

Bishop Auckland Town Council

Public Meeting

Monday 16th January 2023, Bishop Auckland Town Hall, 6pm – 8pm
Investment into bishop Auckland

Members of the Public were invited to attend the meeting where representatives from a range of partner agencies including Durham County Council, Stronger Towns Board, Auckland Project, Future High Streets Fund, Kynren and private sector developers presented updates on the future investment programmes in Bishop Auckland.

The meeting started with an open forum of exhibitions from the Future High Streets Fund, and the Stronger Towns Fund, this enabled attendees to go and chat informally to find out information. This session lasted for 45mins.

6.45pm The Mayor of the Town Council Councillor Michael Siddle welcomed everyone to the meeting. He explained that it was a follow up to the meeting held in February 2022. He explained that the vision of the Town Council is “Working in partnership to improve the quality of life for all those who live, work, visit or invest in Bishop Auckland.” Expressed the importance on keeping the communities of Bishop Auckland informed of the projects as they progress. Therefore they Council are trying to facilitate this by hosting meetings such as this, as no organisation can change or undertake all of the developments needed as an individual. Whilst communication has improved through the likes of the newsletters from the Stronger Towns Board, the Town Council are conscious that there is an appetite for information from the community.

The line up of speakers were introduced:

- David Land, Chair of the Stronger Towns Board
- Amy Harhoff Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth, Durham County Council
- David Madden, The Auckland Project
- Gemma Dishman, Stack
- Anne-Isabelle Daulon, Kynren

Portfolio lead Durham County Councillor Elizabeth Scott was also in the audience to help answer questions as well as DCC officers linked to a range of the projects.

Michael then handed over to Amy Harhoff – DCC Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth

Whilst there were two main pot of funding the Future High Streets Fund and the Stronger Towns Fund, it was getting harder to separate the topics, as many of the projects had interdependencies.

DCC has 3 primary roles in supporting the delivery of the funding as an enabler

- As the accountable body on behalf of the government to ensure that it is all done correctly and under the terms of the funding
- Local authority has an overarching oversight of the programme and are able to see all projects
- Local authority has to deliver on the projects

Amy confirmed the funding forms are all complete and are submitted to central government, with the eastern access corridor having an extension to get the paperwork all in place. There has been a significant amount of work behind the scenes to deliver this.

The food festival in 2022 brought 30,000 people into the town centre and it is attractions like this that bring in visitors who spend money in the town when they are here.

The Bishop Auckland Advisory Board was established to bring forward a wider group of people to ensure the local authority were informed well and had rounded feedback from the public. Some of that feedback was to keep local people informed of progress and this is why DCC established the magazine which has now had 2 editions and was distributed to over 15,000 homes across town and a website was also developed for people to find out more information. The next edition of the magazine will be Feb 2023. The website is also updated with latest information.

Gemma Dishman from Stack was introduced (this project is part of the Future High Streets Fund) -A planning application has been submitted to DCC to convert no's 9-11 Newgate St into a STACK development. This will be a place that consists of 3 bars, 5 street style food outlets, have a central stage for live performances and entertainment. The current STACK's at Newcastle and Sunderland have a great atmosphere, encourages families and is a great meet up space through the day or on an evening. This site is expected to create 100 jobs.

Timeline –

- Planning licence is submitted and a decision is expected by the end of Feb 2023
- Demolition request submitted and if approved then groundworks is expected to start March 2023
- If everything goes to plan and there is no slippage then it is estimated to be open by March 2024.
- Confirmed more communications will be issued at each stage of the process.

Amy Harhoff thanked Gemma – and updated on the Property Reuse Fund £450,000 of £1m has been spent or is committed. 2 schemes are complete e.g. Moss & Ivy, 2 more have been approved and 12 are currently under development and have expressed interest.

The future of the high street in any town is difficult and DCC is very supportive of this scheme and hopefully there will be 16 new establishments in the near future if they all progress. One of which is 47 Newgate Street.

Mr Thomas was introduced to update on the development of no.47 Newgate St (old Burtons & Post Office sites) under the property re-use scheme

The plan is to develop these into 10 apartments (7 x 2 bed, 3 x 1 bed). This is for short term holiday style lets of about 3 days at a time. This is to capture people to stay within Bishop Auckland for extended periods when they visit and to spend within the town. The permission for this has been granted. It is anticipated there will be a local brewery on the ground floor. Guests will receive vouchers for local eateries to encourage spending locally.

Michael from Salvador Architects who is supporting Mr Thomas on this scheme, further elaborated that the building will be reconfigured and the frontage will go back to its original historical look. The apartments will be compact but high quality and have terraces at the rear of them.

Mr Thomas assured that the meeting that the Post Office was offered to relocate and a new post master has been found and was pleased to confirm that the post office within the Premier Shop opposite (NatWest) was opening 22nd of January.

Amy thank confirmed there are a range of public realm improvements coming forward. As connectivity of the town needs improving for both residents and visitors, accessibility, public transport and car parks need improving. A walk-through area has been established in Fore Bondgate to open the way through and give better links to the flow of the town, have improved lighting and be a more attractive place to be.

This included changes to the Bus Station & Car Parking – There is a £12m proposal for a new bus station (artists impression on screen) on the existing site, this would include a car park. Bishop Auckland has the third largest used bus station in the county and it is anticipated the footfall will vastly increase over the next few years so it needs to be improved and be able to cope with the influx. Pre-planning for these project are due in February 2023 with a look to start work in the Autumn 2023.

David Madden from the Auckland Project was introduced – he updated on :

- Market Place Hotel This is the buildings on the North side of the market place including all buildings along the Postchase/Queens side. The proposal at this stage is a limited service hotel (Premier Inn style). It would be approx. 80 rooms and 70 car parking spaces at the rear of the building. It will create approx.. 25 jobs. For this to happen it would require the replacement of the existing buildings. Once this is built then The Auckland Project would move on to try and find a developer for the exiting No.42 site and Castle Bar more upmarket boutique style hotel.
- Kingsway Square – This is the waste land at the back of Kingsway (artist impression on screen). It will create 80 car park spaces of an improved quality with trees access onto Newgate St by removing a couple of shops opposite Beales old dept store. Shops surrounding the car park area will be able to open up from the back as well to look onto the square and give a vibrant feel but there needs to be input from the private sector.
- Eastern Access Corridor - This will include a new pedestrian bridge to Kynren. Visitor attractions will bring people in their cars. A new car park will be built by the river so it will bring traffic adjacent to the town but not in it but access will be available by foot or through shuttle buses.

Anne Isabelle Daulon then - 11 Arches – Kynren has ran for 8 seasons now and there has been over 400,000 visitors of which 40% have been from outside the area. These people spend 10 times more than local people when they are here. More attractions are being developed at 11 Arches over the next few years with all attractions being complete by 2026. The next stage is to extend as a daytime visitor attraction and allow 11 Arches to hire staff for 5-6 months of the year over the Spring/Summer season). The site will be called 11 Arches park. This is estimated to attracted 5-7k visitors. It will have themed areas, including the Worm of The Wear, a high flighing bird of prey show and chariot racing.

Amy then provided updates on

- Tindale Triangle – Junction improvements are required to ease traffic congestion in the area, some work has already started in the area. The development will create new retail space, leisure development and approx. 450 jobs. There will be a 7-screen cinema, bowling alley, retail shops and food outlets.
- Springboard to employment in the old McIntyres store site, this is a Bishop Auckland College led project. This will be a training centre across 3 floors with learning space a training kitchen/caf , display space to promote new businesses and products and a business support space (artists impression on screen).

The futures high street funds need to be concluded by march 2024

The Town funds concluded by December 2026

The Mayor thanked the presented for their valuable updates to the audience. The questions were taken from the floor:

Q - As a local business owner we depend not just on visitors but the logistics of goods, people need to be able to carry their purchases and can't walk everywhere down to Kynren etc.

A - The north Bongate car park will remain and it is anticipated about 30% of visitors will park by the river but a shuttle bus will transport regularly so people can access these with their purchases.

Q - Are the 100 jobs proposed at STACK being sourced locally?

A – Yes STACK is working with the council and will be using local people.

Q – Looking at the plans for the bus station. Would it not be better if the bus connection was attached to the Newgate Centre rather than closed off?

A – It is quite close to the Newgate centre but will allow people to enter and exit the bus station in all directions.

Q – Is there any plans to stop wagons and heavy goods vehicles from going through the market place and use an alternative route?

A – No there are no plans for this but the improved infrastructure of the eastern corridor and better traffic management at Tindale will help.

Q – Will residents of Clayton Court overlook the car park in the bus station?

A – Yes they will but it will be of high quality and will be much improved in the area to what it is now, with sympathetic planning etc.

Q – Will the shuttle buses go down Wear Chare as this is a very narrow road with no path and is used by locals regularly?

A – The route for cars will be via the A688 to access the riverside car park or on foot via the network of pathways. The shuttle bus will go down and up Wear Chare but they will be mini buses and not large buses. This is just an idea at present and a discussion of how this will be managed hasn't let taken place, the details will be looked at as development progresses.

Q – Regarding economic plans for the area, such as Vinovium House and other areas within the town, what are the plans?

A – Regarding the economic strategy – jobs in hospitality can be lower than average but it can move to the value chain. It can bring in higher economy and better opportunities for the people of Bishop Auckland. The buildings around town are being looked at as part of the town centre diversification scheme. There are some significant buildings in Bishop Auckland that need to be repurposed. Over the past 18 months DCC have been working with developers and continue with discussions to develop sites and bring jobs and opportunities to the town. There are more layers in this journey that will be developed over a longer period of time.

Q – The Postchase has listed building restrictions at present, the artists impression shown shows a blocky hotel which isn't in keeping with the nice aesthetics of the market place and will turn people away rather than draw them in. If the development isn't controlled well then it will detract people, how will this be addressed?

A – The scheme is subject to planning permission being granted. The diagram is blocky but it is not a design at this stage just a concept. A business case would need to be put forward and approved should the development wish to change the look of the front of the building.

Q – There are lots for plans for hard surfaces and little trees, is now not the opportunity for Bishop Auckland to plan things that are good for the environment. Shrubbery isn't good, it attracts vermin but trees can cast shadows and combat the heat from the tarmac. How can we green up the spaces and use things that are attractive like blossom trees?

A – One area we had to address when completing the application was the government wanted to know what we would be contributing to Net Zero. There are a number of schemes to improve the public realms and trees are part of that. An environmental impact assessment will be conducted as part of the eastern corridor and will form part of the consultation going forward.

Q – Public transport since covid has struggled, the government has introduced some initiatives and given revenue and capital and done some trials of single trips for £2. From DCC we need to have better clearer facility to encourage people to use public transport. We need to have the buses running at the right times to get people to and from work.

A - This will be looked at in greater details over time.

Q – There are some shops here that have been established for a number of years. The amount of small retail shops has gone and we need a structure whereby when people come to town we attract people for the other 6 months of the year and not just when there are festivals and attractions on. The bulk of retail taking is usually for a 8-10 week period leading up to Christmas. We can't just have a town of nail bars and barbers.

A – There is a general trend away from the town high streets which is reflected nationally. Part of the high street will be access services as well as hospitality and not just shops as things have moved on.

Q – Some members of the public would like to get more details on some of the projects e.g. Fore Bondgate traders. Can I ask that developers continue to try and improve and engage with the traders and people of the town.

Q - Is there anything regarding development of the old Beales site?

A – This site is part of phase two in the projects. It needs investment to come back into active use. This site is a constant source of discussion and has had a number of potential developers but with the development of STACK and other things it is more encouraging and is bringing developers back to the table for discussions.

The Mayor thanked everyone for attending. Feedback and future updates would be given via the website and newsletter updates. Pre planning consultations are expected for projects such as the bus station etc, so also keep a look out for those.

8pm meeting closed.