

Report to: **Council**
Date: **5 April 2022**
Title: **West Devon Transport Hub in Okehampton,
Levelling Up Fund Tranche 2 Bid**
Portfolio Area: **Council: Cllr Jory**
Wards Affected: **All**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

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RECOMMENDATION:

That Council is RECOMMENDED to approve the submission by the Director, Place and Enterprise of an application to the Levelling Up Fund Tranche 2 for capital funding for West Devon Transport Hub in Okehampton as outlined in Section 2 of the report.

1. Executive summary

1.1 The Department for Transport, the Ministry for Housing, communities and Local Government and the Treasury have begun planning to invest £4.8 billion in high-value local infrastructure.

1.2 It is especially intended to support investment in places where it can make the biggest difference to everyday life. The Levelling Up Fund (LUF) is to be distributed as a capital grant, as part of this government's broader offer to level up opportunity across the UK.

1.3 West Devon Borough Council (the Council) has been identified as priority 2 - "medium need" under the LUF criteria.

1.4 During 2021, working in partnership with Devon County Council, Network Rail and GWR, the Council submitted a bid for about £11.2m funding to deliver the West Devon Transport Hub in Okehampton. This was unsuccessful.

1.5 During early 2022, feedback on the application was provided by Department for Transport, BEIS and Levelling Up Fund representatives, leading to the conclusion that the bid had passed the majority of the selection criteria. With specific additions, the bid would have likely been selected for funding, including further cycling and walking infrastructure.

1.6 The Levelling Up Fund is due to reopen during the Spring of 2022 offering a second tranche of funding for high value local infrastructure.

1.7 Working in partnership with Devon County Council, Network Rail and GWR, the Council intends to submit a bid to the second tranche for about £12m funding to deliver the West Devon Transport Hub in Okehampton.

1.8 The West Devon Transport Hub presents a once in a lifetime opportunity to transform Okehampton and the surrounding hamlets with a multi-modal travel exchange, to create a thriving neighbourhood that welcomes everyone. It will include; new station, lift and platform, a strengthened active travel cycle and walking offer, bus interchange, car park, EV charging, be fully accessible to wheelchairs and prams, and host a social wellbeing space.

1.9 A matched funding contribution of £1.2m by Devon County Council has been ring-fenced from the original bid. A positive outcome to this decision is essential to the bid's success as 10% matched funding is required.

1.10 The bid is supported by Mel Stride MP, as well as the areas of Torridge, North Devon and Cornwall. The Council is intending to write to all Devon MPs to seek their additional awareness and support for the West Devon Transport Hub bid.

2. Background

2.1. The Government's Levelling Up Fund was announced at the 2020 Spending Review to support communities in order to regenerate a town centres, enable investment in cultural facilities or upgrade local transport infrastructure.

2.2. The LUF will focus on capital investment in local infrastructure thereby building on and consolidating prior programmes. It will have a visible, tangible impact on people and places, and support economic recovery.

2.3. In doing so, it will also create opportunity across the country, prioritising bids that invest in regeneration and growth in places in need and areas of low productivity and connectivity. The eligibility is complex.

2.4. The Government has categorised all authorities based on the need for economic recovery and growth; improved transport Page 2 connectivity and regeneration. West Devon Borough Council has been categorised as Medium Need, Priority 2.

2.5. Members of Parliament are allowed to back one bid that they see as a priority, in this case Mel Stride MP, who has confirmed his support. Schemes need to be deliverable by March 2025.

2.6. The timetable for the LUF application process is as follows:

When	What
Anticipated April 2022	FAQs published on website
Wednesday 6 th July 2022	Bid submission deadline
July – Autumn 2022	Bid assessment by MHCLG and DfT
Autumn	Decision making and announcements

2.7. As a result of the Exeter to Okehampton railway line's re-opening at the end of this 2021, the need and urgency for the West Devon Transport Hub in Okehampton has increased.

2.8. The successful delivery of the West Devon Transport Hub would see congestion reduced on Station Road in Okehampton, but crucially maximise connectivity for the region through convenient multi-modal access to the railway line in close proximity to the A30. This would bring high impact benefits to reduce carbon emissions, improve air quality, cut congestion, support economic growth, and support the safety, security and overall experience of transport users.

2.9. The scheme cost is likely to be in the region of £12m-£13m, of which approximately £10m is for the platforms and bridge and £2-3m for the car park, bus interchange, and active travel cycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

2.10. LUF bids can be up to £20m, however, so as to ensure the best chance of success for this bid, it is important that the Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) is kept high, so it can demonstrate clear value to the Treasury Department. This limits the bid to about £12-£13m.

2.11. The 10% match funding requirement under the LUF is being provided by Devon County Council, who also own the land on which the station car park can be provided.

2.12 It is possible that a matched funding contribution from WDBC will be required for the active travel element of the bid. If this is the case, a further report will be brought back to HUB and Council.

3. Outcomes/outputs

3.1. The West Devon Transport Hub will deliver a station entrance, two platforms connected by a bridge and serviced by a passenger lift.

3.2. Onward connectivity will be provided locally on bike and by foot, on public transport via a bus interchange on Hameldown Road, and by car from the surface level car park with EV charging points.

3.3. There will be improvement of active travel cycling and walking links within Okehampton to incorporate the Transport Hub, through the Community Renewal Fund bid already submitted by the Council should it be successful, and in partnership with Devon County Council in the future.

3.4. 4G connectivity on the railway service is also being explored by Network Rail and GWR, although this will not form part of the LUF bid.

Indicative Programme If Successful

Activity	Likely Duration
Submission of SOBC (<i>RNEP Decision to Develop</i>)	
Development of Outline Design (PACE1), Operational Strategy and OBC (<i>RNEP Decision to Design</i>)	5 months
Non-Station Planning Approvals (Car Park, Highway Access, Bus/Cycle Infra)	4 months
Non-Station Enabling Works (Car Parks, Highway Access)	6 months
Engagement with Network Rail and procurement of Design Consultant for GRIP Stages 4-5/PACE 2	2 months
Single Option Design approval	3 months
Development of FBC (<i>RNEP Decision to Deliver</i>)	3 months
Approval of FBC (<i>RNEP Decision to Deliver</i>)	3 months
GRIP5 Detailed Design	6 months
Construction Period	11 months

4. Options available and consideration of risk

4.1. The Council has been categorised as priority 2 - medium need, so there is no guarantee that the bid will be successful. Ensuring the BCR is kept positive and strong will improve the bids chances of success.

4.2. If the bid is successful a number of partner organisations will be responsible for the multiple strands of project delivery, the Council will not be a direct delivery partner, but will be on the project board.

4.3. The station infrastructure will be delivered by Network Rail, the highway and bus infrastructure will be delivered by the Highway Authority (Devon County Council) and the station car park and active travel cycling and walking infrastructure will be delivered by Devon County Council as landowner.

4.4. Delivering rail projects in budget and on time is notoriously challenging, and this project will be no different.

5. Proposed Way Forward

5.1. That Council approves the submission of the bid, such that the rail and multi-modal transport interchange infrastructure in West Devon can be improved immeasurably, for the benefit of all residents and visitors to the region.

6. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance	Y	Governance arrangements to be agreed at a project level, with the project sponsor for the Council identified as the Director for Place & Enterprise.
Financial implications to include reference to value for money	Y	There is no direct financial impact on WDBC as the Council is not putting in matched funding. The 10% matched funding requirement is coming from Devon County Council.
Risk	Y	
Supporting Corporate Strategy	Y	Re-opening the railway line and improving transport links to it will improve the economic prosperity of the region.
Climate Change - Carbon / Biodiversity Impact	Y	Rail projects are seen as a viable low carbon alternative to road. Ensuring onward travel on public transport is smooth and convenient will maximise the chances of improving modal switch away from the car. Cycle infrastructure and EV charging points will be installed as part off, or soon after the station is opened, should the bid be successful.
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality & Diversity	Y	
Safeguarding	Y	
Community Safety, Crime & Disorder	Y	
Health, Safety & Wellbeing	Y	
Other implications	N	N/A

Appendices:

None

Supporting Information

DCC Cabinet Report – Levelling Up Fund:

<https://democracy.devon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=133&MIId=4172&Ver=4>

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