

challenges that they face to ensure their future economic prosperity. It is not considered that the Council will incur any significant costs in applying for the funding.

The Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) nationally totals £675 million. It is anticipated that this fund will be significantly oversubscribed. The Government has indicated that the majority of successful bids will receive between £5 -10 million; however the fund is able to contribute up to £25 million to projects per local area.

The fund will also support the regeneration of heritage high streets up to £55 million of the overall fund. This is through helping to restore historic high street properties through Historic England and equipping communities with their own resources to put historic buildings back into economic use via the architectural heritage fund.

Legal Implications: To draw down the funding the Council would need to enter into a funding agreement with the Government which would be considered by Legal Services prior to signing.

Risk Assessment: If the expression of interest does not align adequately with the Government criteria there is a risk that it has less likelihood of success. If unsuccessful it may be seen as a missed opportunity to help a High Street in Mid Devon meet its aspirations.

There is also a risk that despite investing significant amounts of staff time and resource that the expression of interest could still be unsuccessful; however the work undertaken to prepare an expression of interest could be seen as a useful basis for future funding opportunities and aligns with areas of activities that the Council is already engaged in.

This report refers to the potential to make a further bid under the heritage high street element of the fund. The ability to do so in addition to a main fund bid is currently unclear. Officers have been engaging with Historic England over a potential heritage focussed bid within the context of Cullompton town centre.

Equalities Impact: There are no equality issues identified in this report.

1. FUNDING PROGRAMME

- 1.1 High streets are recognised as lying at the heart of our communities and local economies, creating jobs, nurturing small businesses and injecting billions of pounds into our economy. The Government has committed to helping local high streets to evolve and adapt to the rapidly changing ways that communities use their high streets; changes that are having an impact on the success of the high street.
- 1.2 The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government released a call for Expressions of Interest (EOI) for a fund of £675 million that has been made available to support local areas to prepare long-term strategies for their high streets and town centres.

- 1.3 The fund will provide investment in physical infrastructure including improving access, regenerating high streets, using under-used retail units for housing and workspace and supporting new housing and workspace. In the first round for the fund, projects which are 'shovel ready' may be fast-tracked for funding.
- 1.4 There is also funding for regenerating heritage high streets - to restore historic high street properties and to put historic buildings back into economic use, for example as residential buildings, new workspaces or cultural venues. It is understood that Historic England will be administering a separate fund of £55 million towards this.
- 1.5 Local areas are invited by the Government to provide proposals setting out the overall vision that they wish to achieve for their high street (and town) and specific improvements that would contribute to that overall vision. Funding is available for up to £25 million for each successful project area although project funds in the region of £5-10 million are the expected allocation range per town centre.
- 1.6 The application process will be a 2 phase process. The first EOI phase is where the proposals will be assessed on the need for funding, nature of the challenge experienced by the high street and the vision for the future of the high street / town centre. For those who pass to Phase 2 there will be an amount of revenue funding available to work up project plans and associated business cases. Funding decisions will be based on project plans and business cases.
- 1.7 The receipt of EOIs for Phase 1, are expected by 22 March 2019. However, applications for the Fund are expected to be supported by a letter of Endorsement from the Local enterprise Partnership HotSW. Officers will be working on this basis. The Future High Streets Fund Prospectus, along with the recently released supplementary guidance for bidding authorities, is appended as **Appendix 1** and **Appendix 2** respectively.

2. ASSESSMENT OF THE POTENTIAL FOR AN EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

- 2.1 The two phase application process is expected to be highly competitive. The guidance makes it clear that Local Authorities need to prioritise the town centre in their area that would benefit most from the FHSF. The Government's Supplementary Guidance clearly specifies that Mid Devon is only eligible to apply for one town.
- 2.2 The guidance specifically refers to town centres. It is clear from the guidance that the population served by the high streets is a significant consideration along with the breadth of different services offered. It is clear therefore that we should be pursuing high streets in one of our three towns rather than the larger villages.
- 2.3 The guidance suggests that there are six areas in which the bids will be assessed as follows:
 - Population and links to wider economic area

- Challenges
- Rationale for selecting town centre area
- Town centre vision and ambition for change
- Engagement and alignment of vision
- Support for town centre vision

2.4 It is clear from the advice that successful bids will be for areas where challenges are significant and where funding has the potential to have the greatest impact. To inform the selection of which town centre Mid Devon puts forward, each of our three towns are considered in turn below:

2.5 **Crediton**, similar to all three of our towns, has a fairly wide rural catchment. It is performing reasonably well as a healthy town centre despite the national downturn and its proximity and access to Exeter city centre. It also has relatively high occupancy rates when compared to the other Mid Devon towns and benefits from good community activity and engagement. However, it still has significant challenges such as air pollution and through traffic. Similarly it has the potential to reduce the need to travel to Exeter by widening and expanding employment opportunities, improve the retail offer and enhancing the built environment. There is more that can be done to strengthen the town's identity and celebrate its culture. A Masterplan is planned to be developed in 2020/21 to tackle issues relating to the town centre and identify projects for intervention and is addressed within a separate report on this agenda.

2.6 **Cullompton** is at a time of transition with significant growth planned for the area. This includes sizeable development proposals to the North West of the town, the Garden Village initiative to the East and proposals for major infrastructure improvements. There is wide acknowledgement that there is an acute need to achieve the following:

- improve the heritage assets of the town;
- tackle air quality problems;
- remove through traffic; and
- improve the vibrancy of the town

2.7 The recent unsuccessful bid for Heritage Lottery funding does mean that there has been a bid already prepared for enhancing the heritage features of the town. This would mean that Cullompton could be well placed to pursue the Heritage element of the Future High Streets Fund pot referred to in the previous section of this report. It is intended that work on a Cullompton town centre masterplan will commence this year.

2.8 **Tiverton**, as with the other towns, has many challenges ranging from achieving increased footfall, improving the night time economy, enhancing the general environment of the town centre and tackling crime. Tiverton has, through its Masterplan regeneration work, made significant progress towards visioning for the Town and engaging the local community in better understanding the challenges and the way forward to help transform the town. There has also been substantial work done with regard to significant regeneration projects being planned for the town. The town now benefits from

an active Town Centre Partnership and there is growing clarity with regard to the aspirations of the town.

- 2.9 All three town centres would be legitimate contenders for the Future High Streets Fund. Given that the District Council can only choose one, it is recommended that a Tiverton based expression of interest (EOI) is pursued as it is considered that such a bid has the best fit with the Government's criteria and has greatest chance of success. The criteria for the EOI make particular reference to the nature of the challenge facing the town centre, the scope of ambition / vision and readiness of 'shovel-ready' projects to be taken forward. The Local Authority is already in discussion with Historic England to seek opportunities to bring monies into Cullompton and this could be timely given the creation of the Heritage element of the Future High Streets Fund likely to be administered by them. Whilst Mid Devon District Council has committed to a masterplanning exercise for Cullompton town centre, detailed plans for the town are not as well progressed as Tiverton. All three of Mid Devon's towns face significant challenges at a time of contracting high street retail. However, statistical evidence indicates that Cullompton and Tiverton have the greatest level of need, with Tiverton having the greatest clarity and readiness of key initiatives to transform the High Street. Other funding opportunities will be sought for Cullompton and Crediton.

3. AIM AND SCOPE OF THE EXPRESSION OF INTEREST.

- 3.1 A Tiverton based EOI would be complementing 'shovel ready' projects and initiatives already started and defined within the emerging Tiverton Town Centre Masterplan (that has been subject to a Stage 1 Public Consultation). The Regeneration and Delivery Plan shows clear evidence of MDDC seeking to invest in the town with opportunities to extend the programme of works beyond the Council's assets to include private investors. In this context, the EOI will refer to the award winning Town Hall Riverside development as evidence of Local Authority investment. However, a clear rationale between the vision for regenerating the High Street and how this links with the challenges will be required. As a means to evidence strategic ambition the EOI will scope out:

- i) Market Walk including redevelopment as a food and retail hall, improved frontages on to Bampton Street and the Pannier Market, new and additional residential accommodation and improved public realm.
- ii) Fore Street / The Pannier Market including redevelopment to provide enhanced visual links to the historic market building, improved frontages on to Fore Street, new and additional residential and retail accommodation and improved public realm.
- iii) Beck Square / Phoenix Lane including new and enhanced retail, residential, office, bar / restaurant and public realm works comprising private sector investment and third sector investment.
- iv) Ambition to regenerate the market area, improve the streetscene and enhance access through to an improved cinema offering.
- v) Town centre including enhanced connectivity (broadband & mobile), signage and public realm including confirmed S106 funding.

- 3.2 Each will be scoped out in the Phase 1 EOI, within the context of the criteria set out below. A plan of the suggested geographical area to be covered by the EOI is attached at **Appendix 3**. Supplementary guidance (issued 8 February 2019) provides weightings (%) to each element:

Defining the Place (10%)

- 3.3 This will require information setting out the extent of the high street / town centre area covered in the proposal including a description of the area, the population living and working in the town centre area, how the area acts as a centre of social and economic activity and its links with wider economic catchment area. Statistical evidence will be required to support the assertions.

Challenges (35%)

- 3.4 A clear description of the issues and challenges facing the area will be required including evidence setting out why the area would benefit from multiple sources of investment more than other centres in the area.

Strategic Ambition (55%)

- 3.5 Evidence of the level of ambition from the local authority, support from local stakeholders and how government support would help to overcome the challenges will be required. A clear rationale between the vision for regenerating the high street and how this links with the challenges will be required.

4.0 SUMMARY

- 4.1 A Tiverton based EOI is proposed. The scope of ambition, vision and readiness of transformative 'shovel-ready' projects with the involvement of private and third sector partners to extend the programme of works, is more advanced than Cullompton and Crediton. This includes opportunities to deliver a dynamic mix of uses, employments, living spaces and cultural programme within the town centre beyond just Council owned assets as encompassed within the Tiverton Town Centre Regeneration and Delivery Plan.
- 4.2 EOI are required by 5pm on 22 March 2019 with an announcement of those submissions moving on to Phase 2, expected summer 2019.
- 4.3 Should opportunity permit, authority is also sought to pursue a heritage high street bid for Cullompton.

Contact for more Information:

Adrian Welsh, Group Manager Growth, Economy and Delivery
01884 234398 awelsh@middevon.gov.uk

Christie McCombe, Area Planning Officer, (Major Projects, Tiverton EUE)
01884 234277 cmccombe@middevon.gov.uk

List of Background Papers:

Future High Streets Fund call for proposals including prospectus, supplementary guidance for bidding authorities and application form:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-high-streets-fund-call-for-proposals>

Circulation of the Report: Members of Cabinet