



Public Meeting Bishop Auckland Town Hall Friday 18th February 2022 6PM

Present (Top Table)

- Katie Eliot, Mayor of Bishop Auckland
- John Robinson, Justice of the Peace & Chair of the meeting.
- Sarah Harris, Town Clerk Bishop Auckland Town Council
- David Land, Chair of the Stronger Towns Board
- Geoff Paul Head of Development and Housing, Durham County Council
- Graham Wood, Economic Development Manager, Durham County Council

Also Present In the audience:

120+ Members of the Public

Bishop Auckland Town Councillors:

- Leanda Chappell
- Sam Zair – Also a Durham County Council representative for Town Ward Bishop Auckland
- Lesley Zair
- Adam Zair
- Tanya Tucker
- Michael Siddle
- David Wilson
- Harley Balmer Howison

Durham County Councillors

- Joanne Howey & Cathy Hunt for Woodhouse Close
- Andy Jackson, Town Ward Bishop Auckland
- Rob Yorke, West Auckland
- Richard Bell, Leader Conservative Group

Mr Jonathan Ruffer, The Auckland Project

David Madden, The Auckland Project

Liz Fisher, The Auckland Project

1. **Welcome and Introduction.** Mr John Robison welcomed everyone to the meeting, and introduced the top table.

Mr Ruffer – whilst not at the top table had asked to speak with the audience, and had requested to go first as he had to leave.

Mr Ruffer explained that he wished to convey to the audience his story and how he came to chose Bishop Auckland.

Mr Ruffer explained his background and that he wanted to help to rejuvenate Bishop Auckland.

Currently it costs 50K per day to run the Auckland Projects and its outreach work. He wants the Stronger Towns Fund to remain within the Town and all associated monies too. I.e. Car parking money from Park and ride and DCC car parks if they were under the control of The Auckland Project that money would stay in the town, whereas with DCC it could be spent elsewhere.

Mr Ruffer states that the Stronger Towns Fund belongs to the Town Board which created the bids and not to DCC, therefore it was the responsibility of the Board not DCC, so that money should be sitting within Bishop Auckland and not DCC.

A story of regeneration has been developed to show that Bishop Auckland is a Town on the Move, and will be open in No43. Former Home Bargains at 10am tomorrow and then will be open in the future for the public.

David Land, then introduced himself as Chair of Town Board and how he had been appointed. He explained his background and how some of the proposed projects had come about. It was also explained that COVID had been a challenge to this, as the board were just starting as lockdown one happened.

He explained that the Board is made up of a range of public and private sector personnel. It looks after the Stronger Towns Fund and The Brighter Bishop Board is responsible for the Future High Streets Fund. However there is some crossover now so maybe working together or forming a new combined entity is needed.

- Future High streets 19.1 Million for Bishop Auckland
- Stronger Towns - bids were requested for up to 25 million.
- Bishop Auckland Identified over 100 million of potential projects, the board whittled them down to 50 million and made a submission – which was above the amount noted.
- The board were then awarded 32.6 million, in June 2021, as a three year project.
- The fund can ignite other investment, like the future high street fund has with the stronger towns.
- Acknowledged that more people need to be involved.
- Bishop Auckland is shaping up to be a strong visitor destination. With expected numbers of 1.5m per year.
- Next stage is to finish fine tuning the business cases, impact assessments etc for re-submission.

Mr Robinson thanked Mr Ruffer and Mr Land. He explained to the audience that Mr Geoff Paul and Graham Wood were going to talk thorough a presentation which should answer the agenda questions of

- **What funding is has been awarded to Bishop Auckland?**
- **Who are the boards behind the funding?**
- **What the projects are proposed for each fund?**
- **What is the current status and what happens next?**

The presentation can be found here: <https://bishopauckland-tc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/2022-02-18-Bishop-Auckland-Regeneration-Town-Council-Briefing.pdf>

Mr Robinson thanked Mr Paul and Mr Wood, and asked about the agenda item **‘How are they planning on improving communication moving forward to keep the community briefed?’**

Mr Paul and Mr Wood acknowledged that communication with the public hadn't been what it should have been, but covid and lockdowns had been an impact. A communications strategy was being developed and would be released with further information. Avenues such as the Town Council would be explored.

The floor was then open to **questions and answers** (Q&A) session.

Regarding the car parks, do you want people in or out the town? There seems to be some conflict one built to keep people out one built to bring them in.

- Geoff Paul - The car parking at Kynren will be relief car parking
- Jonathan Ruffer – to allow for enough car parking (1 -1.2k spaces) there is a car park to be built at Kynren for the majority of visitors to the day park. The Eastern Sustainable Access Corridor will allow for access to this car park from near the Coundon roundabout.
- The Future High Streets fund car park will be to provide effective parking to residents and those coming to town for shopping and leisure.

The digital consultation questioned 965 people. Do you think this is representative of Bishop Auckland?

- Geoff Paul - stated it was “not ideal” that there were not more respondents. It was one of the highest response rates in the County.

Are you going to look at your comms strategy? Will there be more meetings to disseminate information?

- Geoff Paul - More meetings are planned. Possibly March.

If Bishop Auckland doesn't receive the predicted number of visitors - what is Plan B? Can the canopy money be used elsewhere?

- David Land – The aim of the canopy project is to revitalise part of the high street with an enclosed space. Examples given: Victoria centre in Leeds and Grainger Market.
- Geoff Paul – Mentioned the “strength of Plan A”. Stated that visitors to Durham City spending on average £18 per head.
- David Madden - visitor numbers are calculated by experts. Money into TAP stays in Bishop Auckland.

Regarding the South Church Enterprise Park, were DCC aware of the Spark Project? Uses shipping containers.

- Geoff Paul stated it was interesting and would look into it for other projects

Revitalisation of the Bus Station was a “White Elephant” and stated that it was not in the right place as not near the rail station.

- Geoff Paul – the bus network is in a poor state and needs to be supported. Many people rely on buses and they want to create a warm and attractive environment.

Full Moon Market creates natural footfall The plans need “meat on the bones”. Lack of things to do Mon – Fri.

Noted the number of empty shops in town and the price of the rent/purchase of them. Is there funding available to help new business owners?

- Graham Wood - There are a Retail Business Support packages available from DCC of which there are several expressions of interested already submitted.

Regarding skills, lack of diversity and currently excluding some student groups. North East Skills Advisory Panel. Mentions Bridge Creative, Trades for care, Gaunless Gateway.

- Graham Wood – The Springboard to Employment project. In discussions regarding a property for Trades for Care. Strong digital element with £100k enhanced digital facility at the college but happy to have other organisations identified.

Are DCC talking to business owners regarding the state of these buildings?

- Yes – but it is very hard when landlords are absent. Property reuse fund from DCC is live, and expressions are coming forward.

Levelling Up fund was raised by the audience, and comments “Half a bypass” had been bid for.

- John Robinson – requested a response from MP at this fund was MP controlled.

Needs improvement of employability skills. Needs more 6th form provision in Bishop Auckland

- Graham Wood - There is a formula for the number of 6th form places, however he will take it away and discuss with colleagues.

Can see a benefit for large companies, but what about residents who have a choice of heat or eat?

- Graham Wood - The projects will benefit the more deprived areas of the community too.
- Geoff Paul. This is not a ‘fait accompli’, however projects must be delivered within a very small timescale.
- Liz Fisher – Has a food project run from the walled garden and provides fruit and veg. They work with community groups and 65 apprentices as well as involving the local schools. The 65 apprentices have skills to go onto future employment.
- David Madden – visitor income helps the town. On average, a visitor on a day trip will spend £20, or £150 if staying overnight, spending in hotels, pubs and shops. Visitor offer also provides local employment.

What is the plan for the remaining £6.1m. Stated the need to look support independent businesses and create a town attractive to shoppers. Disapproval of canopy.

- Work on those projects are being looked and feedback is being taken.

Is there an option for a Cinema and 10 pin bowling rather than a hotel in 80 Newgate St (Beales)

- Graham Wood - Three screen cinema is coming to Newgate Street. There is no impediment to the plans. Should begin this year.

Why no local businesses involved in plans. Also stated that visitors have had a negative impact on areas such as Alnwick

- Acknowledgment that businesses should have been communicated with more, and that this is in the communications plan

Are DCC buying the Newgate Centre? What is happening with the sculpture at Canney Hill?

- Geoff Paul – cannot comment due to commercial confidentiality.
- Funding for the sculpture raised by Bishop in Bloom.

Will the companies carrying out the construction provide jobs for local people?

- John Robinson – All planning applications have to state how many jobs will be provided.

Local councillors should be involved. There is no independent voice in the town. Does DCC have an inventory of local shop landlords? Why is the Queens Head being given public money for renovations

- David Land – Wants an open debate. Number 43 will be open Saturday 19th February for people to look at information regarding the projects as well as to leave feedback and questions. He wants an open discussion about town centre diversification and wants to talk to as many people as possible.

As an employer, I cannot employ non-drivers due to lack of buses. Stated she would rather money go to TAP and 11 arches as money stays within Bishop Auckland. Because of Kynren etc, she has been able to get grants for her business. Even offices create sales,

Cllr Yorke – stated that he is one of the 15 STB members and would welcome a more diverse board. £19.3m Stated that there are 38 empty shops on the high street, mostly the north end of town. Opposed to spending money on sculpture.

Next steps

Cllr Katie Eliot, Mayor of Bishop Auckland stated that the Town Council are going to hold DCC and the Stronger Towns board to regular updates. Updates will be given to the Council meeting and the Council will be ensuring that better communication is given to the residents of the town.

Jonathan Ruffer – “I want to help Bishop Auckland. I want to help the people who are hurting. I want to make TAP viable. I’m independent and I want to help”