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OPEN REPORT ASHBOURNE REBORN PROGRAMME BOARD

Ashbourne Reborn Programme Board 27 September 2023

ASHBOURNE REBORN PROGRAMME – ADDITIONAL COMMUNICATIONS AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT CAPACITY

Joint report of the Regeneration and Place Manager, Derbyshire Dales District Council and Assistant Director Regeneration and Major Projects, Derbyshire County Council

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Report Summary

To consider the establishment of an additional fixed term post of Communications Officer within the District Council's Communications and Marketing Team to deliver the Communications and Engagement Plan for the Ashbourne Reborn programme and endorse the immediate approach taken to securing short term interim capacity.

Recommendations

1. That Board members endorse the action taken to secure interim communications support from Aecom for the Ashbourne Reborn programme.
2. That, at its meeting of 28/09/23, funding provision be sought from the District Council's General Reserve to enable the establishment of an Ashbourne Reborn Communications Officer post on a fixed-term basis for a period of two-years subject to further engagement with each project board regarding the working arrangements for the role.
3. That Board members note the intention of Derbyshire County Council to ensure additional communication and stakeholder engagement relating to other highways and transport work taking place in Ashbourne during the preparation and delivery of Ashbourne Reborn.

List of Appendices

APPENDIX 1 – Ashbourne Reborn Communications and Engagement Plan (May 2023)

ASHBOURNE REBORN PROGRAMME – ADDITIONAL COMMUNICATIONS AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT CAPACITY

1. Background

1.1 The successful £15.22m Ashbourne Reborn programme bid was developed through close working between local partners who brought forward project ideas, identified opportunities and raised match-funding. The key partners include Derbyshire Dales District Council, Derbyshire County Council, Ashbourne Town Team, Ashbourne Methodist Church, Ashbourne Town Council, and Ashcom.

1.2 The programme comprises the following projects:

Project 1: Public Realm & Highways Improvements - £8.804m led by Derbyshire County Council.

Project 2: Link Community Hub - £6.418m led by Ashbourne Methodist Church.

1.3 Derbyshire Dales District Council is the Accountable Body for the Ashbourne Reborn programme.

1.4 On 27 July 2023 the District Council approved revised governance arrangements for Ashbourne Reborn, including increased Member involvement from both the District Council and County Council. The first meeting of the new programme Board is scheduled for 27 September 2023.

1.5 Over recent months, partners have worked collaboratively to progress both projects, including:

- Summer stakeholder and public engagement events, particularly to inform the highways and public realm design
- Submission of the Listed Building Consent application for works to Market Place and Victoria Square
- Completion of draft RIBA Stage 3 designs / work package for the wider highways and public realm project
- Appointment of the full Link Community Hub Design Team (architect, structural and services engineers, landscape architect etc.) to complete detailed design; all required surveys and engineers inspections of the site condition, including trial pits, underway
- Completion of branding competition with QEGS students and issue of final programme logo.

1.6 The next stage for both projects is to progress detailed design followed by contractor procurement.

2. Key Issues

2.1 Under the original programme governance arrangements, a Communications and Engagement Plan was agreed which requires proactive communications throughout the period of the programme.

- 2.2 An officer Communications and Engagement Group has been established to lead on developing and delivering effective communications and engagement activity. The group is chaired by the Ashbourne Reborn Programme Manager with communication leads from:
- Derbyshire Dales District Council
 - Derbyshire County Council
 - Ashbourne Town Council
 - Ashbourne Methodist Church
 - Ashbourne Town Team
 - AshCom
- 2.3 The group has responsibility for operational decisions about communication and engagement activity and meets approx. every six-weeks (more frequently if required). The group is tasked with working closely with the two project boards to ensure alignment of messages and support those boards in their communication and engagement work. It will produce an updated plan for consideration by the Programme Board and work with the programme manager to produce regular updates for this Board.
- 2.4 The communications and engagement group is responsible at the programme level for:
- Maintaining the communications protocol
 - Developing and overseeing delivery of regular, scheduled communications (e-newsletter updates, social media posts, press releases etc.)
 - Ensuring audiences are aware of opportunities for project level engagement
 - Establishing priorities for engagement at the programme level and ensuring stakeholder relationships are being managed effectively
 - Supporting the delivery of set-piece events including public engagement events and Ministerial visits.
- At the project level, the group's role is to:
- Work with project boards to develop a schedule of communications opportunities linked to project milestones
 - Ensure that delivery partner channels and opportunities are linked to and aligned with programme level communications
 - Commission stakeholder analysis so each project board can identify key stakeholders for each phase of project delivery and plan engagement at the earliest stage
 - Utilise programme stakeholders to support project level activity and mitigate project risks.
- 2.5 To date, communications and stakeholder engagement has been undertaken by the District Council's existing Communications and Marketing Team working collaboratively with Derbyshire County Council, the Town Team and other local partners, drawing on existing communications resources. In addition, Aecom, the consultancy commissioned to develop the highways and public realm design, have provided time-limited

stakeholder and public engagement support to inform the RIBA Stage 3 preliminary design.

2.6 As plans have developed over the Summer, it has become increasingly clear that the scale and pace of the Ashbourne Reborn programme, extent of local interest and breadth of stakeholders involved necessitates a dedicated resource at programme level to increase proactive communication and engagement activity, including to:

- Prepare continuous, proactive co-ordinated messaging in respect of forthcoming programme activity and linked stories through a range of communications channels, including social media
- Publish up to a weekly/fortnightly newsletter (on-line pdf and paper for noticeboards via Ashbourne Town Team, Ashbourne Town Council, Ashbourne Methodist Church etc.)
- Publish up to a weekly/fortnightly press release to provide media organisations with opportunities to draft content for the publications
- Generating content (following up on leads from the Programme Manager/lead delivery partners/wider partners, i.e. not waiting for content to come but proactively creating content) for the above communications channels
- Organise further local engagement events as required
- Liaise with the councils and the other key partners to ensure existing communications channels and partner networks are fully exploited
- Develop productive working relationships with local journalists
- Ensure consistent (compliant) LUF / Government / local branding of all physical signage, information and visual materials relating to the programme (including but not limited to banners, site hoardings, interpretation boards)
- Build connections / relationships with key stakeholders to ensure their views are considered and any emerging issues are well managed
- Ensure effective communication of traffic management measures and phasing of works is disseminated to keep local businesses, residents and visitors informed and up to date before and during the construction phase. It is important to recognise, though, that on matters such as disruption to businesses during construction the contractor must, and will, carry direct responsibility for liaison with the owners and occupiers of affected properties
- Mitigating risks, including reputational risks, to the delivery of the Ashbourne Reborn programme through stakeholder communication, issues management, myth-busting and working to minimise any adverse publicity
- Regularly monitor and report on the outcomes of communication and stakeholder engagement activity.

2.7 The above would form the basis of the work programme for the additional resource (see following section). The resource will also be responsible for updating the Communications and Engagement Plan and ensuring sign-off of this and significant announcements by the Chair and Vice Chair of the Programme Board and respective Project Boards.

2.8 Attendance at programme and project board meetings will be important to ensure an up to date understanding of progress, for key messaging / PR to

be agreed and actioned and to avoid the potential for misinformation. The post will also be responsible for any requirements to share communications with DLUHC.

3. Options Considered and Proposal

3.1 The aspiration is for a high standard of communications and engagement to be maintained for the lifetime of the programme. Three options have been considered:

Option 1: secure dedicated time from within existing council communications resources.

Option 2: directly employ a new temporary member of staff for the lifetime of the programme i.e. a fixed term post for up to two years.

Option 3 commission a communications agency / consultancy to undertake the role for the lifetime of the programme i.e. up to 2 years with additional time / inputs ahead of and during the construction phase.

3.2 After reviewing available capacity with both the district and county councils, it is considered that the establishment of an additional, dedicated communications and engagement resource is necessary to meet the requirements of the programme. Consequently Option 1 is ruled out.

3.3 Option 2 requires recruitment to a post and therefore lead-in time prior to an appointment being made. Recruitment to a temporary post could also be challenging in the current climate.

3.4 Option 3 potentially provides a more immediate solution to address capacity issues but is likely to prove more expensive over the longer term.

3.5 On balance, pursuing Options 2 and 3 in tandem is considered appropriate, specifically to:

- seek the required funding allocation to enable the establishment of an additional Communications Officer post at the District Council on Grade 8 (the same grade as the existing Communications Officer post) for a fixed period of two-years. This approach seeks to provide an increased level of resource to support the Ashbourne Reborn programme. Further engagement is required with each project board regarding the working arrangements for the role. This can be included on the agendas of the project board meetings due to be held on 3 October.
- commission Aecom, currently contracted on Ashbourne Reborn through Derbyshire County Council, to provide interim communications support to the programme, reporting to the Communications and Engagement Group. A proposal has been received from Aecom and agreed by senior officers from the two councils.

- 3.6 Should the appointment of a fixed term post prove challenging, consideration will be given to the procurement of external consultancy / agency support in the longer term.
- 3.7 In addition, there will be a need to ensure that key stakeholders and the general public are informed on the interface between the LUF/partner funded Ashbourne Reborn programme and other works in the town such as those under the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). The County Council recognises that this broader communications work extends beyond the scope of Ashbourne Reborn, and it will use in-house and/or separately procured external communications support to provide capacity. This will ensure that stakeholders have a complete picture of the progress of all schemes proposed for the town. This should also include effective communications and engagement to help mitigate the protraction of TRO processes. Moving forward, it will be important for this resource to work closely with the Ashbourne Reborn Communications Officer.

4. Consultation

- 4.1 Consultation has taken place with the District Council's Leader and Deputy Leaders who are supportive and recognise the importance of effective communications and engagement for the programme.
- 4.2 County Council officers will manage the contract with Aecom for the additional interim services required.

5. Timetable for Implementation

- 5.1 The proposed establishment of an additional resource has been approved by the District Council's Corporate Leadership Team and it is proposed that funding will be formally sought at full Council on 28 September 2023 with a view to allocating the necessary funding to enable the establishment of a post.
- 5.2 The additional interim Aecom resource has been agreed and immediate capacity is available.

6. Policy Implications

- 6.1 Delivery of Ashbourne Reborn is an agreed regeneration priority for both councils. An effective approach to communications and engagement is vital to the successful delivery of the programme.

7. Resources (Finance, HR, Estates and IT) Implications

- 7.1 The anticipated cost of a Grade 8 Communications Officer is approximately £44,000 per annum (including on costs; at top of grade). For the two-year period of the fixed term contract this would total £88,000. It is proposed that this sum be met from the District Council's General Reserve, subject to the approval of this report and of full Council on 28 September 2023.
- 7.2 The core (interim) service from Aecom has been costed at £5,793 for 3 months (£7,724 for 4 months), again to be met from the District Council's

General Reserve subject to the approval of this report and of full Council on 28 September 2023.

- 7.3 Communication of the wider works package for Ashbourne complementing Ashbourne Reborn will be funded by the County Council.

8. Legal Advice and Implications, Data Protection

- 8.1 The Aecom interim communications support will be managed as a compensation event under the existing contract with Derbyshire County Council. There are no further legal or data protection implications associated with this proposal.

9. Equalities Implications

- 9.1 There are no equalities implications associated with this proposal.

10. Climate Change and Biodiversity Implications

- 10.1 There are no climate change or biodiversity implications associated with this proposal beyond the travel of the required resource.

11. Risk Management

- 11.1 The proposed establishment of an additional Communications Officer post is itself a mitigation against the risks identified earlier in the report in respect of demonstrating the progress being made in the delivery of the Ashbourne Reborn programme and ensuring effective stakeholder engagement.