

Report to:	JOINT MEETING EXECUTIVE CABINET / OVERVIEW PANEL
Date:	14 February 2024
Executive Member:	Councillor Jack Naylor – Executive Member (Inclusive Growth, Business & Employment)
Reporting Officer:	Julian Jackson, Director of Place Nicola Elsworth, Assistant Director Investment, Development and Housing
Subject:	LONG TERM PLAN FOR TOWNS FUNDING AND ASHTON TOWN BOARD
Report Summary:	The report provides an update on the selection of Ashton as one of the 55 towns nationally to receive £20m to invest in local regeneration priorities over a 10 year period, subject to confirmation of further details from Government. Approval is also sought for the formal establishment of the Ashton Town Board and commencement of the draft Ashton Town Plan. A further decision by the Executive Member for Inclusive Growth, Business & Employment to formally accept the funding will be required once the full terms of the Grant Funding Agreement are available.
Recommendations:	That Executive Cabinet be recommended to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Note the allocation of £20m from the Long Term Plan for Towns for Ashton; (ii) Approve entering into the formal agreements for the receipt of funding, subject an Executive Decision Notice once the full terms of the Grant Funding Agreement are available; (iii) Approve the proposed governance arrangements for the Ashton Town Board and the programme of works associated with the preparation of a draft Ashton Town Plan; (iv) Enable the Director of Place to manage the programme of works associated with the preparation of a draft Ashton Town Plan to inform the first meeting of the Ashton Town Board.
Corporate Plan:	Key aims of the Corporate Plan are to provide opportunities for people to fulfil their potential through work, skills and enterprise and to ensure modern infrastructure and a sustainable environment that works for all generations and future generations. The interventions that can be supported in Ashton by the Long Term Plan for Towns Funding will deliver against these aims in the areas of job creation, modern infrastructure and a sustainable environment.
Policy Implications:	The interventions that can be supported by the funding in Ashton will support the policy aims of the Borough's Inclusive Growth Strategy 2021, the Housing Strategy 2021 to 2026, Tameside Climate Change & Environment Strategy, the Council's growth priorities agreed at Council February 2020 and the draft Greater Manchester Places for Everyone joint development strategy.

**Financial Implications:
(Authorised by the
statutory Section 151
Officer & Chief Finance
Officer)**

This report seeks approval for Ashton Town Board and commencement of the draft Ashton Town Plan.

On 1 October 2023 it was announced that Ashton was one of the 55 towns selected nationally as part of the Long Term Plan for Towns programme to receive £20 million of funding from Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) of which 75% will be Capital and 25% Revenue and this will be released over a seven year period with flexibility to spend it over a ten year period.

The Council will receive £0.050m of capacity funding to support establishment of the Town Board 1 April 2024 in accordance with grant conditions

On 1 April 2024, DLUHC will provide a further £0.200m of capacity funding to support the development of the Long-Term Plan which will be led by external support.

Appropriate advice should be sought from STAR where applicable to ensure compliance with procurement regulations and to also ensure that value for money is achieved and is clearly evidenced.

**Legal Implications:
(Authorised by the
Borough Solicitor)**

The proposed Governance arrangements for the Ashton Town Board appear to be consistent with the Guidance referenced at **Appendix 1**. In particular, Annex A of the Guidance sets out the Governance requirements. It is important that regard is had to the guidance and legislation referenced to ensure that governance arrangements are, and continue to be, robust as the Council will be the responsible body for the grant funding the subject of the report.

Appropriate governance will need to be put in place to ensure that the Council is aware of the nature and extent of its involvement in the Board, including the decision making processes, to ensure that the contract is managed correctly.

A robust system of checks and measures will need to be put in place to ensure that that any monies held by the Council are used in accordance with the contractual framework and that the Council is not held solely liable for any issues arising from the Board and its decisions in connection with the use of monies under the contractual framework.

Risk Management:

Risks associated with the project are set out at Section 7.

Access to Information:

Not confidential

Background Information:

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Mike Reed – Head of Major Programmes



Telephone: 07974111756



e-mail: mike.reed@tameside.gov.uk

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Council has identified the Ashton Growth Corridor, comprising St Petersfield, Ashton Moss and Ashton Town Centre, as one of its priority areas to deliver growth and implement the objectives of the Tameside Inclusive Growth Strategy 2021-26. The location forms part of the Greater Manchester (GM) Eastern Growth Cluster, which is one of six Growth Locations across GM that will deliver new development, create and retain jobs, offer better job opportunities, enable training and skill development to increase the number of residents in employment. The major development opportunities within the Ashton Growth Corridor are St Petersfield, Aston Moss, and Ashton Town Centre.
- 1.2 On 1 October 2023 it was announced that Ashton was one of the 55 towns selected nationally as part of the Long Term Plan for Towns programme to receive a 10-year endowment-style fund with £20 million of funding of which 75% will be capital and 25% revenue.

2. LONG TERM PLAN FOR TOWNS

- 2.1 The Long Term Plan for Towns is a new government regeneration programme to support improvements to towns in the UK with a ten year commitment of funding and the creation of new local decision making bodies, Town Boards. The guidance released on 18 December 2023 (**Appendix 1**) sets out a requirement to establish the Towns Board by April 2024 with a Town Plan prepared for submission to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) by 1 August 2024. The government will then make funding available to support the interventions set out in the Town Plan, subject to assessment of the Plan by DLUHC.
- 2.2 Within the financial year 23/24 the Council will receive £50,000 of capacity funding to support establishment of the Town Board by 1 April 2024 and commence the planning and initiating of community engagement. On 1 April, DLUHC will provide a further £200,000 of capacity funding to support the development of the Long-Term Plan, including additional community engagement activity to support the submission of the Town Plan before 1 August 2024.
- 2.3 The £20m revenue and capital funding (split 25% revenue and 75% capital) will be awarded to the local authority, acting as accountable body on behalf of the Town Board, and be released over a seven year period with flexibility to spend it over a ten year period. Town Board will need to be properly constituted to assure good governance and respect for the purpose and objectives of the fund. The Levelling Up Funds Local Authority Assurance Framework will apply, requiring the Council's s.151 Officer to provide assurance updates around the proper administration of the funding, including in regard to conflict of interest, subsidy control, procurement, counter fraud and risk.
- 2.4 Additional support will be provided by the Towns Taskforce that will be established as a unit of DLUHC to support the delivery of Town Plans. In particular, the Towns Taskforce will aim to:
 - oversee good governance and delivery;
 - support towns to unlock investment and public support;
 - make it easier for towns to repurpose empty high street shops by reforming licensing rules and supporting more housing in town centres; and
 - to attract private and philanthropic investment into the 55 towns, championing the investment opportunities to building on the endowment-style funding granted.
- 2.5 The Towns Taskforce will report directly to the Secretary for State for Levelling Up and the Prime Minister.

3. EXISTING ASHTON REGENERATION PROGRAMME

- 3.1 The Council has secured £19.9m from the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) for Ashton Town Centre. The specific interventions being funded via the LUF have been prepared in the context of the emerging wider strategic vision for Ashton Town Centre. These interventions are critical to unlocking the comprehensive redevelopment of the Town Centre as well as helping to deliver a catalytic economic and social impact for the local community. The works funded via LUF are focused on commencement of the refurbishment programme for Ashton Town Hall; public realm improvements, with a focus on the Market Square; and enabling works on the former interchange site. These interventions will provide the initial stage in the regeneration of the Town Centre with LUF funding work required to complete by 31 March 2025.
- 3.2 The LUF projects in the Town Centre are further supported by interventions under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) Communities and Place investment priorities for completion by 31 March 2025, including the Ashton Creative Improvement District and the re-purposing of part of Ashton Market Hall.
- 3.3 The St. Petersfield Masterplan (2021) has been completed to provide the long term strategy for the delivery of new development across an area of Council owned sites. The area is identified for the development of a mix of uses including residential and additional employment space in the form of a hub for innovation and the growth of the digital, creative and tech sector in the long term, to complement the completed Ashton Old Baths scheme, whilst also delivering increased town centre residential development in the short term. As part of the UKSPF Local Business (Small and medium-sized enterprise, SME Workspace) investment priority, £1.215m has been allocated for repurposing works and repairs at Ashton Old Baths.
- 3.4 Ashton Moss is a significant employment development site with potential to provide growth on space for Tameside's manufacturing and engineering sectors due to the current lack of available development space in the Borough whilst also providing an opportunity to attract inward investment. The site provides a significant opportunity to deliver new employment space for advanced manufacturing and materials science uses, alongside greater engagement with Higher Educational Institutions. A development framework for the Ashton Moss Innovation Park was prepared by the Council working with the private sector landowners and approved by Executive Cabinet in November 2023.
- 3.5 The award of Long Term Plan for Towns Funding to Ashton provides a significant opportunity to continue the existing regeneration programme beyond 31 March 2025 when all LUF monies will have been utilised.

4. ASHTON TOWN BOARD

- 4.1 The guidance notes that the Town Board must be chaired by a local community leader or local businessperson with the membership requirements set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Town Board Required Membership

Required Membership	Notes
Parliamentary representatives	The relevant local MP(s) whose constituencies sit within the boundary of the town must sit on the Town Board.
Local councillors	In unitary authorities, there should be two councillors from the authority.
A senior representative from the police	It is expected that this will be the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), though subject to the agreement of the chair, a local senior representative from the police can act as

	an alternative, which would be more appropriate given the arrangements in GM.
Other membership tailored to local context	This is at the Chair's discretion and the guidance is non-prescriptive in terms of these requirements

- 4.2 The Town Board will be responsible for developing the Town Plan and reviewing this prior to submission to DLUHC. The local authority are required to act as secretariat to the Town Board.
- 4.3 There is a requirement for the Town Board to be established by 1 April 2024 and be responsible for:
- Identifying the issues and priorities to focus on within the Town Plan, including supporting a process of ongoing community engagement.
 - Working with the Council to develop the Town Plan, setting out how local partners will use their knowledge, powers, assets and new funding to deliver for their communities.
 - Identifying opportunities for Board members to utilise specific powers to deliver the Town Plan.
 - Identifying opportunities to bring in additional investment.
 - Overseeing the delivery of projects set out in the Town Plan.
- 4.4 The Ashton Delivery Group was established in 2022 to oversee the delivery of regeneration in Ashton Town Centre; this group will be repurposed as the Town Board to avoid duplication. It is proposed that Phill Brown is asked to initially undertake the role of Chair of the Town Board, as an experienced local community leader with extensive local business experience. The membership of the Town Board, in addition to the mandatory requirements set out above at Table 1, will be agreed with the Chair prior to the first meeting of the Town Board.
- 4.5 Due to the requirement that the Town Board should be established by April 2024 and the impact of local elections and the associated pre-election period, it will be necessary to hold a first meeting in March 2024 where the proposed Terms of Reference (**Appendix 2**) can be considered for approval.
- 4.6 There is a requirement that the Council act as secretariat for the Town Board. It is noted that there is £50,000 of capacity funding available to support the establishment of the Town Board and this will support the Council's Democratic Services function with this additional responsibility.

5. ASHTON TOWN PLAN

- 5.1 The Town Plan will need to comprise a ten year vision, which clearly identifies the longer-term priorities for the town, and a three year investment plan as an annex. The Town Plan should be a long-term, strategic document, including the strategic case for change, outcomes and objectives the town is trying to meet and how these align with the priorities of the local community, clear evidence of how stakeholders have been engaged to date and how that engagement will continue, and the high level delivery milestones and overview of potential future interventions. The three year Investment Plan annex should set out the interventions and powers the Town Board wishes to use over the three years for each investment theme and how these will address the outcomes set out in the ten year vision.
- 5.2 The development of a draft Ashton Town Plan, utilising the £200,000 of capacity funding, will be undertaken as follows:
- Draft vision and objectives for the regeneration of Ashton Town Centre over the next 10 years prepared within the context of the Long Term Plan for Towns programme

and taking account of the various studies, strategies and projects undertaken in Ashton over recent years.

- Map out the opportunities within Ashton for support via the Long Term Plan for Towns funding.
- Identify a strategy for the delivery of these opportunities, including timescales and phasing.
- Identify areas where the Long Term Plan for Towns funding can support in the attraction on further public and private investment over a 10 year period.
- Prepare a draft Ashton Town Plan for consultation/engagement based on the identified steps above.
- Formal approval of a final Ashton Town Plan prepared for submission by 1 August 2024.

5.3 The initial work to prepare a draft Ashton Town Plan will draw on existing commissions completed or underway, specifically the projects currently being delivered via LUF and UKSPF and the Ashton Town Centre delivery strategy in receipt of funding from Homes England via the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), as approved by Executive Cabinet in September 2023. The preparation and approval of the Ashton Town Plan within a short timescale of five months will require some additional specialist support in relation to consultation and engagement. To ensure that the final Ashton Town Plan is community led it is proposed that specialist external support is procured, utilising the £200,000 of capacity funding, in support of a consultation exercise that will need to take place in June 2024 following the May local elections. This will inform a final Ashton Town Plan for approval and submission by 1 August 2024.

6. NEXT STEPS

6.1 The existing regeneration programme for Ashton will provide the starting point for a Town Plan that complies with the Long Term Plan for Towns guidance. The Town Board will have a duty to engage with local people to finalise the Town Plan that will be assessed by DLUHC as part of the process of releasing funding. It is therefore important that work to prepare a compliant Town Plan is commenced in early 2024, building on the existing programme and recent strategies/studies to provide a clear set of interventions to meet agreed priorities.

6.2 The process to set up the Ashton Town Board will be commenced with the intention to hold the first meeting of the Board by the end of March 2024 to ensure it is formally established by 1 April 2024. The first meeting of the Board will confirm appointment of a Chair/Vice Chair, consider the draft Terms of Reference for approval and agree a programme of works associated with the preparation of the Ashton Town Plan for formal approval and submission by 1 August 2024.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

7.1 The main project risks associated with delivery of the Long Term Plan for Towns in Ashton have been identified in the table below.

Risk Area	Detail	RAG Rating	Mitigation	RAG Rating
Programme	Lack of time to establish Town Board and prepare a Town Plan before Summer 2024		Repurposing of the existing Ashton Delivery Group and early preparation of a Town Plan.	
Programme	Lack of resource capacity to undertake		Apply adequate resource to the project	

	workstreams in line with expectations.		to ensure programme adherence. Requirements for additional resource will require review following recent grant awards.	
Procurement	Lack of capacity in the consultancy sector to undertake any required works.		Early engagement with STaR procurement to understand the most appropriate procurement routes.	
Financial	Conditions attached to funding agreement may not be acceptable.		Early engagement with DLUHC in relation to terms of conditions.	
Financial	Insufficient budget to complete the scope of works required.		Early engagement with internal Council teams and external partners to clearly understand requirements.	

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The delivery of the interventions via the Town Plan will support the ongoing regeneration of Ashton and support the delivery of national, GM and Tameside strategic policies, including the Tameside Corporate Plan and Tameside Inclusive Growth Strategy. On-going performance and reporting on any capital works will be provided via the Strategic Planning and Capital Monitoring Panel as part of the Council's Capital Programme.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 As set out at the front of the report.