

REPORT TO: Cabinet

MEETING DATE: 8 September 2020

BY: Head of Development

SUBJECT: Scottish Government Town Centre Fund 2019–20

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To secure approval to amend the project list that will receive Scottish Government Town Centre Fund 19/20 support in the context of COVID_19 and the prospect that no further flexibility will be forthcoming in respect of grant criteria, most specifically when the grant monies require to be fully spent by.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Cabinet approve the change of proposal for inclusion in the Scottish Government Town Centre Fund from the project *Haddington Town Centre: New facilities at Whittingehame Drive to increase public parking availability in support of Town Centre improvements* with a project to re-generate Preston Tower, Doocot and enclosure walls at Prestonpans.
- 2.2 That Cabinet note the following (revised) key deadlines associated with the Town Centre Fund:
- Progress including notification of any underspend to be reported to Scottish Government by November 2020,
 - Funds must be legally committed by end March 2021, and;
 - Funds must be spent by September 2021.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Scottish Government allocated £50m in capital funds to Local Authorities for 2019/20. The East Lothian Council allocation is £1,275,000. Funds originally had to be legally committed by end March 2020, and be fully spent by September 2020.
- 3.2 The original timeline for the delivery of projects was significantly challenging. A decision was taken by Council under Summer Recess arrangements to fund the following projects:
- Haddington Town Centre: New facilities at Whittingehame Drive to increase public parking availability in support of Town Centre improvements, *Budget:* £700,000 to £900,000
 - Prestonpans High Street: new public realm at War Memorial and John Muir Way in support of the PSG Great Place (Salt of the Earth) project, *Budget:* £300,000 to £500,000

and if spend couldn't be achieved in full:

- Tranent: extend the Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme, *Budget:* extension of this project would allow for the allocation of up to £200,000.
- 3.3 Scottish Government have since extended legal commitment and spent by dates by 1 year. Scottish Government have indicated that these dates will not be extended any further.
- 3.4 The grant criteria being extended was particularly welcomed however with priorities completely realigned as a result of COVID_19, the Head of Infrastructure has flagged that the Whittingehame Drive cannot be completed within the extended timeframe. The project has also been the subject of significant community representation and, alongside Town Centre Access Strategy work, wide-ranging speculation.
- 3.5 The Prestonpans High Street (War Memorial area improvements) project is progressing and, following a COVID-19 delay whilst bidding firms had staff in furlough, assessment of proposed designs is underway in conjunction with Prestonpans Community Council. The spend for the project is budgeted at £350,000, but could be extended to widen the impact of the intervention using additional funds. In common with the proposal for Preston Tower this project has been identified by the local community via the Preston Seton Gosford Great Place Project as a key opportunity to increase the positive impact of local heritage on the community and local economy.
- 3.6 The original decision provided for an extension to the Tranent CARS scheme if spend against the main project(s) could not be achieved in full. To secure the required extension £50,000 - £100,000 has been allocated to the Scheme with the agreement of Historic Environment Scotland. A small number of additional projects have been secured via the extension

with committed spend of £50,000 - £100,000 from the Town Centre Fund, this the full potential of the Scheme

- 3.7 Officers have re-visited the original options appraisal in the context of the now tighter deadline and reviewed the readiness of potential projects against grant criteria most notably the overall funding deadline to identify a replacement project.
- 3.8 Since the original option appraisal was undertaken, work on Preston Tower / Doocot has been continued with the Scottish Historic Building Trust, National Trust for Scotland, PSG Area Partnership, Prestonpans Community Council, and the PSG Great Place Project. A detailed survey to assess a programme of repair and re-generation of the area was commissioned by the Preston Seton Gosford Area Partnership. This work identified and costed a range of interventions to increase the positive impact the site has within the Town and wider area, and make the attraction safe to receive visitors in the future. The overall aim is to allow safe access inside parts of the buildings, to improve the interpretation and understanding of the group of buildings, to link the site with others in the area as part of a heritage network, and fully utilise the potential of the project and site to address local inequalities. There is considerable scope to combine the physical regeneration of the site with high quality training and education opportunities.
- 3.9 Preston Tower is a late medieval towerhouse originally constructed in the 15th century and then repaired and extended upwards in the 17th century. The Doocot dates to the 17th/18th century. Both structures sit within gardens enclosed by a contemporary boundary wall. Its condition, arrangement, and set of differently dated structures make it a well preserved and exceptional example of a site which serves to contribute to the knowledge of the construction, adaptation, and use of such buildings over a period of several centuries.
- 3.10 The Tower's condition has remained relatively steady over the years, and previous repairs, such as the fitting of the wallhead copes, have helped protect the building and slow deterioration. However, some key areas of the building are now in need of immediate repair, these have been highlighted by the recent condition survey. The Tower is not open to the public as there is no safe means of access. The roof of the Doo'cot is unsafe and there is no public access. The intent is to improve public access and interpretation.
- 3.11 The principal aim of the project is to help reduce local inequalities and contribute to the regeneration of Prestonpans Town Centre in collaboration with the local community. This project links with the intervention at the Prestonpans War Memorial site, which aims to introduce a focal point for the High Street that will direct locals and visitors

to other areas of the Town. The repairs facilitated by the project will slow the deterioration of Preston Tower and Doo'cot, preventing further deterioration and potential loss of architectural and archaeological features, and to sympathetically improve physical and intellectual access; making the buildings safer to enjoy and informing all visitors whilst retaining the unique character of the site. The survey work undertaken identifies a range of interventions and identifies costs for repair, access, and interpretation. The identified cost range is £700,000 to £900,000. No other budget or funding has been identified for these works.

- 3.12 The site has been a Scheduled Ancient Monument since 1936 (SM774). The property is now surrounded by an area of housing, designated as Preston Conservation Area. There are several nearby listed buildings, including A-listed Northfield House and Hamilton House. Although the property is owned by the National Trust for Scotland (NTS), it is under the guardianship of East Lothian Council (ELC).
- 3.13 Context - Prestonpans Town Centre has been negatively impacted by the consolidation of a number of local retail centres in the Town and leakage of comparison & convenience spend to Musselburgh and Edinburgh (good transport links / high proportion of commuters). Investment levels in Prestonpans have been lower than in other centres. The inclusion of regeneration work on Preston Tower & Doo'cot together with the work on the High Street in the context of the PSG Great Place project would see Prestonpans benefit significantly from this grant award providing opportunity to add and enhance attractions and public access to those attractions.

Great Place Project – Currently ongoing, the National Lottery Heritage Fund Great Place Project (the PSG Great Place Partnership) focuses on Ward-wide activities to improve local outcomes through the use of heritage assets (built, cultural, natural). This gives opportunities to explore new / improved uses for Prestonpans Town Centre, including the Town Hall, Preston Tower, Harlaw Hill House, and the High Street and coastline / John Muir Way. The Project has funding for community activities and Officer support only and would be significantly enhanced / expanded by allocation of additional capital investment from the TC Fund.

Impact

The proposed interventions in Prestonpans have significant scope to help reduce local inequalities and promote community involvement, for example: opportunities for high quality training in traditional construction and repairs skills; community involvement in the management of local heritage assets and spatial planning; increasing the attractiveness of the

area to communities and visitors alike; and, providing integrated in-context opportunities for learners.

Consultation

The Area Partnership has identified the above as priorities for action and is leading the Great Place Project with ELC.

- 3.14 Scottish Government have indicated that they will be accepting of the change of use request indicating that the key dates of March 2021 and September 2021 still apply.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Town Centre fund investment aligns with the Council Plan and East Lothian Plan outcomes.

5 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 The subjects of this report have been through the Integrated Impact Assessment process and no negative impacts have been identified.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Financial – The grant is for capital expenditure which is additional to that which is already / would otherwise be allocated to the 2019/20 budget, now largely carried forward into 2020/21 and 2021/22, and should not substitute for existing spend.
- 6.2 The Grant conditions stipulate “if the Grantee does not use the grant in prior to the grant deadline, unused grant is to be repaid to the Scottish Government unless otherwise agreed in writing by Scottish Ministers. It is expected that work / contracts will be signed or commenced within 2020-21”. Scottish Government have clarified that they have defined “spent” as where the construction work has commenced or contracts signed, whereby actual delivery of those works may run into the next financial year.
- 6.3 Whilst cost estimates have been undertaken during option identification, a firm understanding of project costs for Preston Tower / Doo’cot will not be secured until work has been tendered. The exact extent and specification of works may need to be flexed to ensure that the Town Centre funds are optimized.
- 6.4 Personnel - grant funding does not allow for additional resource implications to be funded from the award.

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 Scottish Government Town Centre Fund 2019-20 - East Lothian Council (Summer Recess Arrangements – Standing Order 15.5) - 11 July 2019
- 7.2 Town Centre Fund – Option Appraisal
- 7.3 Town Centre Fund – Capital Grant 2019-20 Allocation – Conditions of grant and supporting schedules.
- 7.4 COSLA Information Session FAQs

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