

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Cabinet – 24 January 2022

Report Title

The Towns and Villages Fund

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

Yes

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Paul Woodcock, Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment

Report Author(s)

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-wide

Report Summary

The Towns and Villages Fund is a new £4 million capital programme in Rotherham, aiming to improve the borough's local town and village centres. The borough consists of a wide range of individual communities and places, and it is important that the physical environment of these centres receives continuous investment.

Based on projects put forward by Ward Councillors in consultation with their communities, a work programme, and associated processes for delivering projects has been produced, which will ensure a range of projects across the borough are completed in the next three years, delivering on the priorities of residents and wards.

Recommendations

1. That Cabinet approves the Towns and Villages programme as detailed in this paper and delegates the delivery of category 1 schemes within the programme to the Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Jobs and the Local Economy, and the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Working.
2. That Cabinet receives a further report to update on the delivery of category 1 schemes and agree to progress to delivery of category 2 and 3 schemes in Summer 2022.

List of Appendices Included

- Appendix 1 Towns and Villages Fund – Indicative Work Programme
- Appendix 2 Initial Equality Screening Assessment
- Appendix 3 Carbon Impact Assessment

Background Papers

Budget and Council Tax 2021-22, and Medium Term Financial Strategy Update – 3rd March 2021. <http://modgov-p-db/documents/s129978/0.%20Cabinet%20Report%20-%20Budget%20Report.pdf>

Proposed Rotherham Council Plan 2022-25 - <http://modgov-p-db/documents/s134305/Appendix%201%20-%20Rotherham%20Council%20Plan%202022-25.pdf>

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel
Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

The Towns and Villages Fund

1. Background

- 1.1 Within the Council's budget setting process for this financial year (2021/22), a Capital allocation of £4 million was allocated to 'Town and Villages Improvement Fund'.
- 1.2 Outside of Rotherham town centre, the borough consists of a wide range of urban centres, townships, and villages, many of which have small commercial centres. The physical infrastructure within these centres has not received consistent investment and therefore, it is critical that improvements across the borough be made.
- 1.3 Attractive town and village centres are important to the wellbeing of communities who live within them, work within them, or use them regularly. They are also key to ensuring that the whole borough is welcoming and provides a variety of commercial offers, supporting businesses and the economic development of communities.
- 1.4 Therefore, it is proposed that this scheme delivers scalable improvement works across local villages and townships. Within the Budget and Council Tax update report, approved by Council on 3rd March 2021, it was recommended that the approach to this funding was further developed, through research and engagement with the relevant officers and Members.
- 1.5 This paper proposes a set of aims, objectives and criteria to create a framework for the scheme, and a key part is for Ward Members to work with their communities to identify initiatives that can be delivered through this funding.
- 1.6 This report sets out the submissions received from Ward Members, and the approach to delivering this programme of work.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 Engagement took place with stakeholders to develop the overall aim of the programme and provide a lens to the types of projects that could be completed. This was used as a guide when schemes were being evolved, ensuring that they were relevant to this fund. Based on this work, the overall aim of the scheme is:

To work with neighbourhoods across the borough, to enhance their lived environment, through a variety of improvement projects, focused on town and village centres.

- 2.2 Underneath this overarching aim, five objectives have been proposed to indicate what this programme of work could deliver:

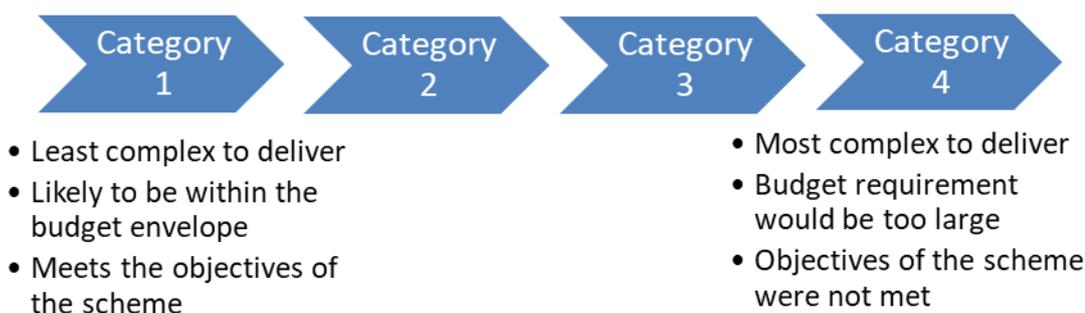
- Improve the lived environment of all residents
- Enhance the visual appeal of town and vilalge centres across the

- borough
- Inspire pride in our neighbourhoods
- Co-produce projects with neighbourhoods to deliver change that is needed
- Deliver on the priorities of wards and/ or wider masterplans.

These objectives have enabled criteria to be developed for project moderation, comparing each project with appropriate outcomes and outputs. This has helped set a framework for the programme as well as the proposals for different categories, detailed in Section 2.5, in order to develop projects relevant to the intended use of the funding.

- 2.3 Based on these objectives, a variety of improvement schemes could be delivered, focusing on improving the environment of local town and village centres, through interventions such as public realm enhancement, creative street lighting, urban green space creation, and building improvements. It is important to note that there is not any additional revenue funding associated with the Towns and Villages Fund, and therefore routine repairs and maintenance, street cleansing and grounds maintenance will be contained within existing approved service revenue budgets.
- 2.4 Central to the aim and objectives of the programme, is the Council's approach to neighbourhood working. This approach encourages Members to act as community champions, engaging with residents, businesses, and stakeholders to create projects which will have a positive impact within their communities. There is a potential for ambitious, co-produced projects being delivered through this scheme, embedding the principles of neighbourhood working into the design and delivery of improved and new public spaces. There is also an opportunity for schemes to link with ward priorities as part of the ward plan process, and this should be considered as these continue to be developed through the municipal year.
- 2.5 The Towns and Villages Fund is a capital scheme where projects will be allocated funds between April 2021 and March 2024. The time taken to deliver all projects is expected to cover the full three-year period.

This programme aims to deliver visible projects across the borough, subject to meeting the aims, objectives, and criteria. To date, wards have submitted schemes for consideration; by late December 2021 those schemes submitted already have been moderated against the aims and objectives of the funding set out in 2.1 and 2.2. These schemes were then separated into four categories, dependent on meeting the objectives of the funding, the complexity of the scheme proposed and the potential cost of the project.



Ward members have now been informed of the outcome of their submissions, with those in Categories 1, 2 and 3 moving to the next stage of the programme, with individualised next steps agreed per project. Those wards that fell into Category 4 will be able to resubmit a different proposal, which will be moderated in the same way and added to the work programme if it meets the criteria of the funding, and the budget envelope. The drafted work programme is attached as Appendix 1.

Based on the categorisation above, it is proposed that Category 1 schemes are designed and delivered, subject to any complications within the process, by Autumn 2022, with due diligence and further engagement being carried out on Category 2 schemes in this time. It is then expected that concept design work could be carried out on Category 2 schemes from Summer 2022 with further engagement on Category 3 schemes alongside this, followed by the concept design of Category 3 schemes from Winter 2022.

If following any due diligence and appraisal, a scheme does not meet the minimum criteria or is unviable, it is proposed that officers, in consultation with ward Members and Cabinet Members, could request that alternative proposals are submitted within that ward.

2.6 Within the work programme, six schemes are identified within Category 1. These are:

Ward	Project
Brinsworth	Creation of off-road parking next to Brinsworth Lane shops.
Dalton and Thrybergh	Improvement to the area outside Ridgeway Convenience Store at East Herringthorpe, including green space and the paved area in front of the shop.
Greasbrough	Green link corridor between Greasbrough Park and Greasbrough Recreation Ground
Hellaby and Maltby West	Off street parking at Laburnum Parade shops, utilising and improving existing green space.
Hooper	Improvement to area outside of Masefield Road shops, including highway and green space.
Swinton Rockingham	Refurbishment of Broadway shopping parade, improving accessibility and environment.

Of the submissions received, these schemes were identified as the most likely to be deliverable. This is because the sites are either predominantly within public ownership or have previous feasibility and design works carried out. This means that there is more certainty regarding the viability of the schemes and less feasibility work and due diligence is required to potentially deliver these projects.

- 2.7 A number of schemes within Category 2 and 3 include land and buildings that are privately owned. These projects will be more complex and require positive working relationships between the Council and the relevant landowner, or owners in some circumstances. Where schemes do include private ownership, the Council will assess what is within its control, whilst working with landowners to agree on a mutually beneficial approach for communities. Any decisions made will be subject to the relevant legal and financial approvals being received. The schemes that are currently within Category 2 are:

Ward	Scheme
Aston and Todwick	The Pastures shopping parade improvements
Boston Castle	Wellgate Public Realm Improvements
Bramley and Ravenfield	Ravenfield Crossroads Public Realm and Parking Improvements
Keppel	St. Johns Green Shop Frontage and Green space
Kilnhurst and Swinton East	Swinton Bridge area gateway enhancement
Maltby East	Maltby High Street
Sitwell	Whiston Village Centre green space and public realm
Thurcroft and Wickersley South	Thurcroft High Street improvements
Wickersley North	Bawtry Road improvements to shopping parade, public realm and street furniture

- 2.8 Although £4 million is a significant sum of money, it is essential that this funding is prioritised and spent in places that have not benefited from recent investments. Therefore, it is proposed that Dinnington and Wath are not included within the Towns and Villages Fund at this time, as these centres are being included in further rounds of the Levelling Up Fund and have the potential to receive significant investment to carry out impactful regeneration programmes within these centres. This will be reviewed based on the outcomes of any subsequent funding rounds, and not all funding will be allocated at this point in time, so it will be possible to put forward proposals if these bids are not successful.

It should also be noted that the centre of Swinton is currently under consideration for a significant potential private sector-led investment, which would include public realm improvements, housing, and a new library. On this basis, the centre of Swinton has not been considered for inclusion within the Towns and Villages Fund, but elected Members representing the two Swinton

wards have submitted schemes in other areas of the ward, which will be included.

The centre of Maltby has not been included in funding bids to date, and therefore it is proposed that a significant amount of funding should be allocated to this key district centre. To ensure that this funding is as effective as possible, Maltby has been included in the principal centre masterplanning work that is being undertaken by Rotherham Investment and Development Office (RiDO). This, alongside extensive consultation with ward Members and communities, will produce prioritised interventions that could be delivered with the funding available through the Towns and Villages Fund, harnessing this support as a route to potentially unlocking further funding that may become available through alternative routes.

2.9 All projects will follow the same process once submissions have been received, moderated and put forward onto a work programme. This will be:

1. Due diligence and relevant pre-design work

Any actions that are required to confirm whether the project is deliverable will be undertaken, such as engagement with private landowners, topography surveys, and transportation assessments.

2. Concept Design and cost estimate

If all due diligence is completed and the scheme is viable, a concept design will be undertaken, alongside an estimate of cost, based on the approved submission, consultation and engagement with stakeholders, including ward Members.

3. Engagement and approval

The concept design can be used as a consultation tool and will be formally approved by ward Members. The project, including the cost estimate, will then be reviewed by the relevant officer or Member, as per the scheme of delegation, to approve the scheme for delivery.

4. Detailed design

A detailed design will then be carried out, which is ultimately used by the delivery team as a work plan.

5. Planning application (if required)

Dependent on the works being proposed, a planning application may be required and if so, this will be submitted alongside the detailed design. This process can take up to twelve weeks.

6. Delivery

Once the detailed design is completed, and necessary approvals are received (e.g., planning), delivery will be scheduled, taking account of any necessary procurement activity, and Members will be informed when works are scheduled to start.

2.10 To ensure that this funding is as far-reaching as possible, only projects that fall within the minimum criteria for the fund will be allocated funding. If any projects

fall within existing funding programmes, these will be referred on to the more appropriate programme of work. For example, a number of sites already have tree-planting scheduled, and other sites will benefit from the litter bin replacement scheme.

Where possible, these pieces of work will be synchronised to increase efficiency of front-line services. This may not always be possible, but where individual pieces of work must be carried out, these will be complimentary to the wider scheme proposed, and will not affect the delivery of any other aspect of the project.

Where there is the possibility of synchronising works being completed under different programmes, this should be encouraged so that projects benefit from other complimentary funding. This may include works such as street lighting replacement, line painting, electric charging points, and road resurfacing.

- 2.11 The budget granted to the Towns and Villages Fund through the budget setting process is £4 million. It is proposed that of this, £823,000 is identified based on the masterplanning work being delivered by RiDO in Maltby, and the open funding rounds for the Levelling Up Fund. This could also be used for other wards if submissions are deemed to be exceptional and worthy of a more substantial amount of funding. It could also be used to fund a second call for submissions later within the funding period. The overall budget will manage the delivery of the scheme over the period it is operational.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1 Three main options were developed in relation to the Towns and Villages Fund, which were then assessed with the preferred option being set out within this report. The three shortlisted options were:

3.2 1. Ring-fenced ward budget

This option would have distributed budgets to individual wards, with an allocated sum per ward to be spent, similar to existing ward budgets which are in place. Although this would have given autonomy to communities to spend on their priorities, this may have been less efficient, and led to small amounts of money being unspent at the end of the funding period, or smaller schemes being proposed to use the remaining budget available.

Furthermore, each ward would have needed dedicated support to ensure the governance of the capital fund was correct, which is likely to have required a larger staffing structure, ultimately meaning that less of this funding was spent on the delivery of schemes.

2. Major and minor schemes

Another option considered was to create two submission pathways, for major and minor improvement schemes. This would have given more control over budgets and ensured that funding was spent efficiently but may have caused issues with regards to a decision-making process, understanding what would constitute an acceptable 'major scheme' and a prioritisation surrounding this.

As the number of major schemes would be limited due to the budget available, it was decided that this may not be an equitable or effective option.

3. Ward Submissions

The third option developed was to allow a submission per ward to be put forward, incorporating the priorities of communities through ward Members, and to utilise an existing framework for deciding where larger projects should be focused. This option will focus on maximising the number and scale of projects delivered by the programme, whilst maintaining an appropriate level of management across individual projects, and the overarching programme. This is the recommended option and is explored through Section 2 of this report.

4. Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 The Council's approach to neighbourhood working is at the centre of this delivery model and consultation will take place through the scheme development process.
- 4.2 Elements of consultation should have already taken place with communities and stakeholders through the initial ward submission, where a part of the documentation covered consultation carried out to date. Ward Members have an important role as champions of their communities, understanding the priorities of neighbourhoods and channelling them into an impactful and deliverable scheme.
- 4.3 Consultation will continue to be an important theme of the project process. Concept designs will be informed by wide-ranging stakeholder consultation and engagement, and these designs will then support wider engagement with communities.
- 4.4 Members will be an active part of each project, and as such, it is expected that communities are engaged and involved in the whole project lifecycle.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 If this report is approved, it is expected that the first scheme could be on site in March 2022. Each scheme in Category 1 of the attached work programme should be designed and approved by April 2022, with delivery taking place until approximately September 2022, subject to any complications that may become apparent when schemes are being designed.
- 5.2 When these six projects have been designed in detail with the necessary approvals, it is expected that concept design work will be started on Category 2 schemes. The exact ordering of Category 2 and 3 schemes is not yet known and will be dependent on the due diligence work outlined within the work programme. Category 2 schemes which are found to be viable but more complex may have a longer lead in time than a scheme originally placed in Category 3, which has the required engagement and can therefore progress sooner.
- 5.3 Projects will follow the process outlined at 2.6 on a rolling basis. When one

scheme finishes on site, another scheme will begin concept design. This will ensure that there is a constant work programme for landscape design teams, as well as civil engineering delivery teams.

5.4 It is expected that the last scheme will enter this process in Autumn 2023, with delivery finishing in March 2024.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications (to be written by the relevant Head of Finance and the Head of Procurement on behalf of s151 Officer)

6.1 The meeting of the Budget Council of March 2021 allocated a sum of £4m to the Towns and Villages Fund with all projects expected to be delivered between 2021 and 2024. The process for allocating the funding as planned is set out in this report. Initial costs for the project have been drawn up using a fair estimation process. Project budget controls, risk management and ongoing monitoring are in place to ensure best value is obtained in delivering the programme.

6.2 All procurement activity associated with these proposals (i.e. the purchase of materials, third party delivery if required etc) must be procured in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (as amended) and the Council's own Financial and Procurement Procedure Rules.

7. Legal Advice and Implications (to be written by Legal Officer on behalf of Assistant Director Legal Services)

7.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations within this report.

7.2 There are likely to be specific legal implications in respect of each of the individual projects within the Work Programme including property issues, contractual matters, procurement and Traffic Regulation Orders and these will be addressed at the appropriate time within the project delivery.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

8.1 There are no direct HR implications arising from this report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 There are no direct implications for children, young people or vulnerable adults arising from this report.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 An Initial Equality Screening Assessment has been carried out on this programme of work, and is attached as Appendix 2 to this report.
- 10.2 Town and village centres should be available to all residents, businesses and visitors of the borough. Improvements to these centres through the Towns and Villages Fund will have a positive impact on these centres and improve equal opportunity and access to the proposed centres. The indicative programme of work attached as Appendix 1 includes substantial public realm and pedestrian footway improvements, which will provide visually impaired and wheelchair users more equitable access to improved places.
- 10.3 Within the delivery process for each project, consultation will be carried out with communities through Ward Members and the Neighbourhoods service. Equality and diversity will be a key theme within this consultation, and ensure that the views of local communities are heard and included within subsequent designs. Additional requirements that are requested to meet specific needs of a group or individual during the delivery of works will also be accommodated to ensure that access is continuous throughout the delivery process.

11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change

- 11.1 A Carbon Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached as Appendix 3.
- 11.2 It is envisaged that the impact of this programme of work will be localised. Where an impact on carbon emissions has been highlighted, relevant mitigations will be implemented to reduce, where possible, the Council's impact on the climate.
- 11.3 The largest impact identified will be emissions from construction and development, where heavy machinery is used to deliver material, and construct projects. To mitigate this as far as possible, local suppliers will be engaged where possible as part of the Council's Social Value Framework.
- 11.4 Climate change will also be referenced in the design of each scheme, with priority given to pedestrian access, active travel, and public transport. This will ensure that users of local centres are encouraged to walk, cycle or take public transport as an alternative to driving.
- 11.5 The indicative work programme also includes schemes that will increase the amount of urban green space in the borough, whilst tree planting will be assessed in every project and included as a priority if achievable.

12. Implications for Partners

- 12.1 Partners and key stakeholders will be directly involved in the project planning process, through local consultation and engagement. Where a project is in close proximity to private land ownership, businesses, or community groups, these stakeholders will be included within the design process and kept

informed of progress.

The scheme has been designed to align with the approach to Neighbourhood working and engagement with Ward Councillors.

- 12.2 It is expected that Ward Councillors, as community leaders, alongside the Neighbourhoods Service, will be able to assist in identifying stakeholders and partners for individual projects, which will be in addition to consultation and engagement work which will be planned for each project.

13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 Programme monitoring will take place through the Projects, Initiatives and Improvement Officer within Regeneration and Environment, which will include project management documentation and formal budget monitoring.
- 13.2 Individual projects will have a variety of internal and external stakeholders, and where necessary, individual project teams will be brought together, which will sit underneath an overall 'strategic group', who will be responsible for tracking progress of the programme.
- 13.3 Two significant risks have been highlighted, which are the complexity of land ownership issues for individual projects, and the uncertainty of costs and available materials within the current construction market. Both risks will be tracked through a programme risk register alongside actions and mitigations to reduce these risks, which will be regularly reviewed and reported to the strategic group.

14. Accountable Officers

Ben Mitchell, Projects, Initiatives, and Improvement Officer

Paul Woodcock, Strategic Director for Regeneration and Environment

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	Sharon Kemp	10/01/22
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	24/12/21
Assistant Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phil Horsfield	24/12/21

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