

**ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
11 APRIL 2024**

DARLINGTON TOWNS FUND

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide an update on progress and the current position with regard to the Towns Fund programme within Darlington.

Summary

2. Information is provided on Towns Fund projects delivered and acquisitions made.
3. The Project Adjustment Request to government is referenced, which ensures a reduction in risk of delivery.
4. Progress on projects is provided.
5. Preliminary information relating to the Long Term Plan For Towns funding is provided.

Recommendation

6. Members are asked to note the update information provided in relation to the Towns Fund.

**Ian Williams
Chief Executive**

Background Papers

None

Chris Mains, Towns Fund Programme Manager

S17 Crime and Disorder	No impact from the report
Health and Wellbeing	No impact from the report
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	No impact from the report
Diversity	No impact from the report
Wards Affected	All wards
Groups Affected	No impact from the report
Budget and Policy Framework	This decision does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework.

Key Decision	N/A
Urgent Decision	N/A
Council Plan	This report directly supports the delivery of the Council Plan to support the economic development of the Borough.
Efficiency	No impact from the report
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	No impact from the report

MAIN REPORT

7. Submission of our Town Investment Plan to Government in July 2020, secured a £22.3M Town Deal allocation in October 2020, which together with £1M Forward Funding has provided a total of £23.3M capital and revenue Towns Fund for Darlington. This focused on three key areas: Victoria Road and Northgate gateways and the Town Centre.
8. To date, the Council has received £18,851,251 capital funding from the Government to fund projects to revitalise and improve the town, alongside £438,965 revenue funding to enable programme development. The remaining funding will be provided within 2024/25.
9. The funding has delivered notable successes to date, including:-
 - (a) T-Levels facility - A new extension at Darlington College (£2.65M), delivered on budget and to time, completing in spring 2023. Now called the `Ingenium Centre` the facility is operational and providing new workshops and classrooms for the students.
 - (b) Skinnergate and The Yards – a scheme providing public realm and property frontage improvements along Skinnergate and the Yards, including Clarks, Buckton’s, Post House Wynd, and Mechanics.
 - (c) Contribution of £4.508M to the development of the Hopetown visitor attraction in Northgate, now under construction.
 - (d) The acquisition of properties and land to enable further intervention projects, including the former Northern Echo building; 156 Northgate; land at Garden Street and one of the properties which make up the historic Edward Pease House in Northgate.
10. Alongside the successes there are also projects which have proved to be a higher risk of delivery within the timescale of the Towns Fund. Most notably Edward Pease House and Linear Park (Northgate). A project adjustment request was submitted and agreed by government to address the risk and continue to maximise benefits from the Darlington Towns Fund.
11. The acquisition of the former Northern Echo building, provides the ideal location for the development of a new Adult Skills facility, funded within the Towns Fund.
12. The announcement of the development of the Darlington Economic Campus (DEC) Treasury relocation to the town has created a demand for high quality office facilities within the town centre. Following the successful Towns Fund project adjustment request

to government and allocation of funds from TVCA, funding is now available to refurbish the former Northern Echo Building and play a crucial role in meeting this demand by converting the upper floors into refurbished commercial space, which will complement and work alongside the Adult Skills facility.

13. Development work continues to create an improved cycle route from the Hopetown visitor centre to the town centre.
14. The brownfield site at Garden Street is being progressed as a community focused urban green space, with art provision.
15. The project at Edward Pease House, although reduced in scale, will be progressed within the property acquired by Darlington Borough Council and suggested options developed for the future of the whole building.
16. Number 156 Northgate has Planning permission in place for the development of this listed building for commercial use. Expressions of interest for the refurbishment work have been sought by Darlington Council.
17. The Town Board continues to review and manage the Towns Fund projects.
18. As part of the budget statement in March 2024 it was announced that Darlington would be included in the second tranche of places to benefit from funding from the Long-Term Plan for Towns. The fund will be aimed at developing interventions which are initiated through 'grass roots' involvement and focussed on projects driven by the community. In short:-
 - (a) The £20m allocation is to be spent over a 10-year period
 - (b) 25% revenue and 75% capital
 - (c) The fund will be allocated in the Built-Up Area of the town. This is an ONS definition.
 - (d) Allocation will be on a 'light touch' approach, but an investment plan will be required.
19. There are three main themes:-
 - (a) High Street and Town Centre
 - (b) Local connectivity
 - (c) Safety and security
20. Guidance from government indicates that the development of an Investment Strategy and allocation of funds would be through the Town Board. The Council has received further information and will be discussing how this funding can be dovetailed into the current governance arrangements of the Town Board.
21. A further report will be presented to members once the arrangements have been agreed.