

Report to:	EXECUTIVE CABINET
Date:	24 November 2021
Executive Member:	Councillor Oliver Ryan – Executive Member (Finance and Economic Growth)
Reporting Officer:	Ian Saxon – Director of Place Gregg Stott – Assistant Director, Investment, Development & Housing
Subject:	ASHTON TOWN CENTRE LEVELLING UP FUND
Report Summary:	The report provides an update on the successful bid by the Council to the Levelling Up Fund for Ashton Town Centre and seeks approval to progress the Ashton Town Centre Regeneration Programme. A further decision by the Executive Member for Finance and Economic Growth to formally accept the funding will be required once the terms of the Grant Funding Agreement are available.
Recommendations:	That Executive Cabinet be recommended to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Note the successful £19.87m Levelling Up Fund bid for Ashton Town Centre (Appendix A refers); (ii) Delegate to the Executive Member for Finance and Economic Growth the approval for entering into the formal agreements for the receipt of Levelling Up Fund monies once further documentation is received from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and reviewed by Legal and Finance, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and Economic Growth; (iii) Enable the Director of Place to manage the programme of works associated with the Levelling Up Fund, the Town Centre Regeneration Programme and to drawdown and incur all Levelling Up Fund expenditure related to delivery. On-going performance and reporting will be provided to Strategic Planning and Capital Monitoring; (iv) To approve the use of £4.8m from the GM Mayors Challenge Fund (MCF) associated with the Ashton Streetscape and Ashton South projects as match funding to the Levelling Up Fund.
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 will be supported by the Levelling Up Fund will deliver against these aims in the areas of job creation, modern infrastructure and a sustainable environment
Policy Implications:	The proposed interventions will support the policy aims of the Council's Inclusive Growth Strategy 2021, the Council's growth priorities agreed at Council February 2020 and the emerging draft

Greater Manchester Places for Everyone joint development strategy.

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

The report provides details of the recently announced successful levelling up grant fund bid of £ 19.87m for Ashton Town Centre.

Table 1 section 2.6 provides the component schemes that were included within the bid. In addition, the bid included an allocation of £ 4.8m match funding via existing approved Mayors Challenge Grant schemes (awarded by GMCA) that will support the public realm, walking and cycling proposals.

The Council awaits the related grant terms and conditions for the levelling up grant. These will require appropriate due diligence once received to ensure the grant is utilised, monitored and profiled in accordance with the related terms whilst also ensuring the key outcomes and milestones are delivered.

An evaluation will also be required on any flexibility in the proposed allocation of the grant against the component schemes within table 1, and compliant use of the related match funding within the terms of the Mayors Challenge Fund grant agreement.

Appropriate advice should be sought from STAR where applicable to ensure compliance with procurement regulations for the associated component schemes within table 1 and to also ensure that value for money is achieved and is clearly evidenced.

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

At this stage this is a high level report to update members on the progress being made with regards Ashton Town Centre in light of the recent funding announcement.

At this early stage the Council has not been provided with any of the terms attached to the funding.

As soon as this information is known the necessary due diligence will be undertaken to ensure that the council is aware of any liabilities and requirements which accompany the funding to ensure that the funding is spent appropriately and delivers the maximum benefit.

It is already known that an element of match funding will be required and therefore the options to provide this will need to be considered and ensuring that the terms in relation to any funds to be used as match funding are also complied with.

Risk Management:

Risks associated with the project are set out at Section 4.

Background Information:

Appendix A	Outcome of Levelling Up Fund (Round 1
-------------------	---------------------------------------

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 Ashton Town Centre as one of its growth priorities, supporting delivery of the Tameside Inclusive Growth Strategy 2021-26 in making our town centres hubs for living, culture, employment and services supporting a sustainable retail sector. The town centre also forms part of the identified Eastern Growth Corridor taking in Ashton St Petersfield, Ashton Moss and Ashton Town Centre to deliver high innovation growth.
- 1.2 Once a leading destination for both local and out-of-town shoppers, Ashton Town Centre has been identified as being no longer fit for purpose, with a large number of shop closures, and footfall has continued to decline.
- 1.3 The Town Centre has undergone improvements in recent years, with the Council's ambition evident through the significant investment of c£60m under the Vision Tameside programme that has delivered a new transport infrastructure, enhanced digital connectivity, learning facilities, the Council Head Office and public realm. Other key successes include the development of the St Petersfield site and refurbishment of Ashton Old Baths to enhance Ashton's digital sector and commercial office offer as well as improvements to the Market Hall.
- 1.4 However, despite the investment observed in the Town Centre in recent years, fulfilling the objectives for the regeneration of Ashton cannot be maximised unless the existing issues and barriers are addressed.
- 1.5 The Council has engaged with the owners of the Arcades and Ladysmith Shopping Centres to better understand the potential for change. A survey led by the Shopping Centre owners in 2020 evidenced the need for the redevelopment of the Town Centre, in response to barriers including:
 - Lack of diverse offer: 45% of respondents said investment in better leisure facilities would encourage them to visit the town
 - Lack of employment opportunities: 40% of respondents would not live in the town centre due to a lack of employment opportunities.
 - Varying quality of public realm and disconnected town centre: 84% of respondents would not live in the town centre, identifying the town centre environment as a contributing factor
 - Poor maintenance of existing assets: 69% of respondents consider the market & square to be either average or poor
- 1.6 Previous public consultation undertaken by both the Council and the owners of the Ladysmith and Arcades Shopping Centres indicates there is support from local residents for significant intervention to rejuvenate the Town Centre.

2. ASHTON LEVELLING UP FUND BID

- 2.1 As part of the March 2021 budget, the Government announced £4.8 billion of 'Levelling Up Funding' ('The Fund') over four years (up to 2024-25), committed to a holistic, place-based approach to funding projects and programmes across the country. The 'Fund' is a joint venture between the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), Department for Transport (DfT) and the Treasury and is open to single tier Councils and District Councils in two tier areas, Counties and Combined Authorities. The Fund will provide investment in projects that require up to £20m of funding. However, there is scope for the Fund to invest (between £20m and £50m) in larger high value transport projects, by exception. The Council submitted a bid of £19.87m for Ashton Town Centre to the Fund on 18 June 2021. On 27 October 2021 it was announced that the bid had been successful and the Council would be awarded £19.87m (**Appendix A** refers)

- 2.2 The bid and the specific interventions proposed within it have been prepared in the context of an emerging wider strategic vision for Ashton Town Centre. The interventions proposed are critical to unlocking the comprehensive redevelopment of the Town Centre and integrating with other as part of a coherent vision, completing of the final phase of Vision Tameside. This in turn will help deliver a catalytic economic and social impact to the local community.
- 2.3 The items identified within the bid to the Fund aim to address the key priorities identified in this engagement and building on the investment delivered in the Town Centre to date focused on:
- Land remediation and enabling infrastructure works on the former interchange site
 - Walking/cycling and public realm improvements
 - Support the restoration of Ashton Town Hall
- 2.4 This has been set within the context of emerging wider Town Centre masterplanning work and will provide the enabling works to act as a catalyst for significantly accelerating delivery of the comprehensive transformation of the Town Centre and unlock its full potential.
- 2.5 The lack of enabling works that are the primary focus of the interventions to be supported by the Fund significantly inhibit the Council's ability to deliver the further comprehensive regeneration of the Town Centre to attract further investment, failing to meet the regeneration objectives for Ashton.
- 2.6 The interventions that will be supported by the Fund are set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Proposal	Description	Funding £'m
Land remediation and enabling works at the former interchange site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Remediation and service diversion works to the former transport interchange site; and ▪ Unlocks the site for future development and helps to facilitate further private sector investment and change at The Arcades and Ladysmith Shopping Centre sites. 	5.3
Ashton Streetscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Public realm improvements along Albion Way to enhance spatial links across the north of the town centre. 	6.2
Ashton South	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provision of public realm improvements, additional cycle routes and cycle parking across the south of town centre; and; ▪ Refurbishment of the Market Square. 	5.0
Restoration of Ashton Town Hall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Funding towards phases 1 and 2 of the restoration of Ashton Town Hall following closure in 2015; and ▪ Supports restoration and re-purposing of Ashton Town Hall as a mixed use site, subject to further funding to complete internal works. 	3.4
TOTAL		19.9

- 2.7 The proposed walking/cycling and public realm improvements, as part of the interventions, are already successful recipients of in principle funding from the Mayors Challenge Fund (MCF), securing a total of £4.8m that will act as formal match funding. The monies secured as part of the Fund for the Ashton Streetscape and Ashton South projects will enable delivery of a wider intervention that complements existing schemes being progressed.

3. ASHTON TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION PROGRAMME

- 3.1 The delivery of the interventions supported by the Fund will be progressed as part of a wider Ashton Town Centre Regeneration Programme. This will involve consultation and collaboration with partners to coordinate the preparation and adoption of an Ashton Town Centre Strategic Framework, including St Petersfield and strategic transport infrastructure.
- 3.2 The Council is finalising a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and associated Terms of Reference with the owners of the Arcades and Ladysmith Shopping Centres in the Town Centre to be supported by a Working Group. The purpose of this group will be to explore the scope for the redevelopment of the two shopping centres as part of a wider plan to regenerate the Town Centre whilst supporting the Council's priorities for growth.
- 3.3 Subject to further due diligence and viability assessment the potential has been identified for delivery of c470 new homes of a range of types and tenure, 8,750 sq.m of commercial spaces, a new Health and Wellbeing hub, with 8,500 sq.m of retail space retained. The spatial transformation north and south of the Town Centre will address the poor connectivity and permeability between the Town Centre and the surrounding areas, with provision of additional cycle routes, public realm improvements and traffic improvements integrated with the wider Bee Network encouraging sustainable travel modes.
- 3.4 The interventions supported by the Fund and the wider Ashton Town Centre Regeneration Programme are designed to be an economic driver that delivers a genuine levelling up opportunity supporting national, GM and Tameside strategic policies. Contributions will accrue from the quality of housing, enhancing sustainable travel, and the regenerating Ashton as a modern hub.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 4.1 The main project risks associated with delivery of the Fund interventions and Ashton Town Centre Regeneration Programme have been identified in the table below.

Risk Area	Detail	RAG Rating	Mitigation	RAG Rating
Procurement	Lack of capacity in the consultancy sector to undertake the work.	Yellow	Early engagement with STaR procurement to understand the most appropriate procurement routes.	Green
Financial	Conditions attached to funding agreement may not be acceptable.	Red	Early engagement with DLUHC in relation to terms of conditions.	Yellow
Financial	Insufficient budget to complete the scope of works required.	Red	Early engagement with internal Council teams and external partners to clearly understand requirements.	Green
Programme	Some sites not in Council ownership / control, but rests with private landowners. May impact on ability to deliver outputs sought.	Yellow	Existing relationship the major private sector land owners being formalise through MoU.	Green
Programme	Lack of resource capacity to undertake workstreams in line with expectations.	Yellow	Apply adequate resource to the project to ensure programme adherence.	Green

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The interventions supported by the Fund and the wider Ashton Town Centre Regeneration Programme will support delivery of the Council's strategic priorities as set out in the Tameside Corporate Plan and Tameside Inclusive Growth Strategy.
- 5.2 The funding secured provides a significant financial contribution to Ashton Town Centre and provides a proactive and positive response to the impact of the recent COVID-19 pandemic in terms of economic recovery and future inclusive growth.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

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