



Bishop Auckland Stronger Town Board

Date Thursday 4 June 2026
Time 3.30 pm
Venue Bishop Auckland Town Council - 54 Kingsway,
Bishop Auckland, DL14 7JF

Business

1. Introduction and Welcome
2. Apologies for absence
3. Declarations of interest
4. Minutes of the meeting held on 2 April 2026 (Pages 3 - 10)
5. Matter Arising
 - Tindale Crossing
6. Programme Update (Pages 11 - 30)
7. Communication Update (Pages 31 - 32)
8. Wider Bishop Auckland Update - Verbal Update
9. Workshop – Potential Reallocation of Funds
10. Matters to Share with Public
11. Any Other Business
12. Date of Next Meeting

Tony Hanson
Corp Dir (Regen, Economy & Growth)

County Hall
Durham
27 May 2026

To: **The Members of the Bishop Auckland Stronger Town Board**

Contact: Kirsty Charlton

Tel: 03000 269705

Bishop Auckland Stronger Town Board

At a Meeting of **Bishop Auckland Stronger Town Board** held in Bishop Auckland Town Council - 54 Kingsway, Bishop Auckland, DL14 7JF on **Thursday 2 April 2026 at 3.30 pm**

Present:

S Hope (Chair)

Board Members:

Tony Hanson	Corporate Director, Regeneration, Economy and Growth, DCC
Sam Rushworth	Member of Parliament (Bishop Auckland)
Councillor Karen Allison	Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Tourism, Regeneration and High Street, DCC
Councillor Michael Siddle	Deputy Mayor, Bishop Auckland Town Council
Jane Ruffer	The Auckland Project (TAP)
Dr C Knights	Brighter Bishop Partnership
Phil Harmby	Business and Community Rep
Brian Sutton	Business and Community Rep
Jack Short	Business and Community Rep

Officers:

Mark Jackson	Corporate Director, Neighbourhoods and Environment, DCC
Nick Bryan	Transport and Infrastructure Manager, DCC
Andrew Walker	Programme and Project Delivery Team Manager, DCC
Sarah Harris	Clerk to Bishop Auckland Town Council
Graham Wood	Economic Development Manager, DCC
Julie Barnfather	Comms, Marketing & Design Strategic Manager, DCC
Richard Hinch	The Auckland Project (TAP)

1 Introduction and Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Jonathan Ruffer, R Yorke and Councillor S Zair.

3 Declarations of interest

Jane Ruffer declared TAP's interest DDG, Kingsway Square, Market Place Hotel, Bishops Gateway and Artist Hub.

4 Minutes of the meeting held on 11 December 2025

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 December were agreed as a correct record with amendments to correct the surnames of Board Members Dr C Knights and P Harmby.

5 Matters Arising

The Chair advised that the total cost of Bishop Gateway had increased from £20.7m to £28.9m however it had not been reflected in the programme update. It also did not reflect the amount of private investment and he asked whether this could be made consistent.

The Bus Station had still not opened despite clear communications to state that it would open in January.

He confirmed that other matters arising would be dealt with under items on the Agenda.

6 Programme Updates

The Board received a presentation which included detailed programme and project updates, financial information to date and key risks.

Bishop Gateway

The planning application had been submitted and the Council were awaiting feedback from statutory consultees and stakeholders. It was expected to be considered by the planning committee in late Autumn due to the complexity of the proposals. B Sutton expressed frustration with the timeline and queried whether it could be prioritised. T Hanson explained that planning was a statutory process which was subject to a comprehensive consultation

process which could not be accelerated. Members of the public were entitled to an appropriate process, and some statutory consultees were national organisations which required 12 weeks to respond to a consultation. Every comment received was fully considered and responded to accordingly. G Wood advised that the Council had tried to engage early with statutory consultees, so that they were aware of the nature of the scheme. The Chair noted the risk that members of the public would perceive the timeline as a delay which was due to delays by the Council or TAP and suggested that communications about the application reflected the justification for the timeline.

Councillor Siddle added that it was imperative for organisations such as the Environment Agency, to have sufficient time to consider the application and provide comments. In response to a question from the Chair, N Bryan advised that the red key risk indicator for planning objections would remain in place until planning consent was granted as representations could be made throughout the whole planning process.

Artist Hub

R Hinch confirmed that the third exhibition was on display and the theme was Portraits in Bishop Auckland. Footfall since opening had been measured with 2000 visitors and there had been five resident artists and 12 workshops. The Artist Hub had recently been used by Bishop Auckland College. He confirmed that TAP were awaiting planning permission for the installation of a kiln. A Walker added that the next scheduled meeting of the Bishop Auckland Strategic Advisory Panel was to take place in the Artist Hub.

Market Place Hotel

J Ruffer provided an update, confirming that contractors were on site. A Walker explained that the grant funding agreement had been complicated by a legal challenge and the tribunal carried a risk. J Ruffer advised that TAP had decided to proceed at risk, but could not deliver the full specification without the grant funding.

Town Centre Diversification

The Board were advised that five Property Reuse Fund schemes had completed and another five were underway. Eight new jobs had been created and eleven safeguarded. Dr C Knights queried the balance of retail units that were falling void in this location as it seemed that whilst one was opening, another was closing at the same rate. G Wood advised that this was a national theme and explained the rationale to consolidate the size of town centres and create a cluster of new properties with other mixed-use properties. In response to a query from J Ruffer, he confirmed that planning

policy provided more flexibility for residential properties in town centres due to the ability to access sustainable travel.

S Rushworth, MP was concerned that the mid-section of the town at Newgate and Beales would remain an eyesore for a significant number of years if it was not addressed. There had been a lot of interest in the building, but it required significant investment to attract investment. He alluded to outstanding issues in Fore Bondgate, which was a priority area for members of the public, which was evidenced by the enquiries he received.

South Church Enterprise Park

The site was out to market with a deadline for offers to be returned by 8 June 2026. There had been some interest in the site, particularly during the soft market testing.

B Sutton suggested that minutes be circulated to the Board as soon as possible after the meeting and J Short suggested that the Board be provided with updates in between meetings, particularly in relation to significant announcements such as South Church Enterprise Park. It was confirmed that draft minutes were published to the website within 10 working days but could be circulated to the Board on publication.

In response to a question regarding South Church Enterprise Park, T Hanson confirmed that a decision would be made by the Council and the Board would be responsible for redistributing any funding if necessary. The Council were no longer required to submit a project change request to MHCLG. J Gilroy added that the Local Authorities Chief Finance Officer was still responsible for ensuring projects represented value for money.

The Town Clerk queried whether the Board should be considering alternative proposals in preparation for the South Church decision, as they could be expected to reallocate funding. G Wood confirmed that the deadline for spending UKSPF funding had been extended to March 2028.

Dr C Knights advised that it was difficult to ascertain abbreviations with no glossary and suggested that it be included with reports going forward. The Board also requested that a section for benefits gained from each project be included in the KPI's.

Public Realm

The Board had agreed to pause the scheme until the Strategic Place Plan consultation had concluded however N Bryan warned that the budget of £716,000 would provide minimal improvements and suggested that the Board should consider whether they would prefer to reallocate this funding.

Heritage walking and Cycling/Tindale Triangle

N Bryan gave a detailed presentation of the improvement works which would link Bishop Auckland junctions with the A688 Corridor and Stockton and Darlington Railway.

There were several funding sources with money allocated, for improvements to the following locations; Public Realm at Fore Bondgate and Newgate Street North, A688 Tindale to Bishop Auckland Marketplace, Tindale Roundabout and A688 Crossing, South Church, Coundon Gate Roundabout, Stockton and Darlington Railway extensions to link Gaunless Bridge to Tindale Retail Park, Low Copelaw to S&DR, A688 to Bishop Auckland Market Place, and Tindale Retail Park to Bishop Gateway (inc Auckland Way). The total estimated cost of all works was £11,637,639.

He confirmed that additional design work had been completed so that if any underspend (against NECA funded schemes) was made available from neighbouring authorities, the Council would be in a position to deliver other projects. Construction would begin in the Autumn and the programme would run for between 15 and 18 months, with a schedule that would cause the least disruption. He added that Spennymoor Town Board were interested in improving connections.

He advised that if money was transferred from the Public Realm to improve highway capacity at the Coundon roundabout, it would assist with exiting Bishop Auckland. The original plan had not been completed due to the location of utilities. S Rushworth and Councillor Siddle did not consider this location to be an issue and queried whether it could be spent on other schemes. N Bryan advised that most of the grants were only able to be spent on capital improvements and the Board must therefore determine whether there was more value in extending the proposed routes or continuing with the Public Realm project. In response to a query from J Short, N Bryan confirmed that upgrades to the Auckland Way would replicate the Stockton Darlington Railway however they did not intend to upgrade locations that were already in good condition.

7 Finance Update

The board noted the finance update and the Chair requested that it was amended to reflect that as agreed at the previous Board meeting, £30k had been transferred from the South Church project budget to Communications, for marketing.

8 Wider Bishop Auckland Update - Verbal Update

The Board were advised that a report had been considered by Cabinet on 18 March 2026 with regards to the status of the Newgate Centre, however the information was unable to be shared as it contained exempt information relating to financial or business affairs.

With regards to STACK, structural engineering consultants remained concerned about potential movement and further information was required from the owners which had been requested. The Council had applied for a Section 77 notice for improvements and in response to a question regarding the timeline he explained that if emergency works were required, the work could be accelerated through the courts. STACK expected the development programme to take nine months once the site was cleared however they would also require a four-week mobilisation period to commence with construction.

With regards to the opening of the Bus Station, N Bryan confirmed that it had been weather permitting as dry conditions were required to surface the road and finish the site.

9 Future Plans/Next Steps

The Board discussed the potential of reallocating £716k from the Public Realm budget. To manage expectations N Bryan provided information which suggested that there would be little benefit to the Public Realm with this budget alone.

B Sutton queried whether the money could be used for repairs to St Anne's Church and G Wood confirmed that there had been progress to move things forward via alternative sources of funding.

S Rushworth MP, M Siddle, B Sutton and J Short all confirmed that they would prefer money to be spent within the town centre. N Welsh was not opposed to it being moved to existing projects if it would assist with meeting timescales.

N Bryan advised that there was merit in improving the Public Realm however it may be disappointing due to the lack of available funds. J Ruffer queried whether the money could be used to remove the large signage and create a colour coordinated scheme, making shop fronts more appealing. G Wood advised that signage in the town centre had been discussed earlier in the programme however there would be difficulty enforcing such a scheme. The Council had previously ran smaller scale grant programmes, but private owners were not guaranteed to comply. Whilst it would be appealing for

Fore Bondgate to have a consistent style, if one or two businesses opted out of such a scheme, it would impact the whole project.

The Chair suggested that the Board required confirmation of plans for the Newgate Centre and whilst they were grateful for the proposals for reinvestment in the highway network, it was clear that the Board would prefer a Public Realm scheme.

The Board were advised that depending on the outcome of South Church Enterprise Park, there could be an additional £1.67m for reinvestment. N Bryan reminded the Board of timescale for delivery and the Chair noted this as a significant risk as the money would have to be returned, if it could not be completed in time.

J Short suggested that if the South Church funding was moved to Public Realm it could significantly change the ambience, particularly in Newgate Street which was desperate for investment. T Hanson suggested that a Public Realm scheme which incorporated the funding from South Church could be investigated, however he reiterated that any scheme would have to be deliverable within the 18-month estimated timescale.

P Harmby observed that many of the projects took business away from the town centre and without investment, people would continue visiting other places.

The Council would investigate what could be delivered in the Public Realm if additional funds would be available.

10 Communications Update

The Board received an update with provided an overview of communications activity linked to the Stronger Towns programme.

J Barnfather confirmed that the allocated budget for the newsletter had ran out and therefore futures editions would need to be funded from the STB allocated marketing budget. Funding of approximately £5,000 had been set aside for two more editions which would be published in July and November if working to the quarterly schedule. Frequency could be reduced to six monthly or alternatively, one final 'double edition' could be published at an appropriate time. The second option would free up an additional amount of around £2,500 for wider marketing activity.

J Barnfather encouraged partners to share positive news with Durham County Council for publication on the Bishop Auckland Regeneration website.

Resolved

That one final double edition of the newsletter be planned for an appropriate time towards the end of the programme and £2,500 be reallocated to the marketing budget.

11 Matters to Share with the Public

The Board were given the opportunity to make suggestions on what information should be shared with the public.

12 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was scheduled on 4 June 2026 however the Chair advised that an additional meeting may be required to consider alternative project options.

Bishop Auckland Stronger Town Board

4 June 2026



AGENDA

1. Introduction and Welcome
2. Apologies
3. Declarations of Interest
4. Minutes of meeting held on 2nd April 2026
5. Matter Arising
 - Tindale Crossing
6. Programme Update
7. Communication Update
8. Wider Bishop Auckland Update - Verbal Update
9. Workshop – Potential Reallocation of Funds
10. Matters to Share with Public
11. Any Other Business
12. Date of Next Meeting

1. INTRODUCTIONS AND WELCOME

Introduction and Welcome.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for Absence

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Board members are obliged to declare a conflict of interest if they, or the organisations they represent, stand to gain financially from any decision taken by the Town Board.

Should such a conflict of interest occur, the member concerned will not be able to participate in or vote on the decision in question and may, at the discretion of the Chair, be requested to leave the meeting while the issue is being discussed and decided. This clause shall not apply when the conflict of interest is shared with a majority of the other Board members present.

4. MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held on 2 April 2026

5. MATTERS ARISING

Matters Arising

5. PROGRAMME UPDATE

1) Overview of Progress

- Programme is progressing well into delivery, aligned with economic regeneration, town centre vitality, skills and connectivity, but faces key risks from financial pressures and project delays.
- Governance has been strengthened through a MHCLG-supported review, new Chair and Board members, and improved stakeholder engagement and partnerships.

- Delivery remains robust with strong programme management, oversight, and risk control; expenditure largely on track with some reprofiling to meet the March 2028 deadline.
- Project delays (e.g. Bishop Gateway, South Church) driven by planning, procurement and market factors are being actively managed through reprogramming and enhanced governance oversight.

2) Look Ahead to Next Period

- Strategic Advisory Panel - 3rd meeting of new format June/July 26 - tbc
- Ongoing implementation and delivery of projects
- Continued Improved Communications
- Ongoing delivery of Marketing Plan through Durham County Council
- Bishop Gateway Planning Determination
- Agree direction for reallocation of funds

3) Project Board Decisions Required

Communications – See report:

- Encourage partners to share positive news with Durham County Council via Julie Barnfather Julie.barnfather@durham.gov.uk for publication on the Bishop website www.bishopaucklandregeneration.com

4) Finance and Legal

- Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Return - April 25 to Mar 26 submitted to MHCLG 22 May 26
- Subsidy control and legal challenge – delaying GFAs

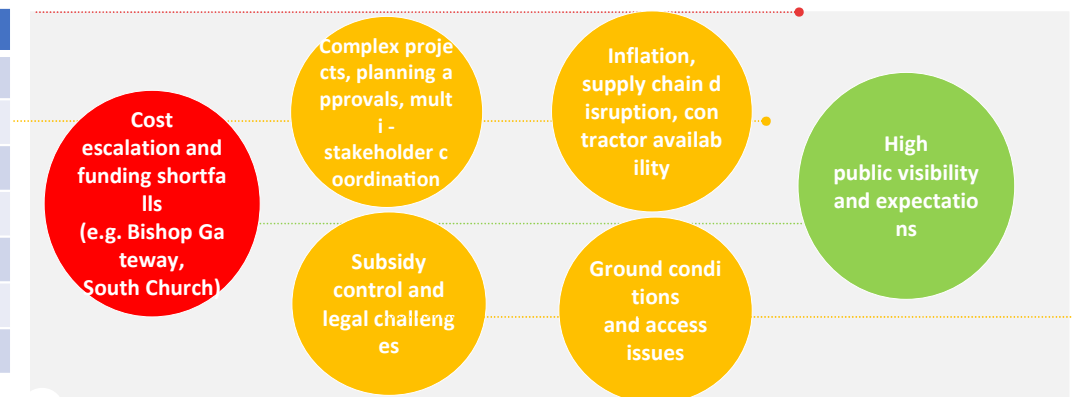
5) Communications

- Issue 12 of Newsletter to be distributed March/April 2026
- Positive Comms re new board members, Strategic Advisory Panel, Artists Hub
- Marketing Plan
- Alternative approach to Strategic Advisory Panel

6) Key Milestones

Task	Completion	Progress
New Chair appointed	July 25	Complete
Market Place Planning Decision - Approved	Sept 25	Complete
Bishop Gateway Planning Submission	Mar 25	Complete
Monitoring and Evaluation Return to MHCLG	May 2026	Complete
Decision on South Church	June 26	In Progress
Bishop Gateway Planning Determination	July 26	In Progress
Ongoing Communication Plan	Summer 26	In Progress

7) Key Risks



6. PROGRAMME PROGRESS

Overall Status

- Programme continues to make steady progress, transitioning into substantive delivery phase and is on track to deliver intended outcomes
- Remains aligned with core aims: economic regeneration, town centre vitality, skills & connectivity
- Financial Pressures and Project Delays biggest risk to Programme Delivery

Governance & Partnerships

- Governance review completed with MHCLG support; new independent Chair & Board members appointed
- Strengthened stakeholder engagement and partnership working through improved communications and revised Strategic Advisory Panel
- Programme Strong governance, financial control, and adaptability underpin delivery

Delivery & Performance

- Strong programme management with effective monitoring, reporting, and risk management - Stronger Towns Board, Internal Governance
- Expenditure broadly on profile, with some reprofiling to align with March 2028 spend deadline - Challenge and Risk
- Continued focus on benefits realisation and refining outputs

Challenges & Mitigation

- Some project delays (planning, procurement, contractor availability, economic pressures) leading to Financial Pressures and Programme Delays - e.g. Bishop Gateway and South Church
- Managed through reprogramming, governance oversight, and proactive mitigation



6. PROGRAMME PROGRESS – FUNDING PROFILE

Period	LRF Funding	Secured Match	Pending Match	Total
Pre-Apr 2026 (Actual)	£11.08m	£0.75m	£0.00m	£11.82m
Apr–Sep 2026	£1.99m	£0.00m	£0.00m	£1.99m
Oct 2026–Mar 2027	£3.97m	£0.15m	£0.30m	£4.42m
Apr–Sep 2027	£7.96m	£0.14m	£4.12m	£10.93m
Oct 2027–Mar 2028	£8.2m	£0.00m	£0.48m	£7.39m
Post-Mar 2028	£0.00m	£0.00m	£11.55m	£11.55m
TOTAL	£33.2m	£1.04m	£16.45m	£48.11m

6. PROGRAMME PROGRESS – OUTPUT PROFILE

Category	Description	Actual to Date	Forecast
Business & Jobs	Land rehabilitated (m ²)	4,010	4,010
	Retail space (m ²)	935	14,517
	Hospitality space (m ²)	0	3,069
	Industrial space (m ²)	0	4,141
	Permanent jobs (FTE)	11	861.5
	Jobs safeguarded (FTE)	6	63
	Temporary jobs (FTE)	0	73
Communities & Place	Public realm (m ²)	0	2,194
	Community/culture centres	1	13
Transport & Environment	EV charging points	8	8
	Cycle routes (km)	0	5.51
	Pedestrian routes (km)	0	5.51

6. PROGRAMME PROGRESS – PROGRAMME RISKS

Risk Category	RAG	Key Issue	Impact	Mitigation Measures
Financial Viability & Funding	Red/Amber	Cost escalation and funding shortfalls (e.g. Bishop Gateway, South Church)	Delays, reduced scope, risk to viability	Value engineering, funding reallocation, alternative delivery models, funding extensions
Programme Delay & Delivery	Amber	Complex projects, planning approvals, multi-stakeholder coordination	Slippage to timelines and dependencies	Re-baselining timelines, strengthened governance, phased delivery
Legal & Regulatory Compliance	Amber	Subsidy control and legal challenges (e.g. Competition Appeals Tribunal proceedings)	Risk to funding approvals, delays, reputational impact	Legal oversight, evidence base, viability assessments, at-risk progression
Market & Delivery Environment	Amber	Inflation, supply chain disruption, contractor availability	Increased costs, procurement challenges, delivery uncertainty	Early market engagement, flexible procurement, contractor coordination
Site & Technical Constraints	Amber	Ground conditions and access issues	Design complexity, increased costs and delays	Site investigations, adaptive planning, technical coordination
Stakeholder & Reputational	Amber/Green	High public visibility and expectations	Loss of confidence, reputational damage	Targeted communications, stakeholder engagement, media strategy

6. PROGRAMME PROGRESS – UPCOMING CHALLENGES

Financial Pressure & Funding Gaps

- Cost inflation and funding shortfalls across major schemes
- Bishop Gateway: cost escalation/value engineering
- South Church Enterprise Park: funding gap following withdrawal of DCC capital – Potential reallocation

Programme Delivery & Timelines

- Risk of delays from planning, design complexity and dependencies
- Bishop Gateway: potential delays e.g. linked to planning determination
- Need to monitor timelines to meet 2028 deadline

Market & Construction Environment

- Inflation, supply chain disruption and contractor availability issues

Legal & Compliance Risks

- Subsidy control and legal challenge risk affecting delivery
- Town Centre Diversification (Market Place Hotel): subject to Competition Appeal Tribunal proceedings

Site & Technical Constraints

Ground conditions and infrastructure challenges

Bishop Gateway & Tindale Triangle: increased cost and delivery complexity

Stakeholder & Reputational Management

High-profile programme requires strong communication and expectation management

7 . COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

Report circulated with papers

8 . WIDER BISHOP AUCKLAND UPDATE

Verbal Update and Discussion

9. WORKSHOP/DISCUSSION – POTENTIAL REALLOCATION OF FUNDS

10 . MATTERS TO SHARE WITH PUBLIC

Matter to share with public

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- AOB
- Opportunity to raise anything that they feel has not been fully considered or aired during the meeting.

12. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 24 September – 3.30pm – 5pm

Thursday 10 December – 3.30pm – 5pm

All meetings at Bishop Auckland Town Council

This page is intentionally left blank

Bishop Auckland Stronger Towns Board

Communications Update

4 June 2026

This report provides an overview of current communications activity linked to the Stronger Towns programme.

1. Recent communications and engagement activity

McIntyre Centre/Stronger Town Fund – Social media reel with Shaun Hope, in his role as principal of Bishop Auckland College, showcasing the venue and its services, with reference to Stronger Town funding.

Durham Vintage/Property Reuse Fund – Social media reel with Poppy Solari and Patrick Fall, owners of Durham Vintage, talking about how they have used money from the Property Reuse Fund to bring an empty unit on Kingsway back into use.

Strategic Advisory Panel – Social media reel with Shaun Hope, as chair of the Stronger Town Board, inviting people to attend the next meeting.

Bishop Auckland Bus Station/Future High Street Fund – Media release and social media messaging re. opening of new bus station on Sunday 10 May, including a virtual walkaround and a reel on social value.

STACK – story published by the Northern Echo on Saturday 23 May regarding delays to the development and issues with the adjoining building. Story included comments from the Danieli Group and Sam Rushworth MP.

2. Newsletter

On hold following agreement from the board.

There is currently only £5,000 budget left to cover two editions. It was, therefore, agreed that one final 'double edition' is published at an appropriate time. This will ensure that the content is timely and meaningful. It will also free up an additional amount of around £2,500 for wider marketing activity due to reduced distribution costs.

3. Marketing Plan

A plan for the £30,000 budget for physical marketing activity around the town, excluding the £2,500 now allocated for the final newsletter design, print and distribution, has been agreed. Some materials now live, with others to follow in the coming weeks.

- Hoardings around Market Place hotel site – now live
- Digital display screens at the new Bishop Auckland Bus Station – now live
- Outdoor digital display screens at Asda and Tesco Bishop Auckland, Bishop Auckland Football Club and 2 x screens on Newgate Street
- Ad shells on bus shelters
- Lamppost graphics

Assets will help residents, businesses and visitors see the progress being made in the town and strengthening confidence in the regeneration programme.

4. Strategic Advisory Panel

The **second meeting** of the new style Strategic Advisory Panel (SAP) took place on Wednesday, 15 April. Social media messages were issued in advance offering an ‘open invitation’ to anyone who wished to attend but requiring them to register in advance. More than 20 people were in attendance. Updates were provided on Stronger Towns Fund and Future High Street Fund Programmes, and the public were given the opportunity to ask questions. The meeting highlighted that communication with residents had clearly been an issue, but feedback from the session was positive.

The Strategic Advisory Panel now has own **section on the Bishop Regeneration website**, where the presentation slides from each meeting are uploaded, along with the date and time of the next meeting and details of how people can register to attend.

The **next Strategic Advisory Panel** is to be arranged following the outcomes of discussions at the Board meeting.

5. Requests for board members

- a. **Encourage partners to share positive news** with Durham County Council via Julie Barnfather Julie.barnfather@durham.gov.uk for publication on the Bishop website www.bishopaucklandregeneration.com

6. Strengthening Board communications

At the end of each agenda, the Chair will confirm what content can be shared publicly. This will give greater clarity, support consistent messaging and ensure the public receive an agreed update following every meeting.