



Growth, Infrastructure & Housing Select Committee agenda

Date: Thursday 25 March 2021

Time: 10.00 am

Venue: MS Teams

Membership:

Z Ahmed, D Barnes, D Carroll (Chairman), S Chapple, M Knight, D Knights, N Marshall, L Monger, G Moore, R Newcombe, C Poll, R Raja, B Roberts, C Rouse and M Winn (Vice-Chairman)

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| Agenda Item | Time | Page No |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| 1 Apologies for Absence | 10:00 | |
| 2 Declarations of Interest | | |
| 3 Minutes | | 5 - 12 |

To agree the minutes of the growth, infrastructure and housing select committee meeting 28 January 2021 as correct record.

- | | | | |
|----------|---|--------------|----------------|
| 4 | COVID 19 and local economic recovery To receive an update from cabinet members on Covid-19 and local economic recovery in Buckinghamshire. | 10:05 | 13 - 18 |
| | Contributors: Martin Tett, Leader of Buckinghamshire Council Steve Bowles, Cabinet Member for Town Centre Regeneration Lisa Michelson, Service Director Economic Growth and Regeneration | | |
| 5 | Future High Street Fund To consider a report on the Future High Street Fund Programme. | 10:35 | 19 - 22 |
| | Contributors: Steve Bowles, Cabinet Member for Town Centre Regeneration Lisa Michelson, Service Director Economic Growth and Regeneration Claire Phillips, Head of Strategy and Partnerships | | |
| 6 | The local authority planning process and the Local Enforcement Plan To receive an update on planning enforcement and local plans. | 11:05 | 23 - 28 |
| | Contributors: Warren Whyte, Cabinet Member for Planning and Enforcement Darran Eggleton, Head of Planning Policy and Compliance | | |
| 7 | Date and time of next meeting Due to the elections taking place on 6th May 2021, this is the last Select Committee meeting before the new Council. Dates of future meetings to be advised. | | |

For further information please contact: Jemma Durkan on 01494 421635, email democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk.



Growth, Infrastructure & Housing Select Committee minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Growth, Infrastructure & Housing Select Committee held on Thursday 28 January 2021 via MS Teams, commencing at 10.00 am and concluding at 12.10 pm.

Members present

Z Ahmed, D Barnes, D Carroll (Chairman), S Chapple, N Marshall, L Monger, G Moore, R Newcombe, C Poll, R Raja, B Roberts, C Rouse and M Winn (Vice-Chairman)

Others in attendance

S Bowles, I Darby and M Tett

Apologies

D Knights

Agenda Item

1 Declarations of interest

There were none.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

3 Covid-19 and local economic recovery

Members received an update from the Leader of the Council, Martin Tett, and the Cabinet Member for Town Centre Regeneration, Steve Bowles, on Covid-19 and local economic recovery in Buckinghamshire. Also in attendance to update Members on economic recovery was Ian Barham, Partnership Manager at Bucks LEP, and Philippa Batting, Managing Director at Buckinghamshire Business First (BBF). The update outlined the lockdown situation since the last meeting and quoted the Office for Budget Responsibility's estimated statistic that UK gross domestic product (GDP) would be down 11% for 2020 compared to 2019. Local data suggested that Buckinghamshire's economy had experienced a similar drop in GDP. Data collected estimated that 7% of private sector firms in Buckinghamshire had cash reserves of under one month which equated to 2,100 firms, and it was also estimated that 38%

of businesses had experienced lower turnover than normal. In contrast, a small number of businesses had experienced an increase of their turnover.

The number of Buckinghamshire residents claiming 'out of work' benefits remained high at 15,110 in November 2020 which was an increase of 9,570 compared to March 2020. This claimant rate remained one of the lowest of all the 38 LEP areas and was at an average of 4.6% compared to the 6.4% national average. It was noted that these figures were made up of residents that may not have been unemployed before or worked in specialised industries. There was significant aviation employment in the north of Buckinghamshire, with workers commuting to Heathrow and Luton, and it was likely to take a relatively long time for this industry to return to normal. The hospitality, events and tourism sectors were also an ongoing concern due to being in lockdown for most of the year and these sectors employed 22,000 people in Buckinghamshire.

Further business support packages had been announced, including the extension of the furlough scheme, following the third lockdown. Business rate payers who had been forced to close due to national or local restrictions may have been eligible for the Local Restrictions Support Grant (LRSB) and/or the Buckinghamshire Discretionary Grant top-up payment. Businesses impacted by restrictions that were unable to obtain support through the LRSB were able to apply for the Bucks Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG). This grant intended to support businesses that did not pay rates or had no rateable premises which may have been the case for those self-employed. The grant was applicable to businesses that had suffered a minimum 30% loss of income during November 2020 compared to November 2019 and businesses could apply again to cover December 2020 compared to December 2019. The deadline to apply for December's grant was 31 January 2021. The same ARG was also available for January 2021. The amount awarded was tiered based on the number of employees the business had and included single individuals, and funds were being distributed across a range of sectors. The scheme had received positive feedback from those businesses unable to claim from Government schemes. The Council was already considering the recovery proposition for when lockdown ends and discussions were ongoing with Government about supporting Buckinghamshire. This would be challenging due to the Government's focus on recovery in the north.

Town centres would be different in the post-Covid future and the Council was considering how to assist high street recovery. Town Centre Regeneration Boards had been set up in Chesham and High Wycombe with a membership of the relevant Cabinet Members, local Members, Town and Parish Council Members and representatives from the public sector. It was felt that the Chesham master plan and High Wycombe regeneration plan both needed re-thinking as post-working practices may require more flexible office space that was not full time. Under the MHCLG Future High Streets Funds programme, High Wycombe had been allocated £11.8m out of its £17.2m bid. The bid had been based on projects pre-Covid but the pandemic was accelerating trends which the bid sought to address and so many were still applicable but a reviewed was needed in order to meet the reduced bid.

Following the update, Members had questions and were advised that:-

- Most community halls were not eligible for the Bucks ARG but there were some exceptions for halls that employed staff, had community shops or cafes. The Council had put deadlines on applications due to payments being on a monthly basis and there was a need to know how much budget was committed to inform the next month's budget. Retrospective audits of ARG applications were also being carried out.
- All information on the schemes was on the Buckinghamshire Council's website or via the customer service centre for advice.
- The focus was on business recovery and employment recovery through re-skilling. Social care issues had been lobbied at central Government for the past 6-12 months which had received a good response with costs being met through support grants.
- Discussion was ongoing regarding regeneration in town centres and market towns. The future was uncertain but it was acknowledged that more remote working may impact towns that had grown around commuter points into London. The town centre plans from the previous District authorities needed to be reviewed to ensure they reflect changes in the business environment.
- The recent Government announcement that committed £760million in support to East-West rail plans did not explicitly include reference to the Aylesbury spur which was key so that the network could be accessed and full benefits realised. The Leader and the Aylesbury MP, Rob Butler, had both written to the Government to reiterate the importance of the spur.
- Superfast broadband coverage in Buckinghamshire was 96% by premises which was not the same as geographical coverage. Current use of the internet (e.g. streaming and remote learning) had moved on from the superfast infrastructure in place. Increasing capacity would be a massive undertaking in terms of cost and engineering due to the need to replace copper cables with fibre. The Government had committed £5bn towards national upgrade programmes and a team within BBF was working to see where these funds would be allocated. The Government Minister had indicated there would be a national prioritisation towards the north of England and economies that were lagging.
- There were electric vehicle charging points at the Gateway and the former County Hall. Discussion was underway with a private company that would potentially double the amount of electric vehicle charging points in Buckinghamshire. It was acknowledged that developing the infrastructure would reassure those considering the purchase of electric vehicles. There were resource limitations on what the Council could do to support garages switch from servicing petrol vehicles to servicing electric vehicles.
- Buckinghamshire Council's capital programme had been inherited from the sovereign councils which was now being re-evaluated as some of the ideas were from 3-5 years ago. The post-Covid environment also needed to be considered. £100m borrowing capacity would be proposed to Council which would be used to fund new schemes from the recovery programme with a

potential for match funding. New schemes had not yet been considered in the past 12 months due to the re-allocating of staff to support the Council's Covid work but the intention was to start developing new schemes.

- The Council would not be able to support residents that had increased home insurance costs due to home working.
- Following Brexit, contacting HMRC was challenging due to a lack of staff. HMRC were recruiting in an attempt to rectify this. It was suggested that Members raised any concerns with their MP.
- In High Wycombe, the re-opening of the River Wye and the removal of the flyover would need to be carefully considered as part of any long-term project. The reality of this project would be incredibly complex and would require a business case to be demonstrated. Moreover, the flyover was incorporated into the roof of the Eden Shopping Centre underneath and so works would hugely disrupt retail and significantly harm the High Wycombe economy. Due to this being a complicated topic and one that had received questions from the public, the Chairman suggested that the Future High Streets Fund and regeneration projects be added to the work programme for further discussion.
- The Council was looking at the properties it owned across Buckinghamshire and considering proposals on their future usage.
- The Cabinet Member wanted the High Wycombe Regeneration Board to work together cohesively to produce a strategy for the town centre. One of the areas of improvement was Frogmore which was linked to the Dandara application for the Chiltern shopping centre. Potential ideas were suggested on how town centres could attract footfall.

Ian Barham and Philippa Batting were invited to provide any further comments related to the activities their organisations had carried out. Bucks LEP was carrying out its Economy Recovery Plan which had three phases: React. Respond. Rebound. The plan was currently in the first and second phases. Looking ahead to the third phase, Bucks LEP believed the Chancellor's March budget would be heavily related to Covid. The Respond phase propositions were looking at the high growth sectors and high performance technologies (electric vehicles, management and battery technologies) which would be centered around Silverstone. Education and training would need to be developed to support this. The Innovation Centre at Westcott had opened in Autumn 2020 and proposals for a DISC hub facility were being developed to be cited at the Venture Park. Retraining and redevelopment had also been focused on in the Buckinghamshire Recovery Plan and, as part of this, the Aviation to Screen Skills programme had been extended into a national programme and being supported by DWP.

BBF had recorded 52,104 business assists in the nine months prior to 31 December 2020 supporting businesses with queries and problems. By comparison, the previous year's figure was 34,000. £6.7m grant funding had been distributed which was in addition to funding that had already been discussed at the meeting. The assistance from BBF had led to the creation of 712 new jobs and the introduction of 311 new products or services to the market. BBF was working with a broad spectrum of

businesses and one of the biggest concerns was the increased number of businesses that had seen costs increase during the pandemic which was challenging the viability of the business. These increases had included PPE provision, broadband upgrades and furlough support. Moreover, in January 2021 the Government had introduced the option for employees to request furlough from their employer which meant employers had to balance order fulfillment and employee satisfaction. Aside from initial challenges on rules of origin checks and reported extra shipping costs, the impact of Brexit was yet to emerge and it was difficult to disentangle Covid issues with Brexit ones. It was expected this would become clearer over the coming weeks. BBF had seven members of staff in place to proactively contact businesses to see if they required any assistance with importing and exporting. BBF were running a pilot with five of the council's Community Boards (Beaconsfield & Chepping Wye, Beeches, North West Chiltern, South West Chiltern & High Wycombe) to help participants develop skills required to start their own business. Regarding skills, BBF had 83 enterprise advisors working with secondary schools around careers provision and also had support in place for SEND and PRU schools. The annual skills show had been held virtually this year and attracted over 5,000 visitors, and included speakers from McAfee and ESRI.

In response to a Member's question, the Committee was advised that the Community Board pilot offered the opportunity to reach out to local residents who may be considering a business start-up thereby extending the reach and impact of BBF and the programme. The BBF scheme would help ensure that individuals had access to a broad spectrum of support and advice depending on each person's circumstances.

Members thanked the Leader and the Cabinet Member for the update, and also thanked Ian Barham and Philippa Batting for their attendance, update and the work they were carrying out across Buckinghamshire. The Chairman also thanked the Members for the questions they had put forward.

4 Temporary accommodation

Members received an update from the Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness, Isobel Darby, on the temporary accommodation provision in Buckinghamshire. The Council had a statutory duty to provide accommodation to persons and households who the Council had reason to believe were homeless, eligible and of priority need. When these thresholds were met, or there was reason to believe these thresholds were met, there was an immediate duty to provide accommodation. There were seven temporary accommodation sites across Buckinghamshire and currently 161 statutory homeless households on the housing register. 95 mainly former rough sleepers had been accommodated due to the pandemic and there were currently five known rough sleepers in Buckinghamshire. Each known rough sleeper had been offered accommodation. At the time of the meeting, there were around 4,700 households seeking housing via Bucks Home Choice. Of this figure, 600 were people aged over 55 seeking older person accommodation and over 900 were households who were considered to be overcrowded.

Around 30% of homelessness was caused by the loss of private rented accommodation. The Government were looking at how better protection could be put in place for private renters. Another key cause of around 30% of homelessness was an eviction from a parent or relative. In these cases, the Council tried to mediate to prevent this from occurring as long as this was a safe option for the potential applicant. There were two types of temporary accommodation:

- Section 188 which was an interim arrangement whilst officers investigated the circumstances
- Section 193 once enquiries were completed and found the homelessness was unintentional and cannot be relieved. Section 188 accommodation automatically became Section 193 accommodation once the investigation had been concluded.

The update included some examples of accommodation in Saunderton, Griffin Place, Chesham and Taplow. Accommodation was currently being built in Desborough Road, High Wycombe. This building comprised of 58 one bedroom flats of modular design construction and would be ready to open in Summer 2021. As at June 2020, Buckinghamshire Council had 278 households in temporary accommodation. For comparison purposes, this was measured as persons per 1000 households and was as follows:-

- Buckinghamshire 1.28
- South East 2.82
- England 4.18
- London 17.69

Following the update, Members had questions for the Cabinet Member and were advised that:-

- The Council was mindful of the potential for private rented accommodation evictions to increase but the service was in a good position to manage this.
- It was a noted trend that some London Boroughs had allocated a portion of their temporary accommodation in Buckinghamshire which meant that Buckinghamshire Council's service would likely need to assist in future. This had the potential for Buckinghamshire Council's adult and social services to become involved.
- The accommodation being built in High Wycombe provided a self-contained flat, had its own front door and was fitted to a high standard. Noise transfer between each apartment would be mitigated through a void space and insulation. Each apartment was also triple glazed. When the project was first considered, officers had inspected a similar modular building design in Ladywell, Lewisham, and had been impressed by the quality and lack of noise transference.
- The Council was trying to assist break the cycle of rough sleeping by helping those with high needs such as mental health issues or alcohol and drug

additions. The purchase of a property was being completed to offer temporary accommodation in these high need cases.

- There was a national home swapping website that meant individual users could make arrangements to swap accommodation. To use this, each user would need to have either a long-term or permanent tenancy. Registered providers also assisted with cross-boundary moves.
- The former District authorities had changed their policies whereby a new applicant would not automatically become a high priority in the banding if mediation was available as an option.
- Consideration could be given to moving the older person accommodation age bracket from 55 to 65 however it was challenging to know when the right age to move would be. One of the benefits of having the age set to 55 was that it had the potential to release a family home to a waiting household sooner.
- It was difficult to keep track of those that had refused the service's offer of temporary accommodation but the team monitored these as best as possible.

Members thanked the Cabinet Member for the update and congratulated the service for the work they had done to reduce the number of rough sleepers in Buckinghamshire. The Committee saw merit in a site visit being arranged in future to visit the temporary accommodation being built in High Wycombe (subject to Covid restrictions).

5 Work programme

As had been discussed earlier in the meeting, an item regarding the Future High Streets Fund would be added to the programme to be considered at a future meeting.

6 Date of the next meeting

The next meeting would be on 25 March 2021 at 10:00am.

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Report to Growth, Infrastructure & Housing Select Committee

Date: 25 March 2021

Reference number: N/A

Title: COVID-19 and Local Economic Recovery Update

Relevant councillor(s): Martin Tett – Leader; Steve Bowles – Cabinet Member for Town Centre Regeneration

Author and/or contact officer: Lisa Michelson, Service Director Economic Growth and Regeneration

Recommendations: For the Select Committee to note; the continued local economic impact from the Covid-19 pandemic, the update on business support packages provided and funds allocated, summary of relevant announcements made at Budget 2021 and updates on local economic recovery activity within the Leader’s and Cabinet Member for Town Centre Regeneration portfolios.

Economic Development

Local economic impact and the third national Covid-19 lockdown

1. The country remains in its third lockdown period although from 8 March restrictions have started to lift with children and students returning to face-to-face education in schools and colleges as part of the government’s four-step roadmap back to a more normal life.
2. Buckinghamshire Council’s partnership with Bucks Business First (BBF) and Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership (BLEP) and collective resources enable continued collation of intelligence and understanding of the local impact on the Buckinghamshire economy thus far and further intelligence is summarised below.
3. According to ONS Business Impact of Covid-19 survey (wave 23), in mid-February 2021, 73% of firms in the UK were trading whilst 25% had paused trading. The trading status of Buckinghamshire firms is estimated to be broadly in line with the national picture. The same survey reports that in mid Feb 2021, 46% of UK firms reported having lower than normal turnover for this time of year, with 9% reporting increased turnover. There is considerable

variation by sector with 79% of hospitality firms report reduced turnover, compared to 26% of IT firms. For Buckinghamshire, in mid February, an estimated 43% of private sector businesses were experiencing lower than normal turnover for the time of year equating to approximately 12,600 firms, an increase on previous estimates made at the end of the year for 11,000 firms to be affected. The survey also reports that in mid February, just under a third of UK companies estimate that they have less than three months worth of cash reserves with 'other service' businesses and hospitality sectors part of this grouping.

4. Based on the ONS BICS, we estimate that in mid February 2021, approximately 660 registered businesses in Buckinghamshire were at severe risk of insolvency, and a further 4,800 were at moderate risk of insolvency. This is an increase from previous estimates at the end of 2020, of 440 businesses being at risk of insolvency and 4,050 at moderate risk.
5. On the jobs front, the number of Buckinghamshire residents claiming 'out of work' benefits remained high with 14,955 residents claiming in December 2020 but which represented a fall of 155 residents between November and December 2020 (but up 9,415 from March 2020); the claimant count is highest in Wycombe constituency area (6.4%). The number of young people (aged 16-24) claiming has increased at a greater rate than other age groups. At the end of December 2020, 13% of Buckinghamshire employees were on furlough, slightly higher than the national and South East averages of 12% and an increase from the October figure of 8% in Buckinghamshire and the national average of 7%. Again, there are variations between sectors but hardest hit is the hospitality sector with 47% of its workforce furloughed compared to 13% across all industries.
6. There are approximately 48,000 self-employed people in Buckinghamshire with 30,900 identified by HMRC as being eligible for financial support via the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS). There have been three rounds of SEISS funding and 54% of those eligible in Buckinghamshire claimed tranche 3 funding up until the end of December, compared to 58% nationally. Overall, more than £1.75million has been paid to self-employed people.
7. Buckinghamshire businesses had secured 14,560 government-backed loans up to 10 January 2021 with a value of £683m. This represents 47% businesses in Buckinghamshire securing loans as a proportion of registered businesses, compared to 55% nationally. The average value of loans secured by Buckinghamshire firms is £47,000.

Update on Support Initiatives for Business

8. There remains extended financial support grants for businesses to compensate them for loss of business from the emergency and the resulting third lockdown. The Council continues to be in a strong position with its partners to deliver an effective response to our businesses.
9. Business rate payers who are forced to close due to national or local restrictions may continue to be eligible for any or all of the following; the Local Restrictions Support Grant (LRSB)(for closed businesses) until 31 May 2021, a closed business lockdown payment until 31 March

2021. These grants are being administered by the Council and the latest grants announced by the government on 22 February are now being paid to businesses.

10. The amount of grant will vary according to the circumstances of each business but a closed grant is available (16 Feb to 31 Mar) depending on the rateable value (RV); £0-15,000 rateable value: grant of £2,096; RV of £15,001-£50,999: grant of £3,143 and RV of £51,000 and over: grant of £4,174. As previously reported, applications can still be made for LRSB for retrospective periods when businesses were told to close and non-essential retail premises are still eligible if they continued to offer delivery and click and collect services where items were pre-ordered without entering the premises. Businesses who chose to close due to lack of trade are not entitled to this grant or those that remained open and were not instructed to close.
11. As previously reported, businesses which have been heavily impacted as a result of the restrictions and not able to get support through the LRSB scheme, could apply for the Bucks Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG). This closed on 28 February 2021 and over 2,800 businesses in Buckinghamshire employing more than 7,600 people have now received these local 'safety net' grants. A £1,000 grant was also available for wet-led pubs (50% of sales came from alcohol rather than food) who have been impacted by the pandemic and this scheme closed on 28 February 2021.
12. The Council with its partners has worked hard to distribute the funds as quickly as possible and maximise the benefit of the support available to businesses. This is illustrated in recently published Government data which shows that as at 18th January, Buckinghamshire ranks 8th out of 265 local authorities for which data is available for its distribution of ARG. The table below sets out the total allocations in Buckinghamshire to date (5 March 2021).

| | No. of Grants Paid out | Amount Paid out |
|--|------------------------|-----------------|
| Local Restrictions Support Grant (LRSB) (Open and Closed) from November 2020 to 5 Mar 2021 | 7768 | £ 12,945,532 |
| Wet-led Pubs | 192 | £ 192,000 |
| Buckinghamshire Discretionary payment grant 'Top up' payment to LRSB (December to date) | 2396 | £ 2,614,056 |
| Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) ROUND 1 (Lockdown 2 Nov) | 1535 | £ 2,659,000 |
| Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) ROUND 2 (December) | 2241 | £ 5,601,750 |
| Additional Restricts Grant (ARG) ROUND 3 (Lockdown 3 January to date) | 1901 | £3,203,750 |
| Total (to 05 March 2021) | 16033 | £ 27,216,088 |

Budget 2021 and national economic recovery

13. Following the announcement of the Government roadmap out of the crisis, the Chancellor also announced further support measures in Budget 2021 which took place on 3 March 2021.

This included an extension of furloughing to September 2021 and an extension to the UK wide Self Employment Income Support scheme to September 2021, schemes benefiting Buckinghamshire businesses as set out above. The government also confirmed eligible businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors in England will benefit from business rates relief and announcements also included an extension to the VAT cut to 5% for hospitality accommodation and attractions across the UK until the end of September, followed by a 12.5% rate for a further 6 months until 31 March 2022. A new UK-wide Recovery Loan Scheme was announced to make available loans between £25,001 and £10million to help businesses of all sizes through the next stages of recovery and £5billion was made available for new Restart Grants, a one off cash grant of up to £18,000 for hospitality, accommodation, leisure, personal care and gym businesses in England. The measures also included an extension of the apprenticeship hiring incentive in England to September 2021 and an increase of payment to £3,000 and £7million for a new “flexi-job” apprenticeship programme in England, that will help apprentices to work with a number of employers in one sector. Additional funds (£126million) were also announced for more traineeships and funding high quality work placements and training for 16-24 year olds.

14. The Chancellor also presented the government publication ‘Build Back Better: our plan for growth’ which focuses on three pillars of investment to act as the foundation on which to build the economic recovery: high quality infrastructure; skills; innovation and that government will do things differently to pursue economic growth: unite and level up the country; drive green growth; support vision for Global Britain. Therefore, the announcements included a number of initiatives for investment-led recovery. This included that beginning April 2021, a new super-deduction will cut companies’ tax bill by 25p for every pound they invest in new equipment. A £375 million UK wide ‘Future Fund: Breakthrough’ will invest in highly innovative companies such as those working in life sciences, quantum computing, or clean tech, that are aiming to raise at least £20million of funding, a new Help to Grow scheme is to be set up to offer up to 130,000 companies across the UK a digital and management boost and a review of R&D tax relief to make sure the UK remains a competitive location for cutting-edge research.
15. Headline announcements also included; the opening of 8 new English freeports with the nearest ones to Buckinghamshire located in East Midlands and Thames and funding support through the Towns Fund with the nearest town benefitting being Bletchley in Milton Keynes.
16. The budget also included the publication of the prospectus for the UK wide Levelling Up Fund, worth £4.8billion over four years, and which provides guidance for local areas, led by local authorities, on how to submit bids for the first round of funding starting in 21-22. The fund is open to all areas but areas were also placed into category 1, 2 or 3 with category 1 representing places with the highest levels of identified need; Buckinghamshire was assigned priority category 3. The first round of the fund focuses on three themes: smaller transport projects, high street regeneration and support for maintaining and expanding cultural and heritage assets and projects should ‘be aligned to and support net zero goals’. The fund sits

within the wider context of the Chancellor's announcement at the Spending Review of £100bn of capital spending in 2021-22, a £30bn case increase compared to 2019-20.

17. The new UK infrastructure bank to be based in Leeds will also begin operating in an interim form later in spring 2021 and will include financing support for private sector and local authority infrastructure projects to help meet UK government objectives on climate change and regional economic growth. The government will also commission a study to the National Infrastructure Commission on towns and regeneration. The commission will consider how to maximise the benefits of infrastructure policy and investment for towns in England.

Update on local economic recovery

Re-opening our High Streets

18. On 22 February 2021, the Government announced its planned road map for taking the country out of lockdown. Whilst it is being led by data and not dates, it is anticipated that no earlier than 12 April, non-essential retail, personal care premises such as hairdressers and nail salons will be able to open and that hospitality venues will be allowed to serve people outdoors. No earlier than 17 May, indoor hospitality will reopen and most businesses in all but the highest risk sectors will be able to reopen including the accommodation sector and indoor entertainment venues such as cinemas. No earlier than 21 June, remaining premises including nightclubs are hoped to be open and the restrictions on large events and performances will be eased.
19. Government calls on local authorities to help high streets re-open safely when restrictions lift and measures put in place to support the reopening remain. This includes the provisions for temporary pavement licences extended for a further 12 months to support the recovery of hospitality and high streets; relaxation of planning rules to allow pubs and restaurants to operate as takeaways and greater flexibility for land to be used for temporary events.
20. Buckinghamshire was allocated £481.5K last year from the 'Reopening High Streets Safely Fund' and whilst the criteria for spend of the fund is very specific, the following areas of spend are allowable; signage, pavement graphics and planters/temporary barriers to support social distancing, reopening safely communications campaigns, business support for reopening, data for reopening monitoring and review purposes, bespoke artwork for empty shops, hand sanitiser stations for high streets and click and collect.
21. Spend has been made supporting the reopening last year and the outstanding funds need to be spent by 30 June 2021. A work programme is in place to support the upcoming reopening of our high streets and a 'Welcome Back' campaign has been developed. The following workstreams of activity are ongoing;
 1. Virtual 'walk talks' with Community Board Chairs and Town/Parish Councils to identify further spend opportunities and follow up support for ongoing recovery work in our high streets, improving the look of the towns and building consumer confidence plus Reopening Aylesbury (coordinated through the Covid Leadership

Recovery Town and Town Centre Management) and Reopening High Wycombe programme development.

2. Re-establish the Reopening Team formed with representatives from highways, licensing, communications, economic development officers, Aylesbury Town Centre Manager with activity focused on highways interventions, pavement licences and managing outdoor hospitality and enhancing outside spaces as well as developing comms campaigns and website.
 3. Business support and engagement mainly through online engagement and expanding the High Street Business Survey which was trialled in Marlow to understand business survival issues to provide triage assistance.
 4. Events including collating local event details as they develop and linking with other services. Not funded by RHSSF but Aylesbury and High Wycombe are working on a programme of Covid-safe events including annual events such as WhizzFizz in Aylesbury and Christmas light switch on (dependent on Government guidelines) and including markets, street entertainment and Aylesbury is looking at launching VIRE, an exploring/walking app.
 5. High Street Footfall monitoring system being procured for Buckinghamshire towns in order to capture footfall, dwell time, heat mapping busy areas and identify catchment of visitor providing valuable data to support further work.
22. There are also a number of linked activities ongoing to support our high streets and businesses including the launch of 'Online Retail Innovation Fund', establishment of regeneration boards and strategies for Chesham and High Wycombe, Future High Street Fund bid in High Wycombe (covered separately on the agenda) as well as future business grant opportunities.



Report to Growth, Infrastructure & Housing Select Committee

Date: 25 March 2021

Reference number: N/A

Title: Future High Street Fund Programme

Relevant councillor(s): Steve Bowles – Cabinet Member for Town Centre Regeneration

Author and/or contact officer: Lisa Michelson, Service Director Economic Growth and Regeneration

Recommendation: For the Select Committee to note the status of the Future High Street Fund Programme .

Background

1. Following a successful bid for feasibility funding from Wycombe District Council in 2019, a full bid was made by Buckinghamshire Council to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in July 2020 for £17.2m of capital funding for Future High Streets Funding (FHSF) for High Wycombe. At the time of submission a decision was due from MHCLG in the autumn.
2. The bid also included £3.4m Council Capital contribution and £400k of private sector funding to generate a total programme of £21m.
3. On 26 December 2020 an announcement was made by MHCLG that funds were allocated to the High Wycombe bid at a level of 69% of the total ask so £11.8m or a total programme of £15.4m.
4. In order to receive the allocation the Council was required to revise the bid downwards, and did so by removing some of the projects within the programme. At the time of submitting the bid the Council was encouraged to do so by the end of January on the basis that funding could be released in February.

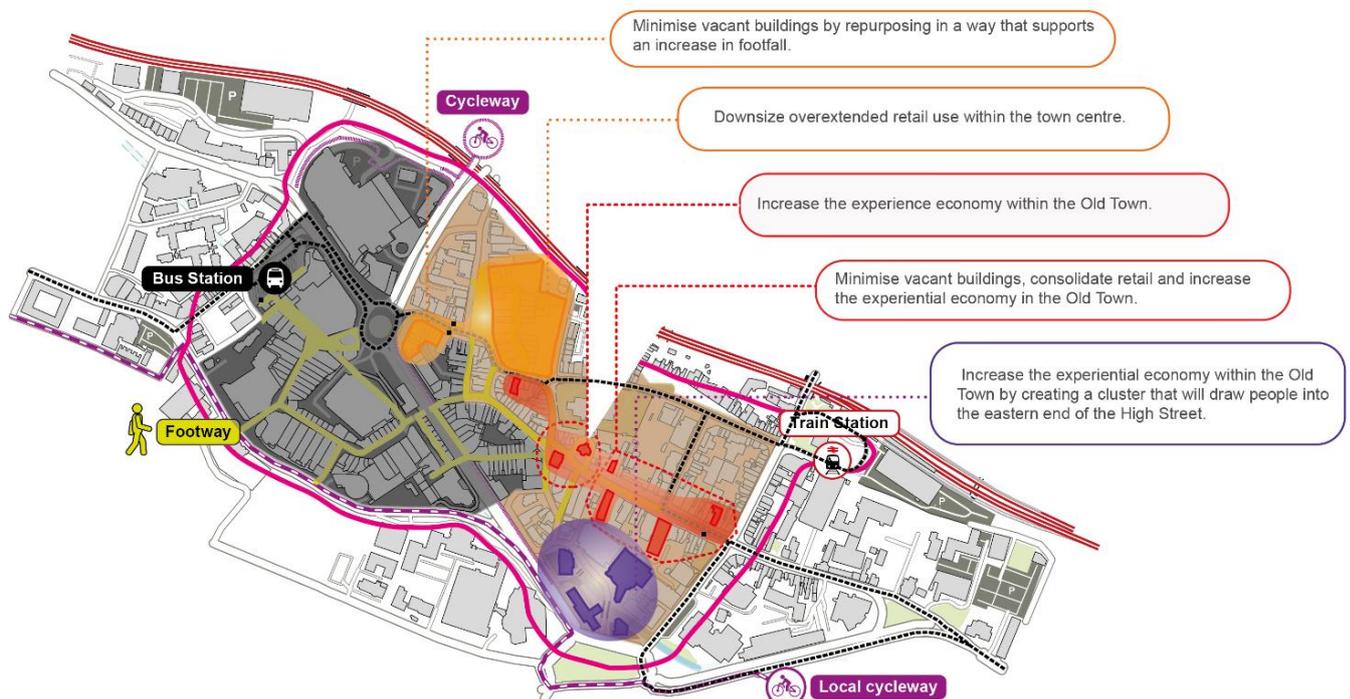
Programme Description

5. Projects are grouped into these three strategic aims and geographic locations:

1. **The Western Gateway:** addressing vacant buildings at a key gateway. (orange in the chart and on the map)
2. **Old Town, New Town:** using the experience economy to draw people to the High Street. (red in the chart and on the map)
3. **The Southern Gateway:** establishing a cultural cluster to increase footfall and dwell time. (purple in the chart and on the map)

6. Further detail on these three strategic aims is in the text below.

| WESTERN GATEWAY (CONSOLIDATION) | | OLD TOWN, NEW TOWN | | | SOUTHERN GATEWAY (CULTURE, ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT) | | |
|---|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|
|  THE CHILTERN |  THE CURVE |  VACANT UNITS |  GUILD HALL |  MARKET HOUSE |  THE LIBERAL CLUB |  FIRE STATION |  RIVERSIDE SOCIAL CLUB |
| Dandara, Primark (associated British Food), Wilko, Eden, House of Fraser, Ruben Brothers | Mclaren Group | Owners, potential tenants | Stall owners, Saunders Markets Ltd | BIDCo, Stall owners, Saunders Markets Ltd | High Wycombe Liberal Club Irish Association, Wycombe Museum | Buckingha mshire Fire and Rescue Service, Housing Association | High Wycombe Community and ex Service man's Club |
| ↑ High Wycombe BIDCo, Bucks LEP, Buckinghamshire Council, High Wycombe Town Council, The Eden Centre, Buckinghamshire New University, Buckinghamshire Business First, Development industry players, Central government, Local Residents ↑ | | | | | | | |



The Western Gateway: addressing vacant buildings at a key gateway.

7. Whilst the Council is undertaking improvements around High Wycombe station to the east of the town centre independently, this project specifically seeks to remove redundant, vacant space at the Western Gateway.
8. The preferred options include (programme subject to change):

Repurposing the Curve, an existing ex-nightclub at the apex of the Western Gateway, which has been vacant for upward of five years. The owners of the site developed the adjacent Travelodge and obtained planning consent for a redevelopment scheme. That scheme has been marketed for at least 12 months, seeking occupiers, with no successful outcome. The site faces a fundamental challenge – it has no on-site or dedicated parking, which deters end investors looking toward the office market. Despite this, permitted development conversions have resulted in a decrease in office space and small office suites at affordable rents, and there is a market for smaller, co-working space that enables local residents to work within High Wycombe, rather than having to commute into London. This would provide multiple outcomes for the town: providing an additional boost to retained GVA within the Town Centre, as well as supporting the daytime economy through retained workers on the High Street.

Wiping away the blight of the redundant 7,035sqm Chiltern Shopping Centre and replacing it with residential development. This is the single biggest transformation for High Wycombe's Old Town, removing vacant, overextended retail from the town, and reinforcing the Eden Shopping Centre as the retail hub within the Town Centre. Funding from the FHSF will allow the Council to forward purchase the commercial ground floorspace in the comprehensive redevelopment of both the existing Chiltern Shopping centre and adjoining Primark Building, which is linked to it. This forward purchase will enable Primark to relocate to Eden and would unlock the provision of circa 300 homes within the Town Centre, bringing an estimated £56m of investment into the Town Centre. Without the funding, the project would be unable to progress forward to a comprehensive redevelopment and the scale of investment in the town is unlikely to manifest.

02 Old Town, New Town: using the experience economy to draw people to the High Street.

9. The Old Town, New Town project aims to address one of the fundamental challenges within the High Wycombe High Street: the provision of Eden in 2008 has created a footfall draw for the Town, but this does not translate past the doors of the Shopping Centre. In order to address this, the preferred option will:

Continue the Council's successful Repurposed Retail Units Fund (RRUF), which re-purposes vacant properties for alternative uses, including food & beverage and experience-based uses and, if necessary, uses that support the Covid-19 recovery. The need for such intervention, to repurpose vacant properties, is increasing and various target units are under negotiation. A core consideration within this project is to convert units from derelict retail use to uses that

are complementary to, not in competition with, the significant mainstream retail available within Eden.

Further, the project will seek to maximise the location of the Old Town's heritage assets, using them to create a flexible modern day agora within the town. The Guildhall and Little Market House are located just at the seam between Eden and the Old Town. The project will re-present the High Street market by bringing the spaces underneath both these listed buildings into use. This will enable the area to create a critical mass of activity just outside the door of Eden, creating a space that attracts the attention and draws people further into the High Street.

03 The Southern Gateway: establishing a cultural cluster to increase footfall and dwell time.

10. We will seek to create an Arts, Culture and Entertainment cluster based upon the existing Swan Theatre at the Southern Gateway. We have one of the buildings, the Liberal Club under option, with plans for it to be used for restoration and display of the town's Chair Collection, above a new social club. This will preserve the town's rich history as the key furniture making area within the UK. Other pieces of the Southern Gateway jigsaw could enable a new riverside 'piazza' in front of the Swan Theatre, enabling pedestrianisation of the St Mary Street Arts Cultural Entertainment zone, which links the High Street to the university.

Next steps

11. Although the Council produced its revised bid prior to the earlier deadline of end January, MHCLG is not able to release funding until May, which will delay delivery

- **As the programme largely depends on acquiring property on commercial terms there is the potential for individual projects to change or be swapped for other opportunities as they arise.**
- **In parallel with the commercial acquisition programme, work will commence on working up detailed designs and procuring refurbishment works**
- **The programme of acquisition and refurbishment is likely to be largely complete with the next 18 - 24 months. The deadline to expend FHSF funds is March 2024**



Report to Growth, infrastructure and Housing Select Committee

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Date: | 26 March 2021 |
| Title: | Planning Enforcement and Local Plans |
| Relevant councillor(s): | Councillor Warren Whyte |
| Author and/or contact officer: | Darran Eggleton |
| Ward(s) affected: | All Wards |
| Recommendations: | It is recommended that the Committee note the report for information. |

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 This report is prepared in response to the request from the GIH select committee for an update on planning and enforcement.
- 1.2 The report provides an overview of the planning enforcement service and the progress on the Buckinghamshire Local Plan.

2. Content of report

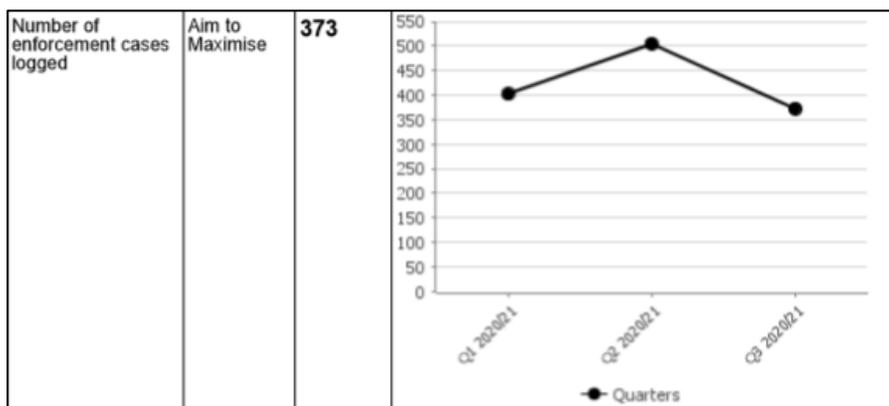
Planning Enforcement

- 2.1 The Local Enforcement and Monitoring Plan was adopted in June 2020.
- 2.2 Since the adoption of the LEMP, the way in which the planning enforcement teams operate and the way that investigations are undertaken has had to significantly adapt in order to react to the COVID19 pandemic, together with start of a new Council, the amalgamation of 5 teams into 1, and a strong political focus on formal enforcement actions.
- 2.3 The lack of simple and easy face to face communication between officers as well as additional measures to ensure that site inspections are COVID safe is having a considerable impact on team resources. This impact is mainly in relation to the increased time it takes to undertake tasks that, in normal circumstances, are easily completed.

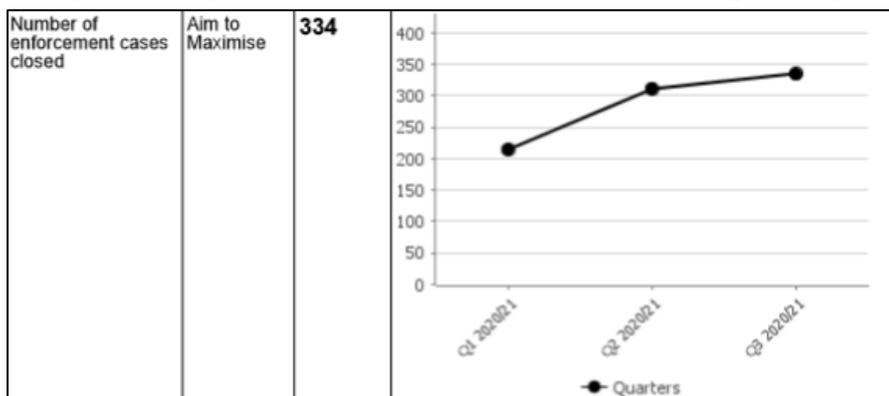
- 2.4 Nevertheless, the team has worked hard to meet the expectations of customers as set out in the LEMP and continues to make service improvements.
- 2.5 The monitoring systems for assessing performance against the timelines in the LEMP are still being created and likely to form part of internal Key Performance indicators going forward.
- 2.6 The Planning & Environment Service is nearing the end of its management restructure, with a new management structure being launched on 9th March. In addition, the team is mid-way through a service review and has recently completed the discovery phase.

Performance

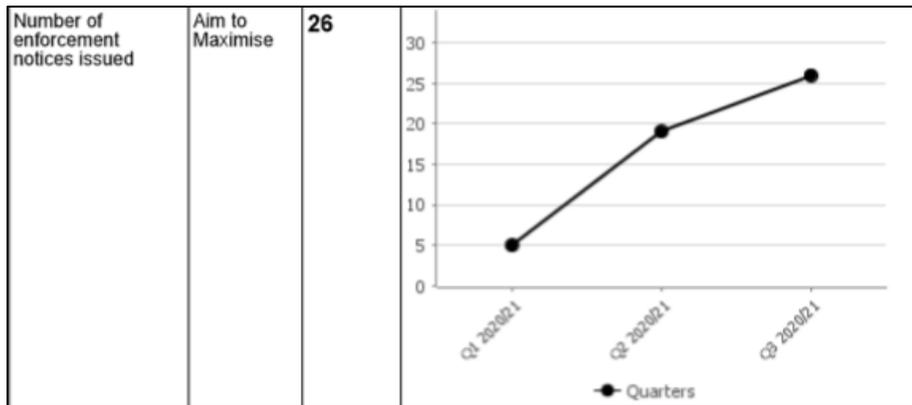
- 2.7 In the first 3 quarters of this financial year the team received 1278 new reports of alleged breaches of planning control. This is similar to the combined number of cases for the 5 legacy authorities during the previous 2 years.



- 2.8 During the same period, the teams closed 746 cases following investigation.



- 2.9 Since April 2020, the team has significantly increased the number of formal actions taken against breaches of planning control across the new Council area. Since vesting day, Buckinghamshire Council has issued over 50 enforcement notices. With Q4 yet to be completed, this number of notices already exceeds the total number issued for the 5 legacy authorities combined during the previous 2 financial years.



- 2.10 The team continues to take a firm but fair approach to planning enforcement but with a revitalised emphasis and focus on progressing cases quickly through their journey and an increased aim to take decisions as early as possible in the process.

Planning Policy - Local Plans

Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan (VALP)

- 2.11 Consultation on the further modifications to the VALP closed on 9th February. 376 representations were received from 288 different respondents. The examination Inspector is holding 4 further days of hearings from 13th to 16th April. Subject to the Inspector's final report it is hoped the Council will be in a position to adopt the Plan in the summer.

Buckinghamshire Local Plan

- 2.12 Good progress has been made on the early stages of the new Buckinghamshire Local Plan. This has included:
- Agreement in December to the Local Development Scheme – the work programme on our plans for the next three years
 - Consultation on the Statement of Community Involvement – this sets out how we intend to involve our communities in not just the Local Plan but also other aspects of planning including planning applications. Consultation on this runs until 22nd March.
 - Commencing a “brownfield call for sites”, to encourage landowners, developers, parish councils and the wider community to make suggestions for potential brownfield development site opportunities for consideration in the plan. This too runs until 22nd March.
- 2.13 Further information on these can be found on the new Local Plan page of the website via the link below:
- www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/local-plan
- 2.14 In addition, we have commenced a scoping exercise with neighbouring authorities and key agencies under the “duty to cooperate” (ie liaison on strategic issues), setting out the strategic matters that it is considered we will need to liaise on with the various authorities and other bodies.

- 2.15 There remains significant uncertainty around the Government’s Planning White Paper reforms and hence both the detail around the new style of local plans they are expecting authorities to prepare and their timing. The Government received around 40,000 responses to the White Paper consultation and are still reviewing them. It is understood that draft legislation may emerge towards the end of the year.
- 2.16 At the same time as consulting on the White Paper last summer, the Government also consulted on changes to the “algorithm” for determining how many homes authorities should plan for. The consultation proposals would have resulted in a significant increase in the figures for Buckinghamshire, rising from 2,936 homes per year to 4,139. The Government have since withdrawn the proposals but have proposed higher levels of housing in the 20 largest cities across the country. As a result, the original 2,936 homes per year figure is the current “local housing need” figure for Buckinghamshire. We await to see how the Government’s planning reforms take this issue forward.
- 2.17 Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)
- 2.18 Progress has been made on preparing a number of supplementary planning documents. These provide more detailed guidance on how to implement specific policies and proposals in local plans. In particular:
- 2.19 Consultation is underway on the Biodiversity Accounting SPD – this sets out how new development will maintain and improve biodiversity on development sites. The consultation closes on 19th March.
- 2.20 Consultation has been undertaken and completed on the Hollands Farm site development brief – Hollands Farm is a major housing allocation in the Wycombe District Local Plan.
- 2.21 The Princes Risborough Expansion SPD was agreed in principle at Cabinet in February, subject to agreeing some detailed amendments. The SPD sets out detailed guidance on design, phasing and delivery of the development and associated infrastructure.

3. Legal and financial implications

There are no direct legal and financial implications to the content of this report.

4. Corporate implications

- 4.1 Whilst the performance of the planning enforcement team has a direct influence of the corporate reputation of the Council, there are no direct corporate implications in relation to the content of this report.

5. Consultation with local councillors & community boards

- 5.1 This report is for information only and whilst the relevant Cabinet member is aware of the content of the report, no formal consultation has taken place with local councillors or community boards.

6. Communication, engagement & further consultation

6.1 No further consultation or engagement has been carried out.

7. Next steps and review

7.1 This paper is for information and therefore recommends that the committee note its content.

8. Background papers

None

9. Your questions and views (for key decisions)

9.1 If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report please get in touch with the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider please inform the democratic services team. This can be done by telephone email darran.eggleton@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

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