

FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

PRESS RELEASE

October 12, 2020

Mayor Palmer pledges further support to help bring transformational projects across the finish line

A multi-million pound bid to dramatically transform March town centre has been given a competitive edge in the bidding process after being backed by the Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

In May, Fenland District Council submitted an £11.3million bid to the Government's Future High Street Fund (FHSF) to help deliver a "once in a generation" rejuvenation of the town.

The outcome of more than 100 shortlisted bids from across the country was expected in late summer, but now all bidding authorities have been informed that match funding for their bids is among the 'gateway criteria' to the fund.

With a tight deadline to submit representations to the Government, the Council held an emergency Zoom meeting this week with Mayor James Palmer, who leads the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA), to discuss the situation.

The Leader of Fenland District Council, Cllr Chris Boden, led the Council's discussions with the Mayor, CPCA representatives and local members.

Members discussed the new requirement for match funding and considered the risk that, as the FSHF is oversubscribed and remains a competitive bidding process, any match funding should be as compelling as possible in order to maximise the chance of March's FHSF success.

At the meeting, Mayor Palmer agreed to a request from members to commit £900,000 of unallocated funding earmarked for March's Growing Fenland Masterplan to support the FHSF bid, subject to a successful bid outcome and CPCA Board approval.

And to make the bid as strong as possible, the CPCA has committed to find a further £1.1million of funding to support it, again subject to a successful bid outcome and CPCA Board approval. This builds upon the £450,000 of Local Growth Funding made by the CPCA into March Adult Education Centre back in January 2020.

Cllr Boden said: "This is a unique opportunity for the town of March. We are working together across local government to support the FHSF bid and deliver a dramatic transformation to the town which will be pivotal to its ongoing vitality. The Mayor's support puts us in a prime position to realise our ambitions for the town and make it fit for the future."

Cllr Chris Seaton, Fenland District Council's Portfolio Holder for the FHSF project, said: "The FHSF represents a once in a generation opportunity for March, and with the Mayor on board we stand a stronger chance of grabbing that opportunity with both hands. The projects it would deliver support the town's Growing Fenland Masterplan and match the aspirations of local people as highlighted in the Masterplan document."

Cllr Jan French, Deputy Leader of Fenland District Council and county, district and town ward member for March, added: "This is fantastic news for the town. Although we can't be certain that this

commitment from the Mayor will make our FHSF bid succeed, it places our bid in an even better position and makes it as compelling as possible in the competitive bidding process.”

Cllr Steve Count, Leader of Cambridgeshire County Council and district ward member for March, said: “These are truly exciting times for March, and we look forward to what the future holds. I’m delighted the Mayor has pledged his support to help make sure we clear the final hurdle and secure the money to start the transformation of the town.”

Mayor James Palmer said: “Making things happen is what the Combined Authority is all about – having the flexibility to jump in where needed and bring extra clout to the proposals and partnerships that will get our region ahead. We believe passionately in the future of Fenland, we’re investing heavily across the whole area, and backing this March bid is part of that. It will be worth every penny if it helps land the big prize. In a competitive process, I’m happy to put the weight of the Mayoral Combined Authority into making this dream a reality.”

The FHSF bid consists of five transformational projects, all of which will contribute to ensuring that March remains a vibrant and sustainable town in the future. The projects are:

- A dramatic intervention to transform Broad Street
- Opening up the riverside areas to improve visibility and access
- Redeveloping the historic Market Place
- Acre Road regeneration
- Reactivating vacant units and a ‘Flats Over Shops’ programme

The projects will work in conjunction with the March Area Transport Strategy (MATS), which is being delivered by the CPCA, Cambridgeshire County Council, and Fenland District Council.

The MATS project will address existing traffic flow problems in Broad Street, with the FHSF project developing the public realm following the road alterations. Together the projects would reduce traffic in the town centre and allow Broad Street to become more pedestrian and cycle friendly.

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For more information contact Fenland District Council press office on 01354 622226