

HIGH PEAK BOROUGH COUNCIL

Economy and Growth Select Committee

4 February 2021

TITLE:	Adoption Buxton VES and future working
EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR:	Councillor Damien Greenhalgh Deputy Leader & Executive Councillor for Regeneration, Tourism and Leisure
CONTACT OFFICER:	Helen Pakpahan, Sarah Porru – Senior Regeneration Officer, Head of Regeneration
WARDS INVOLVED:	(All Wards);

Appendices Attached –

1. Buxton Visitor Economy Strategy final version (2020)
2. Future High Street Fund governance structure
3. Buxton Heritage Action Zone Governance & Terms of Reference

1 Reason for the Report

To update members on Visitor Economy Strategy (VES) project work and to recommend changes for future working.

2 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is recommended:

1. To recommend The Executive adopts the Buxton Visitor Economy Strategy and action plan.
2. To note works to develop 'Buxton branding' and proposed roll-out in 2021/2022.
3. To note changes to future working with stakeholders following completion of VES project.
4. To recommend The Executive approve the Governance and Terms of Reference for the management of the Buxton Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) as set out in Appendix 2 and subject to approval from Historic England.

3 Executive Summary

- 3.1 With the proposed completion of the Crescent and Thermal Spa project, it was recognised that for those involved in Buxton's visitor economy, there was a need to "raise the game" and look at ways to maximise the benefits that this new development was expected to bring to the town and the wider Peak

District. Using a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund with a small amount of match-funding from the Council, a Project Group commissioned consultants to prepare a Visitor Economy Strategy (VES) to ensure that the town identified how to maximise its market reach in terms of potential visitors; had the necessary infrastructure and support to manage the projected increase in visitor numbers over the longer term; and to ensure that their visit is an enjoyable one.

- 3.2 The original terms of reference for the development of the VES project were extended in August 2019 to include the project group acting as an advisory group on the development of Future High Street Fund business case and any emerging HAZ application. Once the branding toolkit is complete, the objectives of the project, and group which has overseen will be complete, and it was agreed as part of the business case report for the FHSF (IED, June 2020) that separate governance structures will be put in place to manage delivery of the FHSF and HAZ projects should they be successful.
- 3.3 Separate governance structures are proposed for the FHSF and HAZ projects. The FHSF board would primarily include representatives with a financial investment into the scheme whilst the governance of the Buxton HAZ is proposed to comprise of a Buxton HAZ Project Team who will have responsibility to review and determine grant applications. The proposed Future High Street Fund governance structure is attached at appendix 2 and the Buxton Heritage Action Zone Governance & Terms of Reference is attached at appendix 3.
- 3.4 In addition, it is recommended support the development of a 'cultural compact' to support research into 'future audience potential for culture in Buxton and to support development of business cases for capital funding bids. Full details of the proposals can be seen at 6.7

4. How this report links to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 The recommendations of this report are consistent with Aim Three of the Council's corporate plan 2019 – 2023: Protect and create jobs by supporting economic growth, development, and regeneration, specifically supporting objectives to promote tourism and support thriving high streets.

5 Alternative Options

Option 1: Do not adopt VES Strategy and continue project working under same governance. The external funding for the project will be fully spent with the completion of the branding roll-out but the action plan remains a live document that adapts to changing circumstances. A revised governance for delivery of externally funded large projects is required to ensure sufficient financial oversight and leadership.

NOT recommended

Option 2: Approve recommendations. This will acknowledge completion of works undertaken by stakeholders and put in place suitable governance for larger projects and future working.

RECOMMENDED

Neil Rodgers
Executive Director (Place)

**Web Links and
Background Papers**

November 2018 - Economy & growth report/minutes

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6. Detail

- 6.1 Buxton has seen significant investment over the last two decades which is now culminating in the opening of one of the UK's most ambitious heritage tourism projects – the Buxton Crescent and Thermal Spa project, which includes a luxury hotel and spa in the Grade I listed Georgian Crescent and adjoining spa buildings.
- 6.2 It was recognised that the completion of the project, set a challenge for the town's visitor economy as a whole – to be prepared and best equipped to maximise the benefits this new development should bring to Buxton and the wider Peak District. It was identified that the new hotel would serve a new market audience not served previously in Buxton and that the town will need to respond to a new 5-star resort hotel, in a coherent and confident way, to ensure messages about the reasons to visit and stay longer in the town are also of high quality, in order to spread the benefit and sustain the market.
- 6.3 In preparation for this, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), which has invested heavily in Buxton's regeneration programme, funded consultants to put together a Visitor Economy Strategy (VES). The HLF grant was required to be match funded by a small contribution from the Council's Regeneration Team's revenue budget.
- 6.4 In November 2018, a draft VES Strategy report was taken to HPBC's Economy & Growth select committee, where it was resolved.
- a) To note draft Buxton Visitor Economy Strategy and seek views from Stakeholders prior to preparation of final version.
 - b) To ask for the scope of the VES to be extended to cover the whole district
 - c) For officers to submit an application to Future High Street Fund, which was expected to be announced in 2019.

6.5 Following the meeting the following actions took place:

6.5.1 Full consultation with Stakeholders, who then took a lead on developing a prioritised action plan and whose members merged with original VES committee. The final version was approved by the group in February 2020 with a recommendation that it be adopted as council policy. It should be noted that the final document sets out the strategy and road map for all partners to deliver against and there is no obligation for the Council to lead or deliver aspects which are beyond our current responsibilities. The final document is attached at appendix 1.

6.5.2 The scope of the external funding meant that it was not possible to extend the document to cover a wider geography. However, HLF agreed for underspend to be used to support a review and refreshing of Buxton's branding which could be used following the opening of the Crescent.

6.5.3 This work was commissioned, and a draft branding scheme has been developed. This has been received very positively by Stakeholders and a toolkit and virtual training programme for businesses to explain how to use and maximise its benefit is under preparation. It is intended that this will be launched to local businesses to support recovery from the Covid lockdowns and help generate clear quality messages about Buxton for 2021/22 and beyond.

6.5.4 It is proposed that the consultant also leads an information event for Councillors and stakeholders in early Spring 2021, prior to launch to businesses, to explain its evolution and how it can be utilised to benefit the town.

6.5.5 A successful application was submitted to Future High Street Fund, which is now covered in separate reports.

6.6 Following consultation with existing VES members, there was a general view from 16 stakeholders that following the completion of the Branding toolkit, it would be an appropriate time to wind-up the existing partnership and find new ways of working in keeping with new priorities, project delivery and also to facilitate better integration of members oversight with external stakeholder input.

6.7 It is therefore proposed that the VES board be disbanded and new governance structures are put in place, which are project specific and time limited as appropriate, including:

6.7.1 Future High Street Fund governance - Subject to a full grant contract being offered, it is proposed a delivery board is established which, which would primarily include representatives with a financial investment into the scheme, led by the Deputy Leader (as Regeneration portfolio holder) and the Leader of the Council together with representation from a town stakeholder group. This group would

have a local councillor for Buxton Central as chair/vice chair with the other position from one of the key community groups. This proposal has been tested with Vision Buxton, Buxton Civic Association and Buxton Town Team who are in favour of this approach. The town stakeholder group will be an active advisory board feeding into and supporting proposals. See proposed governance structure (Appendix 2).

- 6.7.2 Heritage Action Zone governance - Governance of the Buxton HAZ is proposed to comprise of a Buxton HAZ Project Team who will have responsibility to review and determine grant applications. The Project Team will meet on a monthly basis and will comprise of a small number of HPBC officers including the Historic England Lead HAZ Case Officer. It is proposed that the team will also be supplemented by a DCC conservation specialist who is supporting the HAZ Project Officer, with specialist technical advice. It is acknowledged that from time to time, the project team may need to draw upon input from other services in the Council such as legal, planning and financial.
- 6.7.3 The HAZ Project Officer will present an update on the grants awarded, community engagement, the cultural programme, the financial position and the overall progress of the HAZ to a Buxton HAZ Project Board. The Project Board will be responsible for monitoring the overall progress of the Buxton HAZ and will comprise of the Portfolio Holder Regeneration, Ward Councillors Buxton Central, Director of Place or Head of Regeneration, Cultural sub-group representative, Community Engagement sub-group representative and a Business Community representative with a retail focus.
- 6.7.4 Historic England have reviewed the proposed Governance and Terms of Reference as outlined at Appendix 3. They have confirmed that they are satisfied with the proposal, subject to a request for the historic England Lead HAZ Officer be invited to the Buxton HAZ Project Board quarterly meetings and for a copy of the meeting minutes to be provided. Furthermore, they advise that the Project Board includes a representative from the business community with a retail focus. The proposed Governance and Terms of Reference has been updated accordingly.
- 6.7.5 Cultural Compact - In addition to the works being led under the cultural sub-group of the Heritage Action Zone, it was recognised the need to have a task and finish group to support research into 'future audience potential for culture in Buxton and to support development of business cases for capital funding bids, notably linked to Buxton Opera House and potentially the Dome. The Arts Council has offered £20,000 to support this work under its 'Cultural Compact' initiative and the University of Derby is considering this approach.
- 6.7.6 Visitor Economy Support - The Council, as part of its Regeneration Service (town centres, business and tourism team) will continue with its service level agreement with Marketing Peak District and

Derbyshire Destination Management Partnership (Tourist Board) to support district wide tourism and will work with a range of key partners, to address town specific issues and emerging ideas, delivery of the VES strategy and support the roll out of the branding.

- 6.8 A final version of the Buxton VES is appended to this report. It concludes that Buxton possesses the ingredients to develop a highly successful visitor economy. It is a quintessential heritage town – Roman origins, Georgian grandeur, Victorian innovation and entrepreneurship – with a strong and high-profile cultural offer of theatre, opera, ballet, comedy, art, film and music plus major annual festivals. This is all set in cultured and green public spaces and surrounded by some of England’s most magnificent countryside, supported by enthusiastic volunteers, and with a huge catchment area and potential market on its doorstep.
- 6.9 In response to this, the Visitor Economy Strategy outlines a recipe for success, which includes the following themes and transformative ideas:
- a) The town needs to act as one destination, one place and unite behind a distinctive identity [brand] and narrative for the town.
 - b) The town should improve the visitor infrastructure and seek opportunities to improve the shopping core of the town which do not reflect the Georgian splendour of the rest of the town.
 - c) The improvement of the backstage facilities to the Buxton Opera House should be pursued as a priority to ensure fit for a wider range of productions and to retain and grow the cultural customer base.
 - d) Buxton should be re-positioned as a Peak District town both in terms of physical measures to link it to its hinterland as well as its marketing and promotion.
 - e) Buxton should promote collaborative year-round programming to support ambition, create fresh energy and bold ideas that can be planned and presented collectively.