



Northumberland

County Council

22 JANUARY 2019

NORTHUMBERLAND TOWN INVESTMENT PROGRAMME - FUTURE HIGH STREETS FUND PARTNERS BRIEFING

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1. Introduction

This briefing provides information for Town Forums and similar place based partnerships, Town Councils, commercial and community partners with an interest in developing and regenerating town centres in Northumberland.

The County Council is currently encouraging partners to work together to develop a *Northumberland Town Investment Programme*, with the purpose of fully establishing a future pipeline of interventions to boost economic performance in town centres across the county.

Much of this work is already developing in towns across the county, for instance through Town Forums which have been established in a number of towns. The Town Investment Programme is an ongoing process through which the council will work with partners. This briefing explains how we propose to develop this during 2019.

Aligned to this, the Government is currently inviting proposals to the Future High Streets Fund (FHSF). It is the intention of the County Council to use the ongoing Town Investment Programme process to inform its application to this fund which must be submitted to Government by 22nd March 2019.

As such the Council is keen to have a dialogue locally and hear from partners by 5pm Monday 4th February 2019 regarding any proposals that may fit with this fund, taking account of the fund criteria.

2. Developing a Northumberland Town Investment Programme

The County Council is already working with the growing network of town forums and partnerships to develop projects and programmes across Northumberland. The council is offering to support the co-production of an Investment Programme for each main town (the large and small main town centres as defined in the draft local plan), building on work to date.

In the large main towns the development of a Town Forum or other place based partnership arrangement, supported by NCC, is either established or being discussed. Developing an investment programme is intended to ensure the council and partners locally are fully aware of and able to support the development of projects in a unified programme for each town.

The list of main towns in Northumberland is included below:

Towns in Northumberland

The draft Local Plan defines towns in Northumberland as follows in Policy TCS 1 Hierarchy of centres (Strategic Policy).

A hierarchy of centres is defined as follows:

- *Main towns - larger centres:* Alnwick, Ashington, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Blyth, Cramlington, Morpeth and Hexham;
- *Main towns - smaller centres:* Amble, Bedlington, Haltwhistle, Ponteland and Prudhoe;

The Council will also continue to work with all other towns and communities across the county in a locally appropriate way, and would welcome discussions with localities regarding development of opportunities in their area.

Ongoing Call for Proposals

To assist in developing an Investment Programme the council is inviting the submission of proposals using the attached Expression of Interest (EOI) Form on an ongoing basis. The Council already maintains a pipeline of regeneration projects and this will assist the council and partners in identifying potential activities which may be eligible to apply for future opportunities including Borderlands, North of Tyne, Future High Street Fund and other resources.

Support from NCC

Below is a summary of the assistance available from NCC to the main towns across the County to support place making with a focus on development of a Town Investment Programme:

Town Investment Programme - NCC Support

Dedicated support: Support from the County Council includes:

- directly providing coordination support in the seven main towns (larger centres) with a dedicated town forum, forums established to date are supported by officers from the Economy and Regeneration Service and Strategic Estates. Each forum / partnership arrangement is at a different stage in development as they become fully established
- providing a dedicated link officer within the Economy and Regeneration Service to support and regular liaise with smaller main towns. The service provides assistance to a wide range of communities in Northumberland to support regeneration projects and partnership development
- Linked to the above, Advance Northumberland lead on a range of priority investment projects in localities.

Town Chairs: Each main town (larger centres) has support from a senior officer, in most cases as Chair of the relevant forum

Cross service support: The above arrangements provide the basis to identify what support may be required including planning and technical support, and involvement from other services and Advance Northumberland and Active Northumberland.

Corporate Focus: The Council's town regeneration focus is supported by the corporate Regeneration Investment Group (RIG) structure providing a regular focus on the place based agenda to ensure effective provision of funding, strategy and cross service support

Project Pipeline: Each town's key regeneration projects are included in the corporate Regeneration Investment Pipeline

Performance: the Council has produced a new Town Economy Matrix to assist partners in understanding performance in towns. This matrix enclosed with this briefing provides a summary of headline data regarding performance in the main towns and is intended to act as an aid to partners in considering the baseline performance of their town.

NCC officers (see list enclosed) will be engaging with Town Forums, and key partners to discuss the approach outlined in this briefing regarding the development of a Town Investment Programme. Project Proposals can be submitted on an ongoing basis subject to these discussions.

3. Future High Streets Fund

Local Authority Role

The County Council is responsible for developing the focus and content of a sole application to this fund by 22nd March 2019. Each Local Authority may only submit one application to the fund and so must select an appropriate candidate. NCC has initiated a

process of undertaking an initial town by town assessment to consider the eligibility criteria set out in the funding guidance.

Local Proposals for Future High Street Fund

As part of the above process, the council would welcome any proposals that may be eligible for this fund, the attached EOI form should be submitted to Tony Kirsop, NCC Community Regeneration Manager by **Monday 4th February 2019** to ensure proposals can be considered as part of the town based assessment being undertaken.

This deadline only applies to any activities in regard to FHSF and not to the broader Town Investment Programme Process outlined above. This will enable the Council to discuss potential proposals and include them alongside an assessment of the socio - economic conditions in the locality affecting the town centre.

Eligibility Criteria

It is important to note that the Councils town based assessment is considering the FHSF guidance¹. This indicates a number of factors that limit the localities that may be eligible in Northumberland including:

- Bids will not be accepted by Government covering town centre areas that are not facing significant challenges
- The Local Authority must provide justification as to why the town centre area chosen has been selected as opposed to other centres within this area, and why this area is most in need.
- Proposals need to cover high streets or town centres which are defined as areas that exhibit high levels of social and economic activity, that contain a variety of uses and functions and act as important service centres for extensive catchment populations. In the Northumberland context this indicates the 12 main towns in Northumberland as defined in the draft Local Plan would meet the settlement criteria.
- Applications should not be about traditional retail and proposals and need to demonstrate how they will fundamentally change the use of the High Street to adapt for the future.
- Co-funding of £675 million towards capital projects is available nationally for interventions that bring transformative change with a focus on the regeneration of town centres through innovative proposals around transport, housing delivery and public services.
- The Fund will contribute up to a maximum of £25 million to each successful place with a range of project sizes expected, many in the region of £5-10 million per town centre.
- Submissions will need to show co-funding by the public and private sector and this will be taken into consideration as part of the Governments assessment process.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-high-streets-fund-call-for-proposals>

- Co-funding can be either on a project basis or as part of delivery of the local area's wider strategy for the high street.
- This may comprise of more than one intervention in that locality, but that will be subject to a strong business case.
- The Government are expected to issue further guidance later this month on weightings in relation to the criteria in the fund. The separately administered £55m Heritage Town Centres fund will also be announced in further detail at a later date.

NCC Assessment Process

In order to be in a position to submit an application to FHSF by the Government deadline of 22 March 2019, a project identification, assessment and selection process needs to be undertaken and the agreed project submission subsequently completed. The Council is therefore undertaking a town by town assessment against the main criteria of the Fund to ascertain how each town performs against those criteria.

NCC FHSF Town Assessment Criteria

The following criteria linked to the key aspects of the FHSF will be applied in an initial assessment undertaken by NCC on a town by town basis including the 12 main towns in the county. The assessment will consider qualitative and quantitative information available and a simple traffic light RAG rating will be provided against the following factors to aid decision making:

- Evidence of significant challenge eg; vacancies, footfall, crime, mix of uses
- Evidence of high levels of social and economic activity, variety of uses and functions and important service centre for extensive catchment population
- Potential co-funding particularly private sector leverage
- Town Centre Vision - Masterplan, Neighbourhood Plan or development strategy developed
- Evidence of engagement and support for strategy/plan
- Evidence of existing business case development, deliverability including within the funds timescales and project risks
- FHSF Theme strategic fit:
 - Investment in physical infrastructure
 - Acquisition and assembly of land including to support new housing, workspaces and public realm
 - Improvements to transport access, traffic flow and circulation in the area
 - Supporting change of use including (where appropriate) housing delivery and densification
 - Supporting adaptation of the high street in response to changing technology

NCC will continue to liaise with partners as we complete the town based assessment in regard to Future High Street Fund criteria. The Councils Cabinet will consider the outcome of the assessment in February. The outcome of this process will be communicated to partners including confirmation of the FHSF bid which will be submitted by 22nd March 2019.

NCC contacts

Please contact the councils Economy and Regeneration Service to discuss this further. For general enquiries about the Town Investment Programme please contact Tony Kirsop in the first instance.

Town	Town Investment Programme contact
Amble, Berwick, Ponteland	Tony Kirsop, Community Regeneration Manager T: 07917266864 E: tony.kirsop@northumberland.gov.uk
Blyth, Hexham, Haltwhistle, Morpeth, Prudhoe	Anne Lawson Senior Programme Officer (Town Regeneration) T: 07917 266866 E: Anne.lawson@northumberland.gov.uk
Alnwick, Ashington, Bedlington, Cramlington	Karen Donaldson Senior Programme Officer (Town Regeneration) T: 07966 324034 E: karen.donaldson@northumberland.gov.uk (please note working days Monday - Wednesday)

Annex 1. Future High Streets Fund Guidance Summary

The fund² is part of the Government's recently launched *Our Plan for the High Street*, which

includes a cut in business rates by up to a third for a wide range of retail properties for two years, a consultation on planning reform to make it simpler to create more homes, jobs and

choice in town centres, and the creation of a national High Streets Task Force.

The Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) guidance, issued on 26th December 2018 set out the Government's call for proposals for supporting places by co-funding of £675 million for capital projects that bring transformative change with a focus on the regeneration of town centres through innovative proposals around transport, housing delivery and public services.

Objectives and Focus of the Future High Streets Fund

The objective of the fund is to renew and reshape town centres and high streets in a way that improves experience, drives growth and ensures future sustainability.

In this first phase of the programme local authorities in England are invited to define the specific challenges faced by their high streets, to set out their overarching strategic ambition for what the high street or town centre should become and what needs to be done to make this possible.

The fund is to be spent against the following themes:

- Investment in physical infrastructure
- Acquisition and assembly of land including to support new housing, workspaces and public realm
- Improvements to transport access, traffic flow and circulation in the area
- Supporting change of use including (where appropriate) housing delivery and densification
- Supporting adaptation of the high street in response to changing technology

Funding will not be provided for surface-level projects that only make a difference to the appearance, rather than the use, of the area or interventions that would not have a long-term impact.

Heritage Funding

£55m of the overall Fund has been allocated to support the regeneration of heritage high streets. Details are still to be announced on this element of funding. Local Authorities will be able to bid for both the FHSF as well as to the separate heritage schemes pot. As such this may provide further opportunities for applications from Northumberland for appropriate support.

Funding for this heritage element has been allocated to the Department for Culture Media and Sport. Further details of the fund will be announced in due course although it is

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-high-streets-fund-call-for-proposals>

anticipated it may mirror the previous Heritage Action Zone support provided. A number of Northumberland towns have benefited from heritage-related funding in previous years such as through the Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI).

How the fund will operate

The Fund will operate as a two-round fund with two stages to the application process:

- *Phase 1* - calls for places to come forward with Expressions of Interest by 22 March 2019 setting out their challenges and strategic approach to regenerating a selected area. These will be assessed against criteria set out in the Prospectus and covered in more detail below. As the first phase concerns identifying places to work with, specific projects do not need to be included in submitted proposals. Shortlisting will be based on three themes: Defining the Place, Setting out the Challenges and Strategic Ambition. Additional weighting criteria is to be published by the end of January 2019.
- *Phase 2* - shortlisted towns will receive some revenue funding to support the development of high street strategies including specific project plans and associated business cases setting out how these will regenerate the selected town. It's expected that business case development will take around 6-12 months.
- *Fast Tracking* - In the first round of the Fund, projects which are 'shovel ready' may be fast-tracked for funding.

A national High Streets Task Force is being established and will provide support to shortlisted places in developing their cases.

National Timescales

The timetable for the FHSF is as follows:

- 26 December 2018: Phase 1 opened and Expressions of Interest invited
- 22 March 2019: deadline for Expressions of Interest
- Summer 2019: announcement on places moving to Phase 2
- Late 2019: first round of final business cases to be submitted
- Spring 2020: all remaining final business cases to be submitted
- Not before 2020: Second round of applications opens

Eligibility

The guidance points to a number of key eligibility criteria including:

- *Economic Performance* - The guidance clearly states that bids covering town centre areas that are not facing significant challenges will not be accepted. Successful applications will need to provide supporting evidence that clearly illustrates this, including in relation to:
 - Proportion and/or number of vacant properties
 - Openings/closures of commercial units
 - Diversity of uses in the town centre area

- Resident/customer surveys
 - Pedestrian flows and footfall trends
 - Evidence of congestion and air quality
 - Perception of safety and occurrence of crime
 - State of town centre environmental quality including provision of green spaces
 - Accessibility
 - Housing demands
- *Definition of a High Street* - Proposals need to cover high streets or town centres which are defined as areas that exhibit high levels of social and economic activity, that contain a variety of uses and functions and act as important service centres for extensive catchment populations.
 - *Scale* - Small parades of shops of purely neighbourhood significance are not regarded as high streets or town centres for purposes of this fund. Additionally, the Fund is not directed at central business districts of major city centres. Proposals that cover entire city regions, rather than a single high street or town centre, will not be eligible for funding.

Funding and Resourcing

The Fund will contribute up to a maximum of £25 million to each successful place with a range of project sizes expected, many in the region of £5-10 million per town centre. Submissions will need to show co-funding by the public and private sector and this will be taken into consideration as part of the assessment process. Co-funding can be either on a project basis or as part of delivery of the local area's wider strategy for the high street.

Given the likely need for a package of investment any proposal will need to consider how best it can lever in public sector finance and assets as part of any application alongside private sector leverage which will be vital. Depending on the chosen location this may include investment which is already committed or it may require consideration of the councils appetite for new investment in a locality.

Local and Stakeholder Support

Expressions of Interest need to demonstrate engagement with, and support from, a number of stakeholders including: Mayoral and non-Mayoral Combined Authorities, LEPs, private sector and community groups.