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| REPORT TO: | Cabinet |
| DATE: | 4 May 2022 |
| SUBJECT: | Boston Historic Places Panel Visit |
| PURPOSE: | To provide a response to the recommendations in the Historic Places Panel Review Paper |
| KEY DECISION: | Yes |
| PORTFOLIO HOLDER: | Councillor Richard Austin |
| REPORT AUTHOR: | Deputy Chief Executive (Growth) |
| WARD(S) AFFECTED: | Town Wards |
| EXEMPT REPORT? | No |

SUMMARY

The Historic Places Panel (previously known as the Urban Panel) visited Boston in September 2021 to provide independent expertise to help Boston Borough Council and others engage in suggesting ideas and supporting the regeneration and revitalisation of the historic place that is Boston. As a result of that visit, the Panel produced a review paper listing a number of recommendations which Cabinet are asked to consider. The report is shown at Appendix A.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Note the response to the Historic Places Panel review paper recommendations as set out in the body of the report.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

The Historic Places Panel recognised the continued opportunity for Boston to take advantage of external funding opportunities and the recommendations support these ambitions.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

None. Not to acknowledge these recommendations would mean the report could not be used as a supporting, evidence base for future funding opportunities.

1 Background

- 1.1 The Historic Places Panel - previously known as the Urban Panel - provides a broad spectrum of independent expertise to help local authorities and others engage in the regeneration and revitalisation of historic places - a list of current panel members and previous review papers can be found on the website:

www.historicengland.org.uk/about/who-we-are/committees-and-panels/historic-places-panel

We welcomed the following Panellists to Boston:-

Peter Studdert (Chair)

Nigel Baker

Ben Derbyshire

Sophia de Sousa

Johanna Gibbons

Julian Hill

Nigel Hinds

Rosemarie MacQueen

David Ubaka

Katie Wray

1.2 The Visit

The Historic Places Panel's visit to Boston took place on 28 and 29 September 2021 and was supported by key Council officers and Cllr Richard Austin and Historic England officers throughout the two days. On the evening of the first day, there was a splendid celebration of Boston in the Guildhall involving some members of Cabinet and a wide range of strategic partners with the spectacular food prepared and served by the students of Boston College.

The visit was an opportunity to showcase our town at its best, with the Wednesday market in full swing as it has been for generations and it was noted in the final report that;

"Boston's place in the world was established over seven hundred years ago when it rivalled London as a sea port, with trade and cultural links reaching East, far into Europe and beyond. This importance, which led to its name being bestowed on that other, now more famous Boston, has left a legacy of buildings and spaces that evoke not only another time, but also another country. Boston is on the very edge of England, with a church spire 'The Stump', that is as much a landmark to seafarers as it is to those on land with a setting largely reclaimed from The Wash and its coastal marshes."

- 1.3 The purpose of the visit was to provide a valuable report (Appendix A) for the local authority to use to help inform decision making, strategy, evolution of projects and future funding opportunities. The Panel concluded the following:-

"Creating the strong partnerships necessary for place making requires leadership, something Boston has amply demonstrated. Implementing change to best effect, satisfying the desires

of the existing population, while making changes that attract the movers and shakers takes this to another level, and requires technical expertise, lateral, strategic thinking and good engagement and communication. The Panel found a town that has all the ingredients to become a great place to live in, that has taken some significant steps towards achieving that goal. It has also seen the potential pitfalls caused by tight timescales, conflicting requirements and the limitations of capacity.”

2. Historic Places Panel Report

We welcomed a return visit on Thursday 14 April 2022 from Peter Studdart, who is the outgoing Chairman of the Panel and Ben Derbyshire who is the incoming Chairman.

There were 11 recommendations in the review paper and these were explored during the return visit. Discussions focused on how the Historic Places Panel could support our current initiatives, including:-

- Towns Fund
- Levelling Up wave 2
- UK Shared Prosperity Funding
- NPO submission (National Portfolio Organisations)

We explored how Boston Borough Council and Historic England could continue to work together deliver these varied projects, including:-

- (i) Stakeholder engagement and facilitator support for the PE21 paper.
- (ii) It was proposed that an archaeology study of part of the site identified as PE21 should be the subject of an archaeological dig. This has been shown to bring communities together (as noted from a previous dig that took place in the Market Place) and due to the quality and historical significance of the artefacts that are likely to exist in this area, raise the profile of Boston further. It is recommended that this is undertaken to be the formal submission of any planning application to maximise the length of time the dig could take. Officers propose to seek external funding to support this initiative.

2.1 Turning to the recommendations in the Historic England Review Paper:-

- 1. Consider employing an Urban Designer jointly with adjoining authorities. A qualified design professional will be of benefit across the full range of place making activity (including delivering a number of the recommendations below) and would represent excellent value for money. At the same time, more use could be made of the services available from the regional design review service Design Midlands.**

The team have undertaken some initial exploration of this concept, its benefits and its challenges. Clearly, the national agenda steers towards more investment in design, as part of underpinning pride of place. As a Partnership, there may be an opportunity here, but it would require funding. It is suggested we may wish to look at a ‘call-off’ type support, as opposed to retaining in-house, with the key benefits being in relation to securing advice from professionals who are exposed to a wide range of opportunities and challenges, as opposed to simply being exposed to those which are presented to the

Councils and which are influenced solely by our existing places. This needs further exploration, and in principle we would support this, however, it will come at a cost.

- 2. Develop a Green Infrastructure Strategy addressing flood resilience, SuDS, urban farming, green skills, contact with nature, biodiversity, heritage landscapes, cycling and walking in partnership with the local groups. A movement hub would help to get people onto bikes for commuting, improving health and wellbeing, achieving goals set out in the Boston Transport Strategy.**

The development of a Green Infrastructure Strategy could be incorporated through a review of the associated Local Plan Policies for the South and East Lincolnshire Local Plan. This be an issue which requires consideration, however, it will be an extensive piece of work and thus will come at a cost. The decision regarding this would be taken by the Joint Strategic Planning Committee. It is therefore a longer-term requirement.

However, through the South and East Lincolnshire Council's Partnership (SECLCP) we are in the process of developing a Transport Strategy for our sub-region which will develop the strategies suggested to embrace Active Travel for the wider benefits of our community. In addition, one of the first shared scrutiny exercises across that SELCP is on the topic of Public Transport and will what examine good practice looks like and how we can influence the wider agenda.

- 3. Make a study of your car parks, including ownership. Map usage to inform the future rationalization of parking provision, provide evidence to support the design approach for PE21 and to identify opportunities to mend the townscape elsewhere.**

This is a piece of work that has been suggested at various times during the last few years which the impact of Covid has delayed. The Assistant Director for Assets will lead on this as the Council owns a number of car parks - several of which are underutilised and might be available for different commercial outcomes.

In addition there is the ongoing work on the PE21 project which will be informed by car park usage. This study has also been suggested by the project team to look at the issue on a wider basis - including private car parks, on-street arrangements, charging etc. However it is appreciated that politically this is a sensitive issue.

The original Masterplan by ARUrbanism contained detailed references to the number of car parks that are available for public use with the immediate town centre. The consultation exercises that were undertaken with the public (in the Guildhall over three days, in what was Oldrids for one day and one evening in the Municipal Buildings) debated at length why the need for town centre car parks would decline, the changing car ownership models and the cost of car ownership. In addition, the future of the bus station, and bus provision in general (following Covid and usage decline) is a long-term challenge which must be considered.

- 4. Ensure that the Arts Council-funded route map to a cultural policy aligns with the existing Heritage Strategy, and includes measures to allow the full activation of spaces and buildings currently under-used.**

There has been much activity following the Historic Place Panel visit in September and we have been working closely with the Arts Council to develop a Cultural Strategy that will be presented to Cabinet in June.

Furthermore, the Assistant Director for Economic Growth is leading on an NPO submission, working with the Assistant Director for Leisure and Culture. An NPO is a National Portfolio Organisation which, if successful will lead to a three year funding programme to enable us to plan strategically and to deliver ambitions for a post pandemic arts and cultural landscape. The initial thoughts around this project would see the Guildhall as a heritage hub and draw in the wider cultural offer of these heritage buildings in a hub and spoke model, such as Blackfriars, Shodfriars, Fydell House and the Stump. This is intended to work in conjunction with successful Towns Fund projects, creating a “layering” effect to demonstrate greater cumulative impact on outcomes for our communities.

- 5. Write a characterisation study to get a better handle on what it is to “Be Boston”. This will help with many aspects of design and make a conservation area appraisal straightforward. This should include a study of movement, legibility and a strategy for integrated green infrastructure.**

Utilising the funding opportunities from the Empowering Healthy Communities Fund, the Pride in Place element of the programme has seen the #BeBoston campaign evolve and include the #BostonHeroes campaign and #BostonHeroes celebration event held on 8 March 2022.

Whilst this may not link directly to the reference to the conservation area, we are able to take the ideas that have been generated through Pride in Place initiatives and noting the recent publication of the UK Share Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and the focus on Pride in Place, we feel this has created a strong base on which to build.

The Council has also recently looked to align its approach to heritage (in a planning sense) with a shared resource across ELDC/BBC with a revised contractual arrangement with Heritage Trust of Lincolnshire (Heritage Lincs) to provide support across both authorities. This reinforces the partnership between the Councils and Heritage Lincs who have been active in a number of areas including Towns Fund, and PSiCA schemes. It is within the Council's budget to undertake a review of the Boston Conservation Area (and its associated Management Plan, and Shop Front Guide) all of which are dated. This is presently being scoped and is likely to be brought forward with similar work for SHDC/ELDC. These documents will help decision-making and funding bids moving forward. This is expected to be completed within 2022/23.

- 6. Create a list of small, medium and large projects to be delivered over the short, medium and long term as part of a Green, Blue and Grey infrastructure strategy, including wildlife, biodiversity and climate change adaptation.**

To a degree, this links to item 2. However, in the background the Council continues to identify future opportunities with a view to working with proposers or to secure

funding/inward investment. This is quite a wide ranging recommendation and requires further exploration, however in principle, having an identified list of projects which could be delivered by partners would assist in terms of identifying funding opportunities.

The Council may however wish to take a view that it should lead by example, in which case we could seek to identify our own opportunities first (as we have with the climate change strategy). However, this would require a political direction and funding to bring in resource to undertake this work. There would also need to be a shift in mind set for things such as grounds maintenance away from a cost minimisation approach, towards a more multi-faceted view - e.g. returning to adopting open spaces which can then be managed and developed to meet these objectives. Biodiversity Net Gain does potentially present an opportunity in this regard, with the potential to use Council land as a way of providing net gain to off-set development through a credit-based scheme. Cabinet may wish to see this item come forward as a separate report.

- 7. Communication and partnership is a fundamental of good place making and Boston has made great strides in this. To derive even greater value from this, the Panel recommends that the Borough does a quick relationship and stakeholder mapping exercise which may reveal common interests that were previously unrealised and establish relationships that would otherwise not happen.**

This piece of work is underway as part of the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership combined working - to build upon the great partnership working we have seen as a consequence of the Boston Town Deal Board creation. Through this structure we have seen the value of strong partnership not just in the way ideas and initiatives are developed and delivered but through the shared communication which has an impact on the Pride in Place outcomes.

- 8. Ensure urgent repairs happen at Shodfriar's Hall. It is, strategically, the building in Boston with the greatest untapped potential and it should play a leading part in the town's cultural regeneration.**

Since the visit of the Historic Place Panel in September, Shodfriars has been acquired by a new owner. Through the Healing the High Street Towns Deal project, which following approval by the Department of Levelling Up and Communities means that funding may now be drawn down by the delivery partner, Heritage Lincolnshire, the new owner and the lead officer from Heritage Lincolnshire who have been working closely to bring forward works to Shodfriars.

During the feedback visit of 14 April, the Historic Places Panel members were able to visit Shodfriars and see first-hand the difference that has been made to the building in a short time.

- 9. Build an engagement approach focusing on heritage, harnessing every phase of the development process including design, archaeology and construction. This will deliver on community cohesion and skills and improve outcomes.**

During the feedback visit of 14 April the Historic Places Panel members discussed the potential of this to align with PE21. This will be explored further.

- 10. Economic analysis is necessary to underpin the PE21 strategy. Commission a development appraisal to provide the essential evidence to put the Council in a strong position in its negotiations with delivery partners and planning, as well as to ensure the full potential socio-economic impact of the site is realised.**

Work on this has been done previously, and the Council has sufficient skills in this area to support. Work is progressing at pace with PE21, with discussions with key landowners as well as private sector partners. This links with Levelling Up 2 funding, and members will be updated as this progresses. Clearly there may be some elements of the scheme which have greater social value and can be driven by the Council as opposed to being reliant on the market. Equally, the Council is likely to have to take a role in driving forward the scheme, either as a development partner (JV) or undertaking some delivery itself - for example to provide housing, or buildings for other partners who may have access to revenue funding but not capital.

- 11. Seek a meeting with the Environment Agency and DLUHC to explore ways of unlocking development as the knock-on effects of the housing shortage have implications for the Town Deal. Perhaps an architectural design competition could be promoted to provoke innovative thinking in this field.**

We would agree with this point, however, it is a much wider issue based upon the approach of the EA in planning terms, locally and nationally.

We welcome the idea of a design competition and it is something Officers have discussed previously. However, without the buy-in of partners such as the EA, it could be a theoretical, not a practical outcome.

We should welcome the outcomes of the panel as a way of engendering a more rounded conversation with DLUHC and Ministers regarding the challenges faced by areas such as Boston by adopting a single-issue mind set - i.e. Flood Risk; when in fact areas have multiple challenges that must be balanced - i.e. growth, housing need, ecology, place, heritage, etc.

3 CONCLUSION

- 3.1** This is a hugely positive report for Boston and affirms the importance that the place of Boston holds nationally with the quality of our historical and heritage sphere of influence.

It is pleasing to see the hard work the Council has undertaken through the Towns Fund and the impact this has on Pride in Place is recognised.

EXPECTED BENEFITS TO THE PARTNERSHIP

This is emphasised throughout the report.

IMPLICATIONS

SOUTH AND EAST LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCILS PARTNERSHIP

Opportunity to continue to share learning and expertise across the wider partnership for the benefit of all of the historic places in our towns and villages.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

This Historic Place Panel report helps the Council meet two of the Corporate Strategy priorities in the following way: Boston is a place where people want to live, work and visit and to grow Boston's economy to ensure it remains a thriving town through supporting the Pride in Place initiatives, particularly through the ongoing Healing the High Street Towns Fund project and PE21 project.

STAFFING

There are no staffing implications directly arising, however where opportunities for external capacity funding arises to increase the breadth of skills in the wider team to deliver specific projects.

CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

None

DATA PROTECTION

None

FINANCIAL

There are none directly arising from this report and indeed this report provides a valuable evidence base to support external funding bids.

RISK MANAGEMENT

None

STAKEHOLDER / CONSULTATION / TIMESCALES

None

REPUTATION

This report raises the reputation of Boston in a positive way.

CONTRACTS

None

CRIME AND DISORDER

Improving pride in place is shown to have a positive impact on the perception of crime and reducing low-level anti-social behaviour.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY/ HUMAN RIGHTS/ SAFEGUARDING

None

HEALTH AND WELL BEING

Improving the feel of the place through good design outcomes has been shown to have a positive impact on the wellbeing of individuals.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The potential positive impact on the environment is contained in the report.

LINKS TO 12 MISSIONS IN THE LEVELLING UP WHITE PAPER

| MISSIONS | |
|---|---|
| This paper contributes to the follow Missions outlined in the Government’s Levelling Up White paper. | |
| Living Standards | By 2030, pay, employment and productivity will have risen in every area of the UK, with each containing a globally competitive city, with the gap between the top performing and other areas closing. |
| Transport Infrastructure | By 2030, local public transport connectivity across the country will be significantly closer to the standards of London, with improved services, simpler fares and integrated ticketing. |
| Skills | By 2030, the number of people successfully completing high-quality skills training will have significantly increased in every area of the UK. In England, this will lead to 200,000 more people successfully completing high-quality skills training annually, driven by 80,000 more people completing courses in the lowest skilled areas. |
| Health | By 2030, the gap in Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) between local areas where it is highest and lowest will have narrowed, and by 2035 HLE will rise by 5 years. |
| Wellbeing | By 2030, well-being will have improved in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing. |
| Pride in Place | By 2030, pride in place, such as people’s satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between the top performing and other areas closing. |
| Crime | By 2030, homicide, serious violence, and neighbourhood crime will have fallen, focused on the worst-affected areas. |
| Local Leadership | By 2030, every part of England that wants one will have a devolution deal with powers at or approaching the highest level of devolution and a simplified, long-term funding settlement. |

ACRONYMS

None.

| APPENDICES | |
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| Appendices are listed below and attached to the back of the report: - | |
| APPENDIX A | Historic Places Panel Review Paper |

BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers as defined in Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the production of this report.

CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY OF THIS REPORT

A report on this item has not been previously considered by a Council body.

REPORT APPROVAL

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| Report author: | Michelle Sacks, Deputy Chief Executive (Growth) |
| Signed off by: | Rob Barlow, Chief Executive |
| Approved for publication: | Councillor Richard Austin |