

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

meeting date: THURSDAY 20 JANUARY 2022
title: LEVELLING UP FUND
submitted by: DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING
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1 PURPOSE

1.1 To update Members on our bid to the Levelling Up Fund.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:

- Community Ambitions-
 - To sustain a strong and prosperous Ribble Valley
 - To help make people's lives safer and healthier
- Corporate Objectives –
 - To work with our partners to ensure that the infrastructure in the Ribble Valley is improved
 - To promote stronger, more confident, and more active communities throughout the borough

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Members will be aware that last year, as part of the Spending Review, Rishi Sunak MP announced the Levelling Up Fund. This fund is intended to invest in infrastructure that improves everyday life across the UK. The £4.8 billion fund will support town centre and high street regeneration, local transport projects, and cultural and heritage assets.

2.2 Every area of the country was placed into category 1, 2, or 3, with category 1 representing places with the highest levels of identified need. Ribble Valley fell within category 3. Notwithstanding this categorisation the prospectus for the fund confirmed that bids from categories 2 and 3 will still be considered for funding on their merits of deliverability, value for money and strategic fit, and could still be successful if they are of exceptionally high quality.

2.3 After some consideration it was decided to explore submitting a bid for Longridge Town Centre under the Regeneration and town centre investment theme of the fund. Officers of the Council worked with Buttress Architects who produced a Strategic Overview Document

(https://www.ribbonvalley.gov.uk/info/200294/planning_buildings_and_countryside/1785/levelling_up_longridge). This was shared with the community of Longridge and two public engagement sessions were held on Tuesday 8th June.

2.4 The timescale for submitting a bid was exceptionally short, 18th June 2021, however a bid was submitted by the deadline.

2.5 As part of the Autumn budget the successful bids were announced which did not include ours and on 28th October 2021 the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities confirmed our application had not been successful.

3 ASSESSMENT PROCESS

3.1 The assessment process of the fund focused on the following key criteria:

- 3.1.1 Characteristics of the place
- 3.1.2 Deliverability
- 3.1.3 Strategic fit with local and Fund priorities
- 3.1.4 Value for money

3.2 Our application, along with all applications, was considered by a central appraisal team and on 8th December feedback on our application was given by one of the Assistant Directors at the Cities and Local Growth Unit. Whilst he did not assess our application, he took us through the feedback provided by the team.

3.3 What was clear from the feedback is that we submitted a reasonably strong bid and that the application process was highly competitive and very oversubscribed. Our bid scored well in respect of its strategic fit and value for money with a comment that our application was well received within a very competitive application round. The weakest area of our bid was deliverability. The following specific areas of feedback were provided.

3.4 Deliverability

- 3.4.1 It would have been helpful to detail what other funding streams had been secured/ discussed to support the projects- such as a conversation with Homes England in respect of their contribution. The details did not clearly set out who would be contributing
- 3.4.2 More detail on the costings for each project would have assisted evaluation
- 3.4.3 Further details on the Councils procurement processes would have assisted in respect of assessing the deliverability of the project
- 3.4.4 The delivery plan should be extended in terms of its details and include milestones
- 3.4.5 The risk register seemed light although we have identified risks and as such rather than identify more risks, there should have been more details in terms of the risks included with potentially including discounted risks to show all avenues had been considered.
- 3.4.6 The approach to monitoring and evaluation was extremely high level- should include details on how monitoring and evaluation will be captured and evaluated
- 3.4.7 Should include a narrative for the project- how the projects are linked- how they will be procured- how we will ensure best value for money
- 3.4.8 Set out how the projects will work, how we will know the goals have been achieved what we set out to do at the end- if anything changes how they will be identified and adjust the project accordingly.

3.5 Strategic Fit

- 3.5.1 The partner consultation and consideration of feedback from stakeholders was set out clearly just missing how feedback, about civic hall in particular, led to changes to the projects
- 3.5.2 Potentially consider the inclusion of option appraisals to show how the projects were chosen and identified
- 3.5.3 The small transport proposals seemed workable solutions and were considered useful to ensure the three projects complement one another.
- 3.5.4 There was a clear alignment with local strategies which could have been strengthened by linkages to wider strategies outside the Borough

3.5.5 Even if these are very localised schemes, as they are, still the potential to link them to wider Lancashire strategies and wider Government strategies (net zero etc) which would help to contribute to overall aims.

3.6 Value for Money

- 3.6.1 Strong part of the bid and assessed as a good value for money proposal
 - 3.6.2 Issues laid out clearly and references well recognised sources
 - 3.6.3 Projects set out clearly
 - 3.6.4 Demonstrated reasonable value for money
 - 3.6.5 More detail was needed on the impact of the interventions, the assumptions and an impact framework was not included
 - 3.6.6 Further detail of how project lead into specific benefits with a clear line between the issues and how the projects would address them directly would assist with the assessment.
 - 3.6.7 The methodology was simple but effective
 - 3.6.8 Further detail on economic costs- exact costings would have assisted (this is a challenge as it is an early project)
 - 3.6.9 It was unclear what contingency costs have been outcounted for
 - 3.6.10 Information on what the current congestion issues are and how a one-way system would reduce carbon emissions, i.e. by reducing traffic on the road, reduction in waiting traffic etc.
- 3.7 In conclusion our feedback was positive, and we were advised to concentrate on deliverability within future applications.

4 NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 At this stage there is no more information on the Levelling Up Fund other than there will be another round in Spring 2022. Whether this round will include funding caps and different criteria for applications is an unknown at this stage.
- 4.2 Obviously, Longridge is a key area for investment within the Borough and as such it is proposed to await further information on the next round and seek Members views at that time on an application to the fund. The Assistant Director who provided the feedback hoped there would be more support for applicants within future rounds.

5 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

- 5.1 Note the feedback with further information on the Levelling Up Fund provided in due course.



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