

## BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

**Report of:** Cllr Paul Claussen, Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Economic Development & Growth

**To:** Council, 23<sup>rd</sup> March

**Author:** Andrew Holdsworth, Assistant Director Economy & Growth

**Subject:** Norfolk Investment Framework (NIF)

**Purpose** To accept the funding awarded to Breckland from the Norfolk Investment Framework (NIF)

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

- 1) That Council accepts the funding awarded to Breckland from the Norfolk Investment Framework (NIF) to deliver work that will bring forward the Wayland Digital & Creative Media Centre (DCMC) project.
- 2) That Council provide delegated authority to the Assistant Director for Economy & Growth (in consultation with the Executive Member for Economic Development & Growth) to enter into the Grant Funding Agreement and oversee the Wayland DCMC project.

### **1.0 BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 Breckland Council have worked with the Wayland Partnership for several years to develop a proposal for a multi-use centre on Watton High Street. This would house a number of facilities, including business support, office space and training, focused on the growing digital and creative media sectors; whilst also containing a range of commercial and leisure facilities. This proposed mixed-used facility, is referred to as the Wayland Digital & Creative Media Centre (DCMC).
- 1.2 The current vision for the DCMC is to replace the existing Wayland House building on Watton High Street and construct a new Digital and Creative Media Centre. The Digital Creative Media Centre will create a state-of-the-art centre with coding training space, podcast studios, a gaming event cinema, incubator space for SMEs in creative and digital media and a café. It will create digital and creative training space for start-ups and an incubator. The centre will include 2,500 sqm of training and flexible office space. The creation of a new anchor on the high street will drive footfall and catalyse wider town centre regeneration.
- 1.3 The DCMC, and the facilities within, would help to tackle many of the issues facing Watton and the wider area. Improving skills provision in a growing sector will aid Breckland's young people; creation of new high-quality office space will boost entrepreneurship and growth; and an increased retail and leisure offer will boost footfall at the western end of the High Street. There is no other centre in Norfolk that offers all of the proposed, complimentary facilities under one roof, and therefore it is envisaged that the DCMC being a draw to entrepreneurs, businesses and visitors from across the region.
- 1.4 The DCMC was identified as a part of the Future Breckland work undertaken and was earmarked as a key priority for Watton through that work, and underpinning public and stakeholder consultation.

- 1.5 Work has already been completed to develop the proposal, market research has been undertaken that demonstrates need and demand, a Strategic Outline Case has been completed, and some early design work has been delivered. A working group involving multiple stakeholders from across the public and private sectors have been heavily involved throughout the process.
- 1.6 It is clear at this stage that a project of this ambition will require significant investment, in the order of £8m - £10m estimated based on near equivalents developed across the Country. Part of the funding strategy is to lever both public and private investment, and in order to do so the scheme will need to be supported by detailed business and investment plans, as well as technical specifications for the solution.

## **2.0 BACKGROUND - NORFOLK INVESTMENT FRAMEWORK**

- 2.1 Norfolk County Council (NCC) commissioned an 'Investment Framework' for the county in response to several factors:
- The Government's Levelling Up White Paper
  - The desire to create a step-change in the economic profile of the county.
  - The move away from EU funding to a new national financial framework, with more competition for funding, highlighting the need to clearly evidence challenges.
- 2.2 Underpinning the Framework is a comprehensive evidence base about the county, its places, people and sectors. The evidence base and full Investment Framework can be viewed on the [County Council's website](#)
- 2.3 Based on the detailed data and analysis, the Framework is a set of high-level investment priorities designed to tackle four 'Grand Challenges' that Norfolk faces:
- To create new opportunities for Norfolk's residents by increasing skills and labour market dynamism.
  - To provide effective and efficient public services to a spatially dispersed population.
  - To strengthen and future-proof business clusters, to grow the economy.
  - To protect Norfolk's economic and natural assets from climate change
- 2.4 The Framework was endorsed by NCC's Cabinet in June 2022, and funding was secured to take forward pilot activity and start to deliver interventions to start to address the Grand Challenges. A competitive process was run by NCC to identify these projects.

## **3.0 PROPOSED NIF FUNDED PROJECT**

- 3.1 As part of the Council's approach to engaging with the NIF, Breckland Council submitted a full investment case to the NIF Team for pilot project activity, that would be undertaken which would help to move the DCMC project forward and lay the foundations for its future delivery. This application was one of the successful projects chosen to receive funding.
- 3.2 The total project costs will be £150,000, with Breckland having received a Grant Offer Letter for £125,000 of this from the NIF, the additional £25,000 will come via match funding.
- 3.3 The project will deliver work that is made up of two distinct parts:
- **Proof of Concept** – This would involve piloting the incubation and office facilities, as well as training provision, within the existing Wayland House building.

- **Full Business Case** – As part of this we envisage procuring multiple specialist contractors to complete relevant components of a business case of the required detail for a project of this size and complexity, including building design work and options, as well as details of the revenue business case and specific services and offerings which could be successfully delivered from a new facility.

3.4 Throughout the Proof-of-Concept period, all of those businesses that are supported through the incubation and office space and provided support. It is intended this will be delivered in collaboration with local enterprise partners, as well as leading businesses who are in support of the concept. Through this, we will gain an understanding of how many start-ups and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have been supported, whilst also establishing how many of these have grown and/or become more productive as a result.

3.5 Outputs and outcomes that we would expect to see delivered as a result of the Proof-Of-Concept work, these are:

- 10 – Number of businesses supported
- 50 – Interactions supported with Norfolk residents and businesses
- 5 – Businesses that have increased their productivity

#### 4.0 **OPTIONS**

4.1 **Option 1 – Council accepts the funding awarded to Breckland from the Norfolk Investment Framework and provides delegated authority to the Assistant Director for Economy & Growth to enter into the GFA and oversee the Wayland DCMC project** allowing for the Full Business Case and Proof of Concept work to be undertaken.

4.2 **Option 2 – Do nothing.** This would mean that Breckland would not receive the £125,000 in funding from the NIF, therefore being unable to deliver a Full Business Case and Proof-Of-Concept work for the DCMC.

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

5.1 Accepting the grant funding awarded to Breckland Council via the Norfolk Investment Framework (NIF) would allow for work to start on delivering the Full Business Case and Proof of Concept work associated with the Wayland DCMC.

#### 6.0 **EXPECTED BENEFITS**

6.1 The Proof-of-Concept work will help to support local entrepreneurs and residents, as although on a smaller scale than at the proposed Wayland DCMC facility, local people will have access to incubation and office space, as well as training provision on the High Street; helping to support growth.

6.2 Production of a Full Business Case and delivery of the proposed Proof of Concept work at Wayland House will help to build the case for the DCMC, allowing for the project team to be more successful when applying for and securing external funding for capital works.

#### 7.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

In preparing this report, the report author has considered the likely implications of the decision - particularly in terms of Carbon Footprint / Environmental Issues; Constitutional & Legal; Contracts; Corporate Priorities; Crime & Disorder; Data Protection; Equality & Diversity/Human Rights; Financial; Health & Wellbeing; Reputation; Risk

Management; Safeguarding; Staffing; Stakeholders/Consultation/Timescales; Other. Where the report author considers that there may be implications under one or more of these headings, these are identified below.

## 7.1 Corporate Priorities

7.1.1 As a result of this funding, important work will take place to move the Wayland DCMC project forward, this will help to deliver on a number of strategic priorities within the Corporate Plan, particularly under the 'Thriving Places' theme. Specifically, these include: building out, in each town, opportunities of significant strategic impact to unlock future growth; focusing on the support we provide to our businesses, new and old; attracting new investment and Government support and funding for key programmes.

## 7.2 Financial

7.2.1 The £25,000 match funding element of the project will come from existing resources.

7.2.2 The Council will act as accountable body for the funding, and work with the Wayland Partnership and the project partners to agree how best to utilise the investment.

## 7.3 Stakeholders / Consultation / Timescales

7.3.1 Throughout the Wayland DCMC project, a large and diverse group of stakeholders have been heavily involved in shaping the proposals. This project emerged from Future Breckland as a key priority for the people of Watton, this was as a result of a large amount of consultation with the local community. Further to this, consultation work has been undertaken by the Wayland Partnership with residents, businesses and students that demonstrates a demand for this mixed-use facility.

## 8.0 WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED

8.1 The work proposed will have the largest impact on the ward of Watton; however, all wards have the possibility to benefit from the proposed Centre.

## 9.0 ACRONYMS

9.1 The acronyms used in this report are as follows:

- a. GFA – Grant Funding Agreement
- b. NIF – Norfolk Investment Framework
- c. DCMC – Digital & Creative Media Centre
- d. NCC – Norfolk County Council
- e. SME – small and medium-sized enterprises

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Background papers:-

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**Key Decision:** No

**Exempt Decision:** No

**This report refers to a Discretionary Service**

**Appendices attached to this report:**

Appendix A – Proforma B