



CABINET

Tuesday, 24 March 2020

TOWN CENTRE/HIGH STREET FUNDS – BIRKENHEAD AND NEW FERRY FUTURE HIGH STREET FUND.

Councillor Cabinet member for Regeneration and Growth, Cllr Tony Jones, said:

“I’m pleased that Wirral has been among the first 51 selected areas out of more than 300 applications for the Future High Streets Fund, recognising our ambitions for Birkenhead and New Ferry. The rejuvenation of both towns will play a key role in the wider regeneration taking place across the borough.”

“This funding could be crucial to helping both towns’ transformation and assisting the Council to access additional funding so New Ferry and Birkenhead can achieve the aspirations we have set out for them both. We will now use this opportunity to build the best possible business case for both towns to submit to the Government.”

REPORT SUMMARY

The Council has been successful in progressing to the final stage of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Future High Streets Fund Programme for two of its town centres, namely Birkenhead and New Ferry. Officers are now working on the development of Treasury Green Book compliant full business cases, with a submission deadline of 30 April 2020. Draft business cases were submitted to MHCLG on 15 January 2020 with feedback anticipated to be received mid-March 2020.

The purpose of this report is to provide members with an update regarding the development to date of these funding bids and to recommend that the Director of Regeneration and Place is authorised to provide final sign-off in April 2020, therefore allowing Officers to maximise the bid writing timescale within the submission deadline of 30 April 2020.

Town centre regeneration is a long-standing priority for the Council and is reflected in The Wirral Council Plan 2025 through the requirement to deliver inclusive economic growth as a key priority to ensure residents are able to access good, high quality paying jobs in a stable and thriving economy.

This matter affects the wards of Bromborough and Birkenhead and Tranmere.

This is a key decision owing to the significance in terms of the effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards in the Borough.

EXEMPT INFORMATION

This report is partially exempt as the Appendices contain commercially confidential information relating to funding applications to the highly competitive Future High Street Fund. Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 of this report contain exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. It is in the public interest to exclude the press and public under Paragraph 3 'Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding the information)'.

Appendix 1 New Ferry Future High Streets Fund

Appendix 2 Birkenhead Future High Streets Fund

RECOMMENDATION/S

Cabinet Members are asked to:

- note the content of this report and the importance of Future High Streets Fund to the regeneration of Birkenhead and New Ferry town centres, and provide comments;
- authorise the Director of Regeneration and Place to provide final sign-off for the Future High Street Fund applications to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government in respect of New Ferry and Birkenhead Town Centres, and
- note that should the Council be successful in securing Future High Streets Funds then a future report will be brought back to the appropriate Committee for approval in relation to the full terms and conditions of the grant funding agreement.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 The Future High Street Fund can support the Council to access significant funding to regenerate and revitalise Birkenhead and New Ferry Town Centres.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Allowing the Director of Regeneration and Place to authorise the final sign-off of the funding applications allows Officers to continue working on the development of the bids up to the submission deadline of 30 April 2020. This approach was agreed by the Senior Leadership Team on 4 February 2020.
- 2.2 Members will be aware that 23 March 2020 Cabinet meeting is the last one prior to the pre-election period that commences on 27 March 2020. Final sign-off at this stage would significantly restrict the bid writing window in what is expected to be a highly competitive application process.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 In December 2019, as part of the government's commitment to help more high streets adapt, MHCLG launched a £675 million Future High Streets Fund. This detailed a two-phase application process, with expressions of interest to be submitted in March 2019 and those progressing to the final application stage to be announced in Summer 2019.
- 3.2 Wirral submitted 3 applications in respect of Birkenhead, Liscard and New Ferry, however MHCLG subsequently advised that they would only accept 2 applications. Liscard was withdrawn, with an intention for this area to be further developed and re-submitted when the 2020 round opens (MHCLG has not yet confirmed the dates for the next round of applications).
- 3.3 MHCLG received 328 applications and in July 2019 both Birkenhead and New Ferry were announced as part of the first 51 areas to progress to the final application stage. In August 2019, a further 50 areas were announced with the fund subsequently increasing to £1 billion.
- 3.4 All local authorities progressing to the final stage have received a capacity and resource grant of £150,000 per area to assist with the costs of developing a Treasury Green Book compliant full business case to the following timescales:
- **15 January 2020:** Submission of draft full business case to MHCLG.
 - **Mid-March 2020:** Receive feedback on draft business case submission.
 - **30 April 2020:** Submission of final full business case to MHCLG.
 - **Summer/Autumn 2020:** MHCLG to announce successful areas.

- 3.5 The Future High Streets Fund aims to provide infrastructure investment to help renew and reshape town centres and high streets in a way that improves experience, drives growth and ensures future sustainability. The average award is expected to be in the region of £5-10m, with the maximum award being £25m; activity and spend can be profiled to March 2024.
- 3.6 MHCLG expect investment to fall under 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, and
 - Supporting adaptation of the high street in response to changing technology.
- 3.7 Applications will undergo a vigorous assessment as outlined below, with the main weighting attributed to a stringent value for money assessment in terms of the associated economic benefits:
- **Pass/Fail:** Gateway Criteria (demonstrates market failure/delivers investment/meets timescales/demonstrates co-funding).
 - **50% Value for Money (VFM)**
 - Part 1: Provides Benefit Cost Ratio of 2:1 (unless exceptional circumstances).
 - Part 2: Overall VFM assessment compared against other applicants.
 - **20% Strategic Fit.**
 - **30% Delivery.**
- 3.8 Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 of this report provide an overview of the development of New Ferry and Birkenhead Future High Streets Fund bids to date. Both are exempt as their content contains commercially confidential information relating to funding applications.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Council has been awarded £150,000 for both New Ferry and Birkenhead under a Section 31 non-ring-fenced transfer (Local Government Finance Act 2003) with the expectation that these funds will assist with the costs of developing the full business case. All grants paid under section 31 powers are subject to standard local authority grant conditions. As part of the full business case submission the Council's Senior Responsible Officer will be required to confirm that the funding has been properly expended.
- 4.2 Part of this funding has been used to commission specialist regeneration consultants Avison Young to support the Council to develop full business case submissions for New Ferry and Birkenhead.
- 4.3 If the Council is successful in securing Future High Streets Funds then it is expected that there will be additional financial reporting, however these details will be outlined in any subsequent future grant funding agreement. As such, there are no additional direct financial implications as a result of this report at this stage.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 If successful in securing Future High Street Funds the Council will be required to enter into a grant funding agreement with MHCLG, the content and implications of which are unknown at this stage. Advice will be required from Governance and Assurance prior to entering into such an agreement, however at this stage there are no additional legal implications as a result of this report.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 There are no additional resource implications as a result of this report at this stage.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 There was a risk the Council would not have the capacity/specialist expertise to develop two Treasury Green Book compliant business cases as required for the Future High Streets Fund applications. This risk was mitigated by commissioning specialist consultants to support the applications utilising part of the capacity and resource grant from MHCLG.
- 7.2 As outlined in sections 4 and 5 of this report, if successful in securing Future High Streets Funds the Council will be required to enter into a grant funding agreement with MHCLG, however the risks associated with this are unknown at this stage. As outlined within the recommendations of this report, should Future High Street Funds be secured, a further report will be brought to the back to the appropriate Committee and this will include any associated risks and mitigating actions as appropriate.
- 7.3 There are no additional risks identified as a result of this report at this stage.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Officers have continued to brief the Leader of the Council, the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth and local ward Councillors with the development of the Future High Streets Fund bids.
- 8.2 The developing bids support and add value to consultation conducted already as part of the New Ferry Regeneration Plan and Birkenhead Town Centre consultation conducted by Wirral Growth Company. Development proposals will also go through statutory consultation as part of the planning process.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The potential impact of the Future High Streets Fund has been reviewed with regard to equality and links to the existing EIA conducted for Wirral's Growth Plan and no amendments have been made.

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments/equality-impact-assessments-2014-0>

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The content and recommendations contained within this report are expected to reduce the emissions of green house gases. This will include, as appropriate, energy efficient buildings within new developments; infrastructure improvements to reduce car dominance and create a safer environment for road users and pedestrians, and environmental and climate considerations within the Council's Social Value strategy to be used within the procurement of future contractors

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 New Ferry Future High Street Fund (Exempt)

Appendix 2 Birkenhead Future High Street Fund (Exempt)

BACKGROUND PAPERS

MHCLG Future High Streets Fund Call for Proposals, 2018

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

MHCLG Future High Streets Fund Business Case Guidance, 2019

(Copy available on request)

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Delegated Decision Report: Preferred Development Option for New Ferry	Published 20/12/2019