

LOUGHBOROUGH AREA COMMITTEE - WEDNESDAY, 14 JUNE 2023

Report of the Heads of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment, Economic Development and Regeneration, Planning and Growth and Finance

Part A

LOUGHBOROUGH AREA COMMITTEE - ANNUAL UPDATE REPORT

Purpose of Report

To provide information and updates on significant matters relating to the town of Loughborough.

Recommendation

That the report be noted.

Reason

To ensure that members of the Committee are kept up to date on significant matters relating to the town of Loughborough.

Policy Justification and Previous Decisions

At its meeting on 22nd January 2018, Full Council approved the establishment of the Loughborough Area Committee and its terms of reference, to establish a more formal role for those Borough Councillors representing wards within Loughborough in key matters relating to the town.

As part of those terms of reference the Committee receives an annual review of significant matters relating to the Loughborough town area.

Background Papers: None

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Part B

Loughborough Town Deal as a Programme (Head of Economic Development and Regeneration)

1. All of Loughborough Town Deal's 11 projects successfully completed the preparation and independent assurance of their business cases (Stage 2 of the Towns Fund process). The final business case summary documents were submitted in August 2022 to the Department of Levelling Up, Homes and Communities (DLUHC) for approval. Of the £16.9m Town Deal funding awarded to Loughborough, £7.55m has been released to the Borough Council in its capacity as Accountable Body.
2. Nine projects have commenced work on-site with a further project (Digital Skills Hub) expected to start this summer. The final project (Wood Brook Flood Management) remains on track to commence in 2024/25. Construction of the first project, Bedford Square Gateway, has been completed and the project is currently in its defects period.
3. Key challenges currently being faced include poor contractor interest in tender opportunities and the impact of inflation on tender prices. Recent, higher than forecast tender returns have required value engineering of specifications in order to meet available budgets. This has resulted in delays to the programme but projects' outputs are still deliverable.
4. Four projects are expected to be completed this current financial year with a further four projects on track to be completed before April 2025. The final two projects are due to be completed, as originally envisaged by March 2026, which is the end of the Town Deal programme.

Living Loughborough/Lanes and Links (Head of Economic Development and Regeneration)

5. The Living Loughborough Project and the Lanes & Links Project are part of the Loughborough Town Deal Programme. Both projects are being led by Charnwood Borough Council. Each project is made up of multiple work packages (or 'sub-projects'). For example, the Living Loughborough Project includes 17 work packages and there are seven within the Lanes & Links Project.
6. While Living Loughborough and Lanes & Links are classified as two separate and distinct projects within the Loughborough Town Deal Programme, there are strong cross-project inter-relationships and synergies between both projects. In view of this, a decision was taken to establish a single programme management structure. This includes a Programme Executive, which is accountable for the performance of both projects and provides unified direction and support and is accountable for their performance. There is also a Project Leads and Delivery Group, which ensures effective and coordinated delivery across all the work packages within both projects. This approach will help ensure there is effective management, coordination and cooperation across both projects and their respective work packages.

Living Loughborough

7. A total of £2,870,000 of Town Deal funding and £233,250 in match funding was confirmed by the Town Deal Board in February 2023 to support the Living Loughborough Project. The project comprises of 17 work packages that will work hand in hand to create a vibrant, safe and desirable town centre and provide businesses with the skills to create growth and prosperity. It aims to put investment into the town's markets, expand the CCTV system in the town centre, create a number of digital heritage trails and see more events held in the town centre. Charnwood Borough Council is leading the project and is working in close partnership with Love Loughborough, which is also delivering some aspects of the scheme.
8. A number of the work packages in the Living Loughborough Project have recently been completed and work is underway on the delivery of the others. The whole project is planned to be completed by the end of March 2025.

The Living Loughborough Project includes:

- The expansion of free public wi-fi in the town centre to include Ward's End, Devonshire Square, Bedford Square and Queen's Park. This work has now been completed and a launch is planned for June.
- The introduction of new interactive digital trails to encourage people to explore the town centre and its heritage. The trails will feature augmented reality which means they will be able to 'see into the past' using a mobile phone app. This work has now been completed and a launch is planned for June.
- The creation of a new post within Love Loughborough to support crime reduction in the town centre including the purchase of 100 new radios for traders as part of the retail radio scheme. The radios have been purchased and are being distributed to scheme members. Recruitment to the new post is expected to be completed in June.
- Provision of 1-2-1 digital business support to provide BID businesses with the knowledge and tools to leverage social media and digital marketing skills for sustainable business growth. The post of Digital Engagement Officer has been recruited by the BID to provide the training and support. The BID has consulted with its members to identify the type of support and training they require. Work is on-going to enable this to be provided through an online hub and through bookable face-to-face sessions.
- Investment in Loughborough's markets including improvements to the infrastructure of the market to include a new type of stalls that can be used all year round and an extension of the electrical supply for market traders.
- The creation of a 'plaza' area in Market Place with seating, lighting, and planters, to provide more flexibility to be able to hold different types of events in the town centre.

- Improvements to Queen's Park including to new Gateway entrances from Granby Street and Granby Street car park, the addition of new information points, new lighting to the bandstand and improved lighting of the Carillon Tower.
9. The Living Loughborough Project will help make the town centre even more vibrant, attractive and safer for visitors and in turn generate footfall for local businesses. The project will help the town centre adapt to changing shopping habits and introduce innovative ideas to ensure it can continue to draw people in to support businesses.

Lanes And Links Project

10. A total of £669,000 of Town Deal funding and £235,800 in match funding was confirmed by the Town Deal Board in December 2022 to support the Lanes and Links Project. The project includes seven work packages, which together will help bring the town centre and Queen's Park closer together and make Loughborough an even more attractive and safer place to visit. Charnwood Borough Council is leading the Lanes & Links Project.
11. Work has already been completed on the work package to improve the CCTV system in Queen's Park. In addition, work has commenced on the other six work packages within the Lanes & Links Project. The plan is for the whole project to be completed by the end of March 2025.

Hope Bell

12. The centre piece of the Lanes & Links Project is the Hope Bell, a lasting memorial to those who lost their lives in the Covid-19 pandemic. The Bell will also be a tribute to the NHS and key workers and a reminder of how communities came together to support each other in challenging times. The Hope Bell builds on Loughborough's unique place in the heritage world as it is home to the last major bell foundry in the country – John Taylor & Co.
13. The design for the Hope Bell has been completed and work is now in the pre-construction stage. The plan is to complete and open the Hope Bell for the end of summer 2024.

Queen's Park and Town Centre Improvements

14. In addition to the Hope Bell, the Lanes & Links Project includes a number of other work packages that will bring real improvements to Loughborough town centre and Queen's Park in particular. This includes:
- Improvements to the landscaping, pathways, lighting and security in Queen's Park.
 - Improvements to Old Bleach Yard, which links the park and town centre, to make it more attractive by adding lighting, new promotional banners, and pedestrian signage.

- The expansion of the town's bell-themed Christmas lights into Old Bleach Yard, Devonshire Lane and Granby Street car park to make it more attractive to visitors and improve the linkage between the car park and town centre.
15. The Lanes & Links Project will contribute towards making the town centre a more enjoyable place for shoppers and visitors and create a more pleasant environment that people want to spend time in, which in turn will benefit local businesses.

Markets, Fairs and Events (Head of Economic Development and Regeneration)

16. The Borough Council completed a successful programme of events in the latter half of 2022, with the annual Fair, Christmas Lights switch-on and Remembrance Day being highlights within the town centre. The events industry was closed and public attendance at events not permissible during the initial phases of the lockdowns period and it was only during 2022 that events once again became properly possible. Attendance at the Fair and the lights switch-on was excellent and provided an indication the public once again has the appetite to attend events. Events are vital in helping to bring vibrancy, footfall and spend into town centres.
17. In order that the Council – often in partnership with other organisations – can further enhance its events programme and promote the locality as a destination for visitors, the decision was taken in late 2022 to create a new post of Events Manager within the Economic Development and Regeneration Service. The appointee will commence employment in July 2023. The Council published the 2023 events programme in March 2023, which this year has includes a celebration of the Centenary of Loughborough Carillon.
18. In a similar context to events, markets are still building back following the pandemic period. The Council has undertaken significant use of social media, websites, and press releases to promote the markets which are running regularly on Thursdays and Saturdays with specialist markets on other days, especially Fridays and Sundays. Vegan and ceramics markets are particularly popular. Vegan markets are set to expand to being staged 3 times this year as opposed to only once per year originally. Plans to stage a regular Sunday Food and Makers market were put on hold during 2022/23 due to a staffing vacancy but it is expected that this will be rectified during the second half of 2023.
19. Current markets infrastructure which is now somewhat outdated is affected by adverse weather, particularly winds. This has meant 5 markets have been cancelled since January 2023 and others have only gone ahead by deploying extra staff. This increases costs / reduces income to the Council and therefore officers have been looking at options for new robust stalls which will be funded via the Town Deal's Living Loughborough project.
20. The fire at HSBC in March 2023 has meant, due to scaffolding and a safety zone, a loss of approximately 40% of the Market Place. This has caused 16 traders / 40 stalls to be displaced into other adjacent town centre areas. The customer experience is also adversely affected so officers are in discussions with the relevant organisations to achieve a reduced fenced-off area potentially by the end of June 2023. The Council is liaising with the relevant authorities about the impact of the HSBC fire on the staging of Loughborough Fair and at this stage we are planning

for a revised Fair layout as it not expected that the fenced-off area in Market Place will be gone by November 2023.

21. Our markets and events generate not only a good experience for local people, but also attract visitors, create extra spend in the town and promote Loughborough as a good place in which to spend time. Footfall in the town centre is monitored by the BID (Love Loughborough) and the Council is continuing to work closely with the BID to support the town centre and the businesses within it.

Enterprise Zone Sites (Head of Economic Development and Regeneration)

22. The Restocking the Business Base business accelerator programme has been continuing. It uses funding from the accrual of business rates collected at the Loughborough University Science and Enterprise Park (LUSEP) site and is delivered by the University. It has engaged 336 individuals to date: providing advice, signposting and support on starting a business. Of those engaged, 79 emerging and early-stage start-ups have been selected to participate through 4 cohorts of support comprising access to workspace on LUSEP and Town Centre, workshops, mentoring and expert support over 6-month periods. 27 businesses have been registered locally which have generated follow on finance from public (e.g., Innovate UK) and private sources, and have created jobs for founders and both permanent and temporary (e.g. internship / placements) positions.
23. Amongst the participants so far in Restocking the Business Base have been ex-employees of large local employers and local residents setting up businesses ranging from robotics and low carbon technologies to interior designers, waste management architects and landscape designers. The project has helped to attract Loughborough University graduates to return to and relocate in the borough to establish their businesses and has led to some more established businesses to locate at Enterprise Zone follow-on spaces (as well as in other local co-working spaces).
24. The Charnwood NACP (NHS and Academia Collaboration platform), a new partnership between Charnwood Campus and the University of Leicester, has been launched. It will work to identify and tackle barriers to innovation and growth within the scientific research space, enabling closer collaboration between researchers, university led programmes and innovators, and entrepreneurs. The platform will play an instrumental role in driving change and contribute to Charnwood and the UK's ambitions to become scientific centres of excellence.
25. Refurbished lab space at Charnwood Campus was opened for new tenant, Charnwood Molecular. The project was funded through £3.14m Enterprise Zone Business Rates Reinvestment Funding, facilitated through an agreement with Charnwood Borough Council and Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP), to part-fund the refurbishment of the substantial three-storey, state-of-the-art laboratory facility. It will support the company's expansion on to the site and is expected to create around 300 jobs.

Nanpantan Road Cemetery (Head of Contracts – Leisure, Waste and Environment)

26. The new cemetery, located off Watermead Ln, Nanpantan, opened on 8th March 2023 and internments are now taking place. Work started on the new cemetery in 2020 but its completion was delayed by the pandemic. It was due to open last year but the extreme hot weather in the summer made it difficult for the planting to take hold and it was not ready to open until earlier this year. The Council has invested over £1 million to create the 10-acre facility which will serve the town for the next century and beyond. Officers are planning to hold open days later in the year.
27. The cemetery has space for around 5,000 burials which should last the town for 100 years. There is room to expand so the cemetery should serve the town for another 200 years.
28. Parking at the new cemetery is available and vehicles can gain access via Nanpantan Road. The car park is free and can also be used to access the Outwoods by walking uphill on the public footpath between the adjacent fields.
29. For more information about Nanpantan Road Cemetery, please visit: www.charnwood.gov.uk/NanpantanCemetery.

Bedford Square Gateway Project (Head of Planning and Growth)

30. The Bedford Square Gateway Project achieved construction contract completion on 2 August 2022 and is currently managing the 12 month defects and snagging reconciliation period.
31. The Project has delivered a range of benefits to an area of Loughborough Town Centre that was sorely in need of improvement. The public realm improvements have delivered a pleasant and distinct character to the area and aim to boost trade within the area.
32. The Project has already achieved a number of its key aims and objectives, including:
 - Creating a distinct, characterful and pleasant shopping-friendly destination, with wider pavements, designated raised pedestrian road crossing points, large areas of public open space and more seating, cycle parking facilities and planting.
 - Rebalancing the area from a vehicle dominated environment to one with improved pedestrian safety, accessibility and comfort.
 - Retaining as much free parking as possible within the scheme area (54 of the original 66 designated spaces have been retained).
33. There is also evidence that the improvements made to the public realm have already started to stimulate investment by local shops and businesses. For example, a number of businesses have invested in making improvements to the exterior and interior of their premises. A number of businesses have also taken advantage of the wider pavements and public open space by putting table and

chairs, displays and signage outside their shops, helping to create a vibrant atmosphere in the area.

34. There has been positive feedback on the completed project from local businesses and organisations within the scheme area. Particular praise has been expressed by businesses for the benefits it has brought to business and the area in terms of foot fall and spend.
35. The Project has also started to attract further investment into the area. This includes the proposal to create a Living Wall in Devonshire Square, funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. This proposal will transform the concrete façade in Devonshire Square into a beautiful living feature, with panels of plants added to the building to grow and bring nature into the town centre. In addition, the proposal will also see the establishment of a weekly Charnwood Gardeners' Fair held in Devonshire Square in the summer to bring more visitors to the town centre.
36. The Project is currently managing the 12 month defects/snagging process, in liaison with the County Highway Authority, pending the formal handover to the County Council in due course. Following a number of site inspection visits, a programme of outstanding defects/snagging works has been prepared, based on information submitted by the County Highway Authority and the Council's appointed Site Supervisor. A plan of works is currently being prepared by the appointed contractor, Fitzgerald, for agreement with the County Highway Authority. This work will inevitably involve some short term local disruption for local businesses. Every effort will be made to minimise any disruption and local businesses will be kept informed throughout this process.
37. Prior to the formal handover of the scheme to the County Highway Authority, the Project has to instruct the fourth and final stage of the independent Road Safety Audit (RSA). The purpose of the independent RSA is to examine and report on the road safety implications of the scheme in order to improve the safety of the scheme and minimise collision occurrence. The RSA is carried out by independent auditors in four stages during the implementation of a project. It is a requirement of the agreement with the County Highway Authority for this Project to commission an independent audit and it is carried out under the terms of the UK Design Manual for Roads and Bridges. To date, Stages One to Three of the independent audit have been successfully carried out and actions identified through the audits have been carried out with the agreement of the County Highway Authority.
38. The final stage of the process will be the formal handover of the scheme to the County Highway Authority. This will follow the completion of the RSA Stage Four and a final inspection of the scheme area. It is anticipated the formal handover process will take place towards the end of this year.

Loughborough Special Expenses Outturn (Head of Finance)

39. The Loughborough Special Expense Outturn for 2022/23, as summarised in Appendix 1, shows Original Budget of £1,283k against Actuals £1,298k, an overspend of £15k (1.2% of the Original Budget).
40. The main overspends being:
- a. CCTV £19k, 29% of the cost of this service compared to the budget which was set at 24%, this is due to the total number of cameras have been reduced overall due to the cancellation of the contract with Carillon Court for 36 cameras, however, the number charged to the Loughborough Special Rate increased by 2. There was also an overspend on employee costs and an income shortfall due to the cancellation with Carillon Court.
 - b. Lodge Farm £17k, additional security measures due to ongoing anti-social behaviour incidents at the site including installation of palisade fencing to increase security.
 - c. Town Centre Management £25k, employee costs and town centre events were overspent mainly due to additional activities such as the Queens jubilee. Income shortfall from street trading and BID contributions and reduced support services.
41. The main underspends being:
- a. Parks Loughborough £22k, various underspends such as Britain in bloom and play equipment, reduced support service recharges and additional income from contributions and hire of Southfields Park
 - b. Derby Road £12k, less expenditure on building repair and maintenance was required and reduced support services recharges
42. Appendix 1 shows the 2022/23 original budget and outturn for each area of the budget and the net overspend of £15k along with explanations for all major variances. This overspend will be carried forward within the Loughborough Special Expense Account and adjusted in the Loughborough Special Levy.