

UPDATE ON COPELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL'S TOWN CENTRES PROGRAMME – THE GOVERNMENT'S FUTURE HIGH STREETS FUND OPPORTUNITY FOR WHITEHAVEN AND TOWNS FUND OPPORTUNITES FOR CLEATOR MOOR AND MILLOM

LEAD MEMBER: Mayor Mike Starkie
LEAD OFFICER: Pat Graham, Chief Executive
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WHAT BENEFITS WILL THESE PROPOSALS BRING TO COPELAND RESIDENTS?

Through the Corporate Strategy, Copeland growth priorities and the Economic Development Service Plan, the Council has agreed several projects and objectives to bring forward regeneration and growth in the Borough, including pursuing funding opportunities for investment in the towns. As part of the Governments agenda to level up the country – creating jobs and building stronger and more resilient local economies and communities – funding opportunities through Future High Streets Fund and the Towns Fund are potentially available to Copeland for investment in three of its towns.

The benefit to Copeland residents is the potential for significant funding into Whitehaven, Cleator Moor and Millom through Government, with support from public and private sector partners. The regeneration of our town centres will bring improved economic prosperity with a knock-on increase in jobs, new businesses and visitors to the area.

WHY HAS THIS REPORT COME TO FULL COUNCIL?

(e.g. Key Decision, Policy recommendation for Full Council, at request of Council, etc.)

The report presents an overview of current funding opportunities within the Towns Programme that are being pursued by the Economic Development team and the Council are asked to agree to accept external funding against current funding applications to enable immediate spend to meet deadlines should grant offers be forthcoming.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Council are requested to:

- a) Subject to (a) the applications being successful and (b) the Chief Executive in consultation with the Elected Mayor and Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee being satisfied with any grant conditions imposed that the proposed receipt of up to £24,000,000 against current applications to both the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and Sellafield Ltd Social Impact Fund to invest in our towns be approved with spend then being dealt with in accordance with schemes submitted and in accordance with contract standing orders and financial regulations and otherwise in accordance with the Council's constitution; and

- b) the composition of the Cleator Moor and Millom Town Deal Boards as required by the Towns Funds programme be noted and that Council confirms that the Copeland Borough Council Board member on each Board be confirmed as Councillor Hugh Branney and Councillor Felicity Wilson respectively.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Following a successful Expression of Interest in the Future High Streets Fund (FHSF), the Council was informed in July 2019 that its application had been selected to go forward into the next phase of assessment and were invited to develop a full business case for capital investment by the FHSF in Whitehaven.
- 1.2 The development of the Business Case focused on identifying the interventions, buildings and schemes that will offer the best opportunity to deliver our vision for Whitehaven, as set out in the EOI and to meet the FHSF criteria to renew and reshape the town driving growth; improving experience and ensuring future sustainability. The Full Business Case (FBC) holds those interventions within a Treasury Green Book business case model, outlining the Strategic, Economic, Financial, Commercial and Management cases underpinning our submission.
- 1.3 The FBC was originally due for submission at the end of May 2020, but due to the impact of Covid-19, this was extended to 5th June 2020, with a request for additional information on the impact of Covid-19 on the FBC.
- 1.4 In July 2020, MHCLG wrote to the Council offering both Cleator Moor and Millom grants of £500,000 to fund capital projects that can be delivered this financial year against the intervention framework as set out in the Towns Fund Further Guidance. The Council was required to confirm how it could spend the grant, achieving good value for money within the 2020/21 financial year.

2 DISCUSSION

- 2.1 The Whitehaven Future High Streets Fund scheme intends to create a more cohesive town that utilises King Street and the harbour as a united space and reinvents Whitehaven as one of the UK's premier coastal towns. As Copeland's principal town Whitehaven has the potential to become an "experience" town on the Lake District Coast, for people looking to achieve a work/life balance embracing clean energy, modern living, remote research, rural health, great leisure cycling opportunities and the outdoor and creative industries.
- 2.2 The intention is to bring in more footfall from residents using new services and leisure; from workers relocating businesses into the town and from visitors to the area that are coming to stay and experience the new opportunities on offer. This builds on the opportunities post Covid including local produce, health and wellbeing, rural/coastal housing, quality of life/work balance and the staycation market.

- 2.3 The following objectives were agreed as part of the strategic case:
Connecting Whitehaven:
- Objective 1: To visually and physically connect the retail centre and the harbour through creating through-routes and new modern arcades by February 2024
 - Objective 2: To increase footfall and improve pedestrian flow onto the main retail street by March 2024
 - Objective 3: To manage traffic flow and prioritise pedestrian access between retail and leisure areas, creating safe cycleway connections by March 2024
- Diversifying Whitehaven:
- Objective 4: To diversify the town centre by creating a broader mix of uses and space for start-ups and investment by December 2023
 - Objective 5: To increase the availability of modern living accommodation within the town centre, especially for younger generations, by December 2023
 - Objective 6: To increase footfall on weekends and evenings through developing the leisure and the night time economy by March 2024
- 2.4 The schemes to support these objectives include improvements to King Street public realm; the expansion of the Streetscapes scheme along Strand Street and the strengthening of pedestrian links between the harbour and primary retail street. New developments will include renewing a Grade II vacant retail space into multi-user digital community hub; the development of a Bike Bank Hub and harbourside bike themed café/ restaurant with hotel accommodation and the provision of low energy live/ work units for young professionals. We included two additional schemes within our “Do more” option to enhance the harbourside and repurpose empty shops on King Street.
- 2.5 The financial case outlined a total scheme cost for the preferred option of £24,575,780, with £1,658,131 already secured and agreed by Council, and further external funding applications to FHSF and Sellafield Ltd totalling £22,917,649, both of which are in process.
- 2.6 Regarding recent Towns Fund accelerated funding, the Council worked with partners to agree options against the immediate challenges raised by government, including:
- Improvement to or new parks and green spaces and sustainable transport links;
 - Improvements to town centres including repurposing empty commercial properties;
 - Demolition or site remediation where this will have an immediate benefit.
- 2.7 Both towns have identified projects that will address some of the immediate challenges under the first theme to improve facilities, green spaces and walking/running and cycling trails. These were submitted to Government in August 2020. The Executive on the 25th August considered a detailed report on the Towns Fund and this is available via this link as agenda item EXE 143 - <https://copeland.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=852&Ver=4>. As part of the governance arrangements to the Town Fund Boards the Council is required to appoint a member to each Board. The second

recommendation on this report asks Council to confirm Councillor Hugh Branny as the Council's representative to the Cleator Moor Town Board and Councillor Felicity Wilson to the Millom Town Board.

3 CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1 FHSF offers Whitehaven an exciting opportunity to reinvent itself as one of the UK's premier coastal towns – building on emerging opportunities in the “experience economy”. Whitehaven has the potential in a post Covid landscape to become an “experience” town for people looking to achieve a work/life balance embracing clean energy, modern living, remote research, rural health, great leisure cycling opportunities and the outdoor and creative industries.
- 3.2 The grant offer for this financial year to invest in Cleator Moor and Millom offers a real opportunity to offset some of the current challenges and provide a framework for the development of the emerging Town Investment Plans.

4 STATUTORY OFFICER COMMENTS

- 4.1 The Legal / Monitoring Officer's comments are: Receipt of external funding of this value is a decision of Council. It is not known at this stage what grant conditions will be attached to such funding hence final acceptance being delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Mayor and Chair of OSC. Spend will be dealt with in accordance with the grant applications submitted and the Council's constitution. Specific legal issues arising from individual projects will be dealt with at the appropriate time and particularly in accordance with contract standing orders and financial regulations.
- 4.2 The Section 151 Officer's comments are: Specific financial issues arising from individual projects will be dealt with at the appropriate time and particularly in accordance with contract standing orders and financial regulations. Detailed financial monitoring arrangements will be put in place to ensure expenditure is managed within budget and to ensure there are no long term financial implications for the Council that are not funded.
- 5.2 EIA Comments:
Regeneration developments and applications for large grant funding will be advised by the Council's Equality Scheme. It is anticipated that Equality Impact Assessments will be undertaken for each project as part of the business planning process.
- 5.3 Policy Framework:
The Council's Corporate Strategy, Growth Strategy and underpinning suite of Plans, Policies and Strategies shape our work on the local economy and its impact to our residents and our responsibilities and role as a District Council. The Corporate Plan states the Council's ambition to deliver town centre regeneration which is reflected in the existing Economic Development Service Plan.

5.4 Consultation:

The FHSF has been consulting consistently with a range of key stakeholders and targeted groups and communities, specifically young people and businesses. Our approach ensures stakeholders are and will be engaged in implementing the final scheme agreed with Government. We have a range of letters of support from key stakeholders including members of the Mayors Future Opportunities Group. Stakeholders have been consulted during the submission of the Town Fund checklists and the Council with its partners and Town Deal Boards will continue to ensure that our approach and subsequent business cases has engagement and consultation throughout.

6 RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS

- 6.1 Resources are held within the economic development service budgets. Where resource requirements exceed those already in place, they have been included within the grant applications. Staffing to deliver using these resources is a mix of existing staffing and posts funded with the external funding received. The request for additional resource against Whitehaven funding includes programme and project management. We anticipate all these externally funded posts will be employed by the Council.

7 HOW WILL THE PROPOSALS BE PROJECT MANAGED AND HOW ARE THE RISKS GOING TO BE MANAGED?

- 7.1 Each project is subject to the Council's Project and Performance Management Framework and will be project managed by the existing Economic Development team or by the identified resource that is included in each funding application. The existing team are APM qualified and new resource being recruited to deliver against programmes will be either qualified or prepared to qualify soon after taking up their new post.
- 7.2 Steering Group meetings are used by Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) to monitor progress and address risks and issues as they arise, plus a Risk Register is being held against each programme as they are developed and be regularly updated throughout, with monitoring reports issued to CLT, the Mayor and his Executive and partners and reported to members via the existing performance Management Framework and portfolio reports to Full Council.

8 WHAT MEASURABLE OUTCOMES OR OUTPUTS WILL ARISE FROM THIS REPORT?

- 7.1 The outputs include the creation of new jobs, diversification, new cycleways, improved facilities and increased investment in the Borough – all outputs will be monitored as part of each individual programme and recorded in Pentana.
- 7.2 The outcomes will be monitored within each key programme, with an overarching outcome of increased growth; greater diversity within Copeland's economic base and more employment and leisure opportunities for local residents

APPENDICES

None.