

Committee: **Executive Committee**
 Date of meeting: **2nd March 2022**
 Report Subject: **Levelling Up Funding (LUF) Bid Request**
 Portfolio Holder: **Cllr David Davies, Executive Member for
 Regeneration and Economic Development**
 Report Submitted by: **Owen Ashton, Service Manager Business and
 Regeneration**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
11.01.22	13.01.22	15.02.22			23.02.22	02.03.22		

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 To request authority to submit Levelling Up Funding (LUF) bids during the second call in line with the UK Govt LUF timetable.

2. Scope and Background

2.1 The LUF is a UK Govt fund of £800 M for the devolved nations over the next four years (up to 2024-25). Bids for the first round of funding had to demonstrate investment or delivery could begin on the ground in that financial year. The funds are administered on a competitive basis.

2.2 The second call for bids is expected to open in April/May 2022 and close in June/July 2022; exact dates will be reported when they have been confirmed. We are anticipating that the call will be focussed around capital works and towns with money having to be spent by 2024/25. This could provide an opportunity to secure funds to implement projects that are emerging out of the Master Plan/Place making Work undertaken in Brynmawr and Ebbw Vale.

2.3 The Regeneration and Development Team have been working on Placemaking Plans for Blaenau Gwent's towns to prepare for funding applications to UK and Welsh Government. The detail of the deliverability and sequencing of projects in these plans is still being developed.

2.4 In preparation for the expected announcement in the Spring it is prudent that the Council agrees that a bid for the LUF can be developed. Some of the key principles around the regeneration of towns post pandemic are set out below. The combined

- Facilitating towns as multi-purpose locations with a variety of uses, such as residential, education, healthcare, cultural, technology, community and purpose-focussed retail and hospitality;
- New purposes for sites and town buildings to encourage more uses in the town centre;
- Working with the changes in retail to encourage business start-up in our towns;

- Working with towns/communities to encourage more sustainable buildings, landscape and infrastructure as part of the decarbonisation agenda.
- 2.5 An adequate lead in time will be required as HM Treasury Green Book applications will need to be worked up which are very detailed and require a lot of technical input which means that if the Council wishes to submit a bid or bids preparation may need to begin before there is a Council structure to make decisions. However, this work has begun with the Placemaking plans which will form part of the background evidence for the bids, but there is still a large amount of work to be done.
- 2.6 The LUF Town Centre criteria from the current guidance sets out the following:
“Regeneration and town centre investment, building on the Towns Fund framework to upgrade eyesore buildings and dated infrastructure, acquire and regenerate brownfield sites, invest in secure community infrastructure and crime reduction, and bring public services and safe community spaces into town and city centres.”
- 2.7 Currently the projects that meet the current LUF criteria and more developed are the Ebbw Vale Multi Storey Car Park, and/or possibly the police station; and the Brynmawr Bus Depot site. There may also be an opportunity to bid for monies for Blaenau Gwent Town centres to decarbonise all the town centres through buildings improvements; and green and blue infrastructure critical to the future of sustainable development, health and wellbeing. Further details of these will be brought back to Members during the new Council session.

However, UK Government could change the criteria for the next round and so previously mentioned projects may no longer be suitable which would mean we would be unlikely to submit any application in round two.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

- 3.1 Option 1: (Preferred) To prepare applications for the next LUF round of bidding for the schemes identified in the report in paragraph 2.7.
- 3.2 Option 2: not to support the report and miss the next round for the LUF UK Govt funding.

4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

- 4.1 **Corporate Plan** – Blaenau Gwent towns can play a part in a number of the Corporate Priorities. The Strong and Environmentally Smart Communities does not mention towns specifically but it is embodied in the aims of the priority. Similarly, the Education and Social Services priorities can fit into the new vision for towns and link to the new Town Hubs that have already been developed.

Finally, the Economic Development and Regeneration priority sets out the main areas of work that we would associate with facilitating improvements in our town centres.

4.2 **Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act** - There are a number of goals that town centres touch in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act; one could argue that towns actually impact all of them. However, the main goals are:

- A prosperous Wales
- A resilient Wales
- A globally responsible Wales
- A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language
- A Wales of cohesive communities

4.3 **Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan** -Town centres do not feature as an objective in themselves but they are intrinsic in a number of the objectives in the BG Wellbeing Plan:

- Safe and friendly communities
- Look after and protect its natural environment
- Forge new pathways to prosperity
- Encourage and enable people to make healthy lifestyle choices in the places that they live, learn, work and play.

4.4 **Social Services and Wellbeing Act** - Town centres can play a part in the main principles of the Act through provision of a place that is suitable to provide social and economic wellbeing, and where individuals are able to participate and contribute to society.

4.5 **Environment Act (specifically the Section 6 Duty)** - Section 6 of the Environment Act is to do with our responsibility as a Council in maintaining and enhancing biodiversity, and promoting the resilience of ecosystems.

4.6 The bid for LUF will need to address both decarbonisation and biodiversity of town centres. Providing access to open and green space is strongly associated with wellbeing and successful, sustainable and attractive town centres.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

Submitting the bids to UK Govt will not have an immediate effect on the Council budget. A further report setting out what match funding will be expected will be brought to Council in the Summer.

5.2 If the report is not agreed and no applications are submitted there will be no immediate budget implications however this could have future negative consequences for the towns in Blaenau Gwent.

5.3 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

The risks around submitting a bid, and the bid content will be dealt with through the project development/LUF bid.

5.4 The risks around not submitting a bid are both reputational and the potential loss of capital investment into the town centres in BG.

5.5 ***Legal***

There are no legal implications associated with the content of this report.

5.6 ***Human Resources***

Additional technical expertise will be required to work on the bids. There is separate funding identified by UK Govt for this work to assist local authorities with development costs.

6. ***Supporting Evidence***

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

There is currently no PI or data to support this report.

6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

There are no outcomes associated with this report; the outcomes will be linked to the bid for LUF.

6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

Involvement through consultation and engagement will be part of the bid process.

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

There are no implications to consider as part of this report.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

The bids for LUF are aimed at improvements to towns in Blaenau Gwent and as such should have a preventative focus in terms of the built environment. Not submitting a bid may have a detrimental effect.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

The Regeneration team will be working in partnership to develop and deliver the bids to LUF.

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

Integration will be achieved across service areas through formal and informal arrangements.

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***

Decarbonisation will be a key consideration in the LUF bid.

6.9a ***Socio Economic Duty Impact Assessment***

Not applicable for this report, although the project will be subject of this assessment.

6.9b. ***Equality Impact Assessment***

Not applicable for the bid process.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 Monitoring of the bid, if successful will be through a dedicated Project Board with town groups involved in individual projects.

Formal evaluation will be through UK Govt following the project implementation.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- *N/A*