

<b>Agenda Item No:</b>	5	
<b>Committee:</b>	Cabinet	
<b>Date:</b>	20 May 2024	
<b>Report Title:</b>	Wisbech – Long-Term Plan for Towns Funding	

## 1 Purpose / Summary

- 1.1 To accept funding from the Government’s Long-Term Plan for Towns initiative for the town of Wisbech and make the necessary arrangements for delivery of the project.

## 2 Summary

- 2.1 Fenland District Council has been invited to act as the accountable body for the new Long-Term Plan for Towns funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). The town of Wisbech was identified in the 2024 Spring Budget, to receive funding and support totalling up to £20m to regenerate the town centre. The Long-Term Plan is centred on local political leaders partnering with key local stakeholders to act together in the interest of the local community. This is to be actioned through the creation of a Town Board, a fundamental prerequisite of the DLUHC funding allocation.
- 2.2 By 1 June 2024, Town Boards must be established. Town Boards are then required to submit their Long-Term Plans (comprising 10-year vision and 3-year investment plan) between 1 June and before 1 November 2024. The Plans will set out how funding will be allocated and spent, with the local authority as the accountable body for managing the funding.

## 3 Key Issues

- 3.1 The Government’s Long-Term Plan for Towns initiative was launched in 2023 as part of the levelling up programme. At the Spring Statement in 2024, it was announced that additional funding would extend this programme to a further 20 towns across the United Kingdom, including Wisbech.
- 3.2 Each town will receive endowment-style funding (i.e. the town will receive an annual, uniform predetermined amount that is in a broadly flat profile across each year of the 10-year span of the programme) with the grant support value of up to almost £20m over the 10-year life span of the project.
- 3.3 The selected towns must meet certain criteria to receive the funding, including:

- The establishment of a Town Board, comprised of elected members, community leaders, business representatives, the PCC or their representative and the local MP.
  - Production of a 10-year Vision which clearly identifies the longer-term priorities for the town which includes projects aligned with set criteria from Government.
  - Production of an initial 3-year Investment Plan.
- 3.4 Capacity funding of £50,000 will be released in April 2024 to support the establishment of the Town Board.
- 3.5 Once the Town Board is in place, a further £200,000 of capacity funding will be released to support the development of the 10-year Vision and 3-year Investment Plan.
- 3.6 Both revenue and capital funding profiles are shown in Appendix 3.
- 3.7 This capacity funding can be used for staff resources and consultants to lead the development of the Long-Term Plan and act as a focal point between the Town Board and central government.
- 3.8 Fenland District Council will act as the accountable body for the Long-Term Plan for Towns programme for Wisbech.

#### **4 Recommendations**

- 4.1 That Cabinet notes the contents of the report relating to the Government's Long-Term Plan for Towns initiative for the town of Wisbech.
- 4.2 That Cabinet delegates powers to accept the capacity revenue funding for FY 2024/25 to the Corporate Director and Chief Finance Officer.
- 4.3 That Cabinet appoints Iain Kirkbright as Chair of the Wisbech Town Board;
- 4.4 That Cabinet notes the proposed Independent Chair's suggested appointments to the Wisbech Town Board as set out in Appendix 4 (selected in accordance with the DHLUC guidance summarised in Appendix 6), such appointments to be made prior to the inaugural meeting and subject to the recommendation at paragraph 4.3 being agreed. Appointments after this date will be made by the Independent Chair in consultation with the Town Board.
- 4.5 That Cabinet approves the draft Terms of Reference and Code of Conduct for the Wisbech Town Board, to be adopted by the Town Board at the inaugural meeting in May 2024.

Wards Affected	All Wisbech wards
Forward Plan Reference	KEY/07MAR24/01
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Chris Boden – Leader of the Council Cllr Sam Hoy – Portfolio Holder for Housing & Licensing Cllr Steve Tierney – Portfolio Holder for Communications, Transformation, Climate Change & Strategic Refuse Cllr Susan Wallwork – Portfolio Holder for Community, Health, Environmental Health, CCTV, Community Safety & Military Covenant
Report Originator(s)	Paul Medd – Chief Executive Peter Catchpole – Corporate Director and Chief Finance Officer Phil Hughes – Head of Service Matt Wright – High Streets Programme Manager Jo Blackmore – Head of Corporate Support
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Background Papers	<a href="https://www.gov.uk">Our Long-Term Plan for Towns - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</a>  <a href="#">Our Long-Term Plan for Towns</a> (Government Report)  Cabinet meetings held on <a href="#">13 June 2022</a> and <a href="#">14 November 2022</a>  <a href="#">Wisbech Master Plan</a>

## **1 BACKGROUND AND INTENDED OUTCOMES**

- 1.1 The Government's Long-Term Plan for Towns initiative was launched in 2023 as part of the Levelling Up programme. At the Spring Statement in 2024, it was announced that additional funding would extend this programme to a further 20 towns across the United Kingdom, including Wisbech.
- 1.2 The Long-Term Plan for Towns programme aims to put power back into the hand of local people so that they can decide on local priorities and what's best for the long-term future of the places they live.
- 1.3 Each town will receive endowment-style funding and support of up to almost £20m (see Appendix 3) over the 10-year life span of the project. This aims to give towns more certainty to deliver projects over multiple years and the flexibility to invest in interventions based on evolving local needs and priorities.
- 1.4 There are a number of criteria which must be met in order to draw down the allocated funding, which include:
  - The establishment of a Town Board, comprised of elected members, community leaders, business representatives, the Police and Crime Commissioner and the local MP.
  - The development a 10-year Vision; a Long-Term Plan to invest in and regenerate Wisbech, based on the priorities of local people and put to local people for consultation. Delivery of this plan will be overseen by the Town Board.
  - Production of a first 3-year Investment Plan, with additional 3-year investment plans to follow throughout the 10 years of the project.
- 1.5 These criteria are explained more fully in this report, along with the expected funding amounts and when it is likely to be received.
- 1.6 Fenland District Council will act as the accountable body for the Long-Term Plan for Towns programme for Wisbech.

## **2 TOWN BOARD**

- 2.1 A Town Board must be in place by 1 June 2024 to receive the initial funding from Government.
- 2.2 The Town Board must have an independent chair to ensure that the Board fully reflects the priorities of the town. Elected Town Board members, such as MPs or local councillors, must not chair the board. The Chair may choose to appoint a deputy, although it is not a requirement.
- 2.3 The length of membership will need to be considered and whether the board make-up may need to change over the duration of its lifetime.
- 2.4 Government guidelines require that the membership of the Town Board must include the following:

- Independent Chair
- Local MP
- A Cambridgeshire County Councillor
- A Fenland District Councillor
- Representation from the Police (either Police & Crime Commissioner or delegated to a senior Police Officer)

2.5 Other optional appointments to the Town Board may include people who are, or who are locally connected with:

- Community partners such as:
  - Community groups
  - Faith groups
  - Local charities
  - Neighbourhood forums
  - Youth groups
  - Local Council for Voluntary Service (CVS)
- Local employers or investors in the town
- Cultural, arts, heritage and sporting organisations, such as:
  - Local sports club directors
  - Local heritage groups
- Public agencies and anchor institutions, such as:
  - Local schools, higher education & further education institutions
  - Relevant government agencies, e.g. Integrated Care Boards
  - Combined Authority
- Wisbech Town Councillors
- Local residents

2.6 Fenland District Council, as the accountable body, will provide secretariat support to the Town Board. Part of this responsibility includes developing Terms of Reference and a Code of Conduct for members sitting on the Town Board. These documents are available in Appendices 4 and 5 for Cabinet to approve.

2.7 Once established, the Town Board will be responsible for:

- Identifying the issues and priorities of focus for the 10-year Vision, including supporting a process of ongoing community engagement
- Working with the local authority to develop the Vision for the town, setting out how local partners will use their knowledge, powers, assets and new funding to deliver for their communities

- Identifying opportunities for Board members to utilise specific powers, such as neighbourhood planning, to drive forward their Vision
  - Identifying opportunities to bring in additional philanthropic or private investment to support the Vision for their town
  - Overseeing the delivery of projects set out in their Vision and initial 3-year delivery plan.
- 2.8 Town Boards, through their constituent members, have access to a range of levers and flexibilities to drive improvement and unlock barriers to regeneration and development. The Vision will need to demonstrate how the full range of powers available will be convened to achieve the best possible outcomes for Wisbech in line with investment priorities. Please see Appendix 1 for further information on the new toolkit for towns in England.
- 2.9 Government have stated that they will continue to work in partnership with local authorities to identify opportunities for extending and strengthening powers in the future and help local authorities to make full use of new powers shortly coming into force. Consideration will also be given to where local authorities can be granted more flexibility over exercising these powers without requiring central government approvals.

### **3 10-YEAR VISION - LONG TERM PLAN**

- 3.1 The 10-year Long-Term Plan should set out the Vision for Wisbech and the priorities for investment and regeneration and is expected to include:
- A clear articulation, evidenced by local engagement, of the priorities of town residents;
  - A plan for how the £20 million endowment-style funding (see Appendix 3) and support will be deployed in line with investment themes to support these priorities;
  - How local authorities, community groups and businesses are using their existing assets and resources to support these priorities;
  - How the Town Board intends to attract additional private and philanthropic investment to support these priorities; and
  - How members of the Town Board are using their existing powers and flexibilities – including but not limited to those in the Toolkit – to support these priorities.
- 3.2 The projects in the 10-year Vision should be focused around the following 3 key themes (for further information, please see appendix 2 – List of Policy Interventions):
- High Streets, Heritage & Regeneration
  - Transport & Connectivity
  - Public Safety & Security

- 3.3 Projects that do not meet the criteria set out in appendix 2 can still be submitted as part of the 10-year Long-Term Plan, but an outline business case will also need to be submitted, based on numeric evidence wherever possible.
- 3.4 As the accountable body, FDC will be responsible for ensuring good use of public funds via existing Section 151 officer duties, according to the priorities set out by the Town Board in the Vision.
- 3.5 The 10-year Long-Term Plan must also include a 3-year Investment Plan (see below). Both plans must be submitted to central Government by 1 November 2024.

#### **4 3-YEAR INVESTMENT PLAN**

- 4.1 Alongside the development of the 10-year Vision, the Town Board must also produce a 3-year Investment Plan. This plan should include:
- Proposed policy interventions that the Town Board wishes to pursue
  - Forecasted spend that matches expected delivery timescales
  - Any intention to roll over investment allocated to the first 3 years into future years
- 4.2 The first 3-year Investment Plan will be submitted to Government with the 10-year Vision before 1 November 2024.
- 4.3 Subsequent 3-year Investment Plans will need to be submitted at the end of financial years 2027/28 and 2030/31.

#### **5 GOVERNMENT FUNDING**

- 5.1 Wisbech will receive funding of up to almost £20m over the ten-year span of the Long-Term Plan for Towns project.
- 5.2 The allocation of funding over the 10-year span of the project is shown in Appendix 3.
- 5.3 Funding can be rolled over to future years if this helps to deliver priority interventions to a high standard. However, funding cannot be drawn down in advance of the set profiles shown in Appendix 3.
- 5.4 Any underspend within a financial year can be rolled into the next financial year with certainty that the next tranche of funding will follow.
- 5.5 FDC, as the accountable body, may seek to use the confirmed revenue funding stream to borrow against, subject to normal considerations for prudential borrowing and the flexibility provided by the additional confirmed capital income, should front loading of investment be required. The £20m of funding can be used to leverage additional funding from key partners.

## 6 ASSISTANCE FROM GOVERNMENT

- 6.1 The Government are establishing a Towns Taskforce which will help the Town Board to develop their town plans and advise them on how best to take advantage of government policies. The Towns Taskforce will provide bespoke, hands-on support from place making experts to assist with delivery, encourage shared learning and promote networking between Town Boards.
- 6.2 Town Boards will also be supported by the Government's Towns Unit.
- 6.3 Dedicated support from the respective area team will also help to guide the Town Board and FDC through the necessary processes.

## 7 TIMELINE FOR LONG-TERM PLAN FOR WISBECH

- 7.1 Certain deadlines must be met in order to draw down funding from central Government.
- 7.2 The table below outlines the actions for both FDC/Wisbech and Government over the 10-year span of the project:

DATE	ACTION FOR FDC/WISBECH	ACTION FOR GOVERNMENT
April 2024	-	£50,000 of capacity funding released to begin community engagement and support the establishment of the town board.  Provision of bespoke data pack for Wisbech.
1 June 2024	Deadline for Town Board to be established.	-
June 2024	-	£200,000 capacity funding released to support the development of the 10-year Long-Term Plan and 3-year Investment Plan.
1 November 2024	Deadline for submission of 10-year Vision and first 3-year investment plan.	
1 November 2024 onwards	-	Government assessment of plans.
April 2025	-	Consolidated capital and revenue released for financial years 2024/25 and 2025/26.
April 2026 (TBC)	-	Annual funding payment to be released.
April 2027 (TBC)		Annual funding payment to be released.
Jan 2028 (TBC)	Submission of next 3-year investment plan.	-

Feb/March 2028	-	'Check in' point to analyse delivery across first 3 years. Review of second 3-year investment plan.
April 2028 (TBC)	-	Annual funding payment to be released.
April 2029 (TBC)	-	Annual funding payment to be released.
April 2030 (TBC)	-	Annual funding payment to be released.
Jan 2031 (TBC)	Submission of next 3-year investment plan.	-
April 2031 (TBC)	-	Annual funding payment to be released.
April 2032 (TBC)	-	Annual funding payment to be released.
April 2033 (TBC)	-	Annual funding payment to be released.

## **8 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 8.1 To enable the creation of an inclusive and effective Town Board for Wisbech and to support the development of the Long-Term Plan (comprising 10-year Vision and 3-year Investment Plan) for submission before 1 November 2024. DLUHC will assess the plan and once approved will release funding.

## **9 CONSULTATION**

- 9.1 N/A at this stage but will be required after 1 June as part of the development process for the 10-year Vision and 3-year Investment Plans.

## **10 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 10.1 An application for Levelling Up Funding was made in July 2022.
- 10.2 The projects for inclusion in the Wisbech Levelling Up Fund bid were agreed at Cabinet on 13 June 2022. The Wisbech Levelling Up Fund bid was submitted by the deadline of 6 July 2022 but was unsuccessful.
- 10.3 A Wisbech Masterplan was created as part of the Levelling Up Fund application and was shared with Cabinet on 14 November 2022. This masterplan will be reviewed as part of the Long-Term Plan for Towns submission and will form the initial basis for the development of the 10-year Vision.
- 10.4 Do Nothing – Cabinet could choose to reject the creation of a Town Board and acceptance of the capacity revenue funding, forfeiting the £20m of investment.

## **11 IMPLICATIONS**

### **11.1 Legal Implications**

11.2 The proposals set out in this report reflect the guidance associated with the establishment of the Town Board as well as legal and constitutional requirements in relation to local authority powers and decision making.

### **11.3 Financial Implications**

11.4 There are no direct financial implications for this as this is externally funded finance. However, as described above FDC, as the accountable body, may seek to use the confirmed revenue funding stream to borrow against, subject to normal considerations for prudential borrowing and the flexibility provided by the additional confirmed capital income, should front loading of investment be required. The £20m of funding can be used to leverage additional funding from key partners.

### **11.5 Equality Implications**

11.6 There are no specific equality implications associated with the contents of this Report.

## **12 SCHEDULES**

Appendix 1 – Toolkit for Towns

Appendix 2 – List of Policy Interventions

Appendix 3 – Allocation of funding

Appendix 4 – Terms of Reference

Appendix 5 – Code of Conduct

Appendix 6 – Composition of the Town Board