

Public
Key Decision - Yes

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Market Towns Programme – Summer Update

Meeting/Date: Overview & Scrutiny (Performance & Growth) – 8th June 2022
Cabinet - 16th June 2022

Executive Portfolio: Executive Councillor for Jobs, Economy & Housing

Report by: Corporate Director (Place)

Ward(s) affected: Huntingdon, St. Neots, St Ives and Ramsey

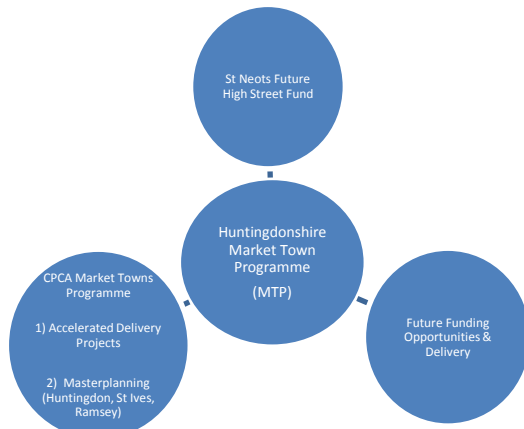
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report provides the 2022/23 Q1 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 experience 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. The cumulative funding confirmed to date for the MTP is £19.28M with £16.28M targeted at St Neots and the remaining £3M being invested in Huntingdon, St Ives and Ramsey.

The MTP consists of three strands summarised below:



- 1) **St Neots Future High Streets Fund (FHSF)** - Delivery of a number of projects in St Neots.
- 2) **CPCA Market Towns Initiative** - Initiated by the CPCA in 2020 consisting of two phases:

Phase 1 Accelerated Programme (shorter term) - A suite of interventions delivered across St. Ives, Huntingdon and Ramsey Market Towns that address the impacts of Covid 19 forming part of the Council's Covid-19 recovery programme.

Phase 2 Masterplanning (longer term) – Development of Masterplans in St. Ives, Huntingdon and Ramsey Market Towns. St. Neots has not been included as the CPCA committed separate funding for St. Neots which includes £3.1M toward the FHSF.
- 3) **Exploring future funding opportunities and delivery** - The MTP continues to explore future external funding opportunities including the submission of an Expression of Interest to the CPCA on the 29th April 2022 for Local Growth Funding (LGF). This funding is to deliver a produce and market hub and public realm improvements at the Great Whyte, Ramsey.

In addition, the Council are actively considering the submission of a Levelling Up Fund (LUF) Round 2 bid for Ramsey. With the final submission of any bid being the 6 July 2022.

Furthermore, there is the opportunity to explore the use of UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF) to aid the delivery of the MTP with community & place being one of three UKSPF investment priorities.

RECOMMENDATION

Cabinet is invited to note the progress to date of the Market Towns Programme outlined in the Spring 2022 Cabinet Update report, the second of the quarterly updates.

Cabinet is requested to:

- Endorse the submission of the Ramsey Local Growth Fund bid enabling the delivery of a new produce hub and public realm improvements.
- Delegate authority to the Corporate Director (Place) and the S151 Officer in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Place, Executive Councillor for Jobs, Economy & Housing and Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources the submission of a funding bid in respect of a second round of the Levelling Up Fund
- Agree to delegate authority to the Corporate Director (Place), the S151 and Head of Legal Practice in Consultation with Executive Councillor for Place, Executive Councillor for Jobs, Economy & Housing and Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources to enter into all relevant and necessary contracts for the successful design, development, construction and delivery of the Market Towns Programme.
- Reflect the change in operational responsibility for the Market Towns Programme, to authorise the Corporate Director (Place) to exercise the above delegations in line with statutory procurement, standing orders and the Council constitution.
- Note that update reports will be brought back to Cabinet on a quarterly basis outlining any contracts that have been entered into under the above delegation within the period reported.

1. PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update on activity across the strands of the MTP, 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. BACKGROUND

MTP Strand 1: St Neots - FHSF

- 2.1 On the 28th July 2020 Cabinet endorsed the Council's funding bid to the then Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) for Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) projects to be delivered in St Neots. The package of regeneration activity included the following projects:

- Priory Centre & Quarter
- Waterfront Walkway
- Old Falcon
- Market Square
- High Street
- St Neots Bridge

Priory Centre & Quarter

- 2.2 Proposals to regenerate the Priory Quarter creating a new and enhanced community space. The proposal for the Priory Quarter is to transform the area, improve the connectivity to the town, improve the community and economic offer while maximising opportunities to expand on the area's unique setting adjacent to the River Great Ouse. This will include a riverside promenade opening up the eastern bank of the river to residents and visitors. Initial engagement with stakeholders has centred on the theme of developing a series of flexible spaces for a range of functions, including an enhanced community building which could be an anchor setting creating that connection between the river and high street.

Waterfront Walkway:

- 2.3 The FHSF provides an opportunity to open up the eastern bank of the River Great Ouse as an asset for residents of St Neots and visitors. The redevelopment of the Priory Quarter could allow the opportunity for the area to actively engage with the river. Given the synergy with the Priory Centre/Priory Quarter it is anticipated that exploring this project will only commence upon determination of the preferred options for the wider Quarter area.

Old Falcon

- 2.4 Proposals to regenerate the Old Falcon Inn, an anchor building on the market square. The Old Falcon Inn is a Grade II listed building occupying a prominent location adjacent to the Market Square within the St. Neots Conservation Area. This building was included within the FHSF with the objective to bring this prominent building back into active use. The ambition is to transform the character and appearance of the Market Square by creating a new heart of the town centre which are directly linked with reuse of the Old Falcon, the wider high street plans and planned improvements to the access gateway to the town via the bridge.

Market Square

- 2.5 Proposals include the removal of car parking from the market square to enable a multi-functional space to be the economic and social centre of the town. The Market Square is the focal point of the High Street. At the time of submitting the FHSF bid it was predominantly surface car parking. Through the Pandemic the quantum of car parking was significantly reduced by Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) and is now limited to disabled parking. It is a hard surfaced area, lacking landscaping and street furniture to soften the environment, detracting from opportunities to enhance dwelling time in the town centre. The dominance of cars and related traffic is noted adjacent to the square with the high street to the north, and vehicular access to the south, often used as a short cut to avoid queueing traffic on the high street.

High Street

- 2.6 Proposals include the revisioning of the High Street to improve the street scene and promote walking and cycling. The FHSF programme presents an opportunity to reframe the gateway to the town and reprioritise cycles and pedestrians within the town centre, improving the overall visitor experience.

St Neots Bridge

- 2.7 Proposals include improvements to St. Neots Bridge to promote active travel and better access to Riverside Car Park. CCC Highways has been engaged as the Council's delivery partner, given their statutory role as the Local Highway Authority. In addition, development consultants WSP have been commissioned to work closely with officers across both councils to develop options for consideration, ensuring financial prudence and deliverability.

Background on approvals to date:

- 2.8 In February 2019 the Council submitted an Expression of Interest to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to develop a business case to explore opportunities to renew and reshape St. Neots High Street. In August 2019, MHCLG confirmed an award of £0.15M to develop a business case. Following a successful tender process in October 2019 the Council appointed specialist advisors Mott MacDonald to support and bid for funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) and Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) for St Neots.
- 2.9 On the 28th July 2020 Cabinet agreed to endorse a contribution of £3.1M of Community Infrastructure Levy funding (CIL) to the St Neots FHSF, this was in addition to the £0.445M of CIL money already committed to the Riverside Park Improvements project (approved at the Cabinet meeting of the 18th July 2019 and cited as co-funding). A further £3.1M contribution was agreed by the CPCA in November 2021.
- 2.10 On 31st July 2020, the Council formally submitted a bid for £5.48M to MHCLG for the St Neots FHSF. On the 26th December 2020 MHCLG who have responsibility for the FHSF issued an 'in-principle' letter awarding the Council £3.7M to the overall scheme, representing approximately 69% of the ask. The funding shortfall was £1.7M.
- 2.11 On the 23rd of February 2021 at a Special Cabinet, it was agreed that the Council would contribute an additional £1.7M CIL funding to cover the funding shortfall and enable the delivery ambitions of the original FHSF submission.
- 2.12 Following the successful submission of funding bid to National Highways a further £3.5M has been secured from National Highways toward this ambitious programme of works for St. Neots.

MTP Strand 2: CPCA Market Towns Initiative

- 2.13 The CPCA Market Towns Programme was initiated as a result of the Prospectus for Growth reports of March 2020. Subsequently an allocation of £1M was made for each of the three market towns of Huntingdon, Ramsey and St. Ives.
- 2.14 In Autumn 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the need to mitigate the impacts on the town centre economy the CPCA split the funding pot in two with £0.5M (per town) for Phase 1 (shorter term projects) and the remaining £0.5M to be used for Phase 2 (longer term) Masterplanning activity in Huntingdon, St Ives and Ramsey.

Phase 1 – Covid 19 - Accelerated Towns Programme (Shorter Term)

- 2.15 A revised set of funding criteria was developed by the CPCA for the Phase 1 programme which initially required these projects to be delivered out by March 2021 with a post submission revised for projects to be “in delivery” by 31 March 2021 and subsequently for them to be delivered by 31 March 2022, as agreed by the CPCA board. These timescales were changed primarily because of Covid-19 and the national lockdowns. In December 2020 the Council submitted capital bids totalling £1.8M to the CPCA, these were considered by the CPCA Board in January 2021. A further report was presented to HDC Cabinet on the 18th March 2021.
- 2.16 The Council’s Welcome Back funding which concluded delivery at the end of March 22 enabled the delivery of a range of activities in St Neots, St Ives, Huntingdon and Ramsey including seasonal markets, enhanced Christmas events, festive family events, exhibitions, food festivals and media campaigns promoting town centre visits.

Phase 2 – Masterplanning (Longer Term)

- 2.17 Development of three masterplans for St. Ives, Huntingdon and Ramsey focussing on the development of a pipeline of projects to enable the Council and stakeholders to pursue funding opportunities, including a range of Government opportunities, as they emerge over the coming years, including (but not limited to) the Levelling up agenda.

3. 2022/23 Quarter 1 Progress Update:

- 3.1 Over the past three months we have delivered some significant progress across the MTP programmes, with a number of decision points coming up within the next six months of the programme. The key points are summarised below:

MTP Strand 1: St Neots - FHSF

High Street/ Market Square/ St Neots Road Bridge

- 3.2 In March 2022 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 giving consideration to what stakeholders and residents had identified as being important to St Neots from previous stakeholder and resident engagement.
- 3.3 Following the May 2022 local elections a period of resident and stakeholder engagement began on the 12th May 2022 concluding on the 23rd May 2022 to share the options and gain feedback on the outline design options. During this period business, stakeholders and the Town Council were invited to a stakeholder briefing on the 12th May 2022 and on the 14th May 2022 the Project Team had a stall in the Market Square during the St Neots Farm and Craft Market. Over 300 people attended the event. During this period St Neots Town Centre businesses, stakeholders and

residents were signposted to comment on the outline designs [online](#). The opportunity to provide comments online was also promoted via social media with the deadline for comments being received being the 23rd May 2022. At the time of writing a full analysis of this feedback is still being undertaken.

- 3.4 Once the final analysis from the recent engagement activity report is received it will be shared with CCC Highways and WSP and will be used to inform the detailed design stage and further engagement over the Summer of 2022.

Riverside Projects: Priory Centre / Priory Quarter / Waterfront Walk

- 3.5 Mott MacDonald were appointed in November 2021 to carry out a feasibility study and provide preliminary designs to RIBA Stage 2 for the Priory Centre and RIBA 1+ for the Priory Quarter. This work which has been ongoing over the last quarter will specifically assess the various uses and users of the Priory Centre against required internal configuration for example: changes to rooms, halls, café, facilities etc. While each of these are individual projects, their proximity and interdependency creates an opportunity to create synergy and potentially generate a greater marriage value for the town of St Neots and the Priory "Quarter" in particular.
- 3.6 A public stakeholder event was undertaken on the 31st January 2022 and summary feedback was provided in the Spring 2022 quarterly update to the 17th March 2022 Cabinet.
- 3.7 Key stakeholders have been invited to a series of early workshop sessions where initial ideas and concepts have been discussed in terms of what the future function might fulfil (for current and potentially future users). Furthermore, discussions have also included the role that a reconfigured Priory Centre might play as a 'Destination attraction' in St Neots. Further dialogue with key stakeholders will step up over the next quarter.

Old Falcon

- 3.8 Given the passage of time since this building was last in use, officers have been reviewing the opportunities and constraints of this site. It is recognised that the building is in a poor state of disrepair and the Council's ambition is to work effectively to develop a deliverable scheme avoiding any further dilapidation to the building. Over the last quarter dialogue has continued with the existing landowner and external consultants have been commissioned to provide a condition survey which will aid optioneering work. The outcome from this commission will sit alongside input from legal services, planning, conservation, building control and finance to provide a full range of costed options for decision by Cabinet in Q3 2022/23.

MTP Strand 2: CPCA Market Towns Initiative

Phase 1 – Covid 19 - Accelerated Towns Programme (Shorter Term)

3.9 The Accelerated Programme projects are listed below. A number of these are completed, others will deliver through to the end of 2022/23.

Scheme	Status
Town Walks	Complete
EV Charging	Complete
Modern Waste Solution	Complete
Modern Simplified Street Furniture (Solar Benches)	Complete
Parklets	To be complete by June 2022
Places to Dwell (covered benches)	Complete
Cycle Storage	Complete
Sites for SME	To be completed by June 2022
Market Trader Pop-Ups	Complete
Upgrade / Replacement of Public Toilets	Complete (some snagging at Huntingdon)
Smarter Towns	Project to commence June 2022
Ramsey Civic Hub	Contractor appointed start on site expected by July 2022
St Ives Market Square	Proposals developed for alternative project due to Parklet being cancelled
Ramsey Pedestrianisation	Linked to Masterplan and CPCA bid for LGF funding for wider intervention on Great Whyte
Ramsey Planters	Approval required by Programme Board to proceed.

3.10 Over the last quarter focus has remained on the delivery of a number of projects scheduled for completion, these include:

- Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging – installation of a range EV charging points at key locations across each of the three Market Towns including a total of 15 EV Charging points of which 5 are in St Ives and 10 in Huntingdon.
- Smart Technology via Netbins provision – the use of Smart Technology in the form of Netbin sensors that provide information to support the ambition of ‘cleaner and safer’ environment within town centres
- Town Centre Walks – providing appropriate hardware (benches, parklets) and software (dedicated App) across walking routes in each of the market towns. These interventions seek to support healthier and greener lifestyles as well as increasing footfall (thus increased spending) in our market towns.

Phase 2 – Long Term Towns Programme

- 3.11 In June 2021 Tetra Tech, Steer Economic Consulting and Thomas Lister were engaged to deliver three draft masterplans by March 2022 for Huntingdon, St Ives, and Ramsey. The intention is for these masterplans to provide the basis for aligning regeneration aspirations with funding opportunities over the next number of years. The masterplans comprise:
- Evidence baseline (social, economic, connectivity, built environment) for each of the three towns
 - Opportunities for regeneration, place shaping, connecting communities and suggestions on a broad range of town centre enhancements
 - Pipeline of projects for each of three towns that could be developed further and delivered over the medium and long terms
- 3.12 The draft masterplans are now complete and from the end of May 2022 will be shared more widely to enable Ward Councillors, Town Councillors, Stakeholders and Residents to provide their feedback and inform next steps. Feedback will be sought throughout Q2 and Q3 as part of engagement of a new Huntingdonshire Place Strategy with the opportunity to feed into them through a variety of channels. The intention is for an intensive period of co-ordinated engagement to inform not only the new Huntingdonshire Place Strategy and Masterplans but also future funding opportunities and a range of other Council Strategies including the Environment and Community Strategies. This period of engagement will be a priority activity for the Council.

Future Funding Opportunities and Delivery:

- 3.13 Over the past quarter officers have been actively seeking suitable funding opportunities to support the Town Centre improvements, these include:

Local Growth Fund

- 3.14 The CPCA advised Council's at the end of March 2022 that there was the opportunity to bid for additional funding through the LGF Recycled Fund. The CPCA funding guidance stated that LGF can be used as leverage for future LUF Round 2 and UKSPF bids or high VFM delivery projects linked to the CPCA Economic Growth & Skills Strategy. Individual projects could bid for up to £1M capital funding.
- 3.15 On the 29th April 2022 the Council submitted an Expression of Interest (EOI) to deliver a produce and market hub along with public realm improvements on the Great Whyte, Ramsey. This is one of the Capital projects in the draft Ramsey Masterplan. As the Council had already allocated £0.295M CPCA funding from the Phase 1 – Covid 19 - Accelerated Towns Programme for public realm improvements to The Great Whyte it was identified that this provided a good opportunity to expand the footprint for public realm improvements, deliver one of the projects proposed within the draft Masterplan and that this could be beneficial to any future Levelling Up Fund (LUF) bid to be submitted in July 2022.
- 3.16 The EOI submitted was high level and identified the benefit of securing investment to re-imagine the Great Whyte, with pedestrian friendly space, exploring options for investment in a new market to enhance footfall and tourism and business workspace/ learning centre to support business growth and skills development.
- 3.17 The project 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. The two elements are:

Produce Hub

- 3.18 Proposed 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

- 3.19 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.
- 3.20 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.
- 3.21 Given the short timescale involved to submit the expression of interest there was a limited opportunity for a broad range of engagement but the Project Team however utilised resident feedback received as part of the Welcome Back Fund Programme and worked with Ward Councillors, Ramsey Town Council, Ramsey Neighbourhood Trust and Cambridgeshire County Council on the EoI.
- 3.22 On the 12th May 2022 the Council was informed that we had been successful with our EOI and that we could move to a full application which should be submitted by the 27th May 2022. At the time of writing this report the full application is in development and on course for submission. If this application is successful it is our intention to undertake resident, business and stakeholder engagement in Q2 and Q3 2022/23 as part of the wider engagement strategy for the development of a new Place Strategy for Huntingdonshire to inform the designs.
- 3.23 It is also worth noting that a separate LGF bid was submitted by the Council in relation to a 5G Feasibility proposal which, if successful has the potential to enhance the availability of 5G in Ramsey, providing improved connectivity to support rural towns as part of a targeted package of support for Ramsey.

Levelling Up Funding

- 3.24 In addition, the Council are actively considering a submission of a LUF Round 2 bid for Ramsey. With the final submission of any bid being the 6 July 2022. This bid will again build on the draft masterplanning work which is well developed in Ramsey along with additional technical advice and support to accompany a Ramsey focussed LUF bid. At the time of writing this bid is still in development, with final submission still to be confirmed.
- 3.25 The LUF was announced as part of the UK Government budget in March 2021. The Fund is jointly managed by HM Treasury (HMT), the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the Department for Transport (DfT). In addition to providing new funding, the LUF brings together several existing funds, including for example, Pinch Point Funding, the Future High Streets programme and Town's Fund, which were previously delivered independently.

- 3.26 The objective of the LUF is to invest in local infrastructure on high value investment priorities, including local transport schemes, urban regeneration projects and cultural assets. The total Fund value is £4.8B, with delivery of schemes required by the end March of 2025. Guidance states LUF should be focused on addressing inequalities, deprivation, infrastructure challenges and the climate agenda.
- 3.27 The deadline for the submission of second round bids is the 6th July 2022. Applications to the LUF, are open to single tier Councils and District Councils in two tier areas. Counties, combined authorities and the Greater London Authority are restricted to bidding for transport infrastructure schemes only. A bid limit of £20M is in place, however, the LUF prospectus states that bids above £20M and below £50M will be accepted for transport projects.
- 3.28 The Government has allocated a prioritisation level to all UK Local Authorities with regard to the LUF bidding process. The purpose of this prioritisation is to help inform and guide the evaluation of applications. The highest priority level is 1, i.e., most 'in need' of 'levelling up', the lowest is 3. The priority level is based on a range of metrics concerning socio economic data and other data inputs from across Government.
- 3.29 The Government has stated that applications from priority 2 and 3 Local Authority areas may result in successful outcomes, however, they have been clear that any bids will have to be of an 'exceptional quality'. Huntingdonshire has been given a Priority 3 classification. Additionally, this will be a highly competitive process. It is therefore important to manage expectations in respect of any bid being submitted by the Council. Furthermore, bids can only be submitted with a strong letter of support from the relevant MP.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

- 3.30 There is the opportunity to explore the use of UKSPF to aid the delivery of the MTP with community & place being one of three UKSPF investment priorities, the other two being supporting local businesses and people & skills. This fund is administered by the CPCA and over the coming weeks the CPCA investment plan is being developed, which will include interventions in Huntingdonshire. This is scheduled for submission to Central Government by the 1 August 2022.

4.0 Finance Update:

- 4.1 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 FHSF guidelines and allocations only.

Table 1: Overall MTP funding sources

St Neots FHSF Regeneration		
Sources of Funds	£	Comment
Future High Street Funds (MHCLG now DLUHC)	3,748M	Formalised June 2021
Huntingdonshire District Council Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)	5,25M	As per HDC Cabinet decisions
CPCA	3,1M	As per Funding Agreement (Dec '21)
National Highways	3,5M	As per decision in November 2021
Potential Investment	0.69M	Subject to viability
Sub-total	16,288M	
CPCA Market Towns Initiative	3M (Accelerated delivery £2.652M, Masterplanning £0.3M48)	
Sub-total	3M	
TOTAL	19,288M	

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 A summary of previous MTP engagement was provided as Appendix 1 to the Spring 2022 quarterly update presented to Cabinet on the 17th March 2022. The next quarterly update will provide a summary of all business, stakeholder and resident feedback received during May on the St Neots Highways projects as well as an update on wider stakeholder and resident engagement, given this is a key area of activity for the MTP and wider Council.

6. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

- 6.1 The comments of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel will be included in this section prior to its consideration by the Cabinet.

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:
- **Budget management** – To ensure that financial regulations are being complied with, the MTP will carry out continual review 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. Therefore, as we move from design into delivery any decisions on proposed options will require agreement that they can be funded within the approved St Neots FSHF programme budget. Mitigation: We will continue to monitor the programme funding profile and anticipated spend against budgets, updating to Cabinet on a quarterly basis.

- **Programme Timescales** – This is an ambitious programme of delivery, with £3.748 of the MTP funding coming from MHCLG FHSF with a requirement that the funding awarded is spent by March 2024. While the CPCA will wish to set parameters they recognise the strategic importance of this project and it is anticipated there will be some flexibility in the delivery timescales expected. 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.
- **Programme Resources** – 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 will be developed to ensure the management of expectations and information being shared in a timely manner.
- **Reputational risk** – The MTP is considered to be 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.
- **Political risk** –The outcome of the recent District and Parish elections within Huntingdonshire necessitates the need to re-engage with Town Councils and new Ward Members. Mitigation: as the MTP moves forward additional emphasis will be placed on engaging new Members and Town Councils.
- **Changes to Planning Legislation** – 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

8.1 The delivery of the MTP aligns to the following Corporate objectives:

- Support delivery of sustainable community / leisure activities / facilities.
- Continue to work with partners and influence the Combined Authority to secure resources to facilitate delivery of new housing, drive economic growth and to provide any critical infrastructure.
- Support the Combined Authority's preparation and delivery of Masterplans for the Market Towns.
- Supporting economic growth in market towns and rural areas.

- Improving the quality of the environment, by including infrastructure that supports people to walk and cycle.

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 assurance frameworks, namely:

- Future High Street Fund (MHLCG / DLUHC): The allocation of £3.748M is agreed in Memorandum of Understanding signed by both parties in June 2021. This funding is subject to regular financial reporting and monitoring and evaluation throughout the lifetime of the project. Any proposed changes or re-allocation of funding within this allocation needs to be submitted to FHSF for review.
- CPCA: A Funding Agreement for £3.1M for St Neots' Road Bridge, High St and Market Square projects has been accepted. This sets out specific milestones and delivery timelines for these elements.
- National Highways: A funding agreement from National Highways consists of an allocation of £3.5M for the St Neots' Road Bridge, High St and Market Square projects.

9.2 The LGF and LUF funding bids do not place the Council under any legal obligations. Should either of these be successful the CPCA and DLUHC would communicate the details of the grant agreements in due course. Legal advice will be sought to support these as required. This report asks for delegated authority to progress both the submission of the LUF funding bid and associated grant agreements.

9.3 There will be a requirement for ongoing legal input to support the further development of project options. 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 decisions being brought back to Cabinet during 2022/23 Q2 and Q3.
- 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. Confirm submission of the Council's funding bid for LUF Round 2 and explore options for UKSPF investment.
- To step up stakeholder engagement, particular with Town Councils and Town Councillors across all strands of the MTP.
- Continue to strengthen the MTP programme and associated resourcing as we move into the next stages of programme delivery.

13. APPENDICES

None

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](#)

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