

MARKET TOWNS INITIATIVE – NEW MEMBER BRIEFING

Summary: This report aims to update and inform new Members of the Council on the details of the Market Towns Initiative. This will include details on the establishment of the Working Group, the application process and details of the funding it has recommend to date.

Options considered: N/a

Conclusions: The Market Towns Initiative Working Group has recommended that £274,162.97 of the available £400,000 be awarded to North Norfolk's four inland market towns to date. This leaves a total of £125,837.03 available to applicants proportionate to the amount of funding already received by each town. It is expected that funding recommendations for the second round of applications will be reviewed by Cabinet at the next meeting on July 8th 2019.

Recommendations: It is recommended that;

1. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee note the work of the Market Towns Initiative Working Group to date

Cabinet Member(s): Ward(s) affected
Cllr S Bütikofer Lancaster North, Lancaster South, Holt, North Walsham East, North Walsham West, North Walsham Market Cross & Stalham

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1. Background

- 1.1 This report seeks to update new Members on the work of the Overview & Scrutiny – Market Towns Initiative Working Group, to bring Members up to speed on the applications process, applicant eligibility, funding awarded to date, and the progress of the second round of applications.
- 1.2 North Norfolk covers a wide geographic area and market towns can be found throughout this landscape, acting as important service centres to wider populations in what is still today, a very rural part of the county. The nature of the towns varies, but all of North Norfolk's market towns still retain a historic core, and are generally supported by seasonal tourism.

- 1.3 The towns of Cromer, Sheringham and Wells due to their coastal location attract more tourism than our more rurally located towns of North Walsham, Stalham, Holt and Fakenham. Furthermore, the District Council has recently committed significant additional expenditure to ensure that the town infrastructure meets the needs of residents and visitors alike, together with investment in sporting and recreational facilities.
- 1.4 In common with many market towns in the UK, North Norfolk's four inland market towns are experiencing a number of challenges, including competition from major retail destinations and out-of-town shopping centres, increased online retailing, the closure of key services and a decline in market activity. Whilst each market town has its own unique character, the challenges facing them remain the same.
- 1.5 The focus of the Market Towns Initiative fund is to help our rural town centres adjust to those changing use patterns by engaging with local communities to improve and develop their towns centres to encourage business, promote economic development, improve the visitor experience and to increase footfall.
- 1.6 Increasing the vibrancy of our market towns impacts positively on the rural areas surrounding them, by supporting our local producers and giving our residents an opportunity to shop, live, work and socialise locally.
- 1.7 During budget allocation discussions (and subsequent approval at Council) funding was allocated to the Market Town Initiative, bringing the total budget allocation to £400,000, allowing for £100,000 to be allocated to each market town.

2. Market Town Initiative Framework Summary

- 2.1 The Council has allocated £400,000 to the Market Towns Initiative ("MTI"), with each market town allocated an outline budget of up to £100,000 to spend on locally owned and managed projects within the MTI scheme, intended to revitalise and enhance the town centres.
- 2.2 The intention of the project is to build capacity and capability in the towns to select, manage and deliver projects so that in future years the towns have the skills to access external funding, manage, and deliver projects themselves. Consequently, the model proposed identified small scale proven projects that have been successfully used to support town centres to deliver economic resilience, regeneration and footfall elsewhere, whilst also respecting that each of the market towns has different needs.
- 2.3 The projects have been selected using the following criteria;
 - Contributes either to footfall, regeneration or economic growth
 - Proven track record i.e. successful elsewhere
 - No large overhead costs or complex delivery mechanisms
 - Positive environmental or aesthetic improvements

Further details on the suitability of projects can be found in the MTI prospectus available at the below address:

<https://www.north-norfolk.gov.uk/media/4377/market-towns-initiative-prospectus.pdf>

- 2.4 As well as their potential for improvement, the projects have in part been selected for their “off the shelf” ability to be implemented quickly and not require any additional or ongoing resources in order to be sustainably delivered, and if necessary any ongoing costs will be covered by the applicant.
- 2.5 The groups delivering the projects were given appropriate guidance via Officers at NNDC, but have also been asked to engage and seek advice from their communities directly. This was done via a range on consultation with businesses and business groups including the Chambers of Trade and Commerce, Community Interest Companies, Community Organisations, Charities and the respective Town Councils. Engagement and consultation with the community was therefore an essential condition of gaining approval from the Working Group to move projects forward.
- 2.6 To further develop the MTI and to engage with the community, it was recommended that Cabinet refer the Market Town Initiative to a politically balanced Working Party of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

3. Scheme detail: Applications

- 3.1 Applications were made using the application form available at the following link: <https://www.north-norfolk.gov.uk/media/4378/mti-application-form.pdf>.
- 3.2 Applications were submitted via both post and email with a deadline for receiving applications set at Friday 16th November 2018 for the first round, and Tuesday February 12th for the second round.
- 3.3 A total of thirteen applications were received from across the four market towns in the first round, requesting a total of £633,293.91 from the available £400,000. A breakdown of this total request can be seen in the table below:

Town	No. Applications	Total Available (£)	Total Requested (£)	Total Remaining Gross (£)
Fakenham	4	£100,000.00	£102,559.11	-£2,559.11
Holt	6	£100,000.00	£268,027.00	-£168,027.00
North Walsham	1	£100,000.00	£99,575.00	£425.00
Stalham	2	£100,000.00	£163,132.80	-£63,132.80
Totals	13	£400,000.00	£633,293.91	-£233,293.91

- 3.4 Details of first round applications received are listed below including the associated funding recommendations to Cabinet.

Fakenham

Fakenham Hawk & Owl Trust: Rejected

The application was considered ineligible as it did not fall within the guidelines of the MTI fund.

Fakenham Town Council (A): Approved

AGREED TO RECOMMEND funding of £24,341.67 for a major regenerative project in the town centre called Fakenham Facelift.

Fakenham Town Council (B): Approved

AGREED TO RECOMMEND funding of £2,525 for the design and printing of a Fakenham Heritage Trail brochure.

Active Fakenham: Approved

AGREED TO RECOMMEND funding of £35,550 for multiple town centre events and marketing initiatives under the name of Fakenham Pulling Together.

Holt

The Holt Society: Approved

AGREED TO RECOMMEND funding of £7,210 to design and print a pamphlet and notice boards for the existing Holt Owl Trail.

Love Holt: Approved

AGREED TO RECOMMEND funding of £26,000 to fund a marketing campaign and re-branding project under the direction of Love Holt.

Holt Community Centre (A): Rejected

The application was considered ineligible as it did not fall within the guidelines of the MTI fund.

Holt Community Centre (B): Rejected

The application was considered ineligible as it did not fall within the guidelines of the MTI fund.

Holt Town Council: Approved

AGREED TO RECOMMEND funding of £17,514 to implement the Yellow Brick Route and Park & Ride projects.

Holt People's Forum: Rejected

The application was rejected on the basis that a traffic study of Holt town centre must be completed before any changes can be made to the town centre's traffic and parking provisions.

North Walsham

Regenerate North Walsham and North Walsham Town Council: Approved

AGREE TO RECOMMEND funding of £99,575 to implement three major regeneration projects in North Walsham town centre.

Stalham

Stalham Town Council: Approved

AGREED TO RECOMMEND funding of £32,204.70 to implement improved signage throughout the town and improve the town's tourism offer.

Stalham Area Business Forum: Approved

AGREED TO RECOMMEND funding of £22,171.25 to implement multiple regenerative projects in the town centre.

TOTALS

In summary, the MTI Working Group recommended a total of £266,869.72 of funding to be awarded across the four towns. This would leave a total of £133,130.28 of funding from the original £400,000 available. Adjustments to this figure were made under delegated authority to account for VAT inclusion on grants that were awarded to non VAT registered organisations. Subsequent to the first round of grants being awarded, the MTI Working Group recommended that a second round of applications should be run in 2019 to allow for the remaining funds to be awarded.

4. Scheme details: Delivery

- 4.1 Upon receiving Cabinet approval, successful and unsuccessful applicants were notified of the outcome of their application through a decision notice.
- 4.2 Funding conditions letters were then sent to successful applicants that outlined the conditions of accepting the grant. Once these were signed and returned funding was then processed.
- 4.3 Ongoing consultation and engagement with the local community, including specific engagement with local business, local elected members, heritage and regeneration groups remains vital to the successful delivery of the town centre schemes.

5. Scheme detail: Governance

- 5.1 On governance arrangements, in order to be considered eligible applicants were required to provide evidence of both their governing documents or constitution, alongside evidence of their accounts and audit information where applicable.
- 5.2 Officers assess each bid to ensure that the appropriate governance and accounting safeguards listed above are in place in respect of any funding agreements. Where not yet available, these checks will be included as part of the grant funding conditions and monitored as part of the ongoing dialogue with successful applicants.

- 5.3 The Working Group carefully selected bids from applicants that were either directly or part-owned and run by the communities that seek to benefit, the governance arrangements of these organisations were already confirmed at this point by officers during the bid appraisal process described above.

6. Scheme detail: Engagement and Monitoring

- 6.1 Listening and engaging with our communities in the towns is a key factor in ensuring that the MTI is robust, transparent and fit for purpose, and that the projects are delivered successfully.
- 6.2 Members decided that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was best placed to establish and implement the scheme. Similarly, it is expected that Cabinet would continue to utilise the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as a means to monitor any feedback and the outcomes at the stage of project delivery.
- 6.3 In ensuring the MTI Framework meets community's needs;
- To engage with and receive evidence from the community as to whether there are any further projects that meet the MTI objectives that would be able to be included in the scheme and to make recommendations to Cabinet.
- 6.4 In delivery and monitoring the scheme;
- Once the winning bids are established in each town, to receive any further information required in order to release funding in-line with the scheme's aim and objectives, and to provide challenge and oversight to the selected projects, making recommendations to Cabinet to allocate funding.
 - To monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the scheme and to report to Cabinet on their findings.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1. The Market Towns Initiative represents a good opportunity for the Council to support its inland market towns during a period of change and encourage
- 7.2. A total of £274,162.97 of funding has been awarded across the four market towns. A total of £125,837.03 remains from the original £400,000 available for second round applications.

8. Implications and Risks

Reputational risk to the Council is a possibility if funding is awarded incorrectly, or the decision is taken not to award any funding.

9. Financial Implications and Risks

The funding for the project has already been allocated within the budget for 2018/19. Financial information has been sought from applicants in order to ensure that the financial risk to the Council is as limited as possible, and so that

funds can be returned if not used within the guidelines of the Market Towns Initiative.

10. Sustainability

Project sustainability is a key consideration of the judging process and it has been made clear that any ongoing costs must be met by the applicants.

11. Equality and Diversity

The Equality and Diversity policies of applicants relevant governing bodies has been sought where applicable in order to ensure compliance with NNDC policy.

12. Section 17 Crime and Disorder considerations

None.