

## BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

**Report of:** Leader and Executive Director of Place

**To:** Council: 5 November 2020

**Author:** Andrew Holdsworth (Inward Investment Manager)

**Subject:** Norfolk Strategic Fund

**Purpose:** To accept funds from the Norfolk Strategic Fund to enable Breckland Council's ongoing Covid-19 economic response

### **Recommendation(s):**

- 1) That Council accepts receipt of £583,572 from the Norfolk Strategic Fund, to enable programmes in support of:
  - Digital enablement of High Street businesses in Breckland
  - Master Planning around Snetterton Heath
  - A new Business Start-Up scheme targeting those who have been impacted by Covid-19
  - A business support programme run by the Cambridge to Norwich Tech Corridor.

### **1.0 BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 The Norfolk Strategic Fund (NSF) was established in June 2020 to support funding for regional economic activity which helped respond to the challenges created by Covid-19 and invest in projects which would support resilience and growth in the economy. The fund was established with commitments from the Business Rates Pool, New Anglia LEP, Norfolk County Council and Norfolk District Councils (with a total value of £6.75m).
- 1.2 A regional decision was made to pre-allocate £2.25m of this fund to Norfolk tourism priorities, with the remainder of the fund made available through a competitive application process open to all Norfolk Local Authorities, Partnership Organisations and the New Anglia LEP. This process ran from August – October 2020, and was administered by Officers from Norfolk County Council, with recommendations made to the Norfolk Leaders Group for approval.
- 1.3 Having engaged extensively in the process, Breckland Council sought support for key projects and activity to support local priorities as well as working with regional partners to support several larger cross-border initiatives. Positively, Breckland was highly successful in making applications which passed the viability tests and scoring and has been able to secure three tranches of funding for direct Breckland projects, and a further tranche for a partner project through the Cambridge to Norwich Tech Corridor.
- 1.4 The headline details of our successful Programmes, and their core operational parameters are set out in Appendix 1 of this report.
- 1.5 The Leader on 26 October 2020 issued a decision agreeing the receipt and spend of the grant, but Rule 3.4.4(h) of the Council's Financial Procedure Rules currently also requires full Council approval for receipt and spend of grants over £100,000. The Leader decision is therefore recommended approval by full Council.

## 2.0 **OPTIONS**

- 2.1 Do nothing – do not accept the grant offer from the NSF. This option is not recommended as Breckland would miss out on a key strategic enabler and tool to help respond to the challenges of Covid-19.
- 2.2 Fund the Programmes via Breckland Council resources. This option is not recommended given the activity is additional to that contained within the existing budget and would create further pressures to be managed.

## 3.0 **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 3.1 The Norfolk Strategic Fund represents a significant opportunity to draw down external grant funding to support local priorities.
- 3.2 The Projects and Programmes of activity which Breckland has secured support to fund represent key requirements and opportunities for the economic response to Covid-19. They will enable Breckland to be more resilient, and better placed to grow back stronger. The timing of these projects are crucial, given the move away from Furlough and the added risk to local employment rates.

## 4.0 **EXPECTED BENEFITS**

- 4.1 The Council will benefit from £583,572 to enable economic priorities which would not otherwise have been available.
- 4.2 The programmes themselves are modelled to generate significant benefits including:
- Support for High Street Businesses across Breckland, with training workshops and advice available to all and 50 individual grant awards
  - Expected 12 new start-up businesses
  - Unlocked development scheme which will generate over 4,000 jobs and additional £125m GVA
  - Over 100 businesses engaged along the Tech Corridor with support for investment, funding, pivoting and collaboration. Cluster and spatial planning moved forwards through new detailed technical studies.

## 5.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

### 5.1 **Carbon Footprint / Environmental Issues**

- 5.1.1 A key determinant to successful bids to the NSF was environmental impact and sustainability. All of the Breckland projects have satisfied this criterion.

### 5.2 **Contracts**

- 5.3.1 Breckland District Council will engage several third-party suppliers to deliver elements of these programmes. These arrangements will be entered into under existing standards and in line with policy, and no contractual liability will extend beyond the resource envelope provided via the NSF allocations.

### 5.3 **Corporate Priorities**

- 5.4.1 The proposed use of NSF, and the programmes it will enable, directly support priorities contained within the Corporate Plan, particularly around the “Your Place” and “Your opportunity” priorities.
- 5.4.2 The recommendations are in line with the Council’s Covid-19 Recovery Plan in particular, the elements around supporting the economy.

**5.5 Financial**

- 5.5.1 The award for £583,572 will be drawn down in stages for each programme. The drawdown process will be monitored and supported by Finance Officers and Regeneration Officers through the joint programme oversight arrangements. The funding relating to CNTC activity will be drawdown under the existing mechanisms established for hosting CNTC activity.

**6.0 WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED**

- 6.1 The combined projects will deliver support available to all wards / communities in Breckland.

**7.0 ACRONYMS**

- 7.1 NSF – Norfolk Strategic Fund  
7.2 CNTC – Cambridge to Norwich Tech Corridor

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**Background papers:-**

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**Key Decision:** Yes / No

**Exempt Decision:** Yes / No

**This report refers to a Discretionary Service**

**Appendices attached to this report: (list appendices below or delete)**

Appendix A Project Summaries and key Operational Details

## **Appendix A: Project Summaries and Key Operational Details**

Breckland Council has been successful in securing approval and funding for the following programmes of activity. Overall Programme Management of the activity will be the responsibility of the Inward Investment Manager, with lead Officers responsible for each specific Project / Programme:

<b>Project / Programme Name:</b>	<b>New Business Start-Up Scheme</b>
<b>Grant Award:</b>	£75,000
<b>Summary of Activity:</b>	<p>This scheme will provide advice and grants targeted at individuals who are looking to start new businesses, having suffered from the impacts of the recent economic turmoil (e.g. made redundant, struggling to find new opportunities, or having had an existing enterprise fail). It is an identified key priority, given the lack of equivalent support available for small / early stage start-ups in Norfolk, and the identified strong latent demand.</p> <p>Grants will be available for £2.5k to £10k, to fund key elements of a new Business Plan. Applicants will need to be Breckland residents to be eligible and need to provide a basic business plan. The business plan and application will be subject to an appropriately light touch assessment, based on due diligence and a scoring of core elements, to identify funding available.</p> <p>Applications will be via the Council's Business Support website. Oversight and approvals within the scheme will be delegated to the Council's Regeneration Manager, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and relevant Portfolio Members as appropriate.</p> <p>Pre-applications to the scheme are being taken now, with awards to start immediately following approval. The expectation is the scheme will run to Spring 2021, although funding will be made available on a first-come-first-served basis, and the scheme may close earlier if fully committed.</p> <p>The NSF funding will be enhanced by overlapping this scheme with existing start-up support from Breckland, including additional funding available to new enterprises that wish to take up retail space on Breckland High Streets. Further, the advice and support elements will be enhanced through integration with existing advice services including the New Anglia LEP Growth Hub and organisations such as the Prince's Trust.</p>
<b>Key Outputs Expected:</b>	12 new businesses created within 12 months (with a modelled 20 new jobs created over a 24-month period).

<b>Project / Programme Name:</b>	<b>Digital High Streets Programme</b>
<b>Grant Award:</b>	£115,572
<b>Summary of Activity:</b>	<p>This scheme will combine professional advice, guidance, and support with cash grants to High Street businesses for them to maximise their digital potential.</p> <p>Using expert external advisers, a series of workshops and individual assessments, will be run for each Market Town's business community. These will help coach and train around a full spectrum of key issues relating to digital success, from social media marketing through to online sales and fulfilment. This broad learning will be further enhanced by grants available to High Streets businesses to invest or commission activity to solve their own specific needs (e.g. building a new website, investing in a social media advertising campaign). This is an identified key priority given pockets of low digital utilisation in Breckland business, and a strong need to channel shift with the changes to national shopping trends and the risks of further lockdowns.</p> <p>Applications to the Programme will be via the Council's website and are already open for pre-registration. The workshops and grant programmes will start from November in order to help prepare for the lead into Christmas and continue into the New Year reflecting different businesses have different availability and capacity to invest time in this activity.</p> <p>Oversight and approvals within the scheme will be delegated to the Council's Regeneration Manager, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and relevant Portfolio Members as appropriate.</p>
<b>Key Outputs Expected:</b>	30 workshops delivered for each Market Town (initially online); 50 grants issued worth up to £1.5k to businesses

<b>Project / Programme Name:</b>	<b>Snetterton Master Planning Project</b>
<b>Grant Award:</b>	£238,000
<b>Summary of Activity:</b>	<p>This project will deliver a comprehensive development strategy to realise the vision for Snetterton Heath employment area. This will include identification of the required infrastructure and phasing of this relative to the delivery of commercial floorspace. Furthermore, it will be more prescriptive in terms of the uses that it makes provision for and will seek to 'guide' particular sector uses to certain locations within the overall area and have the capacity to allocate further land for commercial development.</p>

	<p>The 'master planning' work will be focussed on the future ambitions for the area and ensure that development is strategically linked to planned growth elsewhere within the CNTC. It will complement and add value to existing work and studies already completed.</p> <p>The NSF investment will be combined with existing resource and activity allocated to unlocking Snetterton Heath, including the £6m investment underway in delivering power to the site. This will enable an holistic and strategic programme approach to realising this substantial, national-level growth opportunity.</p> <p>The Programmes timeline will draw down funding for key technical expertise over the next 18 months.</p>
<b>Key Outputs Expected:</b>	Key technical documents and tools required to unlock development which will generate over 4,000 jobs and additional £125m GVA.

<b>Project / Programme Name:</b>	<b>Cambridge Norwich Tech Corridor 'Renew Project'</b>
<b>Grant Award:</b>	<b>£155,000</b>
<b>Summary of Activity:</b>	<p>One of the key roles the CNTC plays is helping facilitate and encourage business growth and clustering along the A11. Alongside the delivery of new development sites, this work is key to unlocking the growth vision for the corridor, particularly in areas like Snetterton and Thetford. The 'renew' project will provide key additional activity to support this including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creating a new 'Scale Up Platform &amp; Investment Catalyst': an online platform that curates and collates masterclasses, investment readiness support, funding advice created by partners such as InvestEast, Low Carbon Innovation Fund, the GrowthHub, etc.</li> <li>- Delivering 'Funding Fit' and "e-Imagine Challenge' events to enable businesses to collaborate, innovate and find new ways to work together across the region.</li> <li>- Delivering Cluster Development Roadmap to help drive coordinated and complimentary growth along the A11 corridor. This project will be underpinned by detailed technical analysis, including detailed location studies which will cover Breckland sites, to inform existing and potential areas of strength. The roadmap will include action plans for key stakeholders and identify main gaps which require investment / resolution.</li> <li>- Creating a new 'Knowledge Ecosystem Growth Prospectus' which will help 'bundle' complementing investment opportunities across the Tech Corridor.</li> </ul> <p>This activity has also attracted a further match of £62,500 from other</p>

	<p>partners including the New Anglia LEP. The activity will be run from November 2020 to October2021.</p> <p>Delivery will be managed via the CNTC Programme Director, under the existing relationship established for CNTC Projects.</p>
<b>Key Outputs Expected:</b>	<p>100 businesses engaged / supported. Including via: 8 Pitching events to investors; 12 Funding Fit/ Re-Imagine events, with at least 20 collaborations facilitated. Technical studies delivered including: Cluster Development Roadmap completed; Knowledge Ecosystem Growth Prospectus.</p>