

## BRIEFING REPORT

<b>TITLE OF REPORT:</b>	<b>Places Scrutiny Panel</b>
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**1. PURPOSE OF AGENDA ITEM:**

To provide a response to the queries raised by the Vice Chair of Places Scrutiny Panel regarding the impacts of Covid-19 on Project Anchor and wider Town Centre.

**2. KEY POINTS (BACKGROUND AND DETAIL):****2.1 Background**

A request has been made by the Vice Chair of the Places Scrutiny Panel to provide a response to three queries relating to the impact of Covid-19 on the delivery and design of Project Anchor and wider Town Centre.

**2.2 Detail**

**In the plans, it looks predominantly office space, has this been reviewed since the COVID pandemic?**

The pandemic has caused the adaptation of existing process to be undertaken remotely and accelerated employee preference towards flexible and home working, which has resulted in demands that are fundamentally different to pre-covid. However, the delivery of office space still remains essential to the diversification of Scunthorpe Town Centre and wider sector enhancements for North Lincolnshire.

In order for North Lincolnshire to grow and prosper, diversification to its subregional centre and principle towns is key, adapting to the challenges faced in the retail and leisure industries which is further enhanced by advances in technology. The delivery of Project Anchor aims to make a start on addressing the wider issue of dependency on manufacturing and wholesale & retail trade for employment, providing the opportunity to grow a range of sectors and markets to encourage positive economic growth and resilience. This position has not changed as a result of the pandemic and renewal of the high street through the introduction of new uses is still essential to the vitality of the town. This is echoed through the update to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which responds to the rapid changes in the UK High Street by supporting the revival of town centres through diversification.

Project Anchor will enable the creation of a vibrant business hub that will seek to encourage inward investment from a variety of multidisciplinary themes of health, creative industries, business and logistics, environment and energy. Acknowledging the importance of research and development as an essential driver of economic growth spurring innovation, invention and progress.

The towns reliance on retail and steel sectors, relative decline has resulted in low wage growth and poorer employment prospects with less disposable income, Project Anchor will seek to address this by reshaping the opportunities for employment and skills development unlocking incubator space for businesses and enabling links with educational facilities to support skills retention.

Project Anchor will create the scale and profile as an office location to attract serious private investment and speculative development to strengthen both Scunthorpe's and North Lincolnshire's economic position, establishing Scunthorpe as a place of excellence and set a precedent for investment throughout town. Consideration has been given to how the spaces are formed and the lease arrangement models, follow the pandemic which is address in response to question 3.

### **What is the current plan is there to attract people back into the town centre?**

Scunthorpe's Towns Deal, and subsequent Town Investment Plan (TIP), provides a programme of interventions to deliver increased prosperity by reshaping and renewing Scunthorpe. The TIP is complemented by the Future High Streets Fund, a catalyst to fast-track the re-purposing and repositioning of the High Street which aligns with North Lincolnshire's Economic Growth Plan.

The TIP details projects which will individually and collectively act in accelerating renewal and growth and leveraging further investment. Grant funding will see the development of Scunthorpe's cultural, arts and heritage offer, focusing on civic pride, providing a local attraction which will contribute to the enhancement and enrichment of both residents and visitors. The Town Fund will support on the development to diversify the high street, transforming Scunthorpe's Housing Market, repurposing brownfield sites in the town centre back into use and improve the quality and quantity of housing available. Further investment for the town centre is being sought from the Levelling Up Fund, with a view to develop upon ambitions outlined in the TIP, to create a place of excellence.

The delivery of the Scunthorpe Urban Park will be completed this year, creating a modern and attractive environment that will form a thriving cultural social hub, encouraging visitors and residents to dwell. The improvements to the urban landscape will create a safe and welcoming space to play, exercise, relax and hold events, injecting vibrancy in the high street and supporting businesses with increased footfall.

Further enhancements to the urban park have been put in place with the role out of new bins, designed to provide a cleaner, greener and more attractive environment. Digital display screens have also been installed in the high street and at key visitor destinations, to help market businesses, and local events/ attractions to support our visitor economy.

Engagement with the owners of both the Foundry and Parishes Shopping Centres, respectively continues in order to explore opportunities to bring vacant units back into use. A focus has been on enabling alternative uses to retail, such as health services, leisure services and a food and drink offer to provide a diversified offer that will also support the existing retailers.

### **Has consideration been given to new ways of working post the COVID pandemic to ensure the schemes longevity and viability?**

The pandemic is presenting opportunities for Northern England, promoting a surge of people to move out of the city in favour of lower cost and greener areas which has fed through into a shifting demand for office space in suburban premises, with a wave of start-ups locating themselves more north. In addition to this, the transformation of working models has also put more reliance on versatility, with flexible spaces in high demand.

The Enterprise and Innovation(E&I) Hub will provide spaces for collaboration, creativity and learning and will communicate a new perspective, attract talent and influence behaviour.

Providing a portfolio of space solutions – owned space, standard lease, flexible leases, flexible space and co-working spaces encouraging a balance of individual and collaborative work to ensure the longevity and viability of the intervention.

As organisations re-evaluate their footprints to reduce operating costs, it brings a new demand and awareness for better, more resilient office space. With the crisis accelerating the need for modern, flexible office space with access to lots of services, older buildings are no longer fit for purpose. The E&I Hub will deliver high-quality office space (Grade A), this standard and space, is currently not available in North Lincolnshire to small pioneering businesses who want to collaborate and grow.

The accelerated trend in home working has also revealed its limitations, as reliance of business success is still dependant on face-to-face interactions, collaboration and fortuity. With the office remains a vital anchor when trying to attract, retain and nurture talent in the workplace, delivering an important role in providing learning opportunities for younger employees. The space put forward in Project Anchor delivers workspace specifically in supporting interactions that cannot happen remotely. With some businesses primary purpose to accommodate specific moments of collaboration rather than individual work. The space will support the desired outcomes for collaboration, productivity, culture and work experience.

Physical office space plays a significant part in how people perceive a business, the iconic design of Project Anchor will become a destination with purpose, justifying the existence of the workspace. As the designs are developed for Project Anchor, further consideration has been given on the suitability and specification of products to ensure that the building can respond to another pandemic suitably:

- Focus has been given on the importance of smart hybrid meeting technology to meet the new needs of flexible working. With the required infrastructure in place to accommodate advances in computing platforms to allow workers to collaborate more effectively.
- Consideration has been given to contactless technology to reduce disease transmission E.g., Doors open automatically with motion sensors/smart lighting and contactless lift operation.
- The pandemic has radically reshaped office furniture, previously office desks have shrunk over years, now the reversal to enable people to have own space and align with the allowance of a six-feet distance rule.
- Ventilation has been heavily considered and recognised as being a key component to preventing the spread of disease.
- Density in offices spaces have changed moving away from open-plan layouts with more cellular cubicles linking in with the demand for smaller flexible office space.

### 3. IMPLICATIONS (RESOURCES, POLICY, RE-DESIGN)

N/A

### 4. CONCLUSION:

Consideration has been given to the impact of Covid-19 on the delivery and design of Project Anchor and wider Town Centre.

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