

AGENDA 11, Enc iv) Ashington Regeneration

Proposal

The Council is asked to agree to write to Cllr Glen Sanderson, Leader of Northumberland County Council, to request an update on the status of the Ashington Town Centre Regeneration Project. Specifically, the Council notes that the £600,000 project to revitalize the town centre, Ashington North-East Quarter Redevelopment (Phase 2), appears to now be behind schedule and funding has been temporarily reallocated to other strategic projects in 2023/24.

The Council agree to seek clarity from Cllr Sanderson on:

- a) The specific delays that have impacted on the project timeline.
- b) The reasons and contributing factors for these delays.
- c) A promise that the funding will be protected in the Strategic Regeneration Projects budget 2024/25.
- d) Reassurance that delays will not impact on external funding achieved.
- e) A revised project timeline and expected completion date.

Concerns

Will the project still achieve the intended outcomes for the improvement of Ashington town centre by March 2025?

The Town Council wish to seek reassurance that this critical investment in Ashington town centre remains a priority for the County Council.

The Town Council seeks this clarification for themselves and residents of when they can expect to see real positive changes in the town centre as a result of several linked regeneration initiatives.

Summary of Regeneration Projects

Read full cabinet report (13th June 2023) by clicking on, or visiting the link below:
<https://northumberland.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s15067/06%20Ashington%20Regeneration%20Programme%2010623.pdf>

Ashington High Street Innovation Programme (HSIP)

- Public Realm and Connectivity (£1.76 million) - Improve pedestrian infrastructure and create green gateways and routes. Site acquisition and demolition in 2023-24, completion of works by June 2024.
- Accelerate Ashington Business Support (£0.40 million) - Support for existing businesses and startups to adapt, grow and promote. Delivery from Oct 2022 to June 2024.
- Animating Ashington (£0.51 million) - Cultural events and activities programme. Delivery from Oct 2023 to March 2025.
- Ashington Regeneration Plan (£0.06 million) - Preparation of town centre regeneration plan. Completion by Nov 2023.

Town Centre Renewal of Strategic Sites Programme

- Wansbeck Square Redevelopment (£14.66 million) - Demolition, public realm improvements, events space, potential new facilities. Timeline unclear but aim to complete works by March 2025.

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- Portland Park Development (£9.81 million) - Construction of new cinema and associated public realm. Timeline unclear but aim to complete works by March 2025.
- Portland Park Infrastructure (£2.44 million) - Highway and connectivity improvements. Timeline unclear.

The total estimated cost across both programmes is £29.8 million, with £21.4 million from government/regional grants and £8.4 million from the Council and partners. The aim is to deliver the programmes, particularly the strategic sites work by March 2025 based on the government funding requirements.

Reallocation of capital funds of £0.600 million in 2023-24 from the Ashington North-East Quarter Redevelopment (Phase 2)

Read full cabinet report (6th November 2023) by clicking on, or visiting the link below:
<https://northumberland.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s17422/09%20SummaryofNewCapitalProposalsconsideredbyOfficerCapitalStrategyGrou.pdf>

Summary of Report

Based on the report, it seems that £0.6 million is being reallocated from the Ashington North-East Quarter Redevelopment (Phase 2) project to several other strategic regeneration projects in 2023-24. The main reasons appear to be:

The Ashington project has experienced some delays, so the funding is not required in 2023-24 as originally planned.

The report states there are several other strategic regeneration projects that require funding in 2023-24 to move forward with detailed design and development work. These include projects in Hexham, Berwick, and Alnwick.

The funding will be replaced in the Ashington project in 2024-25 by reallocating it from the Strategic Regeneration Projects budget.

According to the report the funding is being temporarily reallocated from Ashington to progress other strategic projects in 2023-24, since it is not needed in Ashington this year due to delays. The funding will be replaced in the Ashington project in 2024-25.

The key priorities and projects the £0.6 million reallocated funding from Ashington is being allocated to in 2023-24 are:

1. Hexham High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) Public Realm Scheme (£0.5 million)

To complete the construction and delivery of the public realm improvement scheme in the target area of Priestpople, Cattle Market and Battle Hill. This investment is intended to create lasting change in regenerating and revitalising the Hexham town centre.

2. Berwick Visitor Gateway (£0.05 million)

To support initial development of a visitor gateway facility at Berwick Harbour, including a restaurant, parking, EV charging and public amenities. This aims to support tourism, leisure and economic development in Berwick.

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3. Royal Border Bridge Floodlighting (£0.01 million)

To fund detailed design of an improved lighting system for the iconic Royal Border Bridge in Berwick. This aims to enhance this landmark asset.

4. Rural Business Growth Service (£0.02 million)

To cover outstanding costs and close out this business grant scheme supporting rural businesses across Northumberland.

5. Alnwick Cobbles Streetscaping scheme (£0.02 million)

To fund initial detailed design of public realm improvements in Alnwick town centre, improving accessibility and the environment.

Based on the information in the report, we could surmise the potential reasons why the other projects can progress with funding in 2023-24 while the Ashington project has experienced delays, but there are no details given.

Conclusion

The delays to the Ashington project may be understandable in a complex multi-year regeneration program, and reallocating the funding in the short-term to progress other strategic projects may be considered reasonable capital management.

However, the lack of details on the specific reasons for the Ashington delays are concerning, and stronger reassurances could be provided that it remains a priority project.

Overall, the Ashington regeneration funding seems secure long-term, but further transparency from the County Council on the causes of the delays and a firm revised timeline would provide welcome clarity.