

# WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL CABINET

15 FEBRUARY 2022

**CABINET MEMBER RESPONSIBLE FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TOWN  
CENTRE REGENERATION AND GROWTH – COUNCILLOR LIZZY BOWEN**

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**Report Title** Abington Street Public Realm Works

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## **List of Appendices**

Appendix A – Abington Street Public Realm Business Case

Appendix B – Abington Street Public Realm Appraisal Report

Appendix C – Northampton Public Realm Improvements Stage 2 Design Report

## **1. Purpose of Report**

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- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet on the progress made to date on the Abington Street Public Realm Works project and to seek the necessary approvals to deliver the project.
- 1.2. The report seeks:
  - a) approval of the business case for the Abington Street Public Realm project to allow the funding to be drawn down from Northampton's Towns Fund grant allocation.
  - a) to delegate authority to the Executive Director of Place, Economy and Environment in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Town Centre Regeneration and Growth to appoint a principal contractor following a competitive procurement process to undertake the works.

## **2. Executive Summary**

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- 2.1 At the July 2021 Cabinet, noted the Towns Fund grant allocation to West Northamptonshire Council from MHCLG of £24.9m, subject to approval of stage two business cases for each project and in addition noted that each project business case will need to come back to Cabinet for consideration and approval.
- 2.2 The Abington Street Public Realm project is the fourth Towns Fund project to come forward. This report seeks approval of the business case to draw down on £4,610,625 of funding to enable project delivery.
- 2.3 The Abington Street Public Realm project responds directly to the need to support the repurposing and rejuvenation of the town centre particularly in response to the impact of the pandemic on the high street. This project aims to increase footfall into the town centre by regenerating Abington Street and Fish Street in response to extensive consultative and survey work undertaken by West Northamptonshire Council.
- 2.4 A RIBA Stage Two design proposal has now been developed for the project following engagement with the public and the Northampton Forward Board, in order to progress designs for delivery the funding needs to be drawn down from Government.
- 2.5 This report sets out the next steps for once the funding is approved and including the procurement route for the contractor.

## **3. Recommendations**

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- 3.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:
  - b) approves the business case for the Abington Street Public Realm project to draw down on £4,610,625 of Towns Funding.

- c) delegates authority to the Executive Director of Place, Economy and Environment in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Town Centre Regeneration and Growth to appoint a principal contractor following a competitive procurement process to undertake the works.

#### 4. Reason for Recommendations

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##### 4.1 Reasons for recommendations:

- a) the recommendations are necessary to allow the Abington Street Public Realm project to proceed and to ensure the grant award is spent within the award timescales.

#### 5. Report Background

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- 5.1 At the July 2021 Cabinet approval was given to develop the stage two business cases for the projects included within the £24.9m Towns Fund grant allocation.
- 5.2 This public realm project forms part of the Towns Fund grant allocation and directly responds to the need to support the regeneration of the town centre particularly in response to the impact of the pandemic on the high street. The project aims to increase footfall into the town centre in response to extensive consultative and survey work undertaken by West Northamptonshire Council.
- 5.3 The business case was independently appraised by Hatch Ltd in January 2022 and subsequently approved by the Northampton Forward Oversight and Delivery Group on the 24<sup>th</sup> January 2022. The Northampton Forward Board then approved the business case on the 28<sup>th</sup> January 2022.
- 5.4 The proposals are seen to have a good economic rationale with the economic impact resulting from the project is highlighted within the business case, table 1 shows the do nothing position and the expected benefits:

Table 1:

	Footfall (pa)	Gross Spend (pa)	Additional Spend (pa)
<b>Do nothing Pandemic Level</b>	4,427,500	£84,122,500	0
<b>Do nothing pre-pandemic level</b>	6,579,500	£125,010,500	0
<b>5% increase on pandemic levels</b>	4,648,875	£88,328,625	£4,206,125
<b>5% increase on pre-pandemic levels</b>	6,908,475	£131,261,025	£6,250,525.00

- 5.5 Sensitivity analysis has been undertaken on the expected benefits to present optimistic and pessimistic scenarios as well as the base case and are set out in table 2 below:

Table 2:

Footfall	Additional Spend on Pre-Pandemic Level (pa)	Additional Spend on Pandemic Level (pa)
<b>2% Increase</b>	£2,500,210	£1,682,450
<b>4% Increase</b>	£5,000,420	£3,364,900
<b>Base 5% Increase</b>	£6,250,525	£4,206,125
<b>6% Increase</b>	£7,500,630	£5,047,350
<b>8% increase</b>	£10,000,840	£6,729,800
<b>10% increase</b>	£12,501,050	£8,412,250

- 5.6 As shown above the lowest sensitivity gives is an opportunity to realise an additional spend in the town centre of £1,682,450 per annum.
- 5.7 This project directly aligns with the Northampton Town Centre Masterplan and the vision to regenerate the town centre with new experiences and businesses; increasing footfall, enhancing cultural opportunities, with locations and assets better connected.
- 5.8 This project will revitalise the pedestrianised areas of Northampton’s main shopping streets with improvements enhancing the experience for pedestrians and families. The streets that will be the focus of this project centre are;
- Abington Street – which is the main ‘high street’ and while some of the larger retail stores on this street have closed this remains the area with the highest number of retailers in the town.
  - Fish Street – which is fully pedestrianised and is the main link between St Giles' Street and Abington Street as well as linking the Town Centre to the Cultural Quarter.
- 5.9 The project complements proposals for Market Square by extending the areas of the town benefiting from public realm improvements and improving the links between a number of key locations. It will connect with wider TIP investments, increasing their transformational impact.
- 5.10 Gillespies LLP were appointed in July of 2021 to develop a design for the project area up to RIBA Stage 2. Gillespies are also working on the Market Square Project and had a good understanding of the town centre and its issues and opportunities. This ensured that the design team were able to develop a design within our tight timescales and were also able to ensure that there was design synergy between both projects.
- 5.11 The focus of the project is to create high quality areas that are attractive and inviting to shoppers and visitors. To achieve this, it is proposed that:
- Both streets will be re-surfaced in granite to tie in with the eastern end of Abington Street (Granite is a high-quality hard-wearing material and will significantly enhance both streets).
  - There will be more and improved seating that will promote active uses of the streetscape and increase dwell time.
  - Improved wayfinding and signage will aid navigation, improve connectivity and help instil a sense of identity.

- External lighting, tree planting and soft landscaping will be planted to increase biodiversity and improve safety in the town.
- Options for new planters and possibly new seating to the cafes and bars on Fish Street will be explored in more detail with the business on the street.
- A bespoke and eye-catching overhead lighting feature on Fish Street. It's intended that the feature will be designed in collaboration with lighting designers and/or local artists creating a unique solution rooted in the street's name and its rich history.
- Public art will be developed in partnership with NN Contemporary Gallery.
- Pop-up market stalls could be included on Abington Street with service points which could also be used for entertainers.

5.12 To develop the scheme up to this stage consultation with the local shop owners has taken place with details of this set out 7.13 -7.16 of this report.

5.13 During the consultation four options were shown and considered, these four options are set out in detail within Appendix C – Northampton Public Realm Improvements Stage 2 Design Report, and can be summarised as follows:

Dynamic Street – providing a vibrant and multi-functional streetscape with a central, meandering paving pattern, accompanied by pockets of activity zones designed to encourage longer dwell time, and to attract more shoppers and visitors to this area. This proposal aims to encouraging a wide range of activities such as informal play, street performance, outdoor dining, and flexible event spaces that have been carefully positioned along the central route.

Green Street - focuses on the environmental improvements through planting of a substantial number of trees accompanied by swathes of street-level planting. The use of permeable paving will assist with the rainwater infiltration while the new planting will help to improve the town centre's micro-climate and increase the biodiversity through introduction of wildlife-friendly species.

Simple Street - provides an elegant and cost-effective design with small clusters of trees and islands of seating spaced at even intervals creating a rhythm to the streetscape. The reduced amount of street furniture and simplicity of the design enables greater flexibility in the street arrangement while seating grouped in islands allows greater social interaction

Blended Street - this proposal features elements from both Dynamic and Green Street. The central meandering paving pattern is framed by the tree planting. Underneath the tree canopies are activity areas such as informal play, street performance, outdoor dining, and flexible event/market spaces. Flexible and demountable street furniture will also allow a greater flexibility of the street arrangement. A significant increase in tree planting creates a green and verdant character that helps to climate proof the town centre.

5.14 The preference following the consultation was for the 'blended option' which will be developed further during the next stages of design and consulted on further.

- 5.15 Gillespies have subsequently been appointed to take the design to RIBA Stage 3 (Planning Design). They will develop and refine the Stage 2 (Concept Design) proposals and will produce a detailed design that can be submitted for planning.
- 5.16 A RIBA Stage 4 design will be prepared following public consultation, and planning approvals (if required). A traditional Construction procurement is presently envisaged (an alternative would be a Design and Build procurement with early contractor involvement which may have a small impact on the delivery timeframes).
- 5.17 Further consultation will take place during the spring of 2022, this will take the form of full public consultation exercise and will include, a public exhibition, online publication of consultation material, online surveys and distribution of leaflets and flyers.
- 5.18 RIBA Stage 4 Design delivers construction tender documents in order to competitively tender for a Principal Contractor in the open market or through a compliant framework. We will score the contractors against cost and quality criteria to ensure that value for money is achieved.
- 5.19 As part of the towns Fund condition all funds need to be spent by March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2025, the outline programme below shows how we will achieve this.
- 5.20 The indicative project timelines and milestones for the project are:

<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Traditional Contractor Appointment</b>
Business case approval	February 2022
RIBA Stage 3 Design	Summer 2022
Public Consultation	Summer 2022
Planning and highway approval	Winter 2022/2023 (If required).
Detailed Construction design to RIBA 4	Winter 2023
Procure principal contractor	Spring 2023
Works commence	Summer 2023
Completion – Spring 2025	Spring 2025

## **6. Issues and Choices**

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- 6.1 To approve the drawdown of the funding for the project as described in this report.
- 6.2 To not approve the funding for this project will mean that the project will not be able to take place as the project is reliant on the Towns Fund. This would mean that the funding allocated by Government will be lost and not be used for the regeneration of Northampton town centre.
- 6.3 To approve the delegated authority to procure a principal contractor to deliver the project.
- 6.4 To not approve the delegated authority in relation to the contractor. Without the contractor in place, the project would not be able to be delivered.

## **7. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **7.1 Resources and Financial**

7.2 The funding for the project is secured through the Towns Fund grant of a total of £4,610,625.

7.3 The costs include the main construction contract, professional fees for design and delivery as well as suitable contingency and optimism bias, with this all planned to be met through the grant.

7.4 A contingency of 10 per cent has been applied to the project to cover any unforeseen costs, and Optimism bias of 20 per cent included for unknown costs that will arise through the design process and for unplanned inflationary costs given the volatility of the market at this moment in time.

### **7.5 Operating Costs**

7.6 The project will enhance and improve existing infrastructure assets which will reduce the current ongoing operational costs therefore minimizing any additional revenue to the Council;

- Upgraded finger posts to replace current outdated and corroded infrastructure
- New planters and benches

7.7 Maintenance of the new assets and planting will be incorporated into existing town centre public open space operational budgets, it is envisaged this will lead to a revenue pressure of £15k per annum due to the increase in soft landscaping maintenance requirements.

### **7.8 Legal**

7.9 It is noted pursuant to paragraph 5.1 above, that the process by which a business case is considered (prior to that of the Cabinet) has been followed in accordance with the process outlined in the Cabinet Report entitled Northampton Town Fund dated 13<sup>th</sup> July 2021. It follows that there are no legal issues arising from this report.

### **7.10 Risk**

7.10.1 There is no way to reasonably delay or cut activity without significant financial, reputational and political risks. A brief summary of the risks is detailed below:

- Financial risks: if the projects are not delivered within time and deadlines are not met, the Council risks losing external funding and faces increased costs within projects through not being able to undertake appropriate due diligence.
- Reputational risks: if the programme of work is not delivered timely, then it weakens the Council's position to leverage funding from Government. And other external funders in the future. There would also be a reputational hit with the public with many of these schemes already heavily promoted.

- Political risks: as a new authority, the Council is under increased scrutiny from Government and the public and if the projects are not delivered efficiently or efficiently then this can seriously harm the Council's perception to these audiences.

7.11 The project will have a project board established, with a wide range of representatives from the council including Finance, Procurement, Assets, and the Town Centre team. A project specific risk register will be developed and regularly monitored by the project board.

#### 7.12 **Consultation**

7.13 The July Cabinet report highlighted the consultation that took place as part of the development of the Town Centre Masterplan and Town Investment Plan, this included significant consultation with the public via public exhibitions, online publication of consultation material, online surveys and distribution of leaflets and flyers.

7.14 As part of the development of the proposals for Abington Street and Fish Street a consultation exercise with local businesses was held at the Guildhall in Northampton on October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021 with the design proposals displayed on A1 boards. Attendees were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposals at the consultation via a survey on tablet devices. Details of the consultation are set out within Appendix C – Northampton Public Realm Improvements Stage 2 Design Report

7.15 Following the consultation, an online version of the survey including images and information on each concept was sent to other local businesses in the area.

7.16 The proposals were also presented to the July 2021 Northampton Forward Board and comments from the board were incorporated into the proposals.

7.17 Broadly speaking both the businesses which took part in the consultation exercise, and the Northampton Forward Board, were in favour of the proposals and where appropriate the proposals were amended to take account of the feedback received.

7.18 Further consultation will take place during the spring of 2022, this will take the form of full public engagement exercise and will include, a public exhibition, online publication of consultation material, online surveys and distribution of leaflets and flyers.

#### 7.19 **Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny**

7.19.1 N/A

#### 7.20 **Climate Impact**

7.21 The Council will undertake Environmental Impact Assessments in line with the Towns Fund Guidance and the stage two business cases will look at the climate and environmental impact as part of their development.



## 7.22 **Community Impact**

- 7.22.1 The Council will undertake programme-wide level impact assessments, relevant project-level impact assessment and Equality and Impact Assessments when required.
- 7.22.2 Significant consultation with the public has taken place, with many of these projects delivering assets which will benefit the community.

## 7.23 **Communications**

- 7.23.1 Communications Officers were involved in the business consultation exercise and will form an integral part of the wider public engagement exercise that will take place during spring 2022.

## **8. Background Papers**

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- 8.1 Northampton Towns Fund West Northamptonshire Cabinet Report July 2021