

## North Walsham – High Street Heritage Action Zone Programme

- Summary:** North Norfolk District Council has received an agreement in principle from Historic England, to provide funding to create a High Streets Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) in North Walsham. The Council has secured an offer of up to £975,000, with the final amount subject to the successful completion of a Programme Design. The project is expected to commence in April 2020 and will run for four years. This paper broadly outlines the anticipated deliverables of the programme and requests that sufficient match funding is made available to support its delivery.
- Options considered:** The programme requires match funding of at least 50%. Whilst it is anticipated that the programme will draw in private investment, it is anticipated that it is highly unlikely that the scheme could be delivered through private funding alone. It is therefore considered that public funds will be required in order to achieve the ambitions set out within the bid and to capitalise on the potential benefits that this programme could yield.
- Conclusions:** The HSHAZ programme poses the opportunity to make a significant difference in bringing to life the heritage and historic character of North Walsham town centre. The outcome of this is that it will help it to become a thriving economic hub and cultural heart, welcoming to both local residents, the surrounding rural community and visitors.
- Recommendations:** **It is recommended that:**
- 1) Cabinet welcome and support the opportunity that this programme provides to regenerate North Walsham town centre and recommend to Full Council that up to £975,000 be allocated from capital receipts to match fund the programme delivery.**
  - 2) Cabinet resolve to delegate the formulation of the detailed programme to the Head of Economic & Community Development in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economic & Career Development and the Portfolio Holder for Culture & Wellbeing, following a process that includes Historic England and local stakeholders.**

### 3) Cabinet resolve to establish a Cabinet Working Party to support the project development and delivery.

Reasons for Recommendations: To support the Council in its ambitions to make town centres vibrant places to live and do business.

Cabinet Member(s) Cllr Richard Kershaw	Ward(s) affected: North Walsham Market Cross, North Walsham East, North Walsham West
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#### 1. Introduction

1.1 In Autumn 2018, the Chancellor announced a new Future High Streets Fund, with £675m allocated to support the renewal and reshaping of town centres and high streets in a way that improves experience, drives growth and ensures future sustainability. As part of that fund, £92m was allocated to Historic England for work to support historic high streets through the HSHAZ programme and a further £3 million from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to support a cultural programme to engage people in the life and history of their high street.

1.2 The HSHAZ programme is a place-based scheme designed to secure lasting improvements to historic high streets and the communities who use them. The ambitions of the fund are to support sustainable economic and cultural growth in and around high streets and to restore and enhance local historic character; making the high street an attractive, engaging and vibrant place for people to live, work and recreate. HSHAZ's set out to achieve this through physical works to buildings, including repair, reinstatement of lost features and conversion to new uses including residential. HSHAZ's also seek to improve shared spaces, creating cultural opportunities through learning about the history of the high street and its importance to local communities.

#### 2. Background

2.1 In March 2019, NNDC, in collaboration with local stakeholders, including Regenerate North Walsham, submitted a bid to the Future High Streets Fund (FHF). At the time, it was considered that North Walsham was a better fit for the fund than other towns within the District.

2.2 The primary focus of the fund was to support towns that were facing 'significant' challenges, to which it could be argued that whilst North Walsham does not necessarily exemplify a model town, its problems are perhaps not nearly as extensive as very many others in a national context. As such, the bid was written with an anticipation that there was a reasonable chance that it would not be successful (as proved to be the case). Nevertheless, it was felt that the future-gazing exercise was of

significant value in itself and the work undertaken would provide a strong foundation for future funding calls. At the time, the anticipated HSHAZ fund was considered a potentially closer fit for some of the ambitions set out within the described vision and that the work carried out as part of the FHF would provide a beneficial head-start position in providing the necessary evidence base required for a bid into the subsequent HSHAZ scheme.

2.3 In May 2019, the High Street Heritage Action Zone scheme was announced. Given the relatively short time window for this call, the applicant town needed to be in position to commence engagement and bid preparation without delay. North Walsham town centre is within a designated Conservation Area and contains many important historic buildings, some of which are in need of repair and improvement, so was an obvious candidate for this initiative. The Council's Market Town Initiative (MTI) had also already created some mobilisation (in terms of stakeholder collaboration/public engagement) and as a result of that it was considered that North Walsham was optimally positioned to be the subject of a strong bid for the fund. The application warranted local ownership with a heavy emphasis on community engagement; North Walsham benefited from having an established local regeneration group (Regenerate North Walsham), which had already undertaken significant community engagement through surveys as part of their MTI preparation. Moreover, a range of other stakeholders were very willing to become engaged in the development and delivery of a heritage oriented scheme in the town and were quick to lend their support.

2.4 In September 2019, the Culture Secretary, Nicky Morgan, announced that sixty-nine towns will benefit from the £95 million heritage boost for high streets. The East of England saw the smallest proportion of funding made available, awarding funds to only seven projects, totalling £7million for the region. Other towns set to benefit from the new scheme will include: Lowestoft, Great Yarmouth, King's Lynn, Swaffham, Bedford and Dunstable. There are presently twenty existing HSHAZ's (including two upcoming ones). Locally, Kings Lynn and North Lowestoft have previously been awarded funding to deliver HSHAZ schemes.

### **3. HSHAZ Programme Design**

3.1 The ambitions of the HSHAZ programmes are for investment in historic high streets to be used as a tool for improving the social, cultural, and economic outcomes of the area. Funding is intended to support both the regeneration of heritage assets and the wider public realm, and the development of community based cultural activities designed to develop high streets as hubs for local cultural, retail and commercial engagement.

3.2 The scheme has three primary objectives:

- Changing the perceptions of heritage and high streets.
- Supporting sustainable economic and cultural growth on and around high streets.
- Restoring and enhancing local historic character.

- 3.3 The NNDC led project group has now been invited to develop a full Programme Design. At this stage the proposed project is no longer in competition with the other applicants and focus can now be applied to the production of a detailed programme design specifying how it is envisaged that the vision described in the EoI will be delivered. This will need to be completed by January 2020. The Programme Design will include detailed information about the HSHAZ scheme content, the deliverables and the timetable for delivery. Historic England will provide advice and work with the project group on the development of the programme.

#### **4. North Walsham Programme Outline**

- 4.1 For each scheme, a partnership agreement will be set up between Historic England, the grant applicant and other partner organisations. The lead partner (NNDC) will be delegated with the day-to-day running of the scheme. The lead partner is responsible for ensuring that staff with the necessary qualifications and experience are in place to support the scheme, either as direct employees or on a consultancy basis. Specialist staff are likely to include a conservation-accredited architect or building surveyor. Every HSHAZ is required to have a dedicated FTE project officer to support the programme delivery. Funding for this post is an eligible cost.
- 4.2 Whilst the Programme Design phase will shape the finer details of the project, the submitted bid outlined a wide range of potential initiatives, including:
- Providing new uses to key heritage buildings that are currently vacant or underused;
  - Repairing and restoring historic buildings;
  - Enhancing important areas of public realm and improving their accessibility and attractiveness, including addressing vehicular and pedestrian conflicts;
  - Developing a programme of cultural events, including outdoor theatre at various sites around the town, in collaboration with local theatre and community groups;
  - Supporting the Heritage Group in collecting artifacts and local stories and archiving and presenting its collections
  - Celebrating the outstanding local architecture through interpretative installations, signposted routes and architectural tours.
- 4.3 A very substantial and visible outcome of the scheme will be townscape improvements to the public realm of the Market Place and connecting gateways. Ideas for the townscape elements of the submitted Expression of Interest were informed by a formative 'Place-Making' study commissioned by Norfolk County Council (NCC) as part of its Norfolk Market Town Network Improvements strategy, for which NCC has established a budget through its capital programme to support the delivery of suitable projects. Ideas likely to come out of the study will

inevitably include a number of potential options for remodeling circulation within the town and resolving conflicts between different modes of transport. This work will be an important evidence base that should help inform the development of key aspects of the HAZ programme design, provide a head start to its implementation and may be a timely additional source of match funding; hence it would be beneficial to involve NCC in the HAZ programme design and to partner with them in its eventual delivery.

## **5. Cultural Programme**

5.1 Alongside the capital regeneration element, each HSHAZ must embed a Cultural Programme. This programme is currently being developed by Historic England in partnership with National Lottery Heritage Fund and Arts Council England. HSHAZ project groups are not expected to design the Cultural Programme themselves. However, it is expected that every HSHAZ will link into and support this work. The objective of the cultural elements will be to excite and engage the public; inspiring them to see the high street with fresh eyes, directly supporting the investment objectives of HSHAZs. Delivery of the Cultural Programme will generally be by local arts and culture based groups and organisations. The purpose of the Cultural Programme is:

- to revitalise high streets through cultural programmes, bringing more people and a wider range of people, and new activity, to the heart of communities, and raising aspirations;
- to support greater use of high streets and increase dwell time;
- to support people and places to thrive through cultural engagement, creating greater pride, sense of community and wellbeing;
- to support local organisations, communities and stakeholders to sustain the benefits of the programme in the future.

## **6. Conclusion**

6.1 It is well established that there is a clear and direct relationship between town centre prosperity and the quality of its public realm. The proposals put forward in the HAZ Expression of Interest were developed through active engagement and consultation with local stakeholders. The ambitions laid out are designed to enable sustainable changes to the fabric of the town which will facilitate grass-roots, community-led growth and economic development. Initiatives to develop and revitalise North Walsham to-date (stretching back some 20 years or more) have failed to tap into the resource offered by the active local community. Nor have they previously sought to capitalise on the town's historic assets and cultural heritage. Fresh thinking and innovation will address these significant challenges and deliver the transformational change needed to secure the future role and full potential of the town and, in turn, improve the town's own potential to help solve deep-seated but often masked inequalities within the wider area. It is anticipated that the North Walsham HSHAZ programme will be supported and welcomed as an

opportunity to achieve game-changing benefits to not only the local community but also its wider hinterland.

## **7 Implications and Risks**

7.1 There are presently no identified legal implications directly resulting from the recommendation or options considered in this report.

## **8 Financial Implications and Risks**

8.1 It is anticipated that elements of the programme will require private investment as match funding, to which this scheme is likely to be attractive. This would particularly apply, for example, where it could be deemed that building improvements would bring financial benefits to those holding property interests. It should be noted, however, that such improvements would only be proposed where it is clear that the work matches the objectives of the scheme and is in the wider public interest. This will be determined and managed through rigid governance and programme controls.

8.2 Other elements of the programme will require match funding from NNDC (and/or other public sector sources where appropriate). Cabinet is therefore requested to allocate a sufficient sum from capital receipts to meet the maximum potential match funding requirement of the resultant programme.

8.3 There will inevitably be a significant resource requirement from existing NNDC staff (in addition to the specific increased project staff resource that the funding will support). There may also be a need for staff and volunteer time to come from partner organisations. This will be fully accounted for in the development of the programme design.

## **9 Sustainability**

9.1 There are no identified adverse sustainability implications directly resulting from the recommendation or options considered in this report. The resultant scheme will reinforce the role of the town centre as a local service centre and hopefully thus reduce the journey time of its customers and visitors. Restoring and improving heritage assets will help secure their long-term future and the cultural programme will engender greater the civic pride and provide opportunities to improve the wellbeing of the local population.

## **10 Equality and Diversity**

10.1 There are no identified equality and diversity implications directly resulting from the recommendations or options considered in this report.

## **11 Section 17 Crime and Disorder considerations**

11.1 There are no identified Crime and Disorder implications directly resulting from the recommendations or options considered in this report.