

Agenda Item No:	6	
Committee:	Cabinet	
Date:	14 November 2022	
Report Title:	Wisbech Levelling Up Fund bid update & Wisbech Masterplan	

1 Purpose / Summary

- 1.1 The Council bid to Government in Round 2 of the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) for £12m to add to the £2m already secured from the Combined Authority as match funding. This £14m project was developed following master planning work from a group of consultancies that developed a Masterplan for Wisbech that included shorter term projects as well as longer term visions.
- 1.2 This report revisits the projects within the Council's Levelling Up Bid, as well as presents the final draft of the Wisbech Masterplan to Cabinet.

2 Key Issues

- 2.1 Government's response to Covid-19 through Build Back Better and the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) agenda offered a unique opportunity to attract significant levels of funding to Fenland which is designated as a 'Priority 2' area. The recent success of the March Future High Street (FHSF) bid demonstrates that with the right professional input, stakeholder engagement and political prioritisation, the Council is capable of pulling together a credible and compelling business case for investment.
- 2.2 Announced at the Spending Review in 2020, the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) will invest in capital investment in local infrastructure that improves everyday life across the UK. Building on and consolidating prior programmes such as the Local Growth Fund and Towns Fund, it will have a visible and tangible impact on people and places and support economic recovery. In doing so it will also create opportunity across the country, prioritising bids that invest in regeneration and growth in places of need and areas of low productivity and connectivity. The fund will support town and city centre regeneration to deliver economic and social levelling-up. LUF provides a new approach to tackling economic differences between areas and driving prosperity in towns and cities that have been left behind, and which have now been prioritised by Government for support.
- 2.3 To be better positioned for future bid opportunities, with the ability to respond to demanding deadlines, and to ensure that schemes are capable of delivery on the ground within the timescale expected by Government, the Council made some upfront investment in scheme development to create oven ready bids. This work was necessary in order to develop a cohesive and well developed LUF bid.
- 2.4 Working with a group of experienced consultants led by Norr, a spatial masterplan for Wisbech was developed. It is important to note that this spatial

plan builds on work already completed through extensive partner and community engagement through the Growing Fenland project and associated Wisbech Masterplan and did not start afresh on revisioning the town. It is anticipated that the Masterplan will be integrated into the Council's emerging Local Plan to give it not only significant weight in the planning process but also greater status when being used to form the basis of future bids for funding.

- 2.5 The masterplan contains short, medium and longer term projects and offered potential projects for Members to select for the Council's LUF bid.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 That Cabinet notes the current position in relation to the Council's LUF bid.
- 3.2 That Cabinet recognises the importance of the Wisbech Masterplan in the future development of funding applications and investment opportunities for the town.
- 3.3 That Cabinet instructs officers to ensure that the Wisbech masterplan is incorporated within the next draft of the Local Plan, giving the masterplan significance for any future regeneration work developed for Wisbech.

Wards Affected	Wisbech Wards	
Forward Plan Reference	KEY/110CT22/01	
Portfolio Holders	Cllr Chris Seaton Cllr Ian Benney Cllr Chris Boden	Portfolio Holder for Social Mobility and Heritage Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance
Report Originator	Phil Hughes	Head of Leisure Services
Contact Officers	Simon Machen Paul Medd	Growth and Regeneration Advisor Chief Executive

4 Levelling Up Fund Bid

- 4.1 As Members will recall, the Council submitted a LUF Round 2 bid in the summer. Government launched the Levelling up Fund (LUF) in 2021, with a tight deadline for Round 1 bid submission. Following internal discussions, Member's felt that submitting a considered and well worked up bid in Round 2 (summer 2022) would give Fenland the best chance of success in what is likely to be a very competitive process.
- 4.2 Fenland was assessed as a category 2 priority place for the LUF process. Unfortunately, this means that the Council receives no Government financial

support to develop a bid. In August 2021 Cabinet agreed that the Council should invest in the development of a town centre spatial masterplan for Wisbech to support the development of a LUF bid.

- 4.3 Consultants were appointed to develop the Wisbech Spatial Masterplan, with a further specialist appointed to support the Council in developing a compelling LUF bid, based on the emerging masterplan.

Masterplan development

- 4.4 Members had an initial meeting with consultants to discuss potential opportunities in the town and to help guide the development of the master planning work. Members also met with the bid development consultant who has described the process as very competitive, requiring a bid that is cohesive with projects linking together well and a bid that is compelling in terms of its economic impact and resultant benefit-cost ratio.

- 4.5 Following the development of the draft spatial masterplan, a further discussion with Members took place to narrow down potential project options to submit as a LUF bid. Cabinet then selected the three projects to submit to Government in June 2022. The projects selected met the LUF criteria of:

- Spend within three years
- One project to be significantly underway in 2022/23
- Regeneration & town centre investment
- Cultural investment
- Capital only investment

- 4.6 Cabinet selected the following three projects to be submitted to the Government as Fenland's LUF bid for Wisbech.

- Castle visitor centre and improved public realm linking the castle and market place. Value; £1.7m
- Old market place including street greening and public realm enhancements between the town centre and Nene waterfront. Value; £2.6m
- College of West Anglia - green skills centre. Value; £9.7m

It should be noted that with the selection of the College of West Anglia project, the College is bidding to the CPCA for up to £2m match funding through the recycled local growth fund bidding process. This funding forms the necessary match funding required of a LUF bid.

Total LUF bid value;	£12,027,489
CPCA match funding;	<u>£ 2,000,000</u>
Total project value;	<u>£14,027,489</u>

- 4.7 If the bid is successful, these projects will bring significant capital investment into the town centre regenerating public spaces, ensuring that Wisbech has every opportunity to harness the potential of its heritage and cultural assets to attract people into the town to live, work and visit in the future. These projects

will have a demonstrable impact on the local economy - necessary for the LUF bid.

5 Current LUF status

- 5.1 FDC submitted the LUF bid on time to Government. Since that time little information has been forthcoming, with the large number of bids received by Government being assessed by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.
- 5.2 Fenland has been contacted on one occasion to supply a couple of documents, but otherwise has received no contact since bid submission.

6 Wisbech Masterplan

- 6.1 To develop a spatial, map-based expression to identify further opportunities for regeneration and investment, as well as supporting the initial LUF application, a Wisbech Masterplan was commissioned from Norr Consulting.
- 6.2 This work directly supports the development of the town's quality of life offer. The March FHSF fund bid was successful in no small part due to the funded investment in consultancy support following the Council's successful expression of interest.
- 6.3 Following site visits and discussions with Members, Norr developed a masterplan for the town. It is important to stress that this plan builds on work already done through extensive partner and community engagement on the Wisbech Growing Fenland project, not starting afresh. Its integration into the Council's emerging Local Plan will give it significant weight in the planning process, but also greater status when being used to form the basis of future regeneration work, including future funding applications.
- 6.4 The masterplan includes;
 - Analysis - consideration of the key ingredients of the wider town centre including its physical context, historic context, urban grain, connectivity, views and landmarks, land use, social infrastructure, open space and public realm
 - Identifying barriers and constraints to growth and change
 - Identifying opportunity sites and character areas across the wider town centre for renewal and investment
 - A high-level illustrative masterplan and spatial vision for the wider town centre which is visual in its design, featuring a number of artists impressions, plans/maps and photographs
 - Renewal and regeneration options for opportunity sites and character areas
 - A high-level public realm strategy including improved connectivity and accessibility
- 6.5 The masterplan is attached in Appendix 1.

7 Legal Implications

- 7.1 There are no specific legal implications in relation to this report however each bid and/or funding allocation is managed in accordance with the Council's constitutional requirements with separate and specific legal advice being sought in relation to potential subsidy and/or procurement implications on a case-by-case basis.

8 Effect on corporate objectives

The corporate objectives which link to the projects and proposals discussed in this report are as follows:

8.1 Communities

- Support vulnerable members of our community
- Promote health & wellbeing for all
- Work with partners to promote Fenland through culture and heritage

8.2 Environment

- Work with partners and the community on projects that improve the environment and our street scene
- Work with partners to keep people safe in their neighbourhoods by reducing crime and anti-social behaviour and promoting social cohesion

8.3 Economy

- Attract new businesses, jobs and opportunities whilst supporting our existing businesses in Fenland
- Promote and enable housing growth, economic growth and regeneration across Fenland
- Promote and lobby for infrastructure improvements across the district

9 IMPLICATIONS

Legal Implications

- 9.1 Not applicable at this time. If the LUF bid is successful it is anticipated that the College of West Anglia would be wholly responsible for the development and delivery of the Green Skills Centre, arranged through a grant funding agreement to ensure that funding and risk is allocated correctly
- 9.2 Additionally, as a County Council asset, delivery of the Old Market Place would be a County Council project, again backed by a grant funding agreement to ensure that funding and risk is allocated correctly
- 9.3 Finally, FDC would manage the Castle Visitor Centre project, with a steering group consisting of FDC Members, as well as Town Councillors and volunteers from the Castle, as well as a County Council representative, as owners of the site.

Financial Implications

- 9.4 At bid submission stage, the Council added in significant inflation assumptions into estimates prepared in the bid. It is anticipated that this will cover the current market situation, should the LUF bid be successful and the three projects progress.
- 9.5 Financial risk to the Council will be mitigated regarding the Old Market Place and Green Skills Centre, with the partner organisations being responsible for delivery of these projects as described above.

Equality Implications

- 9.6 N/A

10 Appendix I

Wisbech masterplan