

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ECONOMY AND PLACE**BISHOPWEARMOUTH TOWNSCAPE HERITAGE SCHEME: TOWN PARK IMPROVEMENT PROJECT AND THIRD PARTY GRANT APPLICATIONS****1. Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members on a forthcoming Cabinet report to request approval of the delivery of the Town Park Improvement Project, delegated authority for the procurement of the Town Park Improvement Project, and delegated authority to make all third party grant offers, as part of the Bishopwearmouth Townscape Heritage Scheme funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). A change to the capital programme to include the HLF grant award of £1.9m is also required.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Council was awarded a grant of £1.9m from the HLF in June 2018 to operate a Townscape Heritage Scheme within the Bishopwearmouth Conservation Area. This grant is supported by 10% match funding from the City Council's Investment Corridor Programme. The Townscape Heritage Scheme will operate for five years until 31st August 2023 and will provide grant assistance for restoration and enhancement works to historic buildings in the area, carry out improvements to Town Park, and undertake a programme of events and activities to promote the heritage of the area.

Appendix A includes a map of the Townscape Heritage Scheme area.

- 2.2 The proposals for the Town Park Improvement Project were developed by the City Councils Landscape Design Service, and approved by the HLF as part of our second round funding bid. These proposals include creation of a new central seating area on the footprint of the lost historic streets, resurfacing, new tree and shrub planting, and new seating lighting and signposts. An interpretation panel will be installed highlighting the history of the area, and grant aided repair works will be carried out to the Minster churchyard walls.
- 2.3 The round two funding submission to the HLF included a target list of 22 potential building restoration and enhancement projects within the Townscape Heritage Scheme area, with a budget allocation of £1.2m for this element of the scheme. An average grant rate of 80% will be offered to owners and tenants of historic buildings, with estimated grant awards ranging from £12K to £177K, and 13 of the 22 potential projects expected to receive grant offers

of over £50K. Proposed grant aided works would include stonework restoration, window and roof repairs, and replacement shopfronts.

- 2.4 The Council's Cabinet adopted the revised Bishopwearmouth Conservation Area Management Plan as formal planning guidance on 20th June 2018. This contains the following objectives which would support delivery of the Townscape Heritage Scheme:

Management Objective 3 states that the Council will *"ensure that heritage and culture led regeneration underpins the sustainable economic future of Sunderland City Centre through the promotion of and successful delivery of a Townscape Heritage Scheme"*. This is supported by Management Proposal 3a which states that *"The Council will invest in repairs to historic buildings, reinstatement of traditional features and bringing property back into economic use through delivery of the Townscape Heritage Scheme"*

Management Objective 4 states that the Council will *"protect, enhance and maintain significant open spaces and streetscape/landscape features in Bishopwearmouth Conservation Area"*. This is supported by Management Proposal 4c which states that *"The Council will seek to improve the quality, attractiveness and accessibility of the Park to users through a range of environmental improvements, including the introduction of high quality surface materials, landscaping and street furniture. The Council will ensure the enhancement of Town Park is informed by its historic significance and seeks to improve the setting of key listed buildings and create a higher quality, more attractive, secure and usable public space"*

3. Current Position

Town Park Improvement Project

- 3.1 £423K has been allocated from the funding package to undertake the Town Park Improvement Project and £5K has also been allocated for the planned interpretation panel. Complimentary improvements in street lighting by Aurora and new signposting as part of the wider Investment Corridor Programme will also be delivered.
- 3.2 It is anticipated that the process of procuring a contractor to carry out the proposed works will take 3-4 months to complete, with an estimated start on site in Spring 2019, and works continuing until the end of 2019. Phasing of the works will take into account ecology constraints, weather conditions, and planned events at Sunderland Minster.

The indicative Town Plan Masterplan and visualisations are attached as Appendices B, C and D. Further detailed technical design drawings will be produced as part of the tender documentation.

Third Party Grant Applications

- 3.3 Part 4 FPR16 of the Council Constitution states that,

16.6 The approval of Cabinet must be sought before Chief Officer's provide assistance to any third party by way of loan, grant or guarantee of over £50,000 to any one body in any one financial year.

- 3.4 The Council has provided a scheme of governance to the HLF as part of our second round submission which includes the above provision. Since approval of our second round application in June 2018 we have revisited the proposed process for third party grant offers and the likely timetable for delivery for each of the building restoration and enhancement projects including the timeline for receiving, assessing and making a funding offer. This work has highlighted that a large proportion of the 22 potential projects, and almost all of the high and medium priority projects would typically require formal Cabinet approval before a grant offer can be issued. This coupled with the need to receive written HLF approval for any grant over £100K and any grant for one of the 9 high priority projects, means that a grant applicant could wait 3-4 months for a funding decision.

4. Consultation

Town Park

- 4.1 The proposed Town Park Improvement Project has been the subject of localised public consultation as part of the HLF funding bid preparation, including a walking tour event in January 2018, a consultation event in April 2018, a presentation to the Sunderland Civic Society in May 2018, and a display at the Sunderland History Fair in June 2018.
- 4.2 Further public consultation to a wider audience is intended to support our forthcoming application to the Secretary of State to undertake works within the designated village green. This is likely to include an event at a local venue to explain our intentions for the space and to receive feedback on the detailed plans.
- 4.3 Liaison will also be undertaken with local business operators, the project team for the High Street West public realm works, and potential developers of the Crowtree leisure site to take into account adjacent development proposals and minimise disruption to businesses and residents.
- 4.4 The proposals have been discussed with the HLF and suggestions taken on board in the evolution of the scheme. Final consent from the HLF to expend

the assigned budget on the public realm works will be confirmed prior to procurement of the construction contract.

Third Party Grant Applications

- 4.5 The Project Team have held detailed discussions with owners and tenants of the potential building restoration and enhancement projects, and explained the application process. Some negative feedback has been received regarding the complicated application process for third party applicants, which could deter potential applicants from applying for funding and lead to a delay in commencement of works. Simplification of the process and plain English explanations of the grant conditions were suggested as ways in which to mitigate this impact.

5 Conclusion

- 5.1 The Town Park Improvement Project is a key element of the Bishopwearmouth Townscape Heritage Scheme and will significantly improve this important space within the historic conservation area.
- 5.2 The authorisation of the Chief Operating Officer to make all third party grant offers would simplify the application process, reduce waiting time for funding decisions, and support the prompt commencement on site of proposed schemes in line with our project timetable. The application documents would still be scrutinised by the Project Team in line with the Townscape Heritage Detailed Scheme Plan and a delegated decision report prepared to evidence the funding decision made. In the majority of cases the HLF would also need to give written approval of the grant award before it is made, adding an additional level of scrutiny.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1 The Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider and comment.

7 Background Papers

Appendix A: Bishopwearmouth Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan

Appendix B: Summary of consultation responses received

Appendix C: Proposed revised boundary of the designated conservation area

Appendix D: Equality Analysis