

HIGH PEAK BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to the Executive

25th February 2021

TITLE:	Buxton Future High Street Fund Revised Bid
EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR:	Councillor Greenhalgh – Deputy Leader and Executive Councillor for Regeneration, Tourism and Leisure
CONTACT OFFICER:	Neil Rodgers – Executive Director (Place)
WARDS INVOLVED:	Buxton Central

Appendices Attached:

Appendix A - Outcomes from public consultation on technical changes February 2021

1. Reason for the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Executive on the work undertaken to revise the Council's Future High Street Fund Business Case in light of the government's offer to provide only 69% of the original funding which the Council requested, and to seek approval for the submission of the revised Business Case before the deadline of Friday 26th February.

2 Recommendation

It is recommended that the Executive:

- 2.1 Notes the government's response to the Council's original Future High Street Business Case submission, announced on 26th December 2020, and the actions required to revise the bid as set out in this report.
- 2.2 Notes the works undertaken to inform the drafting of the revised Future High Street Fund Business Case.
- 2.3 Approves the submission of the revised Future High Street Fund Business Case, and delegates authority to the Executive Director of Place, in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer to accept any final award offer.
- 2.4 Requires that a detailed programme of expenditure is prepared for the Executive's approval prior to any project spend and grant drawdown.

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 On 26th December, the Government announced that 15 towns had received their full request for funding from the Future High Street Fund (FHSF), with a further 57, including Buxton, being made an 'in principle' partial offer (representing 69% of ask). A further 29 applications were rejected.
- 3.2 On 29th December the Council received the 'in principle' details for the partial funding offer (£6,608,223) and a webinar was held on 11th January to outline the changes required for resubmission.
- 3.3 In order to secure the revised grant offer, the Council is required to submit a revised proposal by the deadline of 26th February 2021 which reflects the reduced offer. Changes can only be of a technical nature and local authorities cannot change overarching themes of the original bid. A minimum Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) of 2.1 must still be achieved and a 5% limit on public realm (beautification) is retained within the reduced ask. This means that the maximum FHSF contribution permissible within the Buxton scheme is now £330,411.
- 3.4 Councils have been requested to consider the following options when considering revisions:
- Securing additional funding to make up the difference between the original ask and the revised offer but this must be fully committed (not potential). For High Peak this would equate to an additional £2,951,777.
 - Scaling back existing elements to reflect the reduced grant.
 - Eliminating certain elements of the bid to reflect the reduced grant – as long as these do not fundamentally alter the strategic case.
 - Make other changes (as long as the overarching objectives of diversification and a Benefit Cost Ratio [BCR] of at least 2.1 are achieved.)
- 3.5 The original Business case submitted in May 2020 included two core elements
- Re-development of The Springs curtilage and station forecourt; and
 - Works to invest in public realm and offer grants for upper floor conversions to properties on Spring Gardens.
- 3.6 It is recognised that when considering changes to the bid a number of factors need to be considered:
- Development of the Springs Shopping Centre and the surrounding land is critical to the successful implementation of the project and BCR outcomes cannot be achieved without diversification of the car park .
 - The fact that no developer partner is in place means that this diversification can only occur if either:

- The existing owner changes their existing policy not to invest in the site (in light of grant & Council's co-investment commitment), or
- The owner sell the freehold (either in full or part) to enable the Council to have control of the overall site for future delivery of objectives.
- While proposed elements outside of The Springs do not significantly contribute towards the diversification of the area, or the calculation of BCR, and in theory could be cut from the final scheme , it is not possible to scale back or eliminate savings entirely from elements outside of The Springs shopping centre as the entire grant ask for these elements (£2.46m) was less than target reduction (£2.95m). Moreover there is strong community support for many of these elements.

3.7 Given the strength of feeling from the earlier consultation undertaken in February 2020, it is also essential that any revised proposals should include the following elements:

- New disabled friendly toilet provision;
- The desire for new community services such as a central library (subject to support from DCC); and
- The potential to develop over the medium term new leisure/hospitality facilities to generate evening footfall (subject to interest from suitable businesses).

3.8 It was determined therefore that there were two principal options for revision namely:

- Transfer a significant proportion of FHSF grant – from a development cost to a site acquisition cost; and
- Reduce or remove some scheme elements from outside The Springs, which will not adversely affect diversification objectives and BCR outcomes.

3.9 Officers engaged with Government to understand if the above changes would be acceptable in terms of a revised bid. Government advisers have confirmed that using the grant award for acquisition would be acceptable and in fact would improve deliverability of spend within the funding timescale.

3.10 Further engagement has since been undertaken with a range of project partners including The Springs owner's agents to discuss co-investment or sale options; Derbyshire County Council and Buxton & Leek College to clarify current position with regard to potential library and further education provision within the town centre; as well as the Member of Parliament for High Peak.

3.11 This engagement concluded:

- The Springs owner's agents have been approached by LSH on behalf of the Council and appear to be willing to engage on options including a potential sale. A non-binding memorandum of understanding is being developed to give the Council an exclusive option for 12 months for negotiation, subject to the confirmation of grant offer from government.

- Derbyshire County Council have confirmed 'in principle' support for a town centre library to be considered for inclusion in the scheme and have expressed interest in working with the Council to develop a business case. They have also expressed an interest in exploring co-investment options on other commercial elements which may generate a revenue return for them.
- Buxton and Leek College's position remains unchanged from the original submission, namely that they are interested in a potential new site subject to funding and decisions on future use of the Devonshire Dome. If a college use cannot be realised within the FHSF scheme then, as per the business case, the site can be considered for alternative purposes such as office space, housing or leisure uses.

3.12 Engagement with the town's civic bodies and Robert Lorgan, High Peak's MP, has taken place and a public consultation exercise was also undertaken asking participants to re-confirm priorities and request suggestions for elements of the scheme to scale back. Details of the public consultation and outcomes are appended in full (Appendix A) but concluded five key outcomes:

- The results showed that the public strongly favoured elements which would generate footfall into the Springs/Spring Gardens to help retain or attract shops, support job/business growth and create attractive entrances. Approximately 50% of all respondents placed two elements as either their top or second priority. These were:
 - The opening up of the River Wye and the creation of an attractive public realm in the Springs Curtilage near Waitrose.
 - The creation of a new pedestrian route from the railway station into the Springs shopping centre (and onto Spring gardens).
- The proposed new pedestrian route from the Station into The Springs was opposed by 33 respondents (7%) including civic bodies but 283 supported this element and nearly 50% placed it as a top priority. It is felt that some of the concerns of Civic partners/respondents regarding the pedestrian route can be mitigated at the design stage, but ultimately if the ambition is to increase footfall to help retain shops, then a change of the pedestrian flow will be required.
- The proposed grant scheme to private landlords to bring upper floors of properties on Spring Garden into productive use was opposed by 31 respondents (7%) but was supported by 192 (42%) of respondents, 25% of whom identified it as top priority. Civic bodies strongly supported this element. From discussions with property owners as part of the Heritage Action Zone launch, it is likely that there will be a reduced demand for this element within the grant timescale due to lack of private match funding, access to finance and confidence in the market following Covid-19.
- There was strong consensus of opinion from respondents that the focus of any public realm expenditure should be at the eastern end of Spring Gardens (The Hydro-café to Job centre) and that aspects such as public art, cycle hire and EV charging points should be eliminated/reduced

(potentially due to other funding sources being available to deliver these elements). The civic bodies emphasised improvements to the station forecourt as a priority but this was not reflected in the online survey responses.

- There was continued strong support for a focus on new toilets, town centre location for a library and strong commentary on the need for good quality design and integration of 'green' policies into proposed changes.

3.13 Taking into consideration all of the above, it is proposed to resubmit the revised bid with a reduced funding request for works outside the Springs by approximately £1.5m, which would be achieved by:

- Eliminating cycle hire at station (and look for alternative funding) but retain cycle storage/parking points,
- Scale back the budget for grants to private landowners,
- Eliminate Public art (and look for alternative funding),
- Focus of the Public realm spend (5% beautification) will be at the eastern end of Spring Gardens (but with alternative funding streams explored),
- Options for alternative funding for EV charging will be explored, but core funding will be retained.

3.14 The remaining grant would be used for acquiring control of 'The Springs' site. A financial analysis of this is presented in the Part 2 report. The advantages of this approach are:

- Remaining savings do not need to be identified at present – allowing for additional match funding or scaling back of masterplan objectives at the delivery stage.
- It will enable the Council to have significantly greater control over the timetable for spend of the FHSF grant – giving assurance to both the Council and MHCLG that the FHSF grant can be fully spent by March 2024.
- It will give HPBC control of the site for re-development – enabling the Council to explore best delivery methods for the medium term (including procurement of developer joint partner(s) or direct procurement of works).
- Immediate outputs as set out in the business case have delivery timescale to March 2027.

3.15 The original bid had a Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) of 3.1 following clarifications stage and as fundamentally the objectives of the scheme are unchanged, there is only a minimal reduction in BCR which is principally due to a slightly longer development timescale (as it will inevitably take at least 12 months longer due to the change in approach) and some reduction in outputs associated with elements eliminated or scaled back. However, the resubmission can still achieve the required BCR threshold.

3.16 It should be noted that under this proposal the Council would not be entering into any agreement (or draw down funding) to acquire control of The Springs or surrounding land for at least approximately 12 months – giving sufficient time to undertake necessary financial, structural, legal and risk analysis.

4. How this report links to Corporate Priorities

4.1 The initiatives will have the potential to help deliver the following aims of the Corporate Plan:

- Aim 1 - Supporting our communities to create a healthier, safer, cleaner High Peak.
- Aim 3 – Protect and create jobs by supporting economic growth, development and regeneration. – specially linking to the delivery of thriving and flourishing town centres and high streets

5. Alternative Options

5.1 Do Nothing option: i.e. do not submit revision of FHSF or accept any grant offer.

Under this scenario there is unlikely to be additional capital expenditure by the public sector on improvements within the town centre over the next 10-15 years, although it is assumed that the Council will continue to maintain the streets, pathways and public spaces within the town centre as per current arrangements but will make no other capital investment. A do-nothing approach will not retain the 'status quo' as there is likely to be further withdrawal of retailers and therefore a do nothing option will unfortunately deliver a significant decline in the town centre.

Not recommended

5.2 Re-submission to secure £6.6 grant award

Under this scenario, the Council will re-submit the revised technical change bid and accept the grant offer if awarded. The level of match funding to be provided by the Council remains the same as the amount agreed in the original submission in May 2020. This will allow the Council to have a significant budget to deliver strategic change to diversify lower Buxton over the next 7 years and to help leverage significant private sector investment or other funding to deliver diversification of the area.

RECOMMENDED

6. Implications

6.1 Community Safety - (Crime and Disorder Act 1998)

The proposals within the Future High Street Fund scheme have the potential to increase natural surveillance on Spring Gardens and reduce anti-social behaviour. The impact of these changes has been measured against Government methodology and has been identified as having a crime reduction benefit of £2.656 million.

6.2 Workforce

It is possible that the management of the schemes will require some additional Project Officer time but it is not permitted to include staff salaries within grant award. It is likely that the input of external professionals will be required and potentially from time to time by the following in house staff

- Legal
- Property services
- Finance

The Council will need to commission additional services to ensure delivery of the programme of works and any associated ongoing service specialist requirements

6.3 Equality and Diversity/Equality Impact Assessment

No implications at this stage

6.4 Finance

The potential financial implications of FHSF are set out in a separate part 2 report.

6.5 Legal

There are no specific legal considerations involved in the submission of the revised funding request. However, the work programmes that are brought forward as a result of a successful submission are likely to require compliance with State Aid Rules and Public Procurement Regulations. Further legal advice should be considered before the time of the Member approval processes, as each particular part of the work programme is submitted for authorisation.

6.6 Climate Change

The repair, restoration and continued use of the town centre location is inherently sustainable. The FHSF business case incorporates a number of additional sustainability features and has been assessed in line with government methodology for carbon reduction at £0.136 million.

The project provides an opportunity for the Council to embed and facilitate carbon reduction through improvements in physical infrastructure, pedestrian and cycle access and the regeneration and restoration of River Wye in line with the Climate Change Agenda and the Council's Climate Change Emergency Declaration.

6.7 Consultation

There has been extensive engagement with stakeholders and the community on working up the proposed revision to the Future High Street Bid. Details are provided at Appendix A.

6.8 Risk Assessment

There are no significant additional risks associated with the decision to submit a revised business case. Key risks and mitigation include:

<p>Risk 1: Council using the funding award to obtain a controlling interest in the Springs and car park</p>	<p>Mitigation: The Council will have approximately 12 months to consider in depth financial and other implications of any proposals and if an appropriate deal cannot be agreed, then the Council will withdraw from FHSF.</p>
<p>Risk 2: Should the Council purchase The Springs - Operational Management of the shopping centre and potential maintenance and improvement of the centre to attract/retain tenants which cannot be funded from the grant.</p>	<p>Mitigation: The Council will need to commission a shopping centre management company with successful experience in running retail centres if acquisition is agreed. The grant award/match cannot be spent on retail itself so there would need to be a clear business case based on rental returns for investment in retail elements and the purchase price will need to reflect the condition of the shopping centre. The Council would engage directly with all Springs tenants (and potential future tenants) as part of the due diligence process.</p>
<p>Risk 3: Community aspirations for immediate change</p>	<p>Mitigation: Communication will be a vital tool to ensure this is mitigated and the Heritage Action Zone project will continue to work with existing landlords through the HAZ scheme, new Marks & Spencer owners and with potential and existing tenants to encourage continued investment in Buxton. While it is not recommended that the Council undertake substantial works outside of The Springs in 21/22 (during negotiation period) a small amount of standalone works to public realm could be delivered.</p>
<p>Risk 4: : Grant contract will require delivery of all outputs as set out in 2020 masterplan</p>	<p>Mitigation: The award is being granted on a section 31 basis meaning that it is a direct grant to the Council with no legal</p>

	<p>contract for specific outputs, although there will be a memorandum of understanding on objectives to diversify town centre usage as set out in the bid, and the Council will be part of national monitoring on impact. The masterplan is intentionally indicative and is designed to be flexible to reflect changing floorspace demand-although the overarching principles of diversification of use for new housing, employment and leisure uses remain.</p>
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NEIL RODGERS
Executive Director (Place)

Web Links and Background Papers

Location

Contact details

Approval to submit FHSF application for Buxton

<https://democracy.highpeak.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=317&MId=1222&Ver=4>

Sarah Porru – Head of Regeneration
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Update report to E&G 10th March 2020

<https://democracy.highpeak.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=317&MId=1624&Ver=4>

Approval to submit full business case 28 May 2020

<https://democracy.highpeak.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=295&MId=1678&Ver=4>

7. Background / Detail

Future High Street Fund Application Process

- 7.1 The Government announced a Town Centre Investment Programme in February 2019. The programme outlined proposals to support the development of high streets and town centres, and recommended submission of funding bids (including the Future High Streets Fund, Heritage Lottery Fund and Highways England Designated Fund) to support delivery.
- 7.2 The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government have made provision for a new town centre fund including a £1bn Future High Streets Fund to help diversify high street areas and a Heritage Action Zone fund to help restore historic high street properties and help find new economic uses for these.
- 7.3 Having considered the criteria of eligibility alongside the challenges and opportunities presented by each of the High Peak towns, the primary shopping area of Buxton was approved by the Executive as best placed to be the focus of submissions to both funds and would benefit most from the programmes.
- 7.4 An expression of interest was therefore made to the Government's Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) in March 2019 and was approved in July 2019. This was successful and the Council was awarded a grant of £150,000 to develop a business case to be submitted for consideration for funding to support a comprehensive development of the town centre. High Peak Borough Council committed an additional £30,000 from the Regeneration team budget in line with EOI proposal.
- 7.5 The criteria for the scheme meant that an expression of interest covering the whole of Buxton would have failed, as the town wide shop vacancy level was below the national rate. The expression of interest focused on the sub-area that was facing the biggest challenge.
- 7.6 The expression of interest was submitted for FHSF based on scheme criteria, which set out the principle objective to increase footfall and diversify the town centre retail core (for leisure, residential and office uses) and to address key challenges:
- Disconnect between Georgian heritage, visitor appeal, and Low quality primary shopping zone,
 - Physical disconnect between railway station/former Buxton water site, regeneration area (to be new hospital and retirement housing) and Spring Gardens Primary shopping area,
 - Significant under-use of Upper floors including Heritage Assets,
 - Resident perception & dissatisfaction with Primary shopping zone,
 - Low level of start-ups and growth of small businesses.
- 7.7 The proposed solutions were in line with the Station Road SPD (adopted 2007) and the Adopted Local Plan (2016) and Letters of support for the above were received from approximately 20 organisations including Derbyshire County

Council, University of Derby, Nestle Waters, Chamber, Buxton Crescent and Thermal Spa as well as community groups including Town Team, Civic Association, Vision Buxton and Crescent Development Trust. A letter signed by over 20 Higher Buxton businesses supporting the bid while acknowledging they would be outside eligible area was also received.

7.8 In mid July 2019, Buxton was selected as one of the first 50 towns to receive first stage approval and Lambert Smith Hampton were appointed following appropriate procurement as lead consultant to help support the development of a masterplan and business case in line with the scheme criteria. The grant offer was limited to delivering a business case in line with second stage criteria, and supporting evidence, by timescale (originally 15th January 2020).

7.9 The second stage assessment criteria are outlined below:

Assessment criteria	Method/weighting
Demonstrate market failure (requires grant funding from Govt)	Pass/fail
Delivers investment (i.e. in physical infrastructure, acquisition, transport improvements, supports change including in housing densification & technologies) not beautification projects.	Pass/fail
Meets spending timescale	Pass/fail
Demonstrates co-funding	Pass/fail
Value for Money (demonstrate benefit cost ratio (BCR) of ideally greater than 2.00)	50% weighting
Strategic fit (including delivering transformational change, local need and local support)	20% weighting
Deliverability (made up of review of commercial, financial & management case including risk management)	30% weighting

7.10 Although publicly, the government has said that each town could apply for £25m, it was made clear in the guidance that the expected contribution from Government is likely to be between £5m-£10m. It is expected that this funding would leverage significant levels of co-investment.

7.11 Although the scheme is called 'Future High Street Fund', the government funding cannot actually be spent on supporting or developing retail – the aim of the funding is to diversify the high street away from the shrinking demand for retail space.

Initial Public Consultation

7.12 Public consultation took place in January and February 2020 which engaged with over 800 residents, with over 460 formal written responses. It was successful in generating a consensus on the need for change with widespread support for the proposals (more than two-thirds of responses). There was notable support for several specific elements within the proposal including Station Terrace, pedestrian routes, parking proposals (with re-use of surface level parking) and new public square which opened up the river. This was

important as these are fundamental elements within the proposed strategy and to securing benefit cost ratio outcomes required to secure funding.

7.13 Following completion of the consultation, a number of options to the emerging masterplan were made including:

- Expand cycle parking/cycle hire facilities,
- Review the design of the Station forecourt to allow greater flexibility of use, including space for replacement bus services/coaches and appropriate space for passing,
- Revised location of the bus layby westbound,
- Removed 'picture frame concept' and replaced with 'child-friendly' public art fund to allow for appointment of design project to better reflect local character at request of civic bodies,
- Increased landscaping and tree provision, and widened the Wye Square area to allow for greater public space and inclusion of child-friendly public art,
- Responded to concerns about reliance on lifts to provide full disabled access to Station Terrace, and re-designed with incorporated ramp access while also retaining lifts,
- Responded to strong public call for inclusion of the public library within town centre proposals (as opposed to proposed relocation to the Health & Public Sector hub at former Nestle bottling site). Proposals for optional library and community hub space have now been incorporated into the masterplan and business case, but will be subject to Derbyshire County Council decision and availability of capital funding,
- Responded to concerns over vehicular access onto Station Road. Further work in this area will continue following completion of Traffic Assessments underway with regard to cumulative impact of Fairfield Road roundabout and OPE Health and Public Sector hub.

Initial Business Submission

7.14 The business case was approved and submitted on 28th May 2020. A breakdown of proposed benefits in line with government methodology:

Benefits	
PV Additional revenues	£22.984 million
PV Land value uplift	£1.021 million
PV Crime reduction benefits	£2.656 million
PV Health benefits	£0.526 million
PV Education benefits	£0.263 million
PV Amenity benefits	£1,463 million
PV Reduced loss of Business Rates from exempt occupiers	£0.890 million
PV of reduced carbon production	£0.136 million
PV benefits total	£26.601 million
Costs	
PV costs total	£12.701 million
Benefit Cost Ratio	2.10

- 7.15 In October 2020, all applicants were asked to undertake a 'clarification exercise' to ascertain benefit cost ratio on a wider area (150m from eligible spend area). The result of which meant that Buxton's BCR outcome rose to 3.12 – well above the threshold.
- 7.16 On 29th December the Council received the 'in principle' details for the partial funding offer (£6,608,223) and a webinar was held on 11th January to outline the changes required for resubmission.
- 7.17 In order to secure the revised grant offer, the Council is required to submit a revised proposal by the deadline of 26th February 2021 which reflects the reduced offer. Changes can only be of a technical nature and Councils cannot change overarching themes of the original bid. A minimum Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) of 2.1 must still be achieved and a 5% limit on public realm (beautification) is retained within the reduced ask. This means that the maximum FHSF contribution permissible within the Buxton scheme is now £330,411.

Considerations for Revisions

- 7.18 Local Authorities are asked to consider the following options when considering revisions:
- Securing additional funding to make up the difference between the original ask and the revised offer. For High Peak this would equate to additional £2,951,777 of fully committed co-funding.
 - Scaling back existing elements to reflect the reduced grant.
 - Eliminating certain elements of the bid to reflect the reduced grant – as long as these do not fundamentally alter strategic case
 - Making other changes (as long as the overarching objectives of diversification and a Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) of at least 2.1 are achieved.)
- 7.19 The Council recognises that when considering changes to the Bid a number of factors need to be considered:
- Development of the Springs Shopping Centre and the surrounding land is critical to the successful implementation of the project and BCR outcomes cannot be achieved without diversification of the car park.
 - The fact that no developer partner is in place means that this diversification can only occur if either:
 - the existing owner changes their existing policy not to invest in the site (in light of grant & Council's co-investment commitment) or
 - The owners sell the freehold (either in full or part) to enable the Council to have control of the overall site for future delivery of objectives.
 - While proposed elements outside of The Springs do not significantly contribute towards the diversification of the area, or the calculation of BCR, and in theory could be cut from the final scheme, it is not possible to scale back or eliminate savings entirely from elements outside of The Springs shopping centre as the entire grant ask for these elements (£2.46m) was

less than target reduction (£2.95m). Moreover there is strong community support for many of these elements.

Given the strength of feeling from the earlier consultation undertaken in February 2020 any revised proposals should include the following elements:

- New disabled friendly toilet provision
- The desire for new community services such as a central library (subject to support from DCC)
- the potential to develop over the medium term new leisure/hospitality facilities to generate evening footfall (subject to interest from suitable businesses).

Delivery Governance

- 7.20 At the time of the Business case submission, it was agreed that a project delivery board will be established. This board will 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 the Chair of the Stakeholder group.
- 7.21 A Stakeholder group, chaired by a ward councillor (and vice-chair from a civic body) would be established and act as an active advisory board feeding into and supporting proposals.
- 7.22 Further information will be made available on the board and the group's exact make up following confirmation of the funding.

Appendix A: Outcomes from public consultation on technical changes February 2021

Background

The Government made an 'in principle' award of £6.6m for the Future High Street Fund project in Buxton which is approximately £3million less than application.

To secure £6.6 million the Council needs to revise spend profile in line with new budget but must still deliver minimum outputs of a 2.1 Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) and spend no more than 5% of grant on beautification elements.

To support the review, the Council has asked the public and stakeholders to re-confirm their priorities for elements which will fundamentally not impact on the required outputs to leverage the funding and to identify any suggested savings.

Consultation Process

Although the timescale for consultation was short and determined by the timescale awarded to the Council to make revisions, the level and scope of engagement has been widespread and particular effort was made to engage with hard to reach groups. This consultation included:

- Meeting chairs of Buxton Civic Association (BCA), Vision Buxton (VB) & Buxton Town Team(TT)
- Meeting with Robert Largan MP
- Meeting with Derbyshire County Council officers
- Meeting with Buxton & Leek College & University of Derby
- Updated HPBC webpage information (featured on homepage as banner) with link to online survey
- Facebook and twitter social media posts with link to online survey/webpage
- Direct mailing to all HPBC staff and Councillors to alert them to online survey with request to share
- Direct mailing to 50 operational shops businesses within FHSF eligible area and all known freeholders with e-mail contacts via Heritage Action Zone or FHSF project development
- Business newsletter feature sent to 1135 subscribers
- Direct mailing to over 20 organisations to alert them to online survey with request to share (BCA, VB, TT, Buxton Opera House, Buxton International Festival, Buxton Hotel & Crescent Spa Hotel, Buxton Crescent Development Trust, Parkwood Leisure, D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership, Marketing Peak District & Derbyshire, NHS Foundation Trust community health services, Derbyshire County Council, High Peak Access Group, Fairfield Residents Association, Harpur Hill Residents Association, Zink Project, Buxton Jobcentre & DWP, Buxton and Leek College, University of Derby, East Midlands Chamber of Commerce, Buxton Street by Street (Connex) and High Peak Community & Voluntary Services)
- Many of above actively shared link to their mailings lists and posted on social media. It is known that this included Robert Largan MP, BCA, VB (who also held virtual meeting), Jobcentre Plus, Zink Project, High Peak CVS, Buxton Street by Street, Buxton & Leek college (who circulated all staff and all student survey requests).

Level of response

The online survey was open for 11 days and generated 472 responses (marginally more than 460 received to online survey in February 2020) and shows the level of engagement of local residents. In addition, written letter responses were received, in particular, from Buxton Civic Association, Vision Buxton and the Buxton Town Team.

Key Conclusions

1. The online survey generated a strong return and there was a clear focus on delivery of two elements, with approximately 50% of all respondents placing this as either top or second priority. These being:

- the opening up of the River Wye and the creation of an attractive public realm in the Springs Curtilage near Waitrose
- The creation of a new pedestrian route from the railway station into the Springs shopping centre (and onto Spring gardens)

Two other projects (grant scheme for conversion of upper floors and Gigabyte Broadband) also generated strong support – with around a quarter of respondents seeing these as a top priority.

The results re-enforce the findings of the February 2020 survey and also continue to show the divergence of the general public responses to those from the Civic Association and Vision Buxton.

The results showed that the public wanted an emphasis on projects which would generate footfall into the Springs/Spring Gardens to help retain or attract shops, support job/business growth and create attractive entrances. The public placed less emphasis on art, cycle infrastructure or EV charging or heritage restoration although there was a strong desire for the scheme to include planting and for new buildings to be as carbon neutral as possible.

2. It is recognised that the proposed new pedestrian route from station into the Springs was opposed by 33 respondents (7%) but 283 supported the concept and nearly 50% placed it as a top priority. It is felt that some of the concerns of Civic partners and those respondents can be mitigated at the design stage, but ultimately if the ambition is to increase footfall to help retain shops, then a change of the pedestrian flow is required.

3. A similar proportion (31 respondents 7%) were opposed the awarding of grant to private landlords to bring properties into productive use but 192 (42%) supported this element and it is recognised that the Town Team and Vision Buxton see this as a priority. From discussions with property owners as part of Heritage Action Zone launch, it is likely that there will be a reduced demand for this element within the grant timescale due to lack of match funding capital and confidence in the market following Covid-19, so it is recommended that this element be scaled back but not eliminated.

4. There was consensus of opinion from respondents that focus of public realm should be at eastern Spring Gardens (hydro-café to Job centre) and that aspects such as cycle hire and public art could be eliminated (potentially due to other funding sources). The civic associations placed emphasis on priority of station forecourt but this was not reflected in the online survey.

5. There was continued strong support for a focus on new toilets, town centre location for a library and strong commentary on the need for good quality design and integration of 'green' policies into proposed changes.

Recommended way forward

In line with the reduced budget and the priorities taken from the public survey, a number of elements of the Future High Streets Bid can be reduced as follows:

- Cycle hire at station – hire point to be eliminated in short term (and look for alternative funding) but cycle storage/parking points retained especially in Spring Gardens area to support shoppers who use bicycles.
- Upper Floor/ The Yards grants to landlords – amount of funding scaled back
- Public art – eliminated in short term (with option to look for alternative funding or integrate into design of buildings/public realm)
- Focus on Public realm spend will be on eastern Spring Gardens but with alternative funding streams explored to try to retain project longer term.
- Options for alternative funding for EV charging will be explored, but core funding will be retained.

The above changes will reduce budget by approximately £1.5m and will have limited impact on benefit cost ratio output requirements.

The remaining savings will either be made by reduced delivery or design solutions within The Springs re-development stage which would be consistent with changing commercial demand post Covid-19 or will be supplemented by new sources of funding which may come forward.

Detailed responses

Q1: Please rank which elements you think are the most important to be retained in a revised smaller scheme (in average score in priority order)

	Mean average score	Number respondents placed in top 3	Number respondents placed in top 2
1. Opening up of River Wye & creation wye square	6.11	296 (63%)	232 (50%)
2. Creation of a new pedestrian route from railway station and adjacent hospital/retirement development into the shopping centre and Spring Gardens	5.67	283 (60%)	224 (47%)
3. Funding for local property owners on Spring Gardens and 'The yards' to help create new housing or offices	4.82	192 (41%)	118 (25%)
4. Gigabyte broadband	4.67	177 (38%)	111 (24%)
5. Improvements to the crossing point at the top of Station Approach	4.17	141 (30%)	77 (16%)
6. EV charging points	4.05	107 (23%)	57 (12%)
7. Bike hire & safe cycle parking	3.51	78 (17%)	41 (9%)
8. Child friendly public art	3.25	68 (15%)	35 (7%)

Q2. Do you think we should eliminate one or more specific proposals?

Yes (62%) No (38%)

Q3 If yes, which element would you eliminate and why? (in order of responses)

Number of responders (%)	what	Summary of rationale comments
76 (16%)	Child friendly public art	Will date quickly, not priority if limited funds
48 (10%)	Cycle hire & safe cycle parking	limited demand, hilly, alternative funding
33 (7%)	New pedestrian route)	Don't want extra crossing, steps/design, takes you to shops not heritage area,
31 (7%)	Upper floor grants	Oppose funding property owners in principle, should focus on ground floor empty units
27 (6%)	Broadband	Don't see need, alternative funding
24 (5%)	EV charging points	Limited demand (people will use at home/obsolete in 5 years)
11 (2%)	Station approach/existing crossing	Plinth waste of money, no need if new route
10 (2%)	Opening of river wye	Not priority if limited funds

There were a number of other comments which did not relate directly to use of grant funding but to the masterplan more generally. These includes "don't build housing (8 responses 2%); don't want FE college or new leisure uses (11 responses 2%) and a number of people who either wanted to eliminate all car parking; increase car parking or introduce free car parking.

Question 4: We are only allowed to spend 5% of the grant on ‘beautification’ of the existing public realm (pavements, road surfacing, street furniture etc)Should we prioritise a specific location to create the most impact/improvement (but in less places) or reduce the budget overall?

Prioritise 73% Reduce overall 27%

Question 5: which should be priority?

- Eastern Spring Gardens (Hydro café – job centre) 55%
- Western Spring gardens (cavendish arcade to Loungers) 28%
- Station forecourt 17%

Summary of key comments (open question)

The open comments had a wide range of comments:

Key common themes were:

- Importance of new toilets (baby-changing/disabled friendly) facilities
- Important to bring Library into town centre
- Want attractive design (to both public realm and to hide The Springs)
- Want ‘green-friendly’ development with new planting & flood mitigation
- Want specific shops to come (McDonalds key ask)
- Want improved Christmas decorations and evening lighting all the way down spring gardens – visible from roundabout to entice footfall.
- Introduce free parking

Suggestions (outside geographic area of project)

- Improvements to Fairfield road, coach park and High footpath
- Support Higher Buxton

Suggestions with contradictory or opposing views

- Improve or increase car parking **versus** don’t want multi-level or covered parking
- Oppose housing on station road **versus** want frontages to station road so feels less like bypass
- Focus on local residents (not spend on tourist and heritage again) **versus** restore heritage features (replace canopies)
- Focus on re-create old fashioned high street type shops and sole traders **versus** should focus on attracting brands to get people to come into town (B&M, McDonalds key ask)
- Want new youth focused leisure (cinema climbing centre, bowling, skating) and family friendly restaurants **versus** already have cinema/gym don’t need more leisure

There were also a small number of very positive comments including ‘The council does a fantastic job on a small budget; this project is really needed – just get on with it; I like that you are looking at whole area not just individual buildings.

Comments from three stakeholder organisations

BCA

- Welcomes proposal to convert funding to purchase The Springs
- Want to see priority given to works on Spring Gardens - Recognise council limited to 5% on public realm but want council to increase match funding to make up the loss. (circa £200k)
- Would like to see emphasis on rail station forecourt
- Want a larger public realm redevelopment within the springs curtilage (re-opening river)
- Want smaller new-builds (*not funded from FHSF grant*)
- Don't want new build Further education college (*not funded from FHSF grant*)

It was also noted that BCA oppose the concept of multi-level car park at Spring gardens.

Town Team

- Support proposals to convert funding to purchase The Springs
- Prioritised list:
 1. Funding for local property owners on Spring Gardens
 2. Improvements to the crossing point on Station Approach and restoration of the LMS station gable
 3. Creation of a new pedestrian route from the railway station
 4. Opening up of the River Wye near to the existing Waitrose entrance
 5. Electric charging points within the car park
 6. Bike and hire and safe cycle parking at the railway station
 7. Introduction of Gigabyte broadband
 8. Child friendly public art

Vision Buxton

- Spring Gardens upper floor grants programme
- Improved link from Station to town (not shopping centre)
- New residential (especially, given HPBC involvement, environmentally responsible 'green' housing)
- Station forecourt as transport hub
- M&S unit as a focal point of the scheme

No to:

- Restaurant pods beside river, backing on to Spring Gardens buildings
- multi-storey parking (not necessarily against multi-level)
- Waitrose service access from the West
- Steps and ramps (which will ultimately prove unacceptable and unbuildable)

It was also noted that Vision Buxton did not have a consensus on potential new building for FE college and they recognised that "A successful college would clearly be a bonus for the town but the key argument against its inclusion here is that Buxton has many existing buildings which need productive uses. In its favour, a college building would generate footfall and activity

Both Vision Buxton & Buxton Civic Association also felt that the consultation was insufficient.