

Public
Key Decision - No

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Market Towns Programme – Autumn Update
Meeting/Date: Cabinet – September 2022
Executive Portfolio: Executive Councillor for Jobs, Economy & Housing
Report by: Corporate Director (Place)
Ward(s) affected: Huntingdon, St. Neots, St Ives and Ramsey

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report provides the 2022/23 Q3 update on the Market Towns Programme (MTP).

The MTP is an ambitious programme of economic led interventions to support Huntingdonshire's town centres both recover from the Covid-19 Pandemic whilst also looking forward to renewing and reshaping our town centres and high streets for the future in a way that promotes growth, improves experiences and ensures sustainability. The MTP is underpinned by creating a renewed sense of place, igniting civic pride, and providing attractive new destinations for our residents and businesses alike. The longer-term ambition is to stimulate public and private sector investment, bringing forward future opportunities for jobs and skills.

The MTP is funded through a combination of external funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC), Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA), Huntingdonshire District Council Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and National Highways.

RECOMMENDATION UPDATE

Cabinet is invited to note:

- Progress on the Market Towns Programme (MTP) over the last quarter.
- That any reports will be brought back to Cabinet on a quarterly basis updating on any contracts that have been entered into through the previous Cabinet delegation.
- Latest update on MTP finances and resources.

1. PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update on activity across the strands of the MTP, on a town-by-town basis, the report also updates on funding opportunities particularly noting activity on the St Neots Fund Future High Street highways related projects, the planned wider engagement in the draft masterplans for St Ives, Ramsey and Huntingdon and the imminent external funding opportunities.

2. UPDATE ON MARKET TOWNS PROGRAMME

The section below provides an update for the MTP on a town-by-town basis.

2.1 ST NEOTS

2.1.1 Priory Centre & Quarter

The Priory Centre has an exceptional riverside location, which is well loved by the local community. However, it is not being utilised to the best of its ability. The Council have commissioned Mott MacDonalds to carry out high-level options analysis for the Centre to make the best use of its location, to investigate possible uses based on local need and to support its commercial viability.

The wider Priory Quarter has also been included within the commission, this is to carry out early high-level feasibility studies and any further work would require significant investment. Once this work is complete the Council will commence engagement process with the key stakeholders to consult on the options and gain any feedback to incorporate into the next phase of the project.

2.1.2 Old Falcon

The Old Falcon is a Grade II listed building and holds a prominent position in the Market Square. The building is privately owned and in a poor condition. If the building is left with no repair works carried out the Old Falcon will eventually fall into further disrepair.

To understand the full extent of the works, the Council have commissioned a full structural and condition survey that will be required to bring the building back into a viable economic use and to support the regeneration of the Market Town.

In the coming months, the Council will then commission an options report to outline the best use of the FHS's limited funding. These options may include using HDC's statutory authority to avoid further degradation to a Grade II listed building and any future proposals would require a full planning application as well as Listed Building consent.

2.1.3 Waterfront Riverside

The proposal would form part of the wider Priory Quarter and Priory Centre concepts. In essence the development of the wider Priory Quarter would allow landowners and stakeholders to seize the opportunity to actively engage the Great Ouse River through the development of a Walkway.

2.1.4 St Neots Transport Projects - High Street/Market Square/Road Bridge

In March 2022, Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC), Highways and WSP provided a series of outline design options for the High St, St Neots Road Bridge and Market Square. These options were based upon the location, technical survey results, engagement with utilities and bus surveys, constraints, available budget and considering what stakeholders and residents had identified as being important to St Neots from previous stakeholder and resident engagement.

A series of resident and stakeholder engagement events were conducted throughout May 2022, which were detailed in the Summer Update Report. The results of these engagements and the continuing collaboration with the Cabinet has allowed us to further refine the preliminary designs, which we expect to be able to share with stakeholders gaining further input prior to the request final approval of in the coming weeks. Approval of these designs is a key stage in the project, as this will allow us to proceed to the detailed design and procurement phase.

Discussions are also taking place with CCC to establish the most suitable contractual approach to procuring a contractor for the main works. Consideration of commercial arrangements for procurement and the legal arrangements between HDC, CCC and contractors are being progressed.

The target for the next phase of the transport projects in St Neots include detailed design to start in late 2022, procurement of contractors early 2023 and commencement of works in spring 2023. The target date for completion is summer 2024.

2.2 ST IVES

The Masterplan for St Ives was commissioned in the summer of 2021 and has been completed by Tetra Tech, this has been circulated to Ward Councillors and Town Councillors. There is a meeting on the 13th September with Ward Cllrs to hear first-hand their views on the plan and a further meeting on 26th September with the Town Council. In addition, the masterplan will be on the Council's website to enable wider engagement with the town's residents, businesses and stakeholders. Deadline for feedback on the masterplan should be received by the 28th October 2022.

The projects delivered under the Accelerated Programme have now completed in St Ives, these included improvements to the Public Convenience, Parklets and EV charging points for electric vehicles.

2.3 HUNTINGDON

The Masterplan for Huntingdon was commissioned in the summer of 2021 and has been completed by Tetra Tech, this has been circulated to Ward Councillors and Town Councillors. There is a meeting on the 13th September with Ward Cllrs to hear first-hand their views on the plan and a further meeting on 27th September with the Town Council. In addition, the masterplan will be on the Council's website to enable wider engagement with the town's residents, businesses and stakeholders. Deadline for feedback on the masterplan should be received by the 28th October 2022.

The projects delivered under the Accelerated Programme have now completed in St Ives, these included improvements to the Public Convenience, Parklets, EV Charging points for electric vehicles.

2.4 RAMSEY

The Masterplan for Ramsey was commissioned in the summer of 2021 and has been completed by Tetra Tech, this has been circulated to Ward Councillors and Town Councillors. There is a meeting on the 14th September with Ward Cllrs to hear first-hand their views on the plan and a further meeting on 28th September with the Town Council. In addition, the masterplan will be on the Council's website to enable wider engagement with the town's residents, businesses and stakeholders. Deadline for feedback on the masterplan should be received by the 28th October 2022

The projects delivered under the Accelerated Programme have to date included Parklet, Planters and Modern Waste Solutions. One of the projects, The Ramsey Civic Hub was

acquired by the Town Council and work commenced in July 2022, this project will facilitate the relocation of the Town Council and provide much needed office space in the centre of the town centre. Some work has been completed to planters in the town centre and this project needs to be completed. The other main project within the Accelerated projects is the Public realm project to the Great Whyte, this is linked to the funding application to the CPCA for the Local Growth Fund project, more detail is provided on this project in section 3 below.

2.5 PROJECTS ACROSS THE TOWNS AND UPDATE ON MARKET TOWNS TEAM

2.5.1 Smarter Towns

The Smarter Towns project will deliver a standard based Low Power Wide Area (LPWA) network within Huntingdon, Ramsey and St Ives. This will form the basis for the deployment of IoT devices by the council, businesses and community groups to create a rich data landscape of our market towns that can support business to become more efficient and provide data to help shape we best support our towns.

The base LPWA network will support the initial deployment of air quality and water level /flood sensors as a proof of concept to demonstrate its deployment and provide an additional source of data to support transport and housing strategy planning. The project will also support the economic development team in-ongoing exploitation work that will engage with local businesses to demonstrate how they can use this shared LPWA network to support their own business needs to contribute to a combined data picture which provides them added value. The exploitation team will then look to commercialise this data creating a tradable commodity which will generate revenue to pay for the ongoing operations of the team and the network.

The project will work with the network and sensors providers to understand the ability to deploy additional data collecting sensors into our market towns to help understand the usage of the high streets and surrounding areas.

This project has been paused for a period due to limited staff resources. It is planned that this project will re-commence in Q3 (2022/23). There was an initial funding allocation of £91,300 as part of the Accelerated Funding (awarded within £1.85m in January 2021).

2.5.2 Wayfinding Project

The Wayfinding project seeks to make use of the most appropriate information, communication and technology systems as a means of providing current information to residents, visitors and other interested parties in Huntingdonshire's Market Towns.

As part of the wider Market Towns Programme, the Wayfinding Project seeks to collectively enhance the 'resident and visitor' experience of the towns of Huntingdon, Ramsey and St Ives. The provision of branded, strategically located 'signage' providing accessible information seeks to

- Provide information regarding events, car parking, retail and services promotions in each of the respective towns
- Support travel into and out of the towns
- Support the economic recovery of the high street through an enhanced information system for all
- Support a shift toward more sustainable travel as outlined in the Local Transport Plan
- Provide a better visitor experience

The Project works include the installation of digital screens/infrastructure appropriate to the requirements of St Ives, Huntingdon and Ramsey. The actual deliverable will depend on need and local environment but could include:

- VMS signs/Parking Guidance configured and installed to show car park data and or traveller information
- Outdoor information screens configured with real time travel info or local information
- Indoor travel information screens.

Initial work undertaken in 2021/22 included discussion with local stakeholders, identification of types and location of 'digital signage' in each of the three towns as well as cost estimates for same. Subject to agreement, this project may be re-commenced. There is an existing £200k budget from within the initial Accelerated Projects award of £1.85m of January 2021.

2.6 MARKET TOWNS TEAM

In July 2022, two new members of staff joined the MTP, firstly a Project Manager whose main area of responsibility will be to deliver the St Neots Transport Projects and a Project Officer providing much needed support to the Team.

In addition to this we have completed successful recruitment and have appointed a Regeneration Programme Manager who is due to join the team at the beginning of October 2022.

3. FUTURE FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES AND DELIVERY:

3.1 LEVELLING UP FUND

In the past quarter a decision was made between officers and members not to pursue a Levelling Up Bid for Ramsey, this was due to a lack of a developed projects and the need to undertake more extensive engagement with stakeholders, businesses and residents to refine projects further.

3.2 LOCAL GROWTH FUND BID - RAMSEY GREAT WHYTE ENHANCEMENTS

The submission to the CPCA Local Growth Fund (LGF) seeks funding of £1.15 million for an overall project cost of £1.45 million was made in the spring 2022. The project which is contained within the Ramsey Masterplan (Draft) is an innovative initiative that seeks to revitalise the Great Whyte area of Ramsey

It consists of two complementary elements that will significantly enhance the overall physical, economic, and social vitality of this section of the Great Whyte. HDC will lead delivery in partnership with Ramsey Town Council (RTC), Ramsey Heritage Trust and CCC Highways and will procure design and build contractors.

Produce Hub

The new Produce Hub at the southern end of Great Whyte delivering up to 10 retail units for local producers, retailers and businesses in appropriate dedicated retail space appropriate for twenty first century agri-food producers. The Produce Hub will act as a catalyst for local food producers in Ramsey and wider Fenland area to promote and sell locally grown and harvested products and provide high value added 'home-farm' produce. The building will be temporary (10–15-year lifespan), engineered to sit above the High Lode culvert. It will be architecturally designed, sustainable, providing a focal space within the town centre.

Public Realm Enhancements

Delivery of circa 600 m2 public realm improvements wrapping around the Produce Hub including pedestrian-friendly zoning and traffic calming measures adjacent to the Clock tower.

This project is the first phase of re-imagining the Great Whyte focussing on a new commercial offer on fresh food and a revitalised town centre experience.

- 3.2.1 Both elements will deliver highly visible town centre improvements for residents, visitors and investors alike and will deliver a range of benefits including increase footfall, public realm improvements and town centre vitality, business start-ups, job creation, supporting healthier lifestyle choices. The dedicated space will contribute to a healthier lifestyle (ability to walk and cycle to a local market) and an enhanced sense of community and a destination for visitors.
- 3.2.2 In May 2022 the Council was informed that we had been successful with our EOI and that we could move to a full application which was submitted on 27th May. This was followed by a series of discussions with CPCA as to the availability of the funds for the overall package of submissions that CPCA had received and were deemed worthy of financial support had exceeded their budget.
- 3.2.3 During June, July and August ongoing discussions have been had with CPCA to optimise the level of support to be received by HDC from the LGF funding pot. At the time of writing the position is that the full HDC request (£1.15m) will be presented to the CPCA Business Board on September 12th for consideration and subject to approval this will be forwarded to the CPCA Board on September 21st for review and final approval.

3.3 UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND

An application was submitted to the CPCA at the end of July 2022 for a share of the UKSPF, funding to aid the delivery of the MTP was included as part of this submission as community & place is one of three UKSPF investment priorities, the other two being supporting local businesses and people & skills. The CPCA investment plan, includes interventions in Huntingdonshire. This was submitted to Central Government in August 2022 and the Council is currently waiting on the outcome of this application.

4. FINANCE UPDATE

The overall sources of funding for the MTP are shown below. All funding identified below has been secured and is subject to contractual obligations and must be spent within the agreed guidelines and allocations only.

Table 1: Overall MTP funding sources

Market Towns Regeneration		
St Neots Regeneration - Sources of Funds	£	Comment
Future High Street Funds (MHCLG now DLUHC)	£3,748,815	Formalised June 2021
HDC Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)	£4,829,943	As per HDC Cabinet decisions
CPCA	£3,100,000	As per Funding Agreement (Dec '21)
National Highways	£3,493,218	As per decision in November 2021
Sub-total	£15,171,976	
CPCA Market Towns Initiative (Huntingdon, Ramsey and St Ives)	£3,000,000	(Accelerated delivery £2.652M, Masterplanning £0.3M, Footfall cameras £42k).
Sub-total	£3,000,000	
TOTAL	£18,171,976	

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Engagement will be taking place from August 2022 until the end of October 2022 on the masterplans for St Ives, Huntingdon and Ramsey with Ward Councillors and Town Councillors, as part of this activity there will also be engagement with Councillors and Parish Councils across Huntingdonshire. The engagement programme will include invitations to the wider rural communities of the Market Towns.
- 5.2 The Council's website has also been updated to provide up to date information on the MTP and includes a copy of the masterplans for each of the three towns (St Ives, Ramsey and Huntingdon) and an online form will enable wider feedback to be received. This feedback will inform the direction of travel taken in further engagement. Copies of the masterplan will be available at Town Council offices to enable residents without access online to be able to view these documents.
- 5.3 It is anticipated that there will be regular engagement by updating the website, liaising with key stakeholders, local businesses and residents and through liaison with the Town and Parish Councils.
- 5.4 The Market Towns team also wish to establish steering groups in each of the towns to support future engagement and to improve upon the stakeholder lists that we hold for each of the towns.

6. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

- 6.1 The Panel discussed the Market Towns Programme Report at its meeting on 7th September 2022.
- 6.2 Following questions from Councillor Pickering and Councillor Gardener, the Panel heard that the options being developed for the St Neots Priory Quarter are merely adding detail to the work already undertaken. The Panel were further assured that the team were using all previous studies available to them and were not seeking to redo

previously undertaken work but to add detail to it and to ensure that it reflects current market rates in a rapidly changing economic climate.

- 6.3 The Chair requested, following comments from several Councillors, that details of additional costs incurred by the consultancy work at St Neots, be included in the next update of the Market Towns Programme.
- 6.4 In response to a question from Councillor Corney, the Panel were advised that the outcome of the application for the CPCA Local Growth Fund for funding for Ramsey was anticipated to be determined within the coming week and that this would be communicated once known.
- 6.5 It was clarified to the Panel that no one project had been ready to start at the change in administration earlier in the year and that the detailed work now being carried out had been anticipated.
- 6.6 Following further questions from Councillor Corney and Councillor Martin, it was clarified that the work in the four market towns was specific to the town and that further consultations would be carried out where appropriate for specific projects.
- 6.7 Councillor Howell observed that the plans published on the website were not easily accessed. The Panel heard that hard copies would be displayed in public buildings within towns, the Panel were also advised that the team were agreeable to any further suggestions of additional suitable areas for this.
- 6.8 Councillor Harvey expressed concern that despite the work being done by the team funding may not become available due to the economic climate. The Panel were reassured that by undertaking research and planning, projects would be ready to start as and when funding is secured. Although funding is subject to availability, it was hoped that it would continue to be available in the long term.
- 6.9 Following questions from Councillor Wells and Councillor Gardener the Panel heard that that the team would be liaising with both town and parish councils to maximise communications channels.
- 6.10 The Panel heard, following a question from Councillor Pickering, that options for the Old Falcon premises in St Neots were being developed and that a paper would be brought into the democratic cycle of meetings in the Autumn.

7. KEY IMPACTS/RISKS

- 7.1 There are a number of risks associated with delivering an ambitious programme of this size and complexity, the notable risks are:

7.1.1 Budget management risk

To ensure that financial regulations are being complied with, the MTP carries out continual reviews of the finances supporting the programme delivery. The projects that sit within the MTP are at various stages and therefore, as options work progresses and high-level costings begin to emerge, we will review the individual projects viability and programme impacts as a whole, identifying any areas of risk. The construction industry as a whole has seen materials and labour costs significantly increase in cost over the past 12 months. Inflation continues to increase. Therefore, as we move from design into delivery any decisions on proposed options will require agreement that they can be funded within the approved Market Towns programme budget. Mitigation: We will continue to monitor the programme funding profile and anticipated spend against budgets, updating to Cabinet on a quarterly basis.

7.1.2 Programme Timescales risk

This is an ambitious programme of delivery, with the funding for St Neots of £3.748m from the FHSF required to be spent by March 2024. The CPCA funding of £3.1m also has a deadline of March 2024, they recognise the strategic importance of this programme and it is anticipated there will be some flexibility in the delivery timescales. National Highways have also indicated that they expect their funding of £3.49m to be spent by September 2024. Mitigation: A detailed programme plan will be developed from design to delivery, this will be continually reviewed will incorporate funding milestones, claim dates and anticipated receipt of funds.

7.1.3 Programme Resources risk

The MTP requires different experience and external technical support at various stages of the project delivery. The programme itself has multiple projects which have to be managed simultaneously identifying all interdependences across the programme. There is significant internal and external stakeholder management and detailed consultation with partners and resident/ business groups. This could result in competing priorities across organisations that will require careful consideration. Mitigation: As part of the project a detailed resources plan and communications strategy with stakeholders has been developed to ensure the management of expectations and information being shared in a timely manner. The HDC's website is regularly updated with the progress across the core programme sites.

7.1.4 Reputational risk

The MTP is a high priority for the Council and therefore monthly reporting, governance and timely decision making are critical to ensure that the programme is successfully delivered. Mitigation: The programme governance and reporting lines will be continually monitored throughout the next 12 months to ensure that the key programme milestones are managed and achieved.

7.1.6 Changes to Planning Legislation risk

Recognising the Government's ambition to overhaul the planning process, through the lifetime of this programme such changes may result in delays to the process. Mitigation: This situation will be continually monitored, and any impact will be reported to on a quarterly basis to Cabinet.

7.2 A full MTP programme risk register is in place along with individual project risk registers.

8. LINK TO CORPORATE PLAN 2022-2026

8.1 The delivery of the MTP aligns to Huntingdonshire District Council's Corporate Plan which sets out the Council's objectives, key actions and performance measures, the recently revised 2022/23 Corporate Plan is a transitional, interim plan at the start of a new four-year administrative term. The Council's objectives are:

- Enhancing employment opportunities and supporting businesses
- Supporting the needs of residents
- Improving the housing situation
- Strengthening our communities
- Tackling climate change and caring for the environment

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The Council, based on previously successful funding bids and Cabinet decisions has entered into a number of grant agreements with associated delivery and outputs frameworks. These are outlined in the Cabinet paper of Summer 2022.

- 9.2 All Funding Agreements and contracts are subject to review by HDC legal team and senior officers and members as appropriate. Over the next period it is anticipated that several Funding Agreements / Contracts may require legal review.
- 9.3 The LGF funding bid (as noted above) does not place the Council under any legal obligation. Should this be successful the CPCA would communicate the details of the grant agreement in due course. Legal advice will be sought to support this as required.
- 9.4 As noted above, consideration of procurement and commercial arrangements in relation to the St Neots Transport (HDC / CCC / Contractors) have commenced. These will be progressed in the coming weeks.
- 9.5 There will be a requirement for ongoing legal input to support the further development of project options, these may include Old Falcon, Priory Centre and Quarter. Other areas include future land and property advice relating for example to acquisitions and may be required should there be any contractual disputes. Noting there are none currently within the programme.

10. EQUALITIES

- 10.1 The Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 10.2 Good planning and effective regeneration can improve environments and opportunities for communities experiencing disadvantage. Planning which does not adequately engage with or consider the needs of local communities is unlikely to improve their life chances and may further entrench area-based disadvantage.

11. ENVIRONMENTAL

- 11.1 The Council has a duty to ensure we continue to promote an environmentally positive recovery in Huntingdonshire following the impacts of COVID 19. We also have a duty to deliver sustainable place making. In December 2021 the Council adopted a core set of environmental principles which the new Administration are intending to review and further develop.
- 11.2 The Council has direct control of only a tiny proportion of all the carbon emissions within Huntingdonshire, but we can adopt a key role to influence the district, demonstrating good practice whilst setting policies and strategies to influence businesses and communities to tackle climate change whilst enabling sustainable living and growth. These principles are embedded within the MTP.

12. NEXT STEPS

The key next steps are:

- To conclude options, feasibility and design works on various St Neots projects, with updates being brought back to Cabinet quarterly.
- To gain feedback on the draft masterplans for Huntingdon, Ramsey & St Ives during 2022/23 Q2 and Q3.
- To respond to any queries arising from LGF submission in Autumn 2022.
- To respond to any queries arising from the UKSPF submission in Autumn 2022.
- To continue an increased level of stakeholder engagement, particularly with Ward Councillors and Town and Parish Councils across all strands of the MTP.

13. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Pre-Procurement Financial Breakdown (Confidential - Part 2)

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Report to Cabinet (FHSF) 13th February 2020 can be found [here](#)

Report to Cabinet (FHSF) 28th July 2020 - EXEMPT

Report to Cabinet (Market Towns Accelerated Programme) 18th March 2020 can be found [here](#)

Report to Cabinet (FHSF) 23rd February 2021 can be found [here](#)

Market Towns Programme Spring 2022 Update to Cabinet, 17 March 2022 can be found [here](#)

Market Towns Programme Summer 2022 Update to Cabinet June 2022 can be found [here](#)

Breakdown of Finances (Part II Appendix)

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