

AGENDA 9, Enc ix) Ashington Regeneration

At the November Full Council meeting, it was AGREED to write to Cllr Glen Sanderson seeking information relating to the Ashington Regeneration Project (letter below).

An online meeting/presentation was held on 7th December, as well as receiving the update below:

Response 12th December 2023

Thank you for your letter outlining queries regarding the Ashington Regeneration Programme. The below matters were covered at the briefing held with County and Town Councillors on Friday 8th December including via the attached slidepack which has now been circulated to all the above members which provides an update regarding the Programme. For completeness please see below a written summary of answers to each query.

We will be in touch to arrange further input to the programme including planning in drop in events which will likely be held in February or March involving the designers of the main schemes. There will be the opportunity for the Town Council to have a presence at these events to promote activities in the town to the community and businesses in partnership which I hope will be something the Town Council would like to participate in.

1. What are the specific delays that have impacted on the project timeline?

As outlined in the presentation the programme is on track to deliver against required timescales noting that DLUHC (CRP) delivery timescale has been extended by a year to March 2026.

2. What are the reasons for these delays, and the contributing factors?

As above

3. What reassurance can you give that the funding will be protected in the Strategic Regeneration Projects budget in 2024/25?

The presentation outlines that £30m is now secured for this programme – see slide 4. £2.5m of this funding is from North of Tyne Combined Authority which is allocated in the Northumberland Line Economic Corridor Programme. Confirmation of this funding is subject to an application which will be submitted in January 2024.

NCC legacy allocations profiled in 2023-24 originally earmarked for infrastructure works have been reprofiled to follow on main works which will be undertaken.

This reprofiling supports the programme tying in with new forecast delivery periods - the same funding is retained in the overall programme budget. This enables the council to spend external grant first and NCC capital allocations later in the programme.

4. What reassurance can you give that delays will not impact on external funding achieved?

With regard to maximising drawdown of external funds, the council will continue to liaise with funders to maximise spend on the programme – one of the benefits of establishing a programme approach is the potential ability to maximise spend across the programme headings and activities.

5. On what basis has 'Accelerating Ashington Business Support' been opened to businesses outside of Ashington?

The Accelerate Ashington programme is designed to support Ashington businesses. In response to demand from a handful of businesses located on the fringe of the town who look to Ashington

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as their nearest primary centre it was felt that a degree of flexibility would be helpful to allow these businesses to access support. As such, with the agreement of the funder this has been provided.

This support is additional to the Accelerate Ashington project in Ashington and is for a trial period. The businesses benefitting could look to employ staff, source suppliers and potentially seek accommodation for activities in the town in the future.

6. What progress has been made with 'Animating Ashington' and at what stage will key stakeholders like Ashington Town Council be consulted on cultural events and activities?

The Animating Ashington project will now commence in April 2024 to better tie in with major capital delivery and will run to March 2025. This is a reduced delivery period due in part to resource limitations in the Economy and Regeneration Team which has had limited capacity to effectively manage an externally contracted Creative Team due to staff departures, new staff are currently being inducted who will support this work package going forward. This change has been agreed by the funder, NTCA.

The Town Council, and other stakeholders will be kept fully up to speed on the project and there will be opportunities to engage with the contracted Creative Team and input to the projects development and delivery once the team are in place.

More broadly a full communications and engagement plan is being developed with input from the appointed design teams and a public 'drop-in' event will take place in early 2024 (subject to design development progress), with regular updates to elected members and Ashington Town Board.

7. What is the revised project timeline and expected completion date

Timeline – as per presentation

Further update 22nd December 2023

Update to Town Council on Ashington Regeneration Programme

The key next steps are as follows:

- **Press Release - Design Teams appointed see issued [Press Release](#) today**- we have just issued a Press Release confirming that the design teams supporting the Programme including the Portland Park and Wansbeck Square sites have been appointed
- **Cabinet Report - 16th Jan** report regarding primarily site acquisitions to support the Programme.
- **Press Release - Site Acquisitions Approved - 16th Jan**
- **Design Team Meet and Greet – confirmed 29th Jan**
- **Further briefings / meetings of Ashington Town Board - early Spring** to be planned in line with the programme Feb / March 2024
- **Briefing at a Town Council meeting** - date tba if helpful to do this in addition to the meet and greet above.
- **Public Drop in Events - February / March 2023 exact dates and venues tbc** - events will be held in venues in the town to publicise and share information about the development of the Ashington Regeneration Programme, take feedback and promote a range of work by other partners in the town.

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Ashington Town Council
Town Hall, 65 Station Road
Ashington
Northumberland
NE63 8RX

Cllr Glen Sanderson
County Hall
Morpeth

Sent via email

Dear Cllr Sanderson

Ashington Regeneration

I am writing on behalf of Ashington Town Council to express our concerns regarding the delays and reallocation of funding for the Ashington Regeneration Project, specifically the North-East Quarter Redevelopment (Phase 2).

While we understand the complexities of managing a multi-year regeneration program, we are troubled by the lack of transparency and communication surrounding the delays to this critical £600,000 investment in our town centre. The project's new unfinished timeline and the temporary reallocation of funding to other strategic projects has raised doubts over whether the intended outcomes will still be achieved by the March 2025 target.

Our council members and residents have faced disappointment before when past investment plans stalled or were revoked in Ashington. This has unfortunately created some distrust. We seek open reassurance from the County Council that this project remains a priority and that the reasons for the delays are justified. Providing a firm revised timeline would also grant helpful clarity.

Beyond the delays, we have additional concerns about other aspects of Ashington's regeneration:

1. Why has the "Accelerate Ashington" business support program been opened to non-Ashington businesses when it was presented to specifically aid Ashington businesses?
2. What is the status of the "Animating Ashington" cultural and events planning? When will key local stakeholders like our Council be brought into that process?

We invite you and Councillor Wearmouth to meet with our Full Council and directly address these pressing issues. We have questions (*copied below*) on the specific causes of the delays, funding protections, the impact to external funding, the business support scope change, event planning, and the revised completion timeline.

Members have been invited to an Ashington Regeneration Programme update on Friday 8th December, and will take up this offer but feel a member response is justified.

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We aim to seek understanding through open dialogue, but our priority is ensuring Ashington receives the regeneration investment and improvements that have been promised to us. We welcome your reassurance and transparency at the earliest possibility. Please let us know if you can make arrangements to meet, we are very flexible in regards the dates and times of Council meetings.

Thank you in advance.

Yours sincerely



Sarah Eden
Executive Officer

Specific Questions

- 1. What are the specific delays that have impacted on the project timeline?*
- 2. What are the reasons for these delays, and the contributing factors?*
- 3. What reassurance can you give that the funding will be protected in the Strategic Regeneration Projects budget in 2024/25?*
- 4. What reassurance can you give that delays will not impact on external funding achieved?*
- 5. On what basis has 'Accelerating Ashington Business Support' been opened to businesses outside of Ashington?*
- 6. What progress has been made with 'Animating Ashington' and at what stage will key stakeholders like Ashington Town Council be consulted on cultural events and activities?*
- 7. What is the revised project timeline and expected completion date?*