



Northumberland

County Council

Cabinet

Tuesday, 12 March 2024

Summary of New Capital Proposals considered by Officer Capital Strategy Group

Report of Councillor(s) Richard Wearmouth, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Services

Responsible Officer(s): Jan Willis, Executive Director for Resources & Transformation (S151)

1. **Link to Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan**

The Council's Capital Programme is consistent with all of the priorities in the Corporate Plan 2023-2026, being 'Achieving Value for Money', 'Tackling Inequalities' and 'Driving Economic Growth'.

2. **Purpose of report**

This report summarises proposed amendments to the Capital Programme considered by the Capital Strategy Group.

3. **Recommendations**

3.1 **A197 Bothal Terrace, Ashington**

- a) Note the capital grant secured of £0.200 million via Sustrans from the Department for Transport (DfT) 6 National Cycle Network (NCN) Activation Programme.
- b) Approve the proposed spend and amend the capital programme in 2024-25 to include the capital grant of £0.200 million.

3.2 **Wooler Visitor Infrastructure**

- a) Approve the spend of £0.106 million to carry out the works detailed in section 6.
- b) Approve the amendment to the Capital Programme to reallocate £0.106 million from the Strategic Regeneration Projects – Wooler Visitor Infrastructure to the Wooler Parking project in 2024-25.

3.3 Energising Blyth Strategic Acquisitions

- a) Approve the amendment to the Capital Programme to reallocate £0.634 million (£0.382 million in 2023-24 and £0.252 million in 2024-25) from the Energising Blyth Acquisitions Project to the Strategic Acquisitions project. Note the details of this project are included in Appendix 1 which is confidential for commercial reasons.

3.4 Prudhoe Waterworld Soft Play

- a) Approve the spend of £0.060 million to replace the existing soft play area at Prudhoe Waterworld in 2024-25.
- b) Approve the amendment to the Capital Programme to reallocate £0.060 million from the Prudhoe Waterworld project to the Prudhoe Waterworld Soft Play project in 2024-25.

4. Forward plan date and reason for urgency if applicable

This report was added to the forward plan on 1 February 2024.

Summary of New Capital Proposals Considered by Officer Capital Strategy Group on 30 January 2024

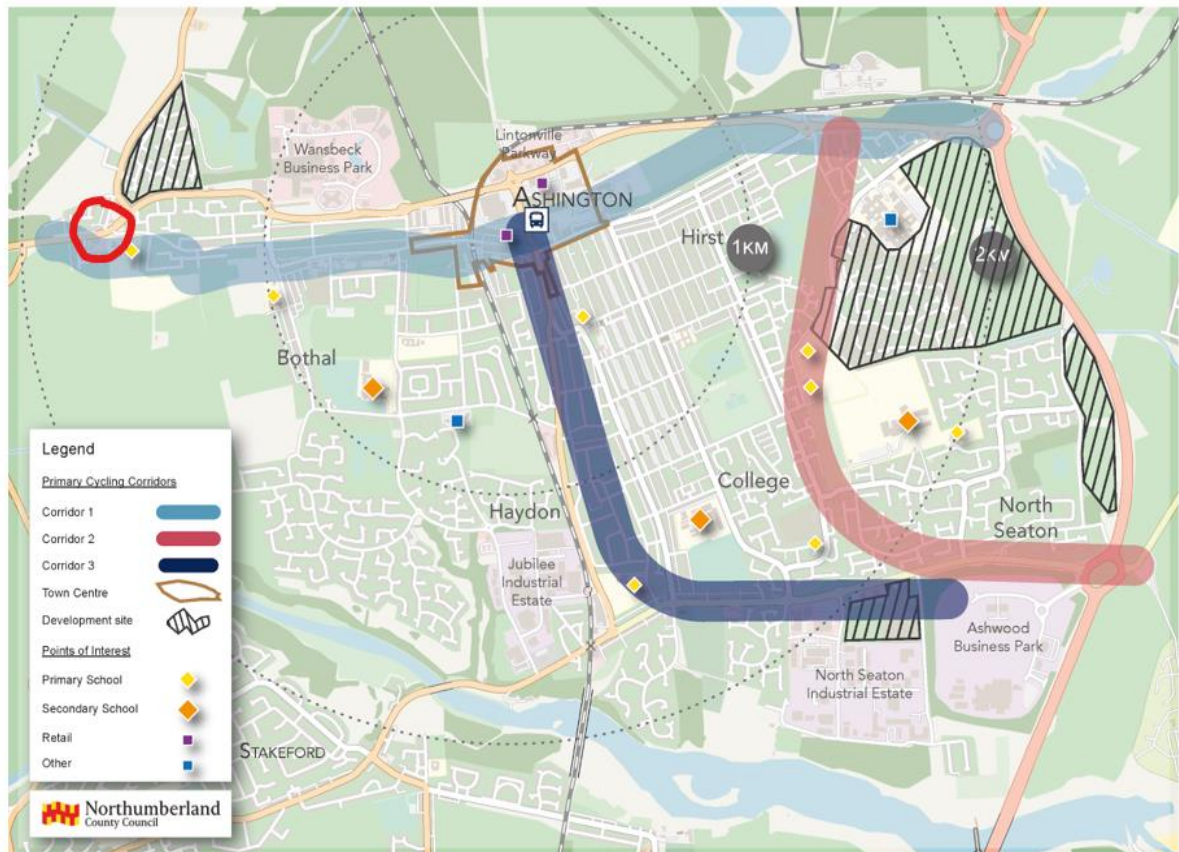
5. A197 Bothal Terrace, Ashington

- 5.1 CSG was asked to consider a capital spend of 0.200 million to upgrade the existing Puffin Crossing on the A197 to a Toucan Crossing. This spend will be externally funded from the Department for Transport (DfT) 6 National Cycle Network (NCN) Activation Programme.
- 5.2 A number of years ago, Sustrans completed a review of the National Cycle Network (NCN), auditing provision and condition of the current infrastructure.
- 5.3 Following this review, numerous sections were deemed no longer fit for purpose and NCN status was withdrawn in 2020, while several other sections were highlighted as requiring immediate improvement, where routes still serve significant local value.
- 5.4 As part of a package of measures funded by the DfT, Sustrans highlighted several sections of the NCN that require improvement. This included NCN 155 (From Morpeth to Newbiggin by the Sea). Sustrans are recommending a safe controlled crossing of the A197 for NCN 155 to the west side of Ashington. The proposed scheme would upgrade the existing Puffin Crossing near Bothal Terrace to a Toucan crossing with associated works.
- 5.5 The original alignment of NCN 155 crossed the A197 via a pedestrian refuge, which is deemed substandard when applying current design standards for cycling infrastructure (LTN1/20).

- 5.6 Given the volume and the composition of traffic using this section of the A197 a controlled crossing is recommended. It is therefore proposed to upgrade the existing puffin crossing, to the east of the pedestrian refuge, to a Toucan crossing with a section of path linking the end of Bothal Terrace with the crossing as indicated in the following image. All elements of the scheme should comply with LTN1/20.



- 5.7 The scheme will provide an improved crossing over the A197 so that it can be used by cyclists as well as pedestrians. In addition, it will provide a safer crossing point, compared to the existing substandard crossing on NCN 155 to the west.
- 5.8 The key date to be mindful of is, 31 August 2024, when construction of the scheme should be complete. The original deadline was 31 March 2024, however officers were able to negotiate an extension with the funding provider.
- 5.9 This project aligns with the draft Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan for Ashington where one of the corridors starts and terminates at the proposed Toucan



location as indicated in the following plan. The location of the crossing is highlighted in the red ring.

- 5.10 The proposed crossing upgrade will connect Corridor 1 to the National Cycle Network (NCN).
- 5.11 Next steps would involve signing a funding agreement with Sustrans, followed by the generation of a brief for design to generate scheme drawings and a target cost.
- 5.12 The grant available is £200,000 from the DfT6 NCN Activation Programme.
- 5.13 The grant available is capped and any overspend will need to be picked up by the Council, however, officers are confident that the scheme can be delivered within the funds available based on similar schemes in the past.
- 5.14 The grant payments would be in areas and structured as below, following the achievement of key milestones as detailed below.

% Grant Payable	Stage for Payment
20%	Once design is agreed with budget holder
60%	Practical Completion of works (31 August 2024)
20%	Payment on Final Report with Grant Claim Evidence

6. Wooler Visitor Infrastructure

- 6.1 CSG was asked to consider a capital spend of £0.106 million to improve the infrastructure and amend the time limits at the existing car parks at Padgepool Place and Riverside. This spend will be funded from the existing Strategic Regeneration Projects – Wooler Visitor Infrastructure budget within the Capital Programme.
- 6.2 In January 2022 Cabinet approved in principle an allocation of £650,000 from the Strategic Regeneration Reserve to invest in visitor infrastructure improvements in and around Wooler. £220,000 was subsequently approved to cover several projects in October 2022. These projects included the redevelopment of the public toilets at Wooler Bus Station as well as making the site of the former Wooler First School available for long stay parking. First School. Of the unallocated funding £400,000 was earmarked to support the development of a new 'countryside' car park at the historic Ad Gefrin site near Kirknewton, however the development of this countryside car park is now expected to be progressed independently of NCC via alternative external funding arrangements, allowing this funding to be considered for other alternative schemes to support the economic development of the town.
- 6.3 To support the improvements already made and encourage use of the new long stay parking facility, it is proposed that funding is allocated to improve the infrastructure and amend the time limits at the existing car parks at Padgepool Place and Riverside.
- 6.4 The proposed works included are as follows:
 - a) Conversion of Padgepool Place and Riverside long stay car parks to short stay.
 - b) Inclusion of the site of the former Wooler First School made available for long stay parking in the 'Off Street Parking Places' Order to allow enforcement.
 - c) Resurfacing Riverside car park to allow bays to be marked which will maximise capacity.

- d) Provision of two rapid electric vehicle chargers at Riverside car park.

Conversion of Padgepool Place and Riverside long stay car parks to short stay

- 6.5 Padgepool Place and Riverside car parks are currently long-stay, allowing vehicles to park for up to 24 hours. Padgepool Place is adjacent to the town centre and Riverside is opposite the new 'Ad Gefrin' visitor attraction. Both car parks are used by walkers accessing the surrounding countryside. This means they are generally full all day. This low turnover of spaces can have an adverse effect on the town centre economy.
- 6.6 The former Wooler First School was made available for use for parking in order to cater for both the existing long stay visitor demand and the expected increase in demand following the opening of 'Ad Gefrin'. As things stand, however, visitors will often use Padgepool Place or Riverside as they are reached before the former First School site. Riverside car park is particularly likely to be used by visitors to 'Ad Gefrin' due to its close proximity. To ensure long stay visitors use the former first school site, it is proposed to implement short stay time limits in Padgepool Place and Riverside. This will provide greater turnover which will benefit local shops and services and will maximise use of the former First School, leading to greater value for money from the investment already made.
- 6.7 Statutory consultees and local stakeholders have been consulted on the proposed short stay time limits. New signage required for this scheme is estimated to cost £3,000.

Inclusion of the former Wooler First School site in the Car Parks Order to allow enforcement

- 6.8 Part of the former Wooler First School site has been made available for use for long stay parking but is not currently included in the Council's 'Off Street Parking Places' Order. To be able to impose standard conditions of use and a 24-hour maximum stay time limit (in line with all other Council owned long stay car parks), it is proposed to include it in the Order. This will allow enforcement to take place and ensure activities such as overnight stays do not occur. New signage required for this scheme is estimated to cost £3,000.

Resurfacing Riverside car park to allow bays to be marked which will maximise capacity

- 6.9 Riverside car park is unsurfaced and parking bays are not marked out. This leads to inefficient use of the available space as motorists can leave large gaps between vehicles. It is proposed to provide a tarmac surface which will allow spaces to be marked out, maximising the use of the space available. This will also allow the provision of disabled bays and electric vehicle charging bays. This work is estimated to cost £30,000.

Provision of two rapid electric vehicle chargers at Riverside Car Park

- 6.10 As part of the improvements set out above, it is proposed to install two rapid electric vehicle chargers in Riverside Car Park. The existing rapid charger located in the town centre serves a wide rural area. Demand is high and likely to increase as electric vehicle ownership grows. In addition, the location immediately adjacent to the A697 strategic road makes it an ideal site for EV charging.
- 6.11 Preliminary investigations have found that there is a suitable electricity supply available. It is estimated that this work will cost £70,000.

- 6.12 The total estimated capital cost of the above proposals is £0.106 million. It is expected that the proposals will be implemented during the first two quarters of 2024-25.
- 6.13 The provision of electric vehicle chargers will incur additional running costs (i.e maintenance, repairs and inspections) which are currently around £1,800 per charger per year, plus the electricity cost; however, these are offset by income from the Council's EV charger network. The average net annual income from rapid chargers is £12,882.72 per charger (based on Feb 2023 usage data after VAT and fees are deducted). The user tariff is set at a level that allows the Council to cover its running costs and electricity usage.
- 6.14 The provision of short stay time limits in car parks may place additional demand on the Council's Parking Enforcement staff and back office.
- 6.15 Adding the former First School site to the Off-Street Parking Places Order will lead to increased maintenance costs which will need to be met from existing maintenance budgets.

7. Energising Blyth Strategic Acquisitions

- 7.1 CSG was asked to consider a capital spend of £0.634 million to complete the strategic site assembly in Blyth. This spend will be funded from the existing Energising Blyth Acquisitions Project budget within the Capital Programme.
- 7.2 The details of the project are included in a confidential appendix.

8. Prudhoe Waterworld Soft Play

- 8.1 CSG was asked to consider a capital spend of £0.060 million to replace the existing soft play area at Prudhoe Waterworld. This spend will be funded from the existing Prudhoe Waterworld project budget within the Capital Programme.
- 8.2 Prudhoe Waterworld was opened in 1990 by Tynedale District Council. It features a 25 x 9 metre main pool, wave pool, gym, fitness studio, soft play area and café. During 2022-23 the facility attracted 140,401 visits, with 105,476 visits from members and 34,925 visits from non-members. In 2016-17 the gym and studio areas were refurbished with minor works carried out over the next three years including modifications to the flume. The pool plant was upgraded in 2020-21.
- 8.3 In June 2023 Cabinet agreed an allocation of £1.500 million (£0.250 million in 2023-24 and £1.250 million in 2024-25) from the Capital Contract Price Inflation contingency budget within the MTFP for improvements at Prudhoe Waterworld. The proposed major improvement project will focus on a refresh of the pool area as many of the finishes and fittings are end of life.
- 8.4 The current soft play structure at Prudhoe Waterworld has been in situ for over 10 years. Despite the condition of the soft play it has continued to prove popular due to the lack of soft plays available in the immediate area. The remedial maintenance costs continued to increase due to the need to ensure the facility remained safe and operational. User experience was very poor and with repairs not being economically viable or possible the area was closed in September 2023.
- 8.5 The soft play has remained closed due to the need for a full replacement. This proposal would renew the soft play area in the context of the wider improvement scheme.

- 8.6 The proposed works are to replace the existing soft play structure with a new, up to date offer which will enhance active play opportunities for children and young people. The costs of these works are estimated to be £0.060 million. These works are additional to the original Prudhoe Waterworld proposal but this will be funded from the existing budget for Prudhoe Waterworld in 2024-25 agreed by Council on 21 February 2024.
- 8.7 The project is necessary to improve overall customer experience as part of the Centre's overall leisure offer for the community and visitors and as a standalone attraction. Customers have expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of current soft play provision.
- 8.8 It is anticipated that the project will be completed by early Summer 2024.
- 8.9 This project will require procurement for external goods and services. Corporate Commissioning & Procurement Service have not been consulted however the delivery of the soft play scheme will be incorporated within the larger improvement project.

9. Implications

Policy	The schemes identified in the report support all of the priorities within the Corporate Plan 2023-26.
Finance and value for money	The report outlines proposed project allocations and amendments to the approved Capital programme 2023-24, 2024-25 and 2025-26. The financial implications of these proposals are outlined in the main body of the report. The projects and the proposals identified in the report will be funded from either external funding or existing funding in the Capital Programme.
Legal	The Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 confirm that the matters within this report are not functions reserved to Full Council.
Procurement	Procurement will follow the Council's standard procedures and financial rules. The Corporate Procurement team will be consulted as appropriate.
Human resources	Not applicable
Property	Not applicable
The Equalities Act: is a full impact assessment required and attached?	No - not required at this point EIA is not applicable to the subject of this report.

Risk assessment	The risks associated with the proposals are regarded as acceptable, but these risks will continue to be reviewed up to and during implementation of the proposals.
Crime and disorder	There are no specific crime and disorder implications within this report.
Customer considerations	The proposals will carefully consider the impact upon both customers and residents of Northumberland.
Carbon reduction	Carbon Reduction measures have been considered within the proposals.
Health and wellbeing	The Council's Capital budget is founded on the principle of promotion inclusivity.
Wards	(All Wards);

10. Background papers

Not applicable

11. Links to other key reports already published

Not applicable.

12. Author and Contact Details

Gemma Simpson,
Email: Gemma.Simpson@northumberland.gov.uk