

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

20 February 2019

Report of the Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

1 FUTURE HIGH STREETS FUND EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

This report sets out information on the Future High Streets Fund and seeks approval for submission of an Expression of Interest for Tonbridge.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Although change on our high streets is not necessarily a new phenomenon, in recent decades the speed of change has increased dramatically. The huge growth in online shopping in particular has had a big effect on high streets across the country, with around 20% of all retail sales now taking place online. In many towns, this has left a number of vacant or under-used spaces, and a mismatch between supply of existing space and the demand for different types of space, which in turn has impacted upon footfall numbers and sales figures.

1.1.2 In response to these challenges, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) released a Call for Proposals for Future High Streets Fund Expressions of Interest in December 2018. This £675m fund is a key part of 'Our Plan for the High Street', which aims to see the regeneration of town centres through 'innovative proposals around transport, housing delivery and public services'.

1.1.3 There will be two rounds of the Fund, both with a two-phase application process - Phase 1 is the submission of Expressions of Interest, with those who pass to Phase 2 receiving funding to work up project proposals and develop project plans and business cases.

1.1.4 In this first round, Expressions of Interest need to be submitted by 22 March 2019. Dates regarding a second round are to be announced in due course, but will not be open before 2020.

1.2 Scope and Eligibility

1.2.1 The main objective of the Fund is to 'renew and reshape town centres and high streets in a way that improves experience, drives growth and ensures future sustainability'. It is expected that any need for investment will fall under the following themes:

- Investment in physical infrastructure
- Acquisition and assembly of land including support for new housing, workspaces and public realm.
- Improvements to access, traffic flow and circulation in the area.
- Supporting change of use including (where appropriate) housing delivery and densification
- Supporting adaptation of the high street in response to changing technology.

1.2.2 The Fund will contribute up to a maximum of £25 million to each successful place, however the expectation is that most bids will seek £5-10 million and that any project submission will be match-funded with a contribution from the applicant.

1.2.3 In terms of eligibility, it is stated that the focus of proposals should be on '*high streets or town centres as defined as areas that exhibit high levels of social and economic activity, that contain a variety of uses and functions and that act as important service centres for extensive catchment populations*', adding categorically that the following will **not** be accepted:

- Bids covering town centre areas that are not facing significant challenges.
- Bids covering parades of shops of purely neighbourhood significance
- Bids covering central business districts of major city centres.
- Bids covering more than one high street or town centre area.
- Bids covering projects that only make a difference to the appearance, rather than the use, of the area.

1.3 Expression of Interest for Tonbridge

1.3.1 Based on the scope and eligibility criteria set out above, the best fit for an Expression of Interest submission is Tonbridge, as it is classified in the draft Local Plan as the only Town Centre within the borough, and as such can demonstrate the high levels of social and economic activity that is expected in a bid.

1.3.2 In submitting an Expression of Interest, there are three sections that need to be addressed:

1. **Defining the Place** – this is essentially an exercise in describing the geographical area that your Expression of Interest relates to, as well as information on the population living and working within the town centre area, and economic activity. Much of this information can be sourced through the Office for National Statistics, with more detailed local data collected by the Borough Council's Planning Policy Team.
2. **Setting out the Challenges** – these challenges can cover a wide range of issues, in recognition of the fact that each place is different. For Tonbridge, the key challenges would likely be – loss of office accommodation to residential use through the use of Permitted Development Rights, road congestion (especially during peak periods), maintaining footfall and addressing the disconnect between Quarry Hill and the High Street.

3. **Strategic Ambition** – although slightly dated, the Tonbridge Central Area Action Plan does provide a strategic framework for the area and sets out policies aimed at regenerating the town centre. This framework, along with the policies of the draft Local Plan and the aims of the Borough Economic Regeneration Strategy provide a high level support for capital investment.

1.3.3 At this stage, there is no requirement to provide details of any specific scheme proposal. MHCLG are effectively looking at the Expressions of Interest and assessing the nature of the towns, the challenges they face and the strategic level ambition of the Council to rise to these challenges. On that basis if they feel there is a compelling case for investment, then successful applicants will be given revenue funding to work up a full business case, which will set out detail on investment projects.

1.4 Legal Implications

1.4.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

1.6 Risk Assessment

1.6.1 Not applicable.

1.7 Equality Impact Assessment

1.7.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

1.8 Recommendations

1.8.1 That the content of the report **BE NOTED**; and

1.8.2 That subject to Member's support, delegated authority **BE GRANTED** to the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health and the Director of Central Services, in consultation with the Leader, Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation and Property and the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning & Infrastructure to finalise an Expression of Interest and submit to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government by 22 March 2019.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration and the Chief Executive confirm that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

None

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