

Agenda Item No:	7	
Committee:	Cabinet	
Date:	13 June 2022	
Report Title:	Wisbech - Levelling Up Fund bid project selection	

1 Purpose / Summary

For Cabinet to formally agree the projects to be submitted to Government in the Council's Levelling Up Fund bid.

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 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 (masterplan) for Wisbech with an accompanying LUF bid at a cost in the region of £75,000 - £100,000.
- 2.3 Consultants were appointed to develop the Wisbech Masterplan, with a further specialist appointed to support the Council in developing a compelling LUF bid, based on projects from the Wisbech masterplan.
- 2.4 Members have met with the consultants to discuss potential opportunities in the town and to help guide the development of the master planning work.
- 2.5 Members have also met with the bid development consultant who has described the process as 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.
- 2.6 As a result of these discussions and the masterplan opportunities that fit the LUF criteria, Members have selected projects to be submitted to Government for a bid in July.
- 2.7 In parallel with the Council's work, the MP's office has commissioned a piece of place shaping work - developing a narrative for Fenland. It is expected that this work will also be used in support of the Wisbech LUF bid submission.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 That Cabinet formally agrees the projects being put forward as part of the Council's Levelling Up Fund bid to Government, namely;
 - Castle visitor centre and improved public realm linking the castle and market place
 - Old market place including street greening and public realm enhancements between the town centre old market place and Nene waterfront
 - College of West Anglia - green skills centre

- 3.2 That Cabinet authorises the Portfolio Holder for Heritage and Social Mobility to work with Wisbech members, officers and consultants to submit a LUF bid to Government by 6 July 2022
- 3.3 That Cabinet notes that the College of West Anglia project's inclusion in the Council's LUF bid is contingent on a successful, formally approved, funding bid to the CPCA in the region of £2m

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

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 case for investment.
- 1.2 The Growing Fenland masterplans for March, Wisbech, Chatteris and Whittlesey were coordinated by the 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 two the emphasis remains 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 outlining in 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 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 supplementary finance, management, and commercial cases, with bids able to demonstrate delivery beginning in financial year 2022-23.
- 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 will be submitted to explain the benefits of the bid and how it represents good value for money.

2.8 Key information for LUF Round 2:

- Bidders can submit one bid or a 'package' bid of up to 3 linked projects per MP constituency
- MPs must support any bid in writing as a gateway criteria for a bid
- Match funding of at least 10% is expected
- If a bid is unsuccessful authorities can submit again in later rounds with a revised or other proposed bids
- Once funding awards are decided, relevant local institutions are responsible for their delivery. Further contributions from the Fund will not be provided to meet cost overruns after funding has been agreed.

Development of supporting evidence and prioritised plans for LUF Round 2

3 Wisbech Masterplan

- 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 a spatial, map-based expression of these priorities and to identify further opportunity areas for investment, a Wisbech Masterplan has been developed by Norr Consulting, with significant input from local elected members.
- 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. It was important to be able to demonstrate how each of the projects included within the long list, and refined through business case development, met the masterplan's priorities.
- 3.4 Following site visits and discussions with members, Noor has developed a masterplan for the town. The plan identifies opportunity areas within the town centre. This is a plan that identifies both short and long term opportunities and will be used in the coming years to focus funding bids to support the continuing regeneration and development of Wisbech, as well as supporting the current LUF bid.
- 3.5 The Plan 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

3.6 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 LUF bid development

4.1 The Council has secured the support of consultants Avison Young to develop the Round 2 LUF bid. Avison Young are very experienced consultants, with a successful track record in the development of bids - including LUF round 1 bids.

4.2 Avison Young will work closely with Norr and council officers in the coming weeks to develop a compelling round 2 LUF bid based on the projects selected by Members.

4.3 As highlighted above, the masterplan offers options for the town centre that are both long and short term. A list was drawn up of projects from the masterplan that fitted the following LUF criteria;

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

4.4 Only three projects are allowed to be submitted in any LUF bid. Members considered the options available and have narrowed these down to 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.
- Old market place including street greening and public realm enhancements between town centre and Nene waterfront
- College of West Anglia - green skills centre

4.5 These projects will bring significant capital investment into the town centre regenerating public spaces and offering skills development opportunities, ensuring that Wisbech has every chance of using the impressive 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.

4.6 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 will form the necessary match funding required of a LUF bid. The College project's inclusion in the Council's LUF bid is contingent on the success of this further funding application.

4.7 CPCA has put in place the necessary governance to complete formal approval of successful bids through the Business Board on 24 June, with the Business Board recommendation then signed off by either a Mayoral Decision Notice or Chief Executive or other Officer Urgency provision prior to 6 July. This is important as any LUF bid match funding must be formally agreed prior to LUF submission.

5 Legal Implications

5.1 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. Acceptance of any LUF support from Government will be brought before Cabinet following the Government decision making processes in autumn 2022.

6 Financial Implications

Not applicable at this time.

7 Effect on corporate objectives

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

7.1 Communities

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

7.2 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

7.3 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