

SHARED PROSPERITY FUNDING, TOWN CENTRE IMPROVEMENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report confirms the process for allocating and progressing SPF funding which has been identified to support town centre improvements in the district.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The government launched its UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) Prospectus in April 2022 as part of its Levelling Up agenda. The funding covers the three year period up to March 2025, with all areas of the UK receiving an allocation from the fund via a funding formula rather than a competition. New Forest District Council received an allocation of £1m and was required to submit a Local Investment Plan to government by 1 August 2022.
- 2.2 In July 2022, Cabinet agreed to delegate to the Chief Executive the submission of an Investment Plan for New Forest District and endorsed the allocation of our £1m fund to support 11 projects across the three priority themes, namely Community and Place, Business Support and People and Skills.
- 2.3 One of the projects considered by Cabinet at its July 2022 meeting focused on the use of SPF funds to realise town centre improvements.
- 2.4 In March 2023 Cabinet additionally considered a report in relation to Totton Town centre and supported progressing delivery of “quick win” projects along with supporting, in principle, six design principles as part of a vision for Totton. This report was based upon a major community engagement exercise, undertaken by consultants Feria, which realised 874 responses from around 250 different contributors. The March 2023 Cabinet report underlined the importance of making early progress at Totton and outlined that the UKSPF town centre project would have a Totton focus through early pilot schemes.
- 2.5 This decision paper establishes how the SPF town centre project will be progressed.

3. PROPOSED TOWN CENTRE ALLOCATIONS

Budget allocations

- 3.1 The total SPF allocation for the New Forest is £1m of which £762,000 is revenue funding and £238,000 is capital funding. The New Forest SPF Investment Plan which was submitted to government in August 2023 identified £220,000 to support our town centres all of which is revenue funding.
- 3.2 The town centre funding will be split in the following way, noting that 4% (£8,800) is reserved to manage the SPF programme:
- Totton Town Centre - £136,200
 - Other district centres - £75,000, with the following split of funds:
 - Fordingbridge - £15,000
 - New Milton - £15,000

- Ringwood - £15,000
- Hythe - £15,000
- Marchwood - £15,000

3.3 Funding allocations for the five district centres may be varied to reflect the nature and cost of individual schemes coming forward.

Rationale for budget allocations

3.4 The majority of the town centre development funding, £136,200, has been allocated to Totton. The rationale for that is that Totton has been identified by the Administration as a key priority for regeneration investment. Additionally, Totton is well progressed in terms of identifying potential areas for investment following the work undertaken by Feria. Previous cabinet reports have established that Totton, through pilot projects, should be a focus for the SPF funding and that there is a need to progress proposed quick wins. Additionally, having undertaken a major engagement exercise in the town, it is essential that we maintain momentum and offer confidence that we are listening to views and moving quickly to respond to issues raised.

3.5 However, the benefits of the SPF programme should also be spread across the district. It is important, therefore, that a reasonable allocation of SPF funding is provided to other town centres. Five town centre locations have been chosen, which are away from the major tourist areas across the district. This decision has been made on the basis that investment in these centres is most needed. The £15,000 allocation for each of these five centres is significantly more modest than in Totton but is still a significant amount of funding to either build on existing projects or to facilitate new ideas.

Developing programmes in each town centre

3.6 The above allocations will need to be progressed through specific projects in each town centre. Officers will meet with representatives of the relevant town and parish councils to agree priority projects which can be delivered within the SPF timeframe, noting all projects must be complete by March 2025. In the case of Totton, projects will need to show alignment with the principles of the March 2023 Cabinet paper and supporting Feria report – either delivering quick wins or progressing design principles.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 The March 2025 deadline for spending the £1m UKSPF allocation for NFDC makes it imperative that we make progress on all aspects of the programme. This report provides a way forward to progressing projects to support 6 town centres across the district with a particular focus on Totton.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 New Forest District Council was awarded £1m by government from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). Following submission of the District's UKSPF Investment Plan, the Council signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) in December 2022. That Investment Plan identified £220,000 of revenue funding to support our town centres. Therefore, the commitments in this paper can be met through that fund. 4% of UKSPF funds are available to manage the programme. There are no additional cost commitments arising out of this paper.

6. CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 All town centres face significant challenges at the present time for numerous reasons including, in particular, new ways of shopping. These have been exacerbated by the COVID pandemic. One impact of declining high streets and town centres is an increase in anti social behaviour (ASB). Whilst the proposals in this paper are modest in scale, any investment to animate and diversify our town centres should help to address any prevalent ASB issues.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Whilst detailed projects for each of the town centres identified have still to be worked up, one area of potential focus for all areas will be to consider how to improve environmental sustainability in those centres – for example through bike stands, bike routes or promotion of walking trails.

8. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The allocations made above specifically reflect those town centres which have seen less investment in recent years than some New Forest centres. As such, ensuring that residents have access to high quality facilities regardless of where they live is a key element of this programme.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- 9.1 The net £211,200 SPF funding for town centre projects will be split in the following way:
- Totton Town Centre - £136,200
 - Other district centres - £75,000, with equal amounts to Fordingbridge, New Milton, Ringwood, Hythe and Marchwood.
- 9.2 Proposals will be worked up with the appropriate Town or Parish Council and will then be considered by the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy for endorsement.

10. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ENDORSEMENT

I have agreed to the recommendation of this report.

Sign: Councillor Derek Tipp

Date: 8 September 2023

For further information contact:

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Background Papers:

Cabinet, 29 July 2022:
Item 4, UK Shared Prosperity Fund

Cabinet, 1 March 2023:
Item 7, Totton Community Engagement

Date on which notice given of this Decision – 8 September 2023

Last date for call in – 15 September 2023