

MARKET TOWNS INITIATIVE – ROUND TWO FUNDING REPORT

Summary: This report seeks Cabinet approval of the recommendations made by the Market Towns Initiative Working Group, in order to award grant funding to successful applicants from North Norfolk's four inland market towns for the second round of funding.

Options considered: All applications and funding options have been considered.

Conclusions: On the recommendation of the Market Towns Initiative Working Group, Cabinet approved funding of £274,162.97 of the available £400,000 be awarded to North Norfolk's four inland market towns in the first round of the scheme. This left a total of £125,837.03 remaining and so a second application round was held, with the residual sum for each town available for eligible organisations to bid for. The MTI Working Group considered the second round applications and as a consequence has recommended that £103,747.36 be awarded, leaving £22,089.67 remaining. The applications are summarised in this report.

Recommendations:

- (1)** That Cabinet approve the MTI Working Group's recommendations to award £103,747.36 of funding to applications outlined in the report.
- (2)** That Cabinet request the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to continue to monitor the outputs and outcomes of any/all applications that receive funding.
- (3)** That Cabinet gives consideration as to the future use of any residual funds (either unallocated or unspent).
- (4)** Delegated authority be given to The Head of Economic and Community Development to agree suitable conditions in respect of the approved applications, issue grant decision letters accordingly, and make any necessary funding adjustments in accordance with the delegated authority policy.

Cabinet Member(s): Cllr Richard Kershaw

Ward(s) affected: 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 Cabinet approval of the recommendations made by the Overview & Scrutiny – Market Towns Initiative Working Group in order to award funding to suitable applications from eligible organisations in North Norfolk’s four inland market towns for the second round of MTI funding.
- 1.2 The MTI fund was established to assist with regeneration of the four inland market towns in the District; the Coastal resort towns having been able to access external grants much more readily and have been the focus of key investment projects. The MTI prospectus set out the expectations of how the initiative will help our inland market towns to thrive. It seeks projects that will bring about improvements in these towns that will help raise their profile as better places to work, live and visit.
- 1.3 Members will be aware that during the budget discussions (and subsequent approval at Council) funding was allocated to the Market Town Initiative, bringing a total budget allocation of £400,000, allowing for £100,000 to be allocated to each market town.
- 1.4 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 (retail) core, and are to varying degrees supported by their local catchment and visitors.
- 1.5 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.
- 1.6 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.
- 1.7 The focus of the Market Towns Initiative 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.
- 1.8 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.

2. Market Town Initiative Framework Summary

- 2.1 The Council has allocated £400,000 to the Market Towns Initiative, 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 Successful projects would be expected to match the following characteristics:
- 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 engagement 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 ingredient of a project success.
- 2.6 To further develop the MTI and provide balanced consideration of project bids, Cabinet referred the Market Town Initiative to a politically-balanced Working Party of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

3. Second Round 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. Due to necessary requests for further information from applicants coinciding with local and European

elections, judgement of the second round applications was postponed until after the elections were complete.

3.3 A total of five applications were received from across the four market towns in the second round, requesting a total of £111,657.36 from the available £125,837.03 remaining. A breakdown of this total request can be seen in the table below:

Town	Total Award Round 1 (£)	Total Remaining Net (£)	Total Request Round 2 (£)
Fakenham	£60,416.67	£39,583.33	£35,949.85
Holt	£50,724.00	£49,276.00	£50,760.00
North Walsham	£99,575.00	£425.00	£425.00
Stalham	£63,447.30	£36,552.70	£24,522.51
Totals	£274,162.97	£125,837.03	£111,657.36

3.4 Details of the second round applications received are listed below, including the associated funding recommendations to Cabinet from the working party.

Fakenham

- Active Fakenham

AGREED TO RECOMMEND funding of £27,544.85 to coordinate, resource and market a large number of events in the town and promote the town itself.

- Fakenham Town Council

AGREED TO RECOMMEND funding of £8405.00 to fund the landscaping and improvement of Fakenham Library triangle.

Holt

- Holt Town Council

AGREED TO RECOMMEND funding of £49,000 to fund town centre amenity space improvements in Fish Hill/Star Plain and an interactive town map for use at the TIC.

North Walsham

- Regenerate North Walsham/North Walsham Town Council

AGREE TO RECOMMEND funding of £425 for additional signage to visitor attractions.

Stalham

- Stalham Town Council/Stalham Area Business Forum

AGREED TO RECOMMEND funding of £18,372.51 for town centre events, planning and installation costs of improved signage, disability access improvements, sensory backpacks, grounds maintenance equipment,

firehouse museum improvements, including educational materials and a website.

TOTALS

In summary, the MTI Working Group recommends a total of £103,747.36 of funding to be awarded across the four towns for the second round of funding. This would leave a total of £22,089.67 of funding remaining from the original £400,000 available.

4. Scheme details: Delivery

- 4.1 Upon receiving Cabinet approval, successful and unsuccessful applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application through a decision notice.
- 4.2 Funding conditions letters will then be sent to successful applicants outlining all necessary conditions of accepting the grant including conditions specific to each application. Once these are signed and returned funding is 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 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.

6. Engagement and Monitoring

- 6.1 Listening and engaging with our communities in the towns is a key factor in ensuring that the success of the MTI and that the projects are delivered successfully.
- 6.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee was best deemed to be placed to establish, implement, oversee and monitor the scheme. Similarly, it is expected the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would act as a means of reporting on the feedback, outputs and the outcomes of project delivery.
- 6.3 Cabinet will need to determine the use of any unspent funds, either those yet to be allocated or those that remain unspent by project applicants. The options might include:
 - 6.3.1 Retain the funds in the general reserve

6.3.2 Operate another round of applications for those towns with unspent allocations

6.3.3 Allocate the funds to the Big Society Fund (perhaps ring-fencing them for use in the respective towns to which they were originally allocated).

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 greater use of highstreets and towns across the district. The administration of the fund has seen some excellent projects come forward and by the end of the second round the vast majority of the funding will have been allocated.

8. Implications and Risks

Reputational risk to the Council would result were the funds not to be awarded fairly or correctly or were successful applicants not to spend them in accordance with the agreed terms. The operation of the scheme has followed the guidelines and procedures agreed in the prospectus and careful consideration has been given to the terms and conditions of any grant offer. Grants will be carefully monitored and feedback will be reported to Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

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

There are no sustainability implications associated with the award of grants in this second round of the scheme.

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

No impacts upon matters relating to crime and disorder are believed to arise from the applications for which funding is recommended.