market Place (reflecting a return to how the market place used to function many decades ago). This will create a more zoned but also flexible space rather than the current large and under-utilised space with defined areas with different usage. • The building itself will house a 3 screen cinema, cafe, creative play area, flexible multi-use space, foyer, arts & wellbeing area and an outdoor space linking to the market place. It will include a welcoming open atrium with easy public access where people can find out what is going on in the 	
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	<p>town overall and in the facility, and signpost people to other cultural providers in the town.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of a couple of different building footprints were shown and further design information will be gradually shared for stakeholder and then public and business views over the next few months to shape the project as it goes through the RIBA stages. • RS reiterated that the culture and place-making programme sits alongside this proposal and is mutually supportive delivering events, branding and public realm/art projects alongside the new Culture Centre as well as capacity through staff and expertise. • To inform the CPP, a number of pilot projects have been underway during the past couple of months, with over 350 people involved, including community groups, schools and local residents in venues across the town. <p><u>Questions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KN - Suggested that the building might be situated further to the west rather than towards the middle of the space. She also noted that a new snooker hall has opened above the old Woolworths building and is doing well. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ RS replied that the options are still being considered but noted the comments and noted that it was really positive to see vacant units being brought back into use, part of the purpose of the project is to build confidence in the area as a place to invest in. • AF - Suggested that the existing public toilet block be incorporated into the new building, or nearby to it. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ FF commented that including it inside the building was looked at initially but it may prove unattractive to potential building operators (partly due to opening times) and also there could be advantages in having provision in and out of the centre given the range of uses of the Market Place. As such the most likely scenario is that the existing toilet block will be improved as part of the scheme alongside new toilets in the centre. • AF - asked what is the situation regarding the damaged gable wall at the east end of the Keel Row shopping centre. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ KN replied that it was damaged during Storm Arwen and scaffolding was erected but the owners are waiting for the insurance money to come through before repairs can be done. <p><u>Appraisal report (FF)</u></p> <p>FF presented the Appraisal Report including the following key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The total cost for the Cultural Centre and Market Place improvements is currently estimated at £8.7m - including £7.2m of FHSF grant, the remaining £1.5m funding requirement will be considered as part of the contingency process mentioned earlier. As with all projects, whilst estimates are included looking forward these prices may increase including due to inflation. 	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The appraisal did highlight some issues that need to be addressed at RIBA Stage 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need a detailed budget and cashflow More detail on the operational model (one or two operators, governance, staffing, market testing for interest, etc) Evidence of match funding Evidence of stakeholder interest Address displacement and competition issues These points are standard at this stage and are to be resolved as the business case develops. <p><u>Questions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> JR - Asked how will we align the capital development with the development of the operational model. How much flexibility needs to be built into the design to accommodate the possible changing needs of the operational model. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> FF reported that the team has employed an expert consultant who will continue to engage with the various stakeholders and their findings will inform the brief. The team has also met with NCC Procurement specialists about how to carry out an effective exercise. She asked the Board to note that there is a great deal of data that sits behind the reports as part of the Business Case which provides confidence that the project is viable. WT - As energy costs are continuing to rise beyond initial expectations he asked what innovative ways are being considered for providing energy for the building. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> FF replied that energy efficiency and low carbon are part of the brief, but at this stage there is no specific detail which will emerge as the building is designed. RS added that the potential district heating network might support other projects planned in Blyth in the future. <p><u>Recommendation and conditions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board approved the recommendation to approve this project to proceed to the Outline Business Case, subject to the listed conditions/feedback. 	
6b	<p>Energy Central Campus – Phase 2</p> <p><u>Strategic Outline Business Case Internal Appraisal (SR)</u> (Report and Recommendation circulated prior to the meeting for discussion) Steve Rutland (Energy Campus Project Manager) presented the report highlighting the following issues:</p> <p><u>Campus</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Campus is made up of two elements: Phase 1 Learning Hub at South Harbour, and Phase 2 Institute in the town centre. Phase 2 is the 	

	<p>element of the Campus which is the subject of the SOBC being considered by Board today.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taken together these offer a transformational business-led, skills, education, and innovation development from Primary education up to PhD level to support the clean energy sector. <p><u>Phase 1: Learning Hub</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase 1 Learning Hub has secured capital funding from NTCA of c£2million alongside the Town Deal and NCC contributions discussed previously at Board and planning and procurement is moving forward. Working with partners the SOBC has been approved, and the OBC is almost complete - it is due to be submitted this Friday, 27 May. • SR showed some sample images of the building - due for completion by Oct '23. <p><u>Institute</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase 2 Institute would focus on higher level skills, work-based training, workforce development, and research and innovation. • Both SOBC and OBC are being worked on and work on Phase 1 supports Phase 2 as well, and the demand-led study is nearly complete. • Key partners have been involved from the university sector, employers and NELEP. • SR showed some sample images of the building - due to open sometime in 24/25 in the town centre, subject to identification and securing a preferred site. • As part of the business case a number of possible opportunities are being reviewed for consideration that the ECI could provide as outlined in the slides. • Some stakeholder workshops have taken place, including with employers, and their feedback has been incorporated into the business case and this work continues. An interim OBC should be ready by the end of Jun. <p><u>Questions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JR - Confirmed that she had been involved in some of these discussions for both Phases and welcomes the exciting opportunities that the Campus offers for Blyth and the wider region. She asked if the workshop in Jun could bring together some of the stakeholders listed above to mobilise interest within HE practioners and to get the most out of those conversations that are currently being held individually. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SR noted that there would may be some logistical issues to doing that, but agreed with the principle. It may be possible to bring together some of the key players, or those activities with synergies. • RH - Felt it was great to hear such good progress is being made but did note the challenging timescales. He is keen to see the business case 	
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	<p>move on and welcomes the demand-led approach. The possibility of a training facility specifically for British Volt would have unique requirements but could be a significant opportunity for the North East.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SR reiterated that these are all just possibilities at this time and the next stage will help to firm up the focus of the project. <p><u>Appraisal (RS)</u></p> <p>RS outlined the appraisal report including the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The challenge in development timescales for two phases of the campus do not fully align with the shorter Town Deal funding deadlines for summary document submission hence the focus on establishing a robust business case at this stage which meets assurance requirements to secure TD funds as the project continues to develop, including any necessary conditions prior to the decision to proceed. • It is therefore important that the Board understands the positives and the risks to proceeding; though the report makes it clear that the project is of strategic importance and is well worth continuing to develop. • AF - Queried if NCC are funding the gap in the budget. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ RS confirmed that the project budget within the programme includes identified funding from a number of partners including NCC and NTCA, subject to necessary organisational approvals. The funding strategy will evolve as the project develops and could potentially include other contributions. • AF - Also recognised the significant competitive advantage that would come from working with British Volt. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SR stated that he has been working closely with their charitable arm, BV FutureGen Foundation to develop provision and support the longer-term developments. • AT - Welcomes the innovative end-to-end pathway from Primary School to PhD. • GG - Northumberland College is happy to be involved with this exciting and forward-thinking development. He acknowledged that there are a lot of options still to investigate. <p><u>Recommendation and conditions</u></p> <p>The Board approved the recommendation that this project proceed to the Outline Business Case, subject to the listed conditions/feedback.</p>	
7	<p>Comms Update (RS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A showcase event for business and the public is planned for in Summer 2022, potentially in the Keel Row shopping centre or on Market Place (with partner involvement). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The focus will be on the Cultural Centre, though there will be reference to the wider programme. ○ NCC will take on a 6 month lease of a unit in the Keel Row as a 'take over' space to advertise the projects and as a place to hold events. ○ Previously occupied by Poundland it will be refurbished to a basic level. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Initially it will be occupied on a part-time basis though this may be extended over time. ○ Other units are also available if more space is needed (such as that previously occupied by WH Smith). ○ Thanks were expressed to Northumberland Estates for their significant help in organising this. • Future activities to be delivered from the 'take over' space may include: displays and feedback, additional themed cultural pilot activities (such as for environment & ecology, living history or a photographic exhibition). • Press releases will also go out regarding Northern Gateway and the above events. • A newsletter is also planned for the future which partners can use to replicate and share joint messages and updates on the programme. <p><u>Comments</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members are open to the idea of holding a future meeting at the 'take over' space if possible. • Any members with ideas for the showcase should email RS or FF. 	ALL
8	<p>Forward Plan</p> <p>All slides presented today will be circulated to the Board.</p> <p>At the next meeting reports will be presented on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme wide updates • Project Highlight Reports • Blyth Bebside Connectivity - Strategic Outline Business Case – Internal Appraisal Report (TBC) • Northern Gateway Phase 2 - Strategic Outline Business Case – Internal Appraisal Report (TBC) • Communications Plan/Engagement Strategy 	RS
9	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>There were no items raised.</p>	
10	<p>Date and time of next meeting:</p> <p>Wednesday 29th June 2022 14.00 - 15.30</p>	