

## Minutes of the Bishop Auckland Heritage Action Zone Advisory Group

Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2020, 10.00am-12.00noon, Microsoft Teams

### Attendees:

Bob McManners	BMc	Chair
Chris Myers	CM	Durham County Council
Jamie Blackburn	JBI	Bishop Auckland Town Council
Kathryn Watson	KW	Durham County Council
Jules Brown	JBr	Historic England
Nigel Bryson	NB	Bishop Auckland Town Team
Alison Tweddle	AT	The Auckland Project
Annalisa Ward	AnW	Durham County Council
Bryan Harris	BH	Durham County Council

### Support:

Clare Howard	CH	Historic England
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### Apologies:

Cllr Joy Allen	JA	Durham County Council
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## ITEM

## ACTION

### 1.0 Welcome and Introductions

1.1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Historic England Architectural Investigator CH was introduced.

### 2.0 Review of Minutes and Actions last meeting – 11<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2020

2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2020 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

2.2 Actions:

2.3 Item No. 6.4 - AnW had had discussions with LF re the potential use of TAP properties for Miners Institute and Youth Hub projects. However, it was decided that this would not be feasible as many of the buildings required extensive repairs to bring them back into use.

2.4 Item No. 6.2 – AnW reported that DCC Records Office were looking at Will books being disposed of by Hewitt's Solicitors to determine whether any could be acquired for the archive.

2.5 Item No. 6.3 – KW had had discussions with Visit County Durham (VCD) regarding proposals to hold an accommodation workshop in Spring 2021. VCD had commissioned a Visitor Accommodation Acceleration Strategy with results due in March, so KW said she would be meeting with Lucy Wearne, Project Research Manager at VCD in March to progress the workshop. KW

### **3.0 Historic Area Assessment – Update from Clare Howard, Historic England**

3.1 CH reported that a Bridges Report by Senior Researcher Marcus Jecock was due for publication in the next few weeks.

3.2 A Story Map of bridges was to be produced for the Festival of Archaeology in summer 21.

3.3 The Historic Area Assessment (HAA) was progressing, with a draft almost completed. Historic England would begin an internal review of the document on 25<sup>th</sup> January, with a wider review commencing mid-February. The final report should be published end of March, early April.

3.4 CH requested that the publishing of The Book be postponed until March 2023 due to the forthcoming maternity leave of the two authors and Covid-19 restrictions affecting access to archives and photography opportunities. CH said that publication in March 2023 would tie in with the celebration of the Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) and would allow an opportunity for feedback from the HAA research report to be assessed.

3.5 BH was concerned that the length of postponement would not afford any flexibility if it was to slip further, beyond the life of the HAZ and would impact on internal workplans around Conservation Area Character Appraisals and management plans etc.

3.6 JBr recognised the frustration around the postponement, however, he said that having the report done by others would be a higher risk than not having it completed earlier. He confirmed that the timetable could not be brought forward.

3.7 CM explained to CH that there could be an issue with archive access due to the relocation of the Durham History Centre (DHC) where archives are stored. Archive materials would be unavailable until Autumn 2022. CM was to send DHC closure dates to CH. CM

3.8 AnW was pleased that a Bridges Story Map was going to be an output from the research and said that she would liaise with Marcus Jecock on details. It was hoped to include information about the HAA in the HAZ exhibition at the Town Hall in Autumn 2022. AnW would liaise with CH on her return from maternity leave.

### **3.0 Historic Area Assessment – Update from Clare Howard, Historic England** (cont'd)

- 3.9 BH referred to the Bridges Report and was concerned that a draft had not been shared with the Advisory Group for information, prior to being published. CH explained that it was not standard practice to share smaller reports however, she could circulate it to the group. CH said that if BH had any comments she would consider these before printed copies of the report were commissioned. CH
- 3.10 CH was thanked for her update.

### **4.0 Update from Brighter Bishop Auckland Partnership**

- 4.1 **Future High Streets Fund** - CM explained that a Government announcement on Boxing Day confirmed that the bid had been successful, with an award of the full allocation of £19.8million.
- 4.2 NB said that on behalf of the Bishop Auckland Town Team he wished to acknowledge the work undertaken on the bid submission and expressed his thanks and congratulations on the successful bid.
- 4.3 JBI expressed his thanks to CM on the successful bid.
- 4.4 AT highlighted the importance of partnership working given the link to the heritage of the area and said a joined-up approach and message was vital.
- 4.5 JBr added it was important that Historic England (HE) were involved from a consent perspective from the outset. In response, BH said he was meeting with CM and the HE conservation team tomorrow to discuss an engagement strategy for the two sites.
- 4.6 **Stronger Towns Fund** – BMc reported that the Stronger Towns Board was working up project proposals for £56 million. The deadline for programme submission was 29<sup>th</sup> January 2021.
- 4.7 **The Auckland Project** – BMc reported that TAP had been awarded a grant from Historic England for its castle curtilage redevelopment project. The Weardale Railway had received authorisation under the Transport and Works Act 1992 and could now be legally run once track maintenance and volunteer training had been completed.
- TAP was currently looking at post Covid-19 re-opening strategies for its visitor attractions, taking into consideration both safety and economics. The Spanish Gallery was due to be handed over to TAP before Christmas and it was hoped it would be opened in 2021. Exhibition design planning was underway. The Faith Gallery would open in 2022.
- 4.8 CM reported that the deadline for submission of the Town Investment Plan was Friday 29<sup>th</sup> January. The Government would then assess the bid, however there may be a delay in announcing the outcome, due to Purdah restrictions. There had

been 1,000 responses to the recent consultation exercise, highlighting the level of interest in the future of the town.

## **5.0 Project Manager's Report**

### **5.1 Management**

- 5.1.1 RAID Log up-dated, adding a new issue re reduction in visitor numbers due to Covid-19. Business support was being provided for affected businesses. The risk score had been increased for St Anne's Church and would be a priority with the aim of reducing the score in the next 6 months.
- 5.1.2 King James 1 Academy – Development Repair Grant approved to bring ancillary buildings back into use. Architects Mosedale Gillet had been appointed to lead on design work and surveys up to planning permission in the summer. Completion of this work would enable the submission of funding applications (National Heritage Lottery Fund and Football Association) for the capital works.
- 5.1.3 103 to 105 Newgate (Gregory's butchers shop) had been awarded a Grade II Listed status and would be included as a case study in the Northern Echo's final feature on the HAZ programme. Enriching the List campaign project in development with the HE designation team. We are also considering a pilot project to develop a local list, but this will be subject to DCC being awarded some funding
- 5.1.4 St Anne's Church – Meetings held with Reverend Keddilty to agree prioritisation of urgent roof repairs, however this was proving difficult during the pandemic.
- 5.1.6 Castle Chare – A further package of work had been agreed to include repair of the walls to the back of the site, clearing of a further area of the site and laying of more limestone chippings.

West Road Fountain - The HAZ were working in partnership with the DCC Find and Fix team to undertake work to the High Bondgate area including the West Road Water Fountain. This would include repair and restoration of the fountain, cleaning and repair to the surface and walls surrounding the fountain. Installation of interpretation panel. Awaiting a start date to be agreed for the project.

### **BH and JBI left the meeting.**

- 5.1.8 Heritage & History Festival 2020 ran from 23<sup>rd</sup> October to 1<sup>st</sup> November working with the Stockton & Darlington Railway HAZ. There was a total of 50 events, happenings, and activities. AnW had created 200 online posts and had achieved a global reach. There had been an increase in Facebook followers so a digital presence would be maintained in the future.  
This years' festival would take place in September 2021. AnW was looking at plans for continuation of the festival at the end of the HAZ in March 2023.

## **5.0 Project Manager's Report (cont'd)**

5.1.9 AnW reported that a local volunteer group were looking to set up a Bishop Auckland Peoples Museum in part of the old Hippodrome Building (Mecca Bingo) on Railway Street. BMC said that he had been contacted by the group for permission to use some of the Civic Society's archive material.

## **6.0 Any Other Business**

### 6.1 Regeneration Update

6.1.1 Visitor Accommodation – Covered in Agenda Item 2.5

6.1.2 Targeted Business Improvement Grant Scheme (TBI) – KW reported that new enquiries were continuing to come in.

6.1.3 Community WiFi Scheme – KW said that tracking of footfall data continued throughout the town.

6.1.4 Fore Bondgate Signage – NB reported that the new signage had been well received and enhanced the street. He said that a group of traders in the street planned to carry out further enhancement works when Covid-19 restrictions were lifted.

6.1.5 CM reported that DCC was dealing with many development enquiries in the town itself, and not just the town centre, confirming that the development industry is still active and taking note of work being done by TAP to bring forward visitor attractions. The resulting increase in visitor numbers would have significant economic benefits to the wider town.

6.1.6 NB reported that WiFi footfall figures indicated that in view of Covid-19 restrictions, visitor numbers to the town remained strong. Figures for the period from April 2020 to date were 351,852. Numbers for October were 50,000 and for November and December 41,000 each month. NB believed that following the successful delivery of several town projects, public response had increased in positivity.

6.1.7 JBr said he welcomed NB's observations and agreed that there was a general undercurrent of positivity and he hoped this would continue. He said NB's observations would be valuable when more detailed evaluation was undertaken towards the end of the HAZ, with people's perceptions being recorded.

## **7.0 Review of Actions**

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| 7.1 | KW meeting with Lucy Wearne, Project Research Manager at VCD in March to discuss progression of an accommodation workshop | KW |
| 7.2 | CH to circulate Bridges Report to the group.  | CH |
| 7.3 | CM to forward Durham History Centre closure dates to CH.  | CM |

## **8.0 Date and Time of next meeting**

- 8.1 Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> April 2020, 2.00pm, MS Teams