



CABINET

Tuesday 7 July 2020

TOWNS FUND CAPITAL PROJECTS GRANT 2020/21

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. On the 1st July 2020, the Chief Executive was written to by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) to offer Lowestoft a grant of £750,000 to fund capital projects that can be delivered this financial year (by March 2021), as part of a post COVID-19 recovery plan. As Lowestoft is 1 of 101 towns selected as part of the Town's Fund Programme, Government have chosen to provide capital funding to fast track delivery of projects, recognising that it is these areas that are likely to suffer significantly from the impacts of COVID 19. The level of grant funding per town has been allocated according to population size from the 2011 Census, using the Office for National Statistics' categorisation of small, medium and large towns.
2. The funding is for capital projects which are "shovel ready", meaning they are at an advanced stage and ready to deliver. Projects selected by the town are required to align with the Towns Fund Intervention Framework.
3. A number of capital projects within the draft Lowestoft Town Investment Plan (Towns Fund) have been looked at to identify those that can be deliverable within the timeframes set by Government. Three were felt to be deliverable. The first is to deliver phase 1 of the redevelopment of the East Point Pavilion (£720,000), the other projects are to erect hoarding and art work to screen the perimeter of the proposed new car park area (the former Burger King site) adjacent to the old Town Hall until this site comes forward for development in 2021 and to support the refurbishment of a pocket park adjacent to the old Town Hall. This is currently the subject of discussions with Lowestoft Town Council and others regarding the possible future management of the site by the local community (£30,000 combined)
4. The next step in releasing the grant is for East Suffolk Council to write to Government to confirm how the grant will be spent. This will need to include confirmation from East Suffolk Council's S151 Officer that the spending is in line with the Towns Fund Intervention Framework, will achieve good value for money and that the project can be delivered this financial year. The deadline for submission to Government is by no later than the 14th August 2020.

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| Is the report Open or Exempt? | Open |
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| Wards Affected: | Harbour & Normanston Kirkley & Pakefield |
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| Cabinet Member: | Councillor Craig Rivett Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member with responsibility for Economic Development |
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| Supporting Officer: | Andrew Jarvis Strategic Director Andrew.jarvis@eastsoffolk.gov.uk |
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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In September 2019, Lowestoft was selected as 1 of 101 towns to be a part of the Government's Towns Fund programme, which provides Lowestoft with the opportunity to bid for up to £25 million through a 5 year Town Deal, which involves the development of a much needed Town Investment Plan, which will make a case for investing in transformative projects in Lowestoft over the next 10 years.
- 1.2 The Towns Fund is central to government's ambition to level up the country – creating jobs and building stronger and more resilient local economies and communities. In recognition of the importance of the fund and the pressing need post COVID-19, in the towns that have been selected to benefit, Government is bringing forward funding to this financial year to support projects that will make an immediate impact in towns.
- 1.3 Through this process and in response to the impacts of COVID-19, Government wrote to the Chief Executives of Town Deal selected towns on the 1st July 2020 to offer a grant of £750,000 with immediate effect to fund capital projects that can be delivered during the current financial year (by March 2021). The level of grant funding per town has been allocated according to population size from the 2011 Census, using the Office for National Statistics' categorisation of small, medium and large towns.
- 1.4 The grant must be used to fund capital projects which deliver against the Town's Fund Intervention Framework. The letter from Government set out some examples relating to immediate challenges being faced nationally, which included:
- Improvement to or new parks and green spaces and sustainable transport links
 - Improvements to town centres including repurposing empty commercial properties
 - Demolition or site remediation where this will have an immediate benefit
- 1.5 The Towns Fund Intervention Framework details the type of projects / interventions which are eligible through the Towns Fund. The headline intervention areas are as follows:
- Local Transport
 - Digital Connectivity
 - Urban regeneration, planning and land use
 - Arts, culture and heritage
 - Skills infrastructure
 - Enterprise infrastructure
- 1.6 The next step in releasing the grant funding is for East Suffolk Council to write to the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) to confirm plans for what the grant funding will be spent on. This will need to include confirmation from East Suffolk Council's S151 Officer that this spending is in line with the Towns Fund Intervention Framework, will achieve good value for money and that the project can be delivered this financial year. The letter needs to be sent by 14th August 2020. Following receipt of the letter, MHCLG will review the proposal to ensure it satisfies the requirements, before releasing the funding via a Section 31 Grant payment.

2 TOWNS FUND CAPITAL PROJECT PROPOSALS

- 2.1 Several capital projects within the draft Lowestoft Town Investment Plan have been looked at to identify those which are deliverable within the timeframes set by Government. Projects were considered against the Towns Fund Intervention Framework, the impact COVID-19 has had on the town / town centre and also the delivery eligibility requirements in terms of timescales.
- 2.2 Whilst plans are currently in development for a project proposal to address the urgent needs identified through the Town Investment Plan and Town Centre Masterplan, which will look at a number of “quick wins” within the town centre in respect of public realm and empty shops, three projects were felt to be realistically deliverable within the parameters given. Two of the three projects are urban regeneration, planning and land use schemes. Here, it is proposed to make an allocation from the grant funding to erect hoardings and public art work to screen the perimeter of the proposed new car park area (the former Burger King site) adjacent to the old Town Hall until this site comes forward for development in 2021. Additionally, an allocation is proposed to support the refurbishment of a pocket park adjacent to the old Town Hall. This is currently the subject of discussions with Lowestoft Town Council and others regarding the possible future management of the site by the local community. These two project interventions above are proposed to be allocated £30,000 from the £750,000.
- 2.3 The remainder of the grant funding (£720,000) is proposed to be allocated to Phase 1 of the redevelopment of the East Point Pavilion which already has Cabinet approval. This project has been worked up for delivery within the timeframes set. The funding from Government would be targeted at the internal redesign of the building, providing community space and space for small entrepreneurial pop-up type business to operate. This would make a distinct, deliverable capital phase, achievable by March 2021. The estimated total cost for this work is £870,000. The additional funding requirement of £150,000 will be met from the capital reserve as previously approved for this project.
- 2.4 East Point Pavilion sits as a project within the Town Investment Plan and aligns well with the Town’s Fund principles, with particular focus and strength around cultural provision, which is part of the intervention framework. It also provides the opportunity for local businesses to grow within this new cultural space. The project is a key part of the emerging Town Centre Masterplan for Lowestoft and would act as the first step in its development, improving linkages to the town centre via Station Square.
- 2.5 The difference between the allocated Towns Fund money and the total estimated cost would come from the existing approved budget within the Councils Medium Term Financial Strategy. The budget previously approved for the refurbishment of the East Point Pavilion is proposed to be reallocated to other priority regeneration works highlighted within the Lowestoft Town Investment Plan, details of which will be put forward at Cabinet in September 2020.

3 HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO THE EAST SUFFOLK BUSINESS PLAN?

- 3.1 The projects deliver against the following aspects of the East Suffolk Strategic Plan:
- Growing Our Economy
 - Maintaining Financial Sustainability
 - Enabling Our Communities

- 3.2 There is an urgent need to make improvements within the town to enable people to engage within the community and feel a sense of pride about the place within which they live. The projects within the Town Investment Plan are focusing on reshaping the Lowestoft so that it has a new purpose that is focused upon community needs, health and wellbeing as well as providing a more sustainable economy and employment opportunities. There is an urgent need to show that Lowestoft is not “forgotten”. A newly regenerated cultural space at East Point Pavilion will provide a catalyst for further development.

4 FINANCIAL AND GOVERNANCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The financial implications come with management of the grant funding, ensuring that the £750,000 is spent as agreed by the parameters set by Government. The grant funding will be managed through East Suffolk Council accountancy procedures. Any grant monitoring of spend will be managed by East Suffolk Council’s Funding Manager.
- 4.2 East Suffolk Council will be the Accountable Body for the grant funding and therefore will own and manage the risks associated with the delivery of the project. Project management and financial processes will be applied to ensure the project is delivered on spec / time.
- 4.3 A process of Governance is already established through the Lowestoft Place Board through the Town’s Fund process, where regular reports will be provided on progress as it is a key deliverable within the Town Investment Plan.
- 4.4 The difference between the allocated Towns Fund money and the total estimated cost for the East Point Pavilion is £150,000. This would come from an existing approved budget within the Council’s Medium Term Financial Strategy. The remaining approved budget would then be available to be reallocated to other as of yet not fully developed Town Investment Plan priority projects. This will be detailed through a subsequent paper at September’s Cabinet.

5 OTHER KEY ISSUES

- 5.1 This report has been prepared having considered the results of an Equality Impact Assessment. The Equality Impact Assessment resulted in no adverse impacts.

6 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The East Point Pavilion project has already been widely consulted on via the Lowestoft Place Board (formally Lowestoft Regeneration Board), Lowestoft Town Centre Masterplan workshops / stakeholder groups and the Lowestoft Heritage Action Zone Perception Survey. The need for urgent public realm works has been identified as a priority through the Town Centre Masterplan work and also the Town Investment Plan evidence gathering. In both of these forums urgent public realm improvements were identified as the key “quick wins”.

7 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 7.1 A number of capital projects sitting within the draft Town Investment Plan for Lowestoft were considered to be put forward for this grant, however, only the projects proposed within this paper were sufficiently developed to meet Government’s short timeframe for delivery.

8 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 Acceptance of the grant and spend against the identified priority projects will provide tangible improvements to Lowestoft and kick-start the towns fund investment. The projects will improve the physical environment of Lowestoft, helping to mitigate against some of the impacts of COVID-19.
- 8.2 The projects will provide a boost to the local economy, creating local direct employment. The delivery of these projects in a short timeframe will instil confidence in the community for an economic recovery post COVID-19 and provide assurance that future plans set out in the Town Investment Plan will be delivered.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Cabinet approves;-
- (a) the acceptance of the £750,000 grant from Government.
 - (b) the use of the grant monies against the recommended priority projects detailed in this report.
 - (c) the reallocation of the money committed previously to the refurbishment of the East Point Pavilions to a series of urgent regeneration works required by the Lowestoft Town Investment Plan, subject to a report on these proposals being presented to Cabinet in September.

APPENDICES

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| Appendix A | Letter from Government |
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BACKGROUND PAPERS

| Date | Type | Available From |
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| 07/07/2020 | Equality Impact Assessment | Democratic Services |