



Northumberland County Council

Cabinet

Tuesday, 9th April 2024

Hirst Masterplan

Report of Councillor(s)

Cllr Richard Wearmouth, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Services

Responsible Officer(s): Simon Neilson, Executive Director - Place and Regeneration

1. Link to Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the following priorities in the NCC Corporate Plan 2023-26:

Achieving value for money: Creating conditions for everyone to live their best lives is typically highly cost effective and can yield lifelong costs savings such as increased earnings and productivity and reduced use of health and social care services.

Tackling Inequalities: To create a society where everybody can thrive, our residents need all the building blocks in place: a stable job, good pay, safe, affordable, and warm housing, and good education. For some of our residents these foundations are weak or missing which create inequalities.

Driving Economic Growth: Ensuring that all our residents have access to building blocks of a good life, will help them to remain healthy and independent and pay an important part of the infrastructure contributing to Northumberland's future prosperity.

This report is also relevant to:

Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (refresh) - Building Blocks of a Healthy Life
Priority Theme 1 – Healthy Neighbourhoods

Northumberland Inequalities Plan

Living conditions, reducing the gap in communities.

Quality and length of life; Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) & Life Expectancy (LE).

Northumberland Local Plan (2022) Includes policies supporting Health and wellbeing and healthy and sustainable homes.

2. Purpose of report

To introduce the Hirst Masterplan to cabinet and seek authorisation to move forward in developing its contents further.

3. Recommendations

Cabinet is asked to:

- 3.1 Note the attached Executive Summary of the Hirst Draft Masterplan and outline options for the long-term regeneration of the area.
- 3.2 To support the aspiration to work towards the 'Do Maximum' option, as set out in section 6.1 of this report, during the ongoing development process.
- 3.3 Approve the establishment of a 'Hirst Partnership Board', to be Chaired by the Director of Housing & Planning and to comprise stakeholders, partners, and Senior Officers from Northumberland County Council (NCC).
- 3.4 To approve the recruitment to two collaborative Hirst regeneration posts, to be funded equally by key stakeholders NCC Housing, Advance Northumberland, and Bernicia for three years. The posts will be hosted by the Strategic Housing function within the NCC Housing Service. NCC element will be funded through Housing Reserves.
- 3.5 To note that communications on the Hirst Masterplan will be integrated into the overall communications strategy for the town as linked to the Ashington Town Board.

4. Forward plan date and reason for urgency if applicable

30 January 2024

5. Background

5.1 Summary

While the Masterplan should not be regarded as final "blueprint", it is underpinned by a series of aims, developed in extensive conjunction with the community. It will help shape and support funding bids and specific projects.

- A tender brief for the Hirst Masterplan was created in 2022 following feedback from the community in a consultation commissioned by the Ashington Town Board.
- A Place Standard Tool community conversation was conducted in Ashington during the summer of 2022 to inform the basis of the Masterplan analysis. Providing a community voice on the strengths and challenges in the area to be addressed by the masterplan.
- Ryder Architecture were the successful applicant, commissioned in December 2022.
- Ryder worked extensively with the community during 2023 whilst writing the master plan, reflecting a broad range of community aspirations in its development.
- The Hirst Masterplan was first presented to the Hirst partnership group, comprising of senior officers from NCC, Advance Northumberland and Bernicia in November 2023. The group agreed a collaborative approach to the further exploration for delivery routes for the Masterplan.
- The Hirst Partnership group has proposed the following:
 - A governance arrangement
 - A staffing arrangement

- The intention to seek the resources to aspire to deliver the ‘do maximum’ option outlined in the plan.

The executive summary of the Hirst Masterplan is included in appendix 1.

The aims for the Masterplan were developed in conjunction with the community and are included in page 15 of the summary. They include the following:

1. A community approach where everyone that wants to can contribute and anticipate in the shaping of places and spaces, and focuses on ‘what is strong, not what is wrong’.
2. A place that helps people to have opportunities for good physical health, mental health and addresses loneliness.
3. Community spaces to meet, be creative, share ideas and skills, and advice and support.
4. A range of good quality and well managed house types and sizes that are suitable for different needs and good for the planet (energy efficient)
5. A diverse range of shops and things to do for all ages, and all cultures.
6. Creating green spaces that people will want to use and look after.
7. A place where people can hope, learn and achieve their goals through the right skills training and job opportunities.
8. A neighbourhood that is safe, well used, welcoming to all, and keeps the spirit and pride of Ashington alive.
9. Having streets that are clean, having access to internet, being able to get around easily on public transport.
10. Easy to move around with safe, enjoyable travel routes for walking and cycling.

The masterplan includes three phases, as summarised in table 1 below.

| Phase One: 2023 - 2027 | Phase Two: 2027- 2035 | Phase Three: 2035 on |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundation phase • Creation of a Hirst Strategic Lead and supporting team • Creation of governance structure including community representation • Build on existing projects and initiatives. • Identify immediate/urgent priorities with community and support programme of specific community led initiatives. • Address local specific key challenges raised by residents that require action by NCC services and partner organisations. • Delivery of first new, high quality housing phase via strategic development of former Coulson School site | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on Phase 1 community-led projects, capacity building and co-design. • Agree business cases and planning briefs with the community to allow development of programme of sites in locality to support all facets of area improvement aims. • Series of pilot high-quality residential living projects within a focused area • Improving the quality, size, accessibility, and energy efficiency of existing homes • Improving the safety, accessibility and appearance of streets and spaces • Whole study area projects | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of projects to support longer-term evolution of the Hirst identified in Phases 1 and 2. • Learning from projects and strategies implemented in the earlier phases developed across the rest of the study area. • Initial ‘priority areas’ adapted to each location / context. • Provide a high quality, sustainable living environment for residents with a good mix of homes, businesses, local services and activities, well connected to the town centre and surrounding areas. • Continue an asset-based community development approach, forging strong |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify, seek and secure external capital funding streams | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links to existing strategic projects | bonds in the community, enabling community led projects and spaces for people to flourish |
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Table 1 Summary of Hirst Masterplan Phases

5.2 Governance Arrangements

The following governance arrangements, including links to relevant stakeholders within Ashington are shown in figure 1 below. Terms of reference and code of conduct documents are included in Appendices 2 & 3.

Points to note:

- **Board Responsibilities:**
 - The Hirst Partnership Board is an advisory board to the lead and accountable body, Northumberland County Council
 - Advising on a clear programme of interventions as outlined in the Hirst Masterplan
 - Ensuring communities' voices are involved in shaping design and decision making at each phase of development.
 - Actively engaging deliberately and constructively with residents and the private, public, and voluntary sectors, providing updates and information on plans.
 - Ensuring equality, inclusion, and diversity in all its engagement with local communities and organisations
 - Ensuring that housing decision making strategies are developed with the intention of providing improved housing options for the benefit of existing Hirst residents.
 - Upholding the Seven Principles of Public Life (the Nolan Principles)
 - Keeping records of meetings and advice given
- The board will be formally established following the recruitment of officers to lead the ongoing resourcing of the Masterplan.

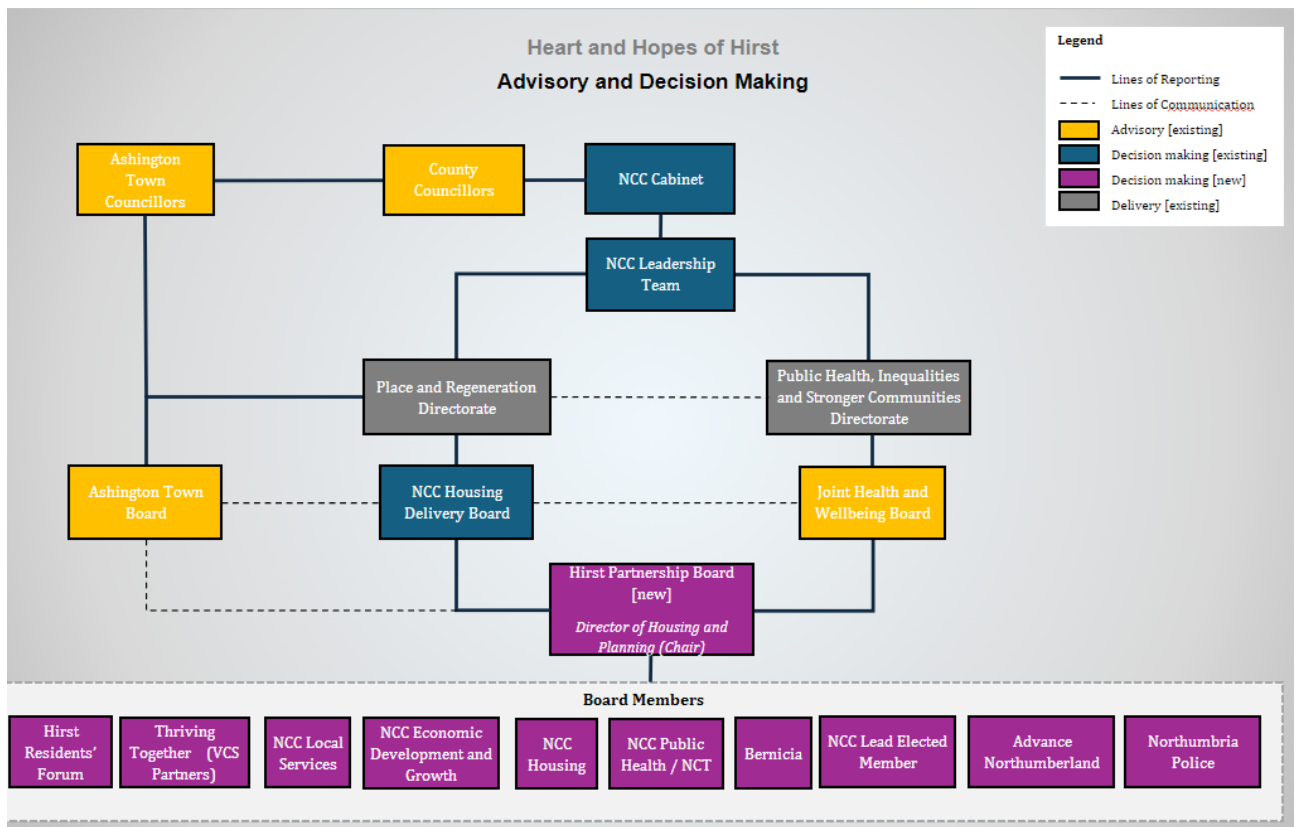


Figure 1 Hirst Masterplan Governance Arrangements

Figure 1 demonstrates the linkages across Ashington with other key stakeholders. The board will also be mindful of all the linked projects in the area where collaborations and cross referencing will be important. A pipeline of projects will be developed in conjunction with the Ashington Investment Plan and will be used to inform programme development and delivery. Updates to this will be provided going forward.

5.3 Initial Staffing Arrangements

Two new roles are proposed for the delivery of phase one of the Masterplan as outlined in table 3 below. The posts will initially be for a three year term.

| New Role | Hirst Strategic Lead (Band 10) | Community and Housing Programme Manager (Band 8) |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| Main Job Responsibilities | Strategic Lead for the Hirst master plan delivery <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Capital funding acquisition. ○ Housing delivery and change management. ○ Strategic Partnership working | Trusted contact point within the community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Community project support and enablement (ABCD) ○ Housing change management |

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| Main skills and experience requirements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Funding Acquisition ○ Strategic community development ○ Strategic housing change and development | Equally skilled and experienced in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Asset based community development. ○ Supporting communities through housing change situations |
|---|--|---|

Table 3 Summary new role descriptions

Estimated staffing cost of the two posts are shown below in table 4.

| Post | Band | 2024 | 2025 | 2026 |
|---|------|----------|----------|----------|
| Hirst Strategic Lead | 10 | £63,926 | £67,817 | £71,667 |
| Community and Housing Programme Manager | 8 | £50,584 | £54,236 | £58,000 |
| Total (A) | | £114,510 | £122,053 | £129,667 |
| Expenses, IT and PPE (B) | | £3,500 | £1,500 | £1,500 |
| NCC contribution (A/3 + B) | | £41,670 | £42,184 | £44,722 |

Table 4 estimated staffing costs (see assumptions below)

Assumptions:

- Includes salary, NI, pension.
- Staff will be appointed on the bottom spine point of each Band, rising by one point annually for five years.
- Pay award equivalent to that paid in 2022-23 will apply annually.
- Years run April – March
- Banding subject to job evaluation

5.4 Communications Plan

A communications plan will be developed in conjunction with the regeneration team to integrate it with plans for communications around other projects in Ashington and the work of the Ashington Town Board.

5.5 Summary Timeline

| Details | Q1 24 | Q2 24 | Q3 24 | Q4 24 | 2025 | 2026 | 2027 | 2028-2035 | 2035> |
|---|-------|-------|---------|-------|------|------|------|-----------|---------|
| Coulson Park development | | | | | | | | | |
| Comms with residents and other stakeholders | | | | | | | | | |
| Corporate reporting | | | | | | | | | |
| Recruitment | | | | | | | | | |
| Delivery | | | Phase 1 | | | | | Phase 2 | Phase 3 |

6. Options open to the Council and reasons for the recommendations

6.1 Do Maximum, Intermediate and Minimum Option

The Hirst Masterplan (appendix 1) presents three scoping options. This paper seeks cabinet support to work towards the ‘Do Maximum’ option whilst seeking support from external funding agencies. The three options are summarised in table 2 below. Each of the options will require an element of revenue and an increasing degree of external capital funding. The proposal from the partnership group presenting this report is that the plan should be ambitious if it is to make a meaningful positive impact on tackling inequalities and improving the place and lives of the local community.

| Do Minimum | Intermediate Option | Do Maximum |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retrofit of properties within the pilot zone • Repairs and maintenance to boundaries, gardens etc • Improve back lanes (parking, green spaces, planting, refuse etc) • Improved routes through north west quadrant • Pocket Park on First Avenue (to include mounds / natural play, planting, seating, renewed community noticeboard) • Infrastructure to enable District Heat Network in 2030 | <p>As Minimum Option, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconfigure existing properties into modern, larger homes. • Selective demolition and new build homes • New central, open public space with play, seating, shelter, trees, planting (created by selective demolition of properties in centre of block) • New rain gardens and street greening, opening ends of terraces | <p>As Intermediate Option, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant redevelopment of Pilot Area with larger scale provision of new, high quality homes, for existing residents and improvement of public spaces. • Significant redevelopment of north west quadrant with retrofit, • reconfiguration, new homes, and spaces. • Redevelopment of Bellway House including community, food, leisure, residential, greening, and public space opportunities, involving the opening of this block to allow views and access |

Table 2 Three options for progression

7. Implications

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| Policy | This paper aligns with the revised ‘Building Blocks of a Good Life’ of the refreshed Northumberland Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy. It considers and seeks to align with other organisational strategies including the corporate plan and the inequalities plan. |
| Finance and value for money | Two new collaborative staff posts will be created to drive forward the delivery of the Hirst Masterplan. They will be equally funded for three years by Northumberland County Council, Advance Northumberland and Bernicia. NCC element will be funded from Housing Reserves. |

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| | <p>There is no capital ask from the council at this time. External funding will be sought by the board and officer team on behalf of the council.</p> <p>It may be that as part of developing implementation plans, NCC will need to consider additional recruitment implications. It is envisaged that delivery posts will be capitalised within externally funded projects.</p> |
| Legal | <p>The governance arrangements for the board created to oversee the work of the Masterplan involve an advisory group and not a decision-making body. Northumberland County Council will retain accountable body status. As host organisation Northumberland County Council will take all employment responsibilities for the new officer posts.</p> |
| Procurement | <p>There are no specific requirements for procurement articulated in this report, however the actions will require additional action plans and each organisation will need to consider procurement implications at this point.</p> |
| Human resources | <p>It may be that as part of developing implementation plans, NCC will need to consider additional recruitment implications. It is envisaged that delivery posts will be capitalised within externally funded projects.</p> |
| Property | <p>The Masterplan refers to the use of Coulson Park school site as a site of strategic interest in the delivery of the first phase of the masterplan. Plans are being developed with the key partners to deliver this site to support the delivery of the Masterplan</p> |
| The Equalities Act: is a full impact assessment required and attached? | <p>No - not required at this point</p> <p>An equalities impact assessment has not been carried out. However, the actions included are specifically aimed at reducing health inequalities which include to people with characteristics protected by the Public Sector Equality Duty.</p> |
| Risk assessment | <p>Risks to the council may include reputational risk, should endeavours to seek capital funding to deliver the masterplan be unsuccessful.</p> |
| Crime and disorder | <p>It is the intention of the Hirst Masterplan to include elements that support the 'designing out' of crime, providing a positive impact on crime and disorder in the area. Northumbria Police will be included in the development of the scheme.</p> |
| Customer considerations | <p>No direct impact on customer services is planned at this time. Updates will be provided as detailed delivery plans are created.</p> |

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| Carbon reduction | The implementation of the masterplan aims to include the potential to link to a district heat network and to include carbon reduction measures in its delivery. |
| Health and wellbeing | The Hirst Masterplan aims to improve the health outcomes of its residents by the reduction of inequalities in the area. |
| Wards | Ashington Central; |

8. Background papers

Appendix 1 – Hirst Masterplan executive summary
Appendix 2 – Hirst Partnership Board Terms of Reference
Appendix 3 – Hirst Partnership Board Code of Conduct

9. Links to other key reports already published.

[Joint Health and Well-being Strategy Refresh Build Blocks for a Healthy Life \(14th December 2023\)](#)

[Healthy Neighbourhoods Paper \(11th January 2024\)](#)

10. Author and Contact Details

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