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| Agenda Item No: | 6   |  |
| Committee:      | Cabinet                                     |  |
| Date:           | 12 May 2022                                 |  |
| Report Title:   | Wisbech - Levelling Up Fund progress update |  |

## 1 Purpose / Summary

For Cabinet to note the Council's progress towards submitting a bid to the Government's Levelling Up Fund – Round 2.

## 2 Key issues

- 2.1 Government launched the Levelling up Fund (LUF) in 2021, with a tight deadline for Round 1 bid submission. Following internal discussions, Members felt that submitting a considered and well worked up bid in Round 2 would give Fenland the best chance of success in what is likely to be a very competitive process.
- 2.2 Fenland has been assessed as a category 2 priority place for the LUF process. Unfortunately, this means that the Council receives no government support to develop a compelling bid. In August 2021 Cabinet agreed that the Council should develop a Town Centre Spatial Plan for Wisbech with an accompanying LUF bid at a cost in the region of £75,000 - £100,000.
- 2.3 Consultants have been appointed to develop the Wisbech Master Plan, with a further specialist appointed to support the Council in developing a compelling LUF bid, based on the emerging Master Plan.
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 The Government's LUF Round 2 prospectus has been published and remains similar to the Round 1 process and prospectus.
- 2.6 A further meeting has recently taken place narrowing down potential project options to submit to LUF in July. Members await some financial information prior to making a final decision on the maximum of three projects that can be submitted to Government as a FLUF package bid.
- 2.7 Members have 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.
- 2.8 In parallel with the Council's work, the MP's office has commissioned a piece of place shaping work - developing a narrative for Fenland. A second stage of this work has been commissioned by Anglian Water. It is expected that this work will also support the Wisbech LUF bid. As part of the place shaping process a Place Board is being developed. This body will also be a partner to the bid and referenced in the FDC submission which should strengthen the bid's credentials when being assessed.

## 3 Recommendations

- 3.1 That Cabinet notes the contents of this report and ongoing progress in developing a LUF bid to Government.

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| <b>Wards Affected</b>         | Wisbech Wards   |
| <b>Forward Plan Reference</b> | KEY/14MAY21/01  |
| <b>Portfolio Holder</b>       | Cllr Chris Seaton - Portfolio Holder for Heritage and Social Mobility   |
| <b>Report Originator</b>      | Phil Hughes - Acting Assistant Director   |
| <b>Contact Officers</b>       | Paul Medd - Chief Executive<br>Peter Catchpole - Corporate Director<br>Simon Machen - Corporate Growth and Regeneration Advisor<br>Phil Hughes - Acting Assistant Director<br>Simon Jackson - Economic Growth Manager |
| <b>Background Papers</b>      | <a href="#">Levelling Up Fund Prospectus</a>  |

## 1 Background / introduction

- 1.1 Government's response to Covid-19 through Build Back Better and the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) agenda offers 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.
- 1.2 The Growing Fenland Masterplans for March, Wisbech, Chatteris and Whittlesey were coordinated by the District Council with support from economic analysts Metro Dynamics who worked closely with key stakeholders. The Masterplans were endorsed by the District Council, respective Town Councils, the County Council and Combined Authority. They include a set of well informed and evidenced strategic priorities for each town.

## 2 Levelling Up Fund

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 The £4.8 billion fund will support town and city centre regeneration to deliver economic and social levelling-up. In round one the emphasis was on town centre regeneration, culture and heritage. 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 The Fund is intended to support investment in places where it can make the biggest difference to everyday life, including ex-industrial areas, deprived towns, and coastal communities. Bidding and funding criteria are not yet known for round two but there remains an expectation of it being similar to round one with the prospectus outlining the priorities below.

- 2.4 **Regeneration and town centre investment**, building on the Towns Fund framework to upgrade eyesore buildings and dated infrastructure, acquire and regenerate brownfield sites, invest in secure community infrastructure and crime reduction, and bring public services and safe community spaces into town and city centres.
- 2.5 **Cultural investment** maintaining, regenerating, or creatively repurposing museums, galleries, visitor attractions (and associated green spaces) and heritage assets as well as creating new community-owned spaces to support the arts and serve as cultural spaces.
- 2.6 It should also be noted Government's Net Zero and wider environmental ambitions represent a key part of the commitment to Build Back Better – and this is particularly important with regards to capital and infrastructure projects which have a visible impact on surroundings. Projects should be aligned to and support Net Zero goals: for instance, be based on low or zero carbon best practice; adopt and support innovative clean tech and/or support the growth of green skills and sustainable supply chains.
- 2.7 The bid assessment process focuses on the following key criteria:
- Characteristics of the place – each local authority is sorted into category 1, 2 or 3 based on Government's published assessment metrics, with category 1 representing the highest level of identified need. Fenland falls into category level 2.
  - Deliverability - will be based on finance, management, and commercial cases, with bids able to demonstrate begin delivery on the ground in 2022-23 financial year prioritised.
  - Strategic fit with local and Fund priorities – this should be addressed in the strategic case of submissions and should include support from stakeholders.
  - Value for money – an economic case should be submitted to explain the benefits of the bid and how it represents value for money - also described as Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR).

### **Progress in developing the necessary supporting evidence and prioritised plans for LUF Round 2 bid development**

## **3 Wisbech Master Plan**

- 3.1 The Growing Fenland Wisbech document sets out a clear list of priorities for the town and town centre.
- 3.2 To further develop this approach with spatial, map-based expression to these priorities and to identify further opportunities for regeneration and investment a Wisbech Master Plan has been commissioned from Norr Consulting.
- 3.3 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. We were able to very clearly demonstrate how each of the projects included within the long list, and refined through business case development, met the Master Plan's priorities.
- 3.4 Following site visits and discussions with Members, Norr has been developing a master plan for the town. The Plan is at a draft stage and will be completed in June.
- 3.5 It is important to stress that this Plan is intended to build on work already done through extensive partner and community engagement on the Wisbech Growing Fenland project, not to start afresh. It will be integrated into the Council's emerging Local Plan to give it significant weight in the planning process, but also greater status when being used to form the basis of the LUF bid.

## **4 College of West Anglia - Net Zero Skills Centre**

- 4.1 As detailed above, net zero is a principle of the LUF prospectus, with bids needing to demonstrate environmental credentials. The College of West Anglia (CoWA) has developed a project for a Green Skills Centre that has considerable support from CPCA. This project has been submitted as an Expression of Interest for £2m support from CPCA's Recycled Local Growth Fund. This £2m bid, if successful, would provide the advised 10% match funding for the LUF bid, should the CoWA project form part of the 3 selected Fenland LUF projects.

## **5 Place Shaping documentation for Fenland as a whole and the four market towns to support economic growth opportunities**

- 5.1 The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly highlighted the importance of where we live, how we live and the role of the local community. This period of disruption is an excellent opportunity to review the services and projects we are delivering to ensure that they will drive the socio-economic and structural changes needed for our towns to thrive.

Building on the success of the Growing Fenland Plans, the local MP has appointed a place shaping specialists to help further develop local priorities in order to create a simple, clear and impactful story that highlights Fenland's assets and opportunities, helping to develop an anchor point for future strategy development and bid submissions.

- 5.2 It is important to stress that this work would not be intended to rewrite or reinvent our current socio-economic strategy and priorities. Those have been subject to extensive stakeholder engagement and are endorsed by FDC, the CPCA and by our town councils. The Growing Fenland Master Plans remain the starting point, with the need to show a clear 'golden thread' back to these from any future work.

- 5.3 Stage 2 of this work is to be funded by Anglian Water with this work anticipated to

- Design and development of the visual language and visual identity for Fenland, based on the overarching place narrative.
- Development of visual identity (more than one required dependant on the audience) for each of the 4 Fenland towns based on their story
- Creation of 'place led' images which can be used by partners and stakeholders
- Development of a Fenland storybook, including stories for all 4 towns. This will be used by partners and stakeholders and can be included within bid documents for external funding.

- 5.4 As part of the place shaping work a Place Board is being developed. This collaborative group, consisting of both private and public sector bodies and individuals, will provide a very strong partner to the bid, highlighting broad support for the submission to Government.

## **6 Legal Implications**

- 6.1 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.

## **7 Financial Implications**

- 7.1 No new implications at this time.

## **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