

**NORTH WALSHAM HIGH STREET HERITAGE ACTION ZONE PROGRAMME:
END OF PROJECT REPORT**

Executive Summary	This report outlines the outputs and outcomes of the North Walsham High Street Heritage Action Zone programme. It shows the final budget position and the effectiveness of the programme in meeting its objectives.
Options considered	The report is for noting as the programme of works has now concluded. No options are therefore presented.
Consultation(s)	During the preparation of the evaluation report key stakeholders and the wider public were invited to provide feedback through a variety of means. Other than the usual consultation with Statutory Officers, no consultation has been necessary in relation to this covering report.
Recommendations	To note the contents of the report.
Reasons for recommendations	The Committee has taken a keen interest in this high-profile four-year programme and this is the final of a series of progress reports considered by the Committee.
Background papers	None

Wards affected	North Walsham Market Cross, North Walsham East, North Walsham West.
Cabinet member(s)	Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Growth
Contact Officer	Robert Young, Assistant Director for Sustainable Growth Stuart Quick, Economic Growth Manager

Links to key documents:

Corporate Plan:	<i>“Working with our Market and Resort Towns to reinforce their roles as local service centres, centres of employment and business activity, served by public transport”</i> <i>“Maximising external grant funding to deliver the Council’s corporate objectives”</i>
Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)	The contents of this report do not impact upon the MTFS
Council Policies & Strategies	None

Corporate Governance:

Is this a key decision	No
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Has the public interest test been applied	No
Details of any previous decision(s) on this matter	<p>Council: November 2019 – agree to match funding and implementation</p> <p>Council: September 2020 – agree to additional third-party funding</p> <p>Cabinet: November 2021 – agreement of Council land for bus interchange, to facilitate Market Place improvements</p> <p>Council: December 2022 – agreement to additional place making budget</p>

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 This is a close of project report, following the completion of all the interventions in the HSHAZ programme, as agreed at the meeting of the Committee in October 2023. This report summarises the overall programme of interventions, the final budget position and the degree to which the programme achieved its aims and objectives.
- 1.2 Appended to this report is the evaluation document, undertaken by a consultant appointed by the Council.

2. Introduction & Background

- 2.1 North Walsham High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) grew from the ambitions of local stakeholders to regenerate North Walsham town centre following many years of concerns about the vitality of its central Marketplace. On the back of North Walsham's successful delivery of a project under NNDC's Market Towns Initiative, and the formation of a strong partnership of local stakeholders, a bid was made to the Government's Future High Streets Fund; although this was unsuccessful. Dialogue with local stakeholders and lessons learnt from that bid resulted in agreement to refocus on the built heritage of the town and a successful bid was subsequently made for funds from the High Street Heritage Action Zone administered by Historic England. At its meeting on 20th November 2019, the Council agreed to equally match the initial bid of £975,000 and to implement the HSHAZ project.
- 2.2 The HSHAZ programme's aim was to capitalise on the built heritage of North Walsham's historic core to improve its vitality and attractiveness to shoppers, visitors and businesses. The programme initially comprised the following substantive elements:
- a) Refurbishment of the Cedars (owned by NNDC)
 - b) Administration of a Building Improvement Grant (for owners of historic buildings)
 - c) Improvements to important areas of the public realm (place making)
 - d) Historic research programme (undertaken by Historic England)
- 2.3 This integrated programme was supported by community engagement activity and the development of a town centre masterplan.
- 2.4 Subsequent to the commencement of the programme, further funding was sought, and the scheme was augmented by further funding for:

- A Cultural Programme (Historic England (HE) – agreed 22 February 2021)
- Additional funding for the place making project (funded by the Getting Building Fund, administered by the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (NALEP) – agreed by Council in September 2020)
- A scheme to provide a bus turning and stopping facility located beyond the HSHAZ area but facilitating the removal of buses from Market Street (undertaken in partnership with Norfolk County Council (NCC) and North Walsham Town Council (NWTC) - agreed by Cabinet 1 November 2021)
- A visioning and marketing toolkit (funded by C-Care Towns Challenge Fund (Interreg) September 2022)

2.5 Cabinet initially established a Working Group to oversee the implementation of the programme but once the Council's project governance arrangements were changed, a project board was established, which reported to the Cabinet Major Projects Working Party. Frequent progress reports were brought to Overview and Scrutiny Committee for information. The senior reporting officer was the Assistant Director for Sustainable Growth, and the programme was managed by the Economic Growth team. A full-time project manager post was established for the duration of the HSHAZ (funded equally by NNDC and Historic England) – that post terminated on 31st April 2024 - and later a part-time post to assist in the administration of the Cultural Programme, together with wider communications and engagement activity, was created (with part funding from Historic England/Cultural Programme) – that post terminated in January 2023 but management of the residual Cultural programme activities transferred to the Project Enabler in the Economic Growth team.

3. Programme Overview

3.1 This section outlines project delivery within the HSHAZ programme. The total cost of the scheme is given in summary below. The breakdown of this is shown in Table 1 in Appendix A. Table 2 also shows the programme outputs and delivery timescales for each workstream and the degree to which the objectives were achieved.

Budget

3.2 **The total final cost of the scheme was £4,455,036, against a budget of £4,710,688 (including the additional budget of £400,000 to support the Place making element, to be funded from Reserves, agreed by Full Council in December 2022). This gives an underspend of £255,652 and therefore will now only require the use of £144,348 of Reserves.**

The overall budget for the HSHAZ programme (and all related elements), broken down into the specific work streams and the funding sources, is shown in table found in Appendix A. This details the approximate final budget position, having accounted for transfers of overspends/underspends between the various project workstreams. There may be some minor adjustments needed once the final budget reconciliation has taken place.

The Cedars

Summary

- 3.3 The scheme to refurbish the Cedars has resulted in the building being let to local organisations, after there previously having been a long period of vacancy and disrepair. The building, located at a principal gateway to the town centre, is visually and historically important and now provides valuable office space and an attractive venue from which the Registrar will operate.

Budget

- 3.4 The total budget for the refurbishment works was £465,000. The total cost of the scheme came to £431,458. This gives an underspend of £33,542 against the budget. The spend includes the additional works that were carried out during the refurbishment works, e.g. agreed variations to the layout of the rooms and the building's principal heating source was changed from gas to electric.

Matters to note

- 3.5 The completion of the scheme was delayed because the original contractor went into liquidation, this regrettably also added significantly to the cost of the refurbishment works.
- 3.6 The rear curtilage wall is in need of repair and consideration is being given to the future of the outbuildings and grounds of the building.

Place making

Summary

- 3.7 The place-making scheme involved enhancing the amenity of key areas of public realm (owned by NNDC) and highway improvements to the accessibility and functionality of the Marketplace and adjoining areas. The designs were based on the following four principles resulting from community engagement feedback:

- improving the public realm
- safe and active travel
- identity tied to history
- community and civic pride.

- 3.8 With the exception of Black Swan Loke amenity garden, design work was undertaken by consultants, *Influence*, procured by the Council. Norfolk County Council managed the contract for the works, which were undertaken by their term contractor (Tarmac) (under an NEC3 Contract, which sets out various pricing options and change management procedures). This saved time (avoiding the need of a separate tender and procurement exercises), enabling the grant to be spent within the time constraints and additional grant to be drawn down. The scheme was redesigned several times to combat rising costs and address issues as they arose. Black Swan Loke also followed an iterative design process, to meet the expectations of key stakeholders and fit within the residual budget. It was constructed by the Council's Contractor (Malcolm Abbs) under a variation of the Measured Term Contract.

Budget

- 3.9 The HE original grant (£385,000) was committed to the scheme and additional HE funds (£298,298) were attracted along the way by bidding for HE year-end underspend (from other HSHAZ schemes nationally). Additional grant to enhance the extent of the place making project was obtained from

the Government's Getting Building Fund (administered by NALEP). Specific elements of the scheme were funded by North Walsham Town Council (Lighting, electrical supply, ground anchors) and NCC funded the improvement of road surfaces in the town centre. NNDC funded the remaining cost of the works.

The total cost of the scheme was £2,416,188. The original budget for the project was £2,638,298 (including the uplift of £400,000, agreed by Council in December 2022, to cover an anticipated shortfall for the satisfactory completion of the scheme).

This means an indicated underspend of £222,110, which, once other minor adjustments and miscellaneous items have been deducted, will only require the use of £177,890 of the Council's reserves rather than the £400,000 originally anticipated.

Matters to note

- 3.10 This was a complex scheme, delivered during a very challenging period for town centre businesses, following as it did in the wake of major disruption caused by the laying of gas pipelines through the town centre in 2019 and the pandemic, with the impacts of social distancing measures etc. The design and implementation of the scheme faced enormous challenges and its scope changed many times in order both to take full advantage of additional funding available; and to mitigate the impacts of rampant construction cost inflation. The place making scheme also brought about the successful creation of the bus interchange within the town, seen as an innovative solution to pre-existing challenges to bus services and passenger comfort – a positive outcome in the eyes of the Passenger Transport Unit and one being viewed by other Norfolk market towns.

Building Improvement Grant

Summary

- 3.11 A core element of the HSHAZ is maintaining historic buildings in a good state of repair. The project set out to do this by providing the opportunity of grant aid to the owners of eligible buildings. A grant programme was thus established and the amount of grant available generally varied between 60% and 80% of the total cost of the works (with one exception of a grant of 100% for a project that greatly improved the public realm). A total of 10 grants were awarded, amounting to £536,202. This was matched by £190,714 of private match funding from the building owners, and therefore, delivering building improvements to the value of £726,916.

The improvement work has varied from reinstatement of historic shopfronts to conversion to new uses, including residential above retail premises (on the basis that vacancy is one of the key issues that bring buildings into disrepair). The largest grant was for the conversion and renovation of the former Barclays Bank building, occupying a prominent location in the Marketplace, into a community space operated by the Phoenix project.

Budget

- 3.12 The total of the Council's budget for the Building Improvement Grant scheme was £536,202, which covered all the costs of the scheme and included the administration costs, professional fees etc. This leveraged considerable private sector match-funding.

Matters to note

- 3.13 Concerns were raised early on about the appetite for owners of town centre commercial premises to invest in the improvement of their buildings, especially in the highly uncertain economic conditions pertaining at that time. These early fears proved to be unfounded as the grants were so sought after that a prioritisation process had to be implemented part way through, in order to focus the grants on the projects that would best achieve the overall HSHAZ objectives.

Wayfinding

Summary

- 3.14 The improvements to the town centre and the historic buildings within it are expected to lead to increased footfall and thus enhanced trading conditions for town centre businesses. Improving the accessibility of the town is a key aspect of this but so too is signposting and way marking of key routes. Interpreting the historical significance of parts of the town centre is important to the visitor experience and civic pride.

Budget

- 3.15 The budget allocation for this scheme was £44,441. This included design, fabrication, and installation in various locations around the town.

Matters to note

Although financially much smaller than other workstreams, this was deemed an important element of the HSHAZ programme. There had been difficulties in its delivery due to various consenting procedures and its implementation was delayed. Being the last element of the programme to be completed, it is difficult to measure its impact, although, comments on social media have been overwhelmingly positive.

Bus Interchange

Summary

- 3.16 In order to redesign the town centre in a way that enhanced the environment and the experience of customers/visitors, it was deemed important to remove buses from the Market Place. Previously, buses would stop on the main shopping street, often leaving engines idling and casting a shadow on businesses on the north side of the road. Bus stops elsewhere in the town centre caused vehicular congestion at certain pinch points, and conflicts with pedestrians. In order to remove through-buses from the Market Place, and not impose substantial route deviations for the bus operators, it was necessary to identify a location where buses could turn. It was desirable also to design a space where passengers could wait in relative comfort and have facilities nearby. The Council therefore offered the use of the front part of New Road Car Park for this purpose (Cabinet decision made on 1 November 2021).

Budget

- 3.17 NNDC provided the land for this development, whilst Norfolk County Council agreed to fund the works, and North Walsham Town Council contributed towards the cost of the bus shelters. Improvements to the footpath through to Memorial Park and to the wider amenity of the area were also funded by NNDC.

Matters to note

- 3.18 This was not part of the HSHAZ programme, as it fell outside the identified HSHAZ area (which coincided with the town centre Conservation Area), however, it was integral to it. It is an illustration of the holistic nature of successful town centre regeneration schemes of this type and highlights the benefits of taking a wider flexible approach to addressing conflicts and resolving long-standing accessibility and traffic management challenges. This scheme facilitated the town centre improvements; yet the HSHAZ was the catalyst for this scheme.

Cultural Programme

Summary

- 3.19 The Cultural Programme (CP) comprised a vibrant and diverse programme of cultural activities and events. It was led by a local 'cultural consortium', which agreed a wide range of events and activities intended to build 'social capital' and enhance the vibrancy of the town centre over a 4-year period. Events supported by the Programme included: orchestral concerts, children's photographic workshops, craft workshops, pantomimes, plays, an upcycling project and fashion show, pop up events, street performance, a spring festival, pop-up shops and other cultural events.

Budget

- 3.20 There was a grant of £90,000 to administer and deliver this programme. This was a fraction of the grant that was originally applied for, as the scheme proved to be highly competitive, but it is considered that the programme delivered exceptional value for money, leveraging some £67,608 in third party match-funding.

Matters to note

- 3.21 This programme was separate from the HSHAZ programme but delivered alongside it. It was deemed essential to the success of the place making project as it not only demonstrated how some of the newly created spaces could be used but it proved to be a positive influence on the hearts and minds of many people in the community.

Visioning & Marketing

- 3.22 Following the successful bid to an EU fund administered by the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership, a Vision and Marketing report was developed and delivered (March 2023) for the town. This was entirely separate from the HSHAZ programme but delivered alongside it. The report analyses North Walsham's 'offer' and the final report contains some key actions and a toolkit for individual businesses or groups to utilise. The desire is for the Town Council and Business Forum to adopt the strategy, and to build on the town's existing strengths to create a long-term strong and successful future business community. It is anticipated that the report/toolkit will be valuable for other locations and the team will look at ways in which it can be adapted and shared more widely.

Miscellaneous

- 3.23 The elements of the programme within the 'miscellaneous' budget heading include the following key areas:
- Staffing costs
 - Mobilisation
 - Engagement, consultation and communication

- Monitoring and evaluation
- Research.

3.24 Clearly, any project requires resource for administration, project management etc. That is especially the case for a complex programme of work such as this, involving high profile proposals. Dedicated staffing was paid for out of the HSHAZ budget, but in addition to that, time was dedicated from the Council's Economic Growth team, as well as other support services. The research element of the programme was supported by experts from Historic England.

3.25 It is vital to understand the impacts that the programme has had and to learn lessons from it. Monitoring was a key requirement of the HE grant, and investment was made early in the programme's implementation to ensure that processes were in place to provide data against which the scheme could be evaluated. The monitoring and evaluation followed HE guidelines, and evaluation reports were submitted to HE, in accordance with the funder's requirements, towards the end of the programme's implementation.

3.26 The evaluation report appended to this report was commissioned to obtain a more in-depth and independent analysis of the effectiveness of the programme against its objectives. This is provided for the Committee to consider, and suggestions/comments are welcomed as to how its recommendations should be acted upon.

4. Corporate Priorities

4.1 The programme of town centre improvements outlined in this report were undertaken to achieve key objectives of the administration's previous Corporate Plan and it links closely to the following objectives of the new Corporate Plan.

"Working with our Market and Resort Towns to reinforce their roles as local service centres, centres of employment and business activity, served by public transport"

"Maximising external grant funding to deliver the Council's corporate objectives"

5. Financial and Resource Implications

5.1 There are no financial / resource implications arising from this report as it provides an update of activity already undertaken and budgeted for.

Comments from the S151 Officer:

There was a request for additional budget of £400,000 which was to be funded from reserves. However not all of this was used and therefore the draw down from the reserves will be less than anticipated. The scheme is now complete, and the final account will confirm the actual expenditure for the scheme.

6. Legal Implications

6.1 There are no legal implications or concerns arising from this report.

Comments from the Monitoring Officer

As this is a report to note, with appendices detailing budget and expenditure, there is no specific decision making requested under this report and accordingly no apparent governance issues.

7. Risks

7.1 No issues arise from this report.

8. Net ZeroTarget

8.1 No issues arise from this report.

9. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

9.1 No issues arise from this report.

10. Community Safety issues

10.1 No issues arise from this report.

11. Conclusion and Recommendations

11.1 Members are asked to note the contents of this report.