

Contact Officer: Jodie Harris

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

AD-HOC SCRUTINY PANEL - REGENERATION

Thursday 17th November 2022

Present:

Councillor Elizabeth Smaje
Councillor Andrew Cooper
Councillor John Lawson

Co-optees

In attendance:

Joanne Bartholomew, Service Director for Development
Simon Taylor, Head of Town Centre Programmes,
Development
Councillor Graham Turner, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for
Growth and Regeneration
Isabel Whitworth, Programme Manager, Town Centres
Zoe Stewart, Programme Manager, Local Centres

Observers:

Apologies: Councillor Yusra Hussain

- 1 Membership of the Panel**
Apologies were received from Councillor Yusra Hussain
- 2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**
That the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd September 2022 be approved as a correct record.
- 3 Interests**
No interest were declared.
- 4 Admission of the Public**
All items were considered in public session.
- 5 Deputations/Petitions**
No deputations or petitions were received.
- 6 Public Question Time**
No questions were received from members of the public.

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Local Centres Update

The Panel received an update on the Local Centres Programme, with an additional focus on Cleckheaton. Simon Taylor, Head of Town Centre Programmes - Development highlighted that:

- In March 2021, the Cabinet considered a report which proposed investing in town and village centres outside of Huddersfield and Dewsbury. The report was based upon an initial investment of £10m across the district.
- The Initial Cabinet report (considered 16th March 2021) proposed that 4 key centres – Batley, Cleckheaton, Heckmondwike and Holmfirth be the focus for the initial round of investment of £1.5m each.
- As part of the process of developing projects and delivering the local centres programme, Cabinet required master plans to be developed for each of the four identified local centres.
- Active engagement with citizens, businesses and local groups was vital to the development process, encouraging conversations about the place to help build up a picture across a number of themes.
- The aim was to develop a series of projects that are deliverable, whilst completing background work to ensure their success.
- A downturn in the UK's economy had affected the amount the Council could deliver due to rising costs.
- Consultation on the masterplan for Batley was underway and was due to be completed on 21st November 2022.
- The aim was to complete the masterplan work in early 2023.
- In parallel to the masterplan, the Council were developing a larger Levelling Up Fund (LUF) bid to central Government, whilst working on the key projects emerging in the process.
- Consultation in Batley covered a mixture of online, face to face and physical handouts, including staffed engagement exercises and events with local businesses.
- The amount of money required was in the region of £14-15m, therefore the focus was on Commercial Street only until subsequent funds were acquired.
- Heckmondwike was slightly behind due to technical reasons. Whilst initial master planning had been undertaken, this had been stalled slightly as some of the identified schemes required more detailed examination of the highway impacts.
- Officers had commissioned a model to collect the data enabling them to set a base line for deliverability. The output would feed into the next phase of the plan with a target date of spring 2023.
- In terms of the model, officers are looking at how to better utilise a large public space surrounded by busy roads. The aim was to improve the connection to the town which could involve removing part of the highway.
- The consultation work in Holmfirth started on 17th November 2022, with a similar practice to the work in Batley.
- Pre-stakeholder engagement with selected groups were taking place in the Holme Valley and were due to complete on 17th December 2022, with the aim for the master plan to be ready for Spring 2023.
- Of all 4 centres, Cleckheaton had progressed the most including having undergone public consultation on the planned masterplan.

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- Final approval was planned for December 2022 and work to develop and deliver the priority projects would begin thereafter.
- Officers were awaiting a funding bid to UKSPF to assist in the development of the priority projects in addition to the Council's Capital allocation.
- In parallel to delivering the priority projects, officers will continue the development of the other ideas to a deliverable standard ready for additional funding streams.
- Technical work was completed around each of the master plans; in Cleckheaton, spatial and architectural analysis, car parking studies, place standards work, socioeconomic data, a planning review and engaging with ward councillors and stakeholders all took place.
- A broad range of engagement activities took place, to encourage the local community and stakeholders to provide feedback. The feedback received demonstrated 62% of the responses agreed or strongly agreed with the proposals, with only 16% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.
- Further analysis of the feedback outlined the most supported projects to be Spen Bottoms, The Market and Savoy Square and the Park Entrance.
- On a site visit the panel were shown these locations and were presented with the plans to develop these sites to become an attractive and improved public space.
- Working with Howard Park Primary School further supported the prioritisation of the 3 projects, taking in views of the future generation.
- The next steps were to finalise the agreed masterplan and await the UKSPF announcement before progressing onto design work for Spen Bottoms and Savoy Square.
- Engagement throughout the process was to continue with the community throughout each project, as appropriate.

Following the presentation, the Panel asked several questions and put forward their comments in relation to:

- Funding, phasing, and timelines; would the Council's current budgetary pressures impact directly on the Local Centres projects?
- Principles of Local Government; due to the small windows of opportunity to gain grants, would the plans/business cases be ready to present?
- Public Art; an emphasis was placed on public art in Huddersfield, would it be given as an option for the small centres and had anything been showcased yet?
- Consultation: it was noted that there was good participation demonstrated from drop-in sessions and over 2000 hits were received online, but there were only 45 completed questionnaires. The Panel wanted to know how this could be adapted to improve outcomes, and would there be wider consultation in schools? Could there be a quick tick box exercise undertaken rather than a full questionnaire?
- Improving engagement; The need for involvement before there was a finalised plan. Concrete signage such as George Hotel hangings provided a good stimulus to get people engaged for example. How would officers improve engagement on key projects with ward councillors and other stakeholders to generate participation?
- Capturing further responses; concerns were raised in relation to the demonstrable numbers from engagement when applying for funding. Would there be a way to capture verbal feedback?

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- The Folk Festival proved to be a useful exercise for getting feedback, was there scope to make use of other heavy footfall areas such as supermarkets and events/festivals?

Officers responded to the questions put forward from the Panel starting with Simon Taylor, who stated that the project was still working with the £1.5 million originally allocated, however the funds now covered less than when the budget was set. The next phase was project development, which was due to take place in 2023, whereby the Council would appoint designers to work on Spen Bottom and Savoy Square. The process would take a few months and delivery of the project was expected towards the end of 2023. This would be dependent on accurate costings and adjusting aspirations, where necessary, as the project progresses. Due to the instability of materials for construction, showing a 30 to 40% increase over 2022, the Council would require further funding to deliver all projects. The proposal would be to develop and deliver one project, whilst keeping another developed ready to deliver when additional funding was secured.

With regards to the questions on public art, Simon Taylor assured the panel that public art was an option but had not yet been brought up with regards to Cleckheaton. Other projects such as Batley and Holmfirth had shown desire to display such art. The concept of public art had been brought forward and setup in the Cabinet report prior.

With regards to the questions on consultation, Isabel Whitworth, Programme Manager, Town Centres, advised that the Council had used various methods to capture all stakeholders including online and physical handouts. The outcome of finished questionnaires had been low, therefore officers had looked at ways to improve outcomes for future projects. Simon Taylor pointed out that the strategic part of projects didn't always grab the public attention, rather the design stage which was upcoming. Simon Taylor was confident the public were aware of what was going on, despite this not translating into the results.

Zoe Stewart, Programme Manager, Local Centres, noted Facebook advertisements had been used to create a quick response form for the consultation which achieved near to 100 responses. Consultation in schools had proved really useful; officers had reached out to hub co-ordinators to further expand talks in an age appropriate way.

To aid engagement, Simon Taylor noted using banners or boards around Savoy Square and the entrance to Spen Bottom to help advertise the projects as it did with the George Hotel. Officers agreed to liaise with the Communications Team and Ward Councillors to feed staged information to the public. Councillor Graham Turner, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Growth and Regeneration also highlighted the planters on New Street, Huddersfield, and how they demonstrated a timeline picture graph, to give a visual stimulus on the envisaged outcome and how long it would take to complete.

Simon Taylor was open to suggestions for future engagement, highlighting the merits of engaging in key stakeholder groups in the local community over a general consultation. It was also noted that a more efficient way to capture verbal evidence

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at various events would aid the collection of feedback. Simon Taylor assured the panel that the exercises that had been undertaken were a strong basis for funding applications. Learning from Cleckheaton, on the small centre work in Holmfirth, interaction with local community groups was undertaken and provided valuable sources of information.

Councillor Graham Turner highlighted the nature of the internet and social media being fast paced. There was a tendency to only comment of problems rather than highlight positives, therefore supported the idea of a yes or no tick box in future campaigns. Isabel Whitworth assured the panel that despite the 45 finished questionnaires, people were still coming forward to communicate their thoughts if they felt the need to. Zoe Stewart concluded by informing the panel of Holmfirth's next engagement exercise, and the use of a yes or no tick box, and to see how the results differ with responses.

RESOLVED: -That all officers be thanks for their attendance and Cleckheaton Town Hall for their hospitality and be asked to consider the following points in taking this work forward:

1. The Consultation exercises be extended to nearby schools.
2. Visuals, such as static Boards and bold posters, be placed in public locations in Cleckheaton to engage the public in designs and the timelines.
3. Information detailing the designs (i.e.- leaflets/posters) be displayed in local shops and businesses in Cleckheaton to help engage the public.
4. Consideration be given to the recording of informal and verbal feedback from residents to engagement.
5. The use of an online poll, with only one YES/NO response option, be used more to increase responses from residents to questions.
6. Stakeholder engagement sessions be promoted more and linked to local events.
7. The Council will ensure a business case is ready (to present when opportunities arise in reference to grants) with demonstratable numbers from engagement exercises.