



COUNCIL EXECUTIVE

CAPITAL PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE : TRADITIONAL TOWN CENTRES

REPORT BY PLANNING SERVICES MANAGER

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to consider the funding arrangements for town centre improvement projects in the five traditional towns for the forthcoming financial year.

B. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council Executive approves the Partnership & Resources PDSP recommendation that funding should be allocated on the basis of a guaranteed amount being available to each town with the balance of funding being allocated on the basis of competitive bids. If Council Executive confirms the recommendation from the PDSP, it is suggested that the end of May is set as the deadline for groups in each of the towns to submit bids for consideration by the council.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

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| I Council Values | Being honest, open and accountable; making best use of our resources; and working in partnership. |
| II Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment) | The need for SEA, equality, health or risk assessments are and will be considered when projects for each year are established. |
| III Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property) | £413,000 has been allocated to 2009/10 traditional town centre improvements from the ten year capital investment and asset planning strategy. |
| IV Consultations | Consultation with town centre groups in each town on existing and future projects is ongoing. A report on funding was presented to the P&R PDSP on 2 March. The terms of the discussion at PDSP are set out in this report. |

D. TERMS OF REPORT

In November 2007 the Council Executive approved a ten year capital investment and asset management strategy outlining general services capital investment over the period 2008/09 to 2017/18. Included within this strategy was investment for each of the traditional town centres of Armadale, Bathgate, Broxburn and Uphall, Linlithgow and Whitburn. The approved budgets for the four years 2009/10 to 2012/13 are as follows:

2009/10 £'000	2010/11 £'000	2011/12 £'000	2012/13 £'000	Total £'000
413	425	438	451	2,341

A significant number of projects have been implemented across the five towns this financial year. However, at the present time, each of the five towns is at a different stage in terms of agreeing frameworks for future bids. The consultants, Ironside Farrar, have been appointed to prepare public realm design guides for Bathgate, Broxburn/Uphall and Armadale. These will provide a framework for future development in and around the town centres, inform development control decisions and identify opportunities, which could be the subject of bids for future capital investment funding. They will, in effect, provide a blueprint for taking projects forward in each of these towns.

The public realm design guide has now been completed for Bathgate and the document was adopted as council policy in January 2009. The Broxburn/Uphall and Armadale design guides are underway and will be reported to Council Executive in Summer 2009.

It is proposed that a similar model will be developed for Linlithgow taking account of the historic importance of the town. The approach to be followed in Whitburn is the subject of discussions with local members and community groups.

Linlithgow, Bathgate and Broxburn/Uphall also have active town centre management groups in place, which act as a platform for discussion and consultation on town centre projects.

Given that each town is at a different state of readiness to prioritise future projects, consideration needs to be given as to how the distribution of funding for the coming financial year should take place.

The following three options were proposed for consideration by the Partnership and Resources Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel :

Option 1 - Continue with the Council Executive agreement from February 2008 whereby each town will receive a fixed allocation of £25k per annum with the balance of the £401k being allocated on the basis of business cases for proposed projects being submitted from individual towns.

Option 2 - Continue with the same arrangement, which has been in place for this financial year whereby the funding of £413k will be split equally between each of the towns.

Option 3 - Implement a higher level of guaranteed funding for each town (for example £50k) with the remainder of the £413k being allocated on the basis of business cases for proposed projects being submitted from each town.

Partnership & Resources PDSP discussed these options at its meeting on 2 March. Panel members considered the options in the context of the officers recommendation that Option 2 should be pursued and the earlier Council Executive decision to allocate funding on the basis of competitive bids. PDSP also recognised the slower than expected progress to date with delivering projects. While it was recognised that not all towns were at the same state of readiness to present competitive bids in the context of an agreed framework, it was considered that such an approach was important in order to maximise the spend by focusing funding on projects which were ready for implementation.

Panel members also recognised that while Bathgate was most advanced in terms of establishing a framework for future improvements, work is progressing in the other towns and that frameworks should be in place during the forthcoming financial year. Project development work is also taking place across the towns through business associations and other community groups. Consequently, these towns will be well placed to secure funding this year and in future years. PDSP also identified that any advantage gained by any one of the towns at this stage could be re-balanced in future years.

The panel concluded that the Council Executive should be recommended to agree to a combination of Options 1 and Option 3 (as set out above) which would allow for the implementation of the February 2008 Council Executive decision for competitive funding, but with the option for a higher fixed amount being guaranteed for each town.

The recommendation from the PDSP will allow a focused approach to town centre improvements and this will allow more substantive improvement to be undertaken. This may be viewed negatively by partner organisations in the towns which do not yet have frameworks in place. However, by the end of 2009/10 each town should have a framework for improvements in place which will inform the preparation of business cases for bids for future years.

E. CONCLUSION

Each of the five traditional towns is at different stages in terms of implementing agreed town centre improvement projects and preparing bids for funding future projects. In light of these differences it is considered prudent to review the existing agreed mechanism for funding for the forthcoming financial year.

Allocating money on a competitive bids basis may favour some towns in the short term but a significant amount of funding is available in the coming years which will allow equal opportunities for all towns to secure funding.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

Capital Programme Expenditure : Traditional Town Centres – Report to the Council Executive 26 February 2008.

Appendices/Attachments: None

Contact Person: Craig McCorrison, Planning Services Manager, County Buildings, Linlithgow.
Telephone 01506-775286. E-mail craig.mccorrison@westlothian.gov.uk

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