

## Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	<b>Cllr Richard Samuel, Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Resources</b>	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	<b>On or after 26th February 2022</b>	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		<b>E 3257</b>
TITLE:	<b>Midsomer Norton High Street Renewal Programme – WECA ‘Love Our High Streets’ Funding to deliver the Market Square scheme</b>	
WARD:	Midsomer Norton North & Midsomer Norton Redfield	
<b>AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM/</b>		
<p><b>List of attachments to this report:</b></p> <p>Appendix 1: Midsomer Norton Town Square Love our High Streets Full Business Case Project Summary (November 2021)</p> <p>Appendix 2: Letter of Support for Funding bid from key community stakeholders (November 2021)</p>		

### 1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 A £895k funding package to support Midsomer Norton’s High Street Renewal has been secured from the West of England Combined Authority’s Investment Fund ‘Love our High Streets’ grant programme. A proposal put forward by B&NES Council through a Full Business Case focused on the delivery of a new Market Square public open space at The Island, Midsomer Norton, adjacent to the Grade II listed Town Hall. The project will support the Council’s Liveable Neighbourhoods agenda and seek to respond to the Climate and Ecological emergencies by significantly improving the useability, accessibility and safety of the location and enhancing the local facilities of the wider High Street.
- 1.2 This report requests agreement to accept the £895k grant funding award from WECA in line with the Midsomer Norton Market Square Full Business Case approved at WECA Committee on 28th January 2022 (link in the Background Papers section). This Report summarises key items of proposed spend, funding approval mechanisms and the key deliverables and outputs anticipated.

### 2 RECOMMENDATION

**The Cabinet Member is asked to;**

- 2.1 Delegate approval to the Director of Sustainable Communities, in consultation with the s151 officer, to accept the £895k Love our High Streets grant from

WECA. These funds will be spent over a two-year period in line with the Full Business Case and the approved concept designs. This will allow full approval of the confirmed £845k in capital funds for the Market Square project (and Midsomer Norton High Street Renewal scheme) and confirmed £50k for revenue budget support (one off for spend 2022-2024) as outlined in Section 5 of this report.

### **3 THE REPORT**

- 3.1 B&NES Council recently secured £895k from WECA's 'Love our High Streets' grant programme for the redevelopment of The Island, Midsomer Norton, via a Full Business Case approved at WECA Committee on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2022.
- 3.2 The rationale for the focus on The Island, specifically the creation of a new Market Square at the western end of the High Street, is to support the market town's local economy by boosting footfall to this location, supporting the economic resilience of the wider High Street, enhancing and revitalising the public realm and historic environment, and enhancing the function and sustainability of this key civic space. This funding will in turn support the wider Midsomer Norton High Street Renewal initiatives and thereby complement schemes seeking to improve footfall and occupancy within the town centre and provide opportunities for diverse local businesses, community groups and residents to thrive.
- 3.3 Reflecting the challenges faced by town centre at a national level, Midsomer Norton town centre, and The Island specifically, have struggled with the growth in online shopping and the subsequent reduction in high street sales, the overreliance on traditional retail outlets, the 'flight' of larger retailers, increasing retail vacancy rates and the general reduction in footfall year-on-year.
- 3.4 At The Island, this general decline has been exacerbated by lack of investment and the unwelcoming nature of the public realm, which is in poor condition, dominated by vehicles and hampered by its irregular layout. This is compounded by the loss of its coherent identity for the space as a historically important civic and commercial space at the western gateway to the town centre. The case for change is further strengthened by The Island's strategic importance to the 'at risk' Conservation Area and – currently negative – contribution to the setting of heritage assets including the Grade II listed Town Hall, White Hart pub, Jersey Dairy Stores and nearby locally-listed buildings.
- 3.5 The redevelopment of The Island as a new public space aims to deliver social, economic and environmental benefits. The proposals will primarily deliver a public good that will address other negative economic and environmental factors through regeneration and the ongoing use of The Island as a Market Square. The new Market Square will be flexible and multi-use, with public realm interventions including the provision of infrastructure to support street markets, civic occasions, community events and the day-to-day function of adjacent businesses. All of the activities are considered important to animate the space, draw people to the location and encourage further investment and business diversification. Diversification away from traditional retail is considered essential to improving the economic resilience of Midsomer Norton's town centre and High Street as this will better meet the varied needs of the community and encourage a strong mix of independent and national retailers.

- 3.6 As such, the proposals for the Market Square scheme firmly support the strategic aims of the Council and the ambitions outlined for Midsomer Norton town centre as detailed in the Core Strategy and Placemaking Plan and associated Policy SV2, both of which advocate for the enhancement of public realm, strengthening the retail offer at the southern end of the High Street ('the retail core') and improving the environment for pedestrians. Both also seek to improve the leisure and visitor offer of the town centre and enhance its heritage and unique townscape character.
- 3.7 The proposals also support Somer Valley-specific placemaking principles outlined in Policy SV1 and the objectives of the Midsomer Norton Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan 2018, namely enabling the delivery of net additional jobs and encourage the retention and expansion of local companies, strengthening the shopping offer in Midsomer Norton town centre by facilitating redevelopment and improving the public realm, protecting and enhancing the distinctive character of the area (including the landscape and built and historic environment) and increasing and enhancing access to local heritage and green spaces in Midsomer Norton.
- 3.8 The proposals will also support the B&NES Public Realm and Movement Strategy by repurposing former highway space for pedestrians and cycles, implementing a high-quality public realm scheme, allowing space for outdoor seating/events and promoting an inclusive 'healthy high street' environment. The emerging Local Plan 2016-2036 also supports the proposals by seeking the retention of existing shops, addressing vacant units and focusing improvement and investment in public realm, shopfronts and additional town centre uses on the south-western end of the High Street. Considerations of ecological and climate emergencies will also be made when sourcing products and specifying planting and materials, and there is an increased emphasis on greening and supporting active travel.
- 3.9 The key deliverables for the project can be summarised as follows:
- (1) Deliver public realm improvement works and create a new multi-use open space for community events, civic occasions and cultural activities such as markets;
  - (2) To provide a welcoming, safe and attractive public space, with high-quality surface materials, street furniture and events infrastructure, to support/enhance the leisure, business and cultural offer of the Market Square/Island;
  - (3) To support the local economy by boosting footfall to the High Street and providing outdoor community space and associated opportunities for a diverse mix of businesses to thrive;
  - (4) To provide improvements to the 'at risk' Conservation Area and enhancements to the setting of heritage assets including the Grade II listed Town Hall, White Hart pub, Jersey Dairy Stores and nearby locally-listed buildings;
  - (5) To support the transformation of the Midsomer Norton Town Hall as it moves into community ownership, including the reinstatement of the internal ground-floor Market Hall, by providing high-quality civic space directly adjacent.

## **4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS**

- 4.1 Elements of the Midsomer Norton Town Square scheme include works which will require highways consents including Traffic Regulation Orders, actions under Street Trading and Licencing legislation and other Council consent processes such as events licencing, streetworks permits etc. It is not proposed that the scope of the Love our High Streets work will trigger advertising consents, however part of the works, namely the provision of accessible steps and ramps to the Town Hall, will require a straightforward planning permission and listed building consent applications to supplement the existing Town Hall permissions granted in September 2021 (21/00914/FUL and 21/00915/LBA).
- 4.2 Consideration will also need to be given to public realm improvements to be delivered outside of the existing adopted highway (i.e. outside Mill Court and at the entrance to the Town Hall) as these will require suitable legal agreements between B&NES and the Registered Title Owner to define ownership and ongoing operation and maintenance. This will either include adoption as public highway (i.e. the footway at Mill Court) or the transfer of assets (i.e. small area of public highway at the Town Hall entrance to accommodate policy-compliant ramps and steps).
- 4.3 Terms and conditions of government funding including consideration of state aid, best value and competitive tendering etc, form part of the scope of work and will need to be followed throughout the course of the project.
- 4.4 Improvements to public space and events will need to consider equalities impacts and support sustainable development including modal shifts towards walking and cycling. Equalities Impact Assessment considering accessibility has been undertaken to inform the scheme proposals, and ongoing accessibility assessment will inform the technical design stage.

## **5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)**

### Capital Budget

- 5.1 A capital budget already exists for the redevelopment of the Island, the linked Market Hall Reinstatement project at the Town Hall, and other projects within the Midsomer Norton High Street Renewal programme. This comprises:

### An Approved Capital Budget of £1.176m funded by:

- £200k B&NES match-funding for the WECA Love Our High Streets grant and Historic England High Street Heritage Action Zone from the CIL and Corporate Supported Borrowing budgets;
- £976k Historic England High Street Heritage Action Zone funding from the HSHAZ grant programme;

### A Provisional Capital Budget of £1.015m funded by:

- £100k B&NES match-funding for the WECA Love Our High Streets grant and Historic England High Street Heritage Action Zone from CIL;
- £45k match-funding from the Midsomer Norton Town Council;

- £25k match-funding from the Midsomer Norton Town Trust;
  - The £845k WECA grant funding outlined in this report is included here.
- 5.2 Delegated Approval is sought to fully accept the £845k capital grant and will be integrated into the Council's approved capital programme under the usual approval processes.
- 5.3 A summary of the funding breakdown is included in **Appendix 1**.

#### Revenue Budget

- 5.4 The WECA LoHS grant funding will add to this budget by £50k (one off for spend during 2022-2024) to support the delivery of a major public realm intervention at The Island to create a new Market Square adjacent to the Midsomer Norton Town Hall.
- 5.5 Delegated Approval is sought to fully accept the £50k revenue grant (one off for spend during 2022-2024) into the Council's revenue programme for Midsomer Norton High Street Renewal.
- 5.6 Programme funding provides revenue towards a 1.0 FTE Senior Officer to oversee and support delivery the project over the 2-year project period and also includes funding to support monitoring and evaluation processes.
- 5.7 A summary of the funding breakdown is included in **Appendix 1**.
- 5.8 Elements of the project will incur revenue or maintenance savings and/or additional costs which will need to be considered as the project develops and factored into design decision-making processes. An annual maintenance revenue budget of £15,000 per annum from 2021-22 for High Street Renewal has also been secured, which will support the implementation of Midsomer Norton Market Square project and other High Street projects within B&NES. Given that the redevelopment of The Island is a hard landscaping intervention, to replace an area in poor repair and in need of upgrading, the ongoing maintenance requirements are considered to be limited.

## **6 RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 6.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision-making risk management guidance.

## **7 EQUALITIES**

- 7.1 The detailed design and delivery of projects will need to address and consider equalities impacts as a key part of the technical design process. Key recommendations to this effect are included in the Equalities Assessment.
- 7.2 The Equalities Assessment has been informed by input from specialist landscape architects and highways engineers and therefore utilises specialist knowledge of accessibility requirements.

## **8 CLIMATE CHANGE**

- 8.1 The focus of this Love Our High Streets scheme in Midsomer Norton is to support the vibrancy and vitality of the High Street by creating a new high-quality Market Square and multi-use open space which can host community events, civic occasions, and cultural activities such as markets. The scheme will support the 'buy local' agenda and provide an improved and accessible environment for outdoor events, outdoor trading, and markets (including farmers', makers/producers, and street markets) which will attract local residents and visitors to the town. The scheme will also improve the environment for pedestrians, cyclists, and users of public transport by prioritising these modes of travel. The provision of power supply and events infrastructure will also avoid the need for street traders, market stalls and community stakeholders to use polluting diesel generators during events.
- 8.2 Procurement of construction hard landscaping materials and street furniture will prioritise natural materials and sustainable sourcing. The scheme will also facilitate a 'decluttering' exercise within this location and the existing street furniture rearranged to support ongoing and new active ground floor uses around the Market Square. Along with the rationalisation of car parking spaces and vehicle access, this will improve the visual amenity and air quality of the area.

## **9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 9.1 There is an option to decline the grant and not progress the High Streets Renewal programmes, or to re-scope parts of the projects. However, our high streets are in urgent need of support and releasing funding now will allow benefits for businesses and the community to be realised as soon as possible.
- 9.2 Another option would be to focus the Love our High Streets grant on another part of the Midsomer Norton High Street; however the proposals aim to bring maximum benefits and animation within Midsomer Norton to support footfall and economic vibrancy. Furthermore, this scheme forms part of a package of interventions within the wider High Street Renewal Programme for Midsomer Norton and therefore The Island is considered to be the location most suitable for this investment. A Delivery Plan for the wider package of interventions outside of the WECA LoHS funding, totalling c.£1.1m, has already been agreed.
- 9.3 Work to demonstrate the economic and social value benefits of the Love Our High Streets Market Square scheme was prepared by Turley Economics as part of the Full Business Case. This analysis anticipates the proposals will result in a significant economic uplift for Midsomer Norton, including:
- (1) Supporting 30 gross FTE jobs during the construction and operational phases;
  - (2) Generating 30 total net additional FTE jobs in the South West, including 10 for residents of the WECA area and B&NES during the construction and operational phases
  - (3) Contributing a total net additional £3.6 million GVA over 4 years, including £3.2 million concentrated in the WECA area and £2.4 million in B&NES;
  - (4) Generating £2.7 million expenditure over 4 years at market stalls and existing town centre businesses;

- (5) Promoting economic resilience through increasing town centre footfall and linked expenditure;
- (6) Generating social value of £110,000 over 4 years through supporting people returning to work;
- (7) Generating social value of £15,000 over 4 years through supporting apprenticeship opportunities;
- (8) Generating social value of £280,000 over 4 years through supporting volunteering opportunities;
- (9) Generating social value through enhancing opportunities for volunteering;
- (10) Generation of social value through promoting healthy lifestyles through physical activity and active travel.

## 10 CONSULTATION

10.1 The development of the project scope has been informed by consistent consultation and engagement with local residents, businesses, community groups and stakeholders. The scheme proposals were themselves developed by a partnership of stakeholders formed of the Project Team, appointed professionals, Midsomer Norton High Street Steering Group –including representatives from the Town Council, Town Trust, Community Trust and Somer Valley Chamber of Commerce– and external funders such as Historic England. A letter of support for the funding bid and scheme proposal is included as **Appendix 2** and was submitted as part of the WECA funding bid.

10.2 Further engagement with key stakeholders will be undertaken as part of the technical design review and consultation processes for the Market Square and other elements of the High Street Renewal Programme. The Midsomer Norton High Street Cultural Programme, led by the Community Trust and funded by Historic England, Arts Council England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, is also underway. This initiative is overseen by a ‘Cultural Consortium’ of community, heritage and arts organisations and will further engage the local people in the life of the High Street through events and activities within the new Market Square and nearby.

10.3 The undertaking of the original WECA Love Our High Streets grant funding application was agreed by the s151 officer, Chief Executive, Cabinet and Senior Management and carried out in line with Council strategies and priorities.

10.4 The report has been agreed by the s151 Officer and Monitoring Officer.

<b>Contact person</b>	<p><i>Simon Martin Director Regeneration &amp; Housing</i></p> <p><i>Cleo Newcombe-Jones, Regeneration Manager</i></p> <p><i>Edward Heritage, High Street Project Manager, Midsomer Norton HSHAZ</i></p>
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<b>Background papers</b>	<p><i>B&amp;NES Core Strategy &amp; Placemaking Plan</i></p> <p><a href="https://beta.bathnes.gov.uk/local-planning-policy-and-guidance">https://beta.bathnes.gov.uk/local-planning-policy-and-guidance</a></p> <p><i>Midsomer Norton High Street Heritage Action Zone Delivery Plan and previous SMD on High Street Renewal Programme for Midsomer Norton (2020), including acceptance of a Historic England grant to support the programme:</i></p> <p><a href="https://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=1436%20">https://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=1436%20</a></p> <p><i>WECA Committee Decision to approve grant funding for the Midsomer Norton Market Square project, 28 January 2022:</i></p> <p><a href="https://bathnesgovuk.sharepoint.com/sites/WECACoordination/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2FWECACoordination%2FShared%20Documents%2FWECA%20Committee%2FDecisions%2FDecisions%2028012022%201200%20West%20of%20England%20Combined%20Authority%20Committee%2Epdf&amp;parent=%2Fsites%2FWECACoordination%2FShared%20Documents%2FWECA%20Committee%2FDecisions&amp;p=true&amp;wdLOR=c7F9D785D%2D55DF%2D4D9D%2DA629%2DE45D1DAAD143&amp;ct=1643725905920&amp;or=Outlook-Body&amp;cid=97FA1E95-A78A-4DFF-94BA-D851965E372E">https://bathnesgovuk.sharepoint.com/sites/WECACoordination/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2FWECACoordination%2FShared%20Documents%2FWECA%20Committee%2FDecisions%2FDecisions%2028012022%201200%20West%20of%20England%20Combined%20Authority%20Committee%2Epdf&amp;parent=%2Fsites%2FWECACoordination%2FShared%20Documents%2FWECA%20Committee%2FDecisions&amp;p=true&amp;wdLOR=c7F9D785D%2D55DF%2D4D9D%2DA629%2DE45D1DAAD143&amp;ct=1643725905920&amp;or=Outlook-Body&amp;cid=97FA1E95-A78A-4DFF-94BA-D851965E372E</a></p>
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