

Agenda Item No:	8	
Committee:	CABINET	
Date:	3rd February 2022	
Report Title:	Wisbech High Street Project Update and Funding Review	

This item comprises EXEMPT INFORMATION comprised in a Schedule 3 and Appendix 1 which is not for publication by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended).

1 Purpose / Summary

- 1.1 To provide Cabinet with an update on progress and issues arising related to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) Wisbech High Street Programme and the ongoing projects relating to two properties at 24 Wisbech High Street and 11-12 Wisbech High Street.

2 Programme Summary

- 2.1 There has been continued positive progress with the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) Programme for Wisbech High Street. Through the months of September to December 2021 the programme has seen continued progress regarding ongoing property projects, new property improvements starting on site and some larger projects nearing completion.
- 2.2 Following regular contact with the NLHF regarding progress on the projects, the NLHF have confirmed in writing that they are willing to extend the project deadline into 2023 to ensure project completion.
- 2.3 Following an ongoing communications plan, the programme has also seen further property owners come forward to enquire regarding the final year of the grant being available for property improvements – two further properties within Wisbech High Street have now come forward and are now at early-stage development of their projects.
- 2.4 The report below outlines key projects and milestones achieved in delivering capital projects and the activity programme over the life of the project.
- 2.5 The two major projects regarding 11-12 High Street and 24 High Street have moved forwards to a position whereby each project has now undertaken and completed a formal competitive tender process for a contractor to develop the properties, as permitted with the current planning permission. This point in the process has solidified contractor market costs for the time being and the report below seeks Cabinet decisions regarding which option for each project is preferred.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 That Cabinet notes the positive progress that this project has made both on supporting third party owned property improvements as well as the continuing activity programme.
- 3.2 That Cabinet notes the current position in relation to 11/12 High Street.
- 3.3 That Cabinet considers the options for 24 High Street, Wisbech and approves a preferred option to take forward together with any associated budgetary implications;
- 3.4 Subject to the above, authorises officers, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Social Mobility and Heritage, to put in place all required financial, legal and governance arrangements as required to facilitate the delivery of the best achievable outcomes for both buildings in line with existing delegations.

Wards Affected	Medworth Ward
Forward Plan Reference	KEY/21NOV21/01 KEY/03DEC21/02
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Ian Benney – Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth Cllr Chris Seaton – Portfolio Holder for Social Mobility and Heritage Cllr Chris Boden – Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance
Report Originator(s) and Contact Officer(s)	Paul Medd – Chief Executive Peter Catchpole – Corporate Director & Section 151 Officer Phil Hughes – Acting Assistant Director Simon Machen – Corporate Growth and Regeneration Advisor Matt Wright – High Streets Project Manager Amy Brown – Head of Legal and Governance and Deputy Monitoring Officer Neil Krajewski – Deputy Chief Accountant
Background Papers	2020 Cabinet Reports June 2021 Cabinet Report Planning documents

4 Reasons for Exemption

- 4.1 Before deciding whether to deal with this report as an exempt item and to exclude the press and public the Cabinet must first decide whether there is exempt information in the report and secondly whether the public interest should override the application of that exemption.
- 4.2 The Council considers that this Schedule 3 and Appendix 1 of this Report comprises exempt information which is not for publication by virtue of Paragraphs 1 & 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended). This report contains information in connection with Paragraph 1, namely *“Information relating to any individual.”* and Paragraph 3, namely *“Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)”*.
- 4.3 The Council considers that this report contains details of commercially sensitive financial matters. The release of this information would significantly prejudice and compromise the Council's ability to competitively negotiate with and appoint contractors in connection with the design and construction phases of 11/12 and 24 High Street. Members will need to decide whether the sensitivity of the information relating to this proposal is so great that the public interest in transparent and accountable decision making is outweighed at this time. Members could decide that disclosing such detailed and sensitive information into the public domain at this stage will be detrimental to the Council.

5 Capital Programme Project Update

5.1 Property No 4 Wisbech High Street

Following a pause in progress last year, this property is now expecting to progress to delivery of a renovated shop front through utilisation of the grant. The owner has received and submitted quotes and the project will be progressing in early 2022.



5.2 Properties No 13 to 17 Wisbech High Street

An excellent example of an owner utilising a high-level intervention from the NLHF grant to deliver high quality historic shop fronts, supported by the creation of town centre residential properties located within the conservation zone. This project will complete in January 2022 and will significantly add to the streetscape of Wisbech High Street.



5.3 Property No 18 Wisbech High Street

Number 18 started delivery of their project in November 2021. Scaffolding is erected, works started and phase one now completed. The owner is anticipating the replacement of windows during February 2022 with completion following this date.



5.4 Property No 19 Wisbech High Street

NLHF are satisfied that works on the property can begin upon completion of the appropriate legal formalities. Works are planned to begin in Spring this year, this property will see a full repair and restoration of the already historic shopfront as an anchor point of the High Street.



5.5 Property No 21 Wisbech High Street

Following a recent communication drive the owner of number 21 has come forward with an expression of interest in the grant. The High Street Project Officer will work with this owner throughout 2022 to deliver a scheme on the property.



5.6 Property No 31 Wisbech High Street

Following a recent communication drive, the owner of number 31 has come forward with an expression of interest in the grant. The High Street Project Officer will work with this owner throughout 2022 to deliver a scheme on the property.



6 Activity Schedule Update

- 6.1 Schedule 2 of this Report sets out a detailed update regarding the activities that have taken place throughout the life of the programme as well as a description of activities planned for the final year of the NLHF project to utilise all remaining activity funding granted by the NLHF.

7 11-12 and 24 High Street, Wisbech

- 7.1 These two projects form the largest capital elements of the programme and are expected to have the most significant impact upon the streetscape and vitality of the town centre in general. Over the past few months significant progress has been made with the opportunity for the building work for both properties having been advertised and bidding contractors submitting their formal tenders. Despite this and the NHLF's continued commitment to working with Fenland District Council to overcome the impact of the pandemic there are resultant financial implications which need to be considered.
- 7.2 Having regard to the above and before progressing with the development phase, a review of the financial and risk profiling is required to achieve the best possible outcomes for Wisbech High Street. The information required to undertake this assessment is set out in exempt Schedule 3 and Appendix 1 of this Report.

8 Reasons for Recommendation

- 8.1 The recommendations set out in this Report have been designed to facilitate the decisions and/or recommendations that Cabinet are requested to take to facilitate the continued progression of the Wisbech High Street project.

9 Alternative Options Considered

- 9.1 All of the considered and/or discounted in relation to 11-12 and 24 High Street are set out in Exempt Schedule 3 and Appendix 1 to this Report.

10 Implications

10.1 Legal Implications

- 10.1.1 Due to the nature of the projects there are various legal implications. These include contractual rights and obligations, procurement, and subsidy control, each of which are relevant to the profiling of the proposed options. Detailed legal implications are set out in exempt Schedule 3 of this Report and Appendix 1 on the basis that they are both commercially confidential and subject to legal professional privilege.

11.1 Financial Implications

- 11.1.1 The financial implications associated with the progress of the project are set out in Exempt Schedule 3 and Appendix 1 of this Report.

SCHEDULE 1

ACTIVITY SCHEDULE UPDATE

Name of activity	Description of activity	Date/Information/Link
Wisbech Underground	Worked with Lincoln Conservation. Three 3D laser-scan surveys of underground locations. Results & historical interpretation available on website.	Started August 2020. 3 surveys have been completed so far. Budget available for more if appropriate venues are found. Wisbech Underground News, Activities, Wisbech Underground Wisbech High Street (highstreetwisbech.org.uk)
Nights at The Museum	4 events, the first worked with Wisbech & Fenland Museum and was very successful with over 300 visitors. Also held one at the newly renovated Wisbech General Cemetery Chapel working with the Wisbech Society.	October 2018, May 2019. Museums at Night Activities Wisbech High Street (highstreetwisbech.org.uk)
Heritage Open Days	Event focused on promoting High Street heritage and the aims of High Street Project, including 2 tours. Later open days showed project progress so far and plans for High Street renovations. As well as telling public about what events have happened, what they can get involved in and promotional material of activities like Merchants' Trail.	Annually in September. Wisbech High Street Project has attended 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020. Opportunity to visit variety of heritage sites not usually open to public. Heritage Open Days New contributions, News, Activities Wisbech High Street (highstreetwisbech.org.uk)
Who is the next Lilian Ream?	12 photographic workshops and exhibition. Delivered by professional photographer Matt Emmet from Forgotten Heritage. Aimed to develop skills, learn about historic photographers in Wisbech and increase interest in High Street work to ensure that restoration process is documented.	Started October 2017, final exhibition was launched in the Museum library in June 2019. Photographic Workshops News, Activities Wisbech High Street (highstreetwisbech.org.uk)
Archaeological Building recording	Worked with Archaeological Project Services (APS), 2 free workshops to learn about recording old buildings in Wisbech venues including Rose & Crown hotel on High Street and the Castle.	8 th & 15 th June 2019. Archaeological Building Recording News, Activities Wisbech High Street (highstreetwisbech.org.uk)
Wisbech Big Dig	Worked with professional archaeologists from APS and local amateur archaeology group FenArch. Volunteers participated in real dig in Wisbech & Fenland museum	5-day event in May & June 2018. "The Big Dig" New contributions, Get involved, News, Activities Wisbech High Street (highstreetwisbech.org.uk)

Name of activity	Description of activity	Date/Information/Link
Great Wisbech Gutter Clean	gardens. Four events delivered. Supported by Wisbech Town Council, Wisbech Society, Street Pride and FDC Conservation Officer on hand to answer questions from building owners and offer practical advice.	Coincided with SPAB's building maintenance week in November 2017. Annual Gutter Cleaning Activities Wisbech High Street (highstreetwisbech.org.uk)
Understanding Historic Buildings & Interiors	Series of popular talks and workshops. Four events delivered on wallpaper, paint, tiles, and shops.	July – November 2019. Understanding Historic Buildings and Interiors - A series of Talks and Workshops Activities Wisbech High Street (highstreetwisbech.org.uk)
Adult training in Heritage construction and conservation	Lincoln Conservation have so far delivered 6 online talks. Events are recorded and available online if not able to join live. Lots of interest in the talks both past and present. Highly skilled and educational. As we continue with these there will also be opportunity for hands-on learning experience alongside it. Most recent about Virtual Immersive Environments for heritage was well attended with good feedback and has sparked possibilities of more use of modern virtual reality technology to record history and heritage in Wisbech.	Started May 2021, most recent December 2021. More planned for Spring 2022. Live Recordings of Conservation Skills Talks now available on our YouTube Channel News, Activities Wisbech High Street (highstreetwisbech.org.uk)
Lost Images of Wisbech photobook & exhibition	Book formally launched with Wisbech & Fenland Museum in June 2021. Copies still selling well in both the museum giftshop and local Community Hub which specialises in local history books. Exhibition disrupted due to Covid-19 therefore was moved to digital online show and shop windows on High Street.	Sales continue to do well. Community Hub recently had a restock. Hub pays FDC £2.80 per book sold to cover costs / fund further print runs. New order of books will be required as so popular. Photographic Exhibition of old photos of Wisbech for Heritage Open Days 2020 Activities Wisbech High Street (highstreetwisbech.org.uk)
How to Look after your Listed building workshops and booklet.	3 free popular sessions delivered so far including Conservation Issues, Taking care of Listed buildings, Damp & Plastering. Final workshop was cancelled due to Covid-19. Can be planned for future as was working with Claire Fidler FDC Conservation Officer.	August 2018 – November 2019. Booklet was published as part of this work which is distributed at other events. Free Conservation Workshops "How to Look After Your Old Building" Activities Wisbech High Street (highstreetwisbech.org.uk)

Name of activity	Description of activity	Date/Information/Link
The Merchants Trail	Trail booklet and app has been updated. The Merchants' Trail walk continues to be very popular, and copies of the booklet are being restocked often. App can be promoted more and there is interest in 3D scanning Virtual Reality technology recording of the trail too.	Launched in summer 2019. Supported by volunteers, Wisbech Society, Street Pride and WISARD. Updating the Merchants Trail Activities Wisbech High Street (highstreetwisbech.org.uk)
Wisbech Christmas Memories	Partnered with Etcetera Community Hub CIC, oral history project during Wisbech Christmas Fayre. Interviewed and shared stories of memories of Wisbech, the high street, shopping, and Christmas. Conversation audio was recorded so opportunities to share in exhibition or podcast form in future and important to have documented and stories preserved from older generation.	December 2021
Hands-on learning activities & practical sessions	6 additional online events planned January-April 2022, with specialists at Lincoln Conservation providing the training. Plans are being made for there to be more opportunities alongside these. First of which is using Community Hub Studio as a venue for a group of people (Covid-19 restrictions pending) to design & paint own Medieval Tile pattern following online talk of same subject.	Aims to develop skills and provide more opportunities for learning. Beneficial for wellbeing in socialising and allowing conversation. First due to be January 2022, this model can then be carried across to other online events to provide a follow up practical session where appropriate. Open to public and students.
Art Competitions	Aim is to attract more engagement in Wisbech High Street project from children and families.	Easter Half Term 2022

SCHEDULE 2

PRESS RELEASES

Members are able to view progress of the overall project by accessing the [Wisbech High Street website](#). The site contains details of the activity programme and progress to date, including press releases regarding progress that the Council has produced.

A full list of all historic press releases relating to the projects can be found below:

[Learn how virtual reality is bringing historical sites to life](#) (2 December 2021)

Virtual reality technology and how it can be used to bring historical sites to life is the subject of the next online heritage talk being held as part of the Wisbech High Street Project.

[Last chance to apply for Wisbech High Street grant as more funded works get underway](#) (25 November 2021)

The countdown is on for Wisbech High Street property owners to apply for a National Lottery grant to restore their historic buildings – as more funded improvement works get underway.

[Wisbech property owners encouraged to take advantage of grant scheme before it's too late](#) (13 October 2021)

Property owners are being given a final opportunity to restore their buildings to their former historic glory as part of Fenland District Council's Wisbech High Street Project.

[Developer sought as historic Wisbech High Street renovation gets the go-ahead](#) (3 August 2021)

Wisbech is poised for an historic High Street transformation after revised plans for a new shop and flats at 'The Gap' were given the go-ahead.

[Learn how to protect historic homes from pest infestations at latest heritage talk](#) (30 June 2021)

Know your furniture beetle from your death watch beetle? Your silverfish from your wood weevil? Put your knowledge to the test!

[Lost images of Wisbech made available in new book](#) (11 June 2021)

Unseen historic photos of Wisbech that proved hugely popular when they went on display for the first-time last year have been made available in a new book.

[Award-winning stone carver hosts free Wisbech High Street Project skills training talk](#) (27 May 2021)

An award-winning stone carver who has worked on some of the world's most prestigious buildings will talk about his work and the use of architectural stone carving within the heritage sector at a free online talk next month.

[New series of free heritage skills training sessions launches as part of Wisbech High Street Project](#) (17 May 2021)

An exciting new series of free, traditional construction and heritage skills training sessions have been launched as part of Fenland District Council's National Lottery-supported Wisbech High Street Project.

[Wisbech Underground brought to life in mesmerising 3D surveys](#) (8 March 2021)

Deep beneath the streets of Wisbech lies a number of hidden vaults and tunnels and cells, cellars and crypts that help to tell a story of the town's steeped history.

[Another Wisbech High Street redevelopment set to get underway](#) (13 January 2021)

Another redevelopment scheme made possible thanks to National Lottery players through Fenland District Council's Wisbech High Street Project is set to get underway.

[Council agrees largest Wisbech High Street grant to date for major improvement works](#) (15 December 2020)

Major improvement works are set to begin on four dilapidated Wisbech High Street properties before Christmas after Fenland District Council yesterday (14 December) agreed the largest grant to be awarded through the Wisbech High Street Project.

[Shop gutters in Wisbech High Street set for annual clean](#) (23 November 2020)

Work to help restore historic buildings on Wisbech High Street will take to the skies once again this week when the Wisbech High Street Project's annual Gutter Clean event takes place.

[Grant agreed for Wisbech High Street building improvement works](#) (12 November 2020)

A grant made possible thanks to National Lottery players has been awarded through the Wisbech High Street Project to enable improvement works to an historic Wisbech high street building.

[Contractor appointed for National Lottery-supported 'The Gap' redevelopment project](#) (2 November 2020)

Plans to breathe new life into 'The Gap' in Wisbech High Street with an ambitious, permanent development have taken a step forward with a key contractor appointment.

[Celebrate Wisbech's heritage with online photography exhibition](#) (20 August 2020)

Heritage fans will be able to step back in time from the comfort of their own home next month when unseen photos of Wisbech go on virtual display as part of Heritage Open Days.

[New plans for 'The Gap' after developments enable longer term solution for site](#) (3 July 2020)

A new development for retail and residential use could now be built at 'The Gap' in Wisbech High Street after major legal issues previously preventing a permanent building from being built have been successfully resolved by Fenland District Council.

[Lease signing paves the way for Wisbech High Street transformation](#) (7 November 2019)

Exciting plans to transform derelict buildings on Wisbech High Street into new shops and flats have moved forward after a regeneration agreement was signed this week.

[Further action required for Wisbech High Street building](#) (23 September 2019)

Fenland District Council is taking further urgent action to a derelict building in Wisbech after surveys revealed that part of its structure had deteriorated and now requires more localised demolition.

[New look heritage trail launched in time for summer holidays](#) (1 August 2019)

A trail which helps bring Wisbech's heritage to life has been given a revamp – with a new interactive mobile app putting history at your fingertips.

[Wisbech High Street re-opens following essential safety work to derelict building](#) (26 July 2019)

Wisbech High Street has re-opened to traffic this evening following the completion of urgent safety work involving partial demolition of a derelict building.

Wisbech High Street building to be partially demolished over safety concerns (15 July 2019)

Fenland District Council is taking urgent action to partially demolish a derelict building in Wisbech after surveys revealed parts of the building are at risk of collapse.

Love your old buildings or lose them! (21 January 2019)

A free and practical guide has been launched to help owners of historic properties to maintain their buildings and preserve them for years to come.

Second Gutter Clean takes to the skies (16 November 2018)

Work to help preserve and maintain historic buildings in Wisbech High Street gets underway next week when the second annual Gutter Clean event is held.

Council agrees action to bring derelict High Street buildings back into use (1 October 2018)

Fenland District Council and a local developer have moved to acquire and redevelop the site of 11-12 High Street from its London-based private owner to regenerate the decaying site once and for all.

Find out more about the Wisbech High Street Project during Heritage Open Days (2 September 2018)

A chance to learn more about plans to bring Wisbech High Street back to its former glory will be just one of the opportunities during this year's national Heritage Open Days.

Big Dig to provide hands on history in Wisbech (18 May 2018)

Budding archaeologists are set to uncover more of Wisbech's history during May half term as a 'Time Team' style community dig gets underway.

Plans for The Gap have the 'Marmite' effect (25 January 2018)

The heritage officer driving a National Lottery-funded project to regenerate Wisbech High Street has responded to a 'Marmite' reaction to plans for 'The Gap'.

Bold plans submitted to transform 'The Gap' (18 December 2017)

Exciting plans to bring a derelict eyesore back to life by transforming it into a new and inspiring area of public realm have been submitted.

Wisbech High Street set for gutter clean (10 November 2017)

Work to help restore historic buildings on Wisbech High Street will take to the skies this month when a special event is held to clean gutters and parapets.

Rich history to be documented through workshops (26 September 2017)

A new series of photography workshops will launch next week as part of the £1.9 million National Lottery funded Wisbech High Street Project.

Renowned photographer joins Wisbech High Street Project (25 August 2017)

An internationally renowned architectural photographer has joined a project aiming to breathe new life into Wisbech High Street – believing it will have a big impact on people's perceptions of the town.

Celebrate Fenland's history at heritage weekend (18 August 2017)

A chance to learn more about exciting plans for Wisbech High Street will be just one of the opportunities on offer during this year's national Heritage Open Days.

[New website for Wisbech High Street project](#) (23 June 2017)

An exciting project celebrating the history of a Fenland high street and driving its future restoration has been boosted with the launch of a new interactive website.

[High Street project wins full backing from the Heritage Lottery Fund](#) (11 July 2016)

Fenland District Council has been awarded a grant of around £1.9 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for the Wisbech High Street Project.