

South Lakeland District Council
Council
27 July 2021
Economy, Culture, and Leisure Portfolio Holder

Portfolio: Cllr Robin Ashcroft

The Council Plan objectives as they relate to the Portfolio area of work, and crosscutting work developed through the Local Plan and Economic Development Strategy, promoting Culture leisure activities and the arts and developing strategy for cultural assets.

Working in partnership to ensure a thriving and prosperous District within the context of the wider sub-region, through effective economic development, regeneration and transport strategies.

Working in partnership to ensure thriving and prosperous town centres throughout the District.

Providing public realm infrastructure to promote the local economy.

Promoting small businesses in both towns and rural areas.

The Council plan objectives in relation to promoting culture, leisure activities and the arts.

To work with our cultural organisations to attract investment and to promote South Lakeland as a premier area for Arts and Events.

Policies, Plans and Strategies

- Economic Development Strategy
- Arts and Events
- Grants Strategy
- Licensing and Statement of Gambling Policies

Key Areas

- Economic Inward Investment
- Business Support and Sector Development
- Visitor Economy
- Town Centre Planning, Car Parks and Transportation Strategies
- Markets
- Arts and Culture
- Grants
- Public Halls
- Use of community assets for the promotion of arts and culture

- Heritage and Events
- Heritage Listed Buildings and built environment
- Voluntary Sector Engagement in relation to Culture and Leisure
- Leisure and Recreation
- Licensing and Gambling
- Cross Authority Economic initiatives

Economic Inward Investment

Throughout the challenges presented by Covid-19, SLDC has continued to play a crucial role in contributing and attracting millions of pounds worth of inward investment into the district, including:

- Cross-a-moor roundabout – Contributions to the estimated £9.4m scheme include amounts from SLDC and Cumbria County Council, with £3m secured from Highways England Growth Housing Fund, £925k from CLEP through Growth Deal funding and £2.4m from CLEP through Cumbria Infrastructure Fund. SLDC is working with CLEP and Highways England to finalise the detail of the funding agreements.
- Grange Lido and promenade – £2.2m towards Lido restoration, funded by SLDC. £2.35m was secured from the Coastal Communities Fund for a joint Morecambe Bay Partnership/SLDC Bay-wide programme, of which £1m is earmarked for the prom and connectivity with the lido.
- Kendal Flood Risk Management Scheme – Estimated construction cost for the three phases is £72m. The first element in Kendal will cost around £18m, with £13m secured from the EA and £5m of ERDF funding.
- South Lakeland House renovations – £2.9m overall cost which is majority SLDC funded with £440k LEP grant to fund the creation of additional business space.
- GSK Masterplan – A masterplan has been commissioned by SLDC to guide the future development of the GSK site in Ulverston following the company's decision to reduce its operations on the site. This seeks to establish a prosperous future for the site with the intention to attract life sciences investment and high value employment.
- Borderlands Place Programme – SLDC continues to partner with Cumbria County Council and other public and private sector stakeholders as part of the Ulverston Town Team which is producing a Place Plan and Investment Plan for the town which will determine where to prioritise the £3m secured through Borderlands Place Programme, as well as seeking future additional investment.

Business Support, Sector Development and Visitor Economy

The recent 2020 Business Survey had the best response rate of 30% (1,259 responses), which was the highest response rate seen so far since the survey began in 2014.

The results found that more than half of business owners in South Lakeland are positive about the future however, as expected, this result has been impacted by Covid-19 and businesses have felt the wide-ranging impacts of the pandemic. In 2019 73% of businesses felt confident about the future which reduced to 54% in 2020.

Other findings from the survey included the majority of those looking for new premises would do so in Kendal and the most likely types of premises businesses would require are for retail, office and light industrial units purposes of all different sizes. The results obtained will feed into the Local Plan review.

Just under half of those responding businesses were seeking to address climate change issues by implementing energy efficiency measures with under a quarter utilising green technologies.

The survey is vital in providing the Council with a clear picture of the current and future plans, issues and challenges that our businesses are facing. The results also mean the Council can offer support and advice where required and develop our strategies and policies including the Local Plan.

The Council has provided essential services over throughout the Covid-19 Pandemic, with assistance from Partners including Cumbria Chamber of Commerce, to provide business support, making a significant financial contribution to delivering free support to start-ups and existing businesses.

The Council is continuing to work closely with Cumbria Tourism, as the Destination Management Organisation for the area, to deliver key elements of the visitor economy recovery plan, as well as helping to shape the wider recovery plans for the area being co-ordinated by Cumbria LEP.

It is acknowledged that South Lakelands economy is heavily reliant on the Visitor Economy, which has been drastically impacted following the Coronavirus pandemic. The Council has agreed to support a Welcome Back campaign lead by Cumbria Tourism, which will be designed to attract and disperse visitors across South Lakeland.

The Council was successful in securing monies through the Reopening the High Streets fund to support the safe reopening of high streets by putting in additional measures to establish a safe trading environment for businesses and customers.

Most recently, the Council received confirmation from MHCLG that it had secured additional grant funding through the Welcome Back Fund. The fund builds on the £50m Reopening the High Streets Fund and forms part of wider support government is providing to communities and businesses, to protect jobs and support the most vulnerable as we continue to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic. As part of this funding the Council will be seeking to boost the look and feel of high streets, run and support publicity campaigns that will encourage people back into the high streets, reinforce Covid-19 guidance and safety measures dependant on Government advice and improve green spaces.

In response to the pandemic, the Portfolio Holder for Economy, Culture and Leisure established an Economic Renewal Strategy Group for South Lakeland, which has representation from MPs, major employers and partners from around the district. This group allows the Council to better understand the challenges being faced and each meeting focuses on a key topic including Brexit, Town Centre Investment and the Visitor Economy.

The second stage of the refurbishment works to the remaining office space in South Lakeland House will involve remodelling the space to create attractive and rentable office space creating a new enterprise centre for start-up businesses and to build on the success of the existing council-run Mintworks hub on Highgate which has supported hundreds of small businesses and clients in the five years since it opened. These works are expected to be completed by October 2021.

Town Centre Planning, Car Parks and Transportation Strategies

The Council published its Kendal Town Centre Strategy, which sets out a long-term strategic approach to ensuring Kendal remains an attractive place to live, work and visit. This has helped to inform the Councils plan, policies and priorities and used to help secure future investment. The Strategy was launched jointly with the Kendal Vision, led by public/private sector partnership Kendal Futures, and a partnership approach is being taken to deliver on their aspirations to create a more sustainable and vibrant Kendal, however this has been impacted by Covid-19.

The Council has undertaken a car parking study of Kendal to understand where publicly available visitors, shoppers, workers and public transport car parking is under stress. The study identifies how those stresses are likely to change over time, how council car parks and other publicly owned car parks and on street car parking can be most effectively managed to maximise town centre viability and visitor spend; and to quantify the need for additional parking spaces in the context of effective parking and traffic management. Actions that have already been taken to address some of the points identified in the study are:

- Acquisition of Dowker Lane Car Park
- Reviewed all parking signage in the Town Centre to improve visitor experience.
- Investigation into the feasibility of installing electric vehicle charging points.
- Kendal College offers parking all day for £2 which has opened up parking opportunities for the Town during College holidays.
- In response to the Covid-19 and to support the vaccination programme we offered free parking at the Westmorland Shopping Centre for those visiting the vaccination centre.

Further works has been postponed whilst the effects of Covid are fully understood.

Following the announcement of the Roadmap from Government SLDC is working closely with partners and local businesses to ensure they can reopen safely to the public in accordance with the Governments 'Covid Secure' guidance across principal areas within South Lakeland.

Markets

In 2019, it was agreed at Cabinet to explore the potential for an innovative and experienced operator to manage Kendal's indoor and outdoor markets as part of a two-stage procurement process. As part of Stage 1 the Council investigated what interest there was in the private sector to take on the running of Kendal markets, whether that be running the markets as one or as two separate markets, understanding the financial implications this would have on our revenue budget, understanding the economic benefits that a new operator could bring to the town and investigating what social value could be added through a different operating model for the markets.

In light of Coronavirus, it was felt it was best to re-tender the Markets through a two-staged approach. However, due to the ongoing impact of the Coronavirus pandemic, it had been difficult to reach an agreement with the bidders. Therefore, it has been agreed that the procurement to outsource the market be abandoned and that the Council would continue to run the service in house with the proposal of the soft facilities management company already in place at the Westmorland Shopping Centre being employed to run the market.

A Market Lead Officer is now in post and is solely responsible for economic development aspects of the market and provides entrepreneurial skills that are important to the success of the indoor and outdoor market.

The Market Lead Officer's role is to:

1. Undertake the complete management of Kendal indoor and Outdoor Market
2. Be responsible for the economic development of the market, working with the traders and maximising the annual income of the market. The market officer will be proactive in bringing new traders onto the market to ensure that the market is fully occupied at all times.
3. Lead with promotion and marketing of the Markets including organisational responsibilities for market events and day-to-day activities.
4. Lead and manage marketing of the special market days, looking at themed events and working with other organisations to combine events as and when required.
5. Prepare and implement an investment strategy and deliver the investment as needed over a 3-year period.
6. Work with Council officers to help create a Consent Street for Market place, Kendal to help with delivery of key events within the Town.

Arts and Culture

Unfortunately during 2020/21 the Covid 19 pandemic saw the temporary closure of the district's cultural venues, theatres, museums and heritage attractions having a significant impact on programme and operations, some of which will remain unable to fully operate until 2022. Many events were also unable to take place throughout 2020 and due to ongoing restrictions up to May of 2021.

However, some events by the council's strategic cultural partners went to a completely virtual model including the Lakes International Comic Arts Festival and Kendal Mountain Festival which promoted South Lakeland and supported the districts economy.

The district's cultural and heritage organisations were successful in securing crucial financial investment from the national Cultural Recovery Fund administered through Arts Council England, National Lottery Heritage and the British Film Institute. The council supported its Strategic Cultural partner's development of Covid 19 contingency plans for their operation throughout the year.

Work is underway by the LSCER partnership to bring together key stakeholders to work and innovate to realise the vision for Morecambe Bay, a significant change in how things have been done by piloting a new 'Cultural Compact' model connecting the three localities' distinct and different cultural assets to boost future creativity, investment, innovation, jobs and prosperity. The cross sector membership of the Cultural Compact will bring together Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships, Universities, Colleges, Businesses, Cultural, and Creative Organisations.

The Council has been one of the supportive partners in major capital infrastructure developments of the Wordsworth Trust 'Reimagining Wordsworth, project and the 'Our Digital Future' initiative at the Brewery Arts Centre Kendal.

The pandemic delayed the completion of the £6.5 million Wordsworth Grasmere until May 2021, though the Trust's ambitious plans have been delivered and the amazing Wordsworth Grasmere family friendly attraction featuring Dove Cottage, an upgraded museum, garden, family and community learning space is now fully open to the public. The Brewery Arts Centre

also stuck to their objectives and delivered on their ambitions with a refurbishment and digital upgrade programme completed in spring 2021 to refit and reinvigorate the venue to improve the cinemas, theatre, music venue, creative studios and welcome areas.

The Council is continuing to work with its creative partners, Craven District Council, Lake District and Yorkshire Dales National Parks on the 'Great Place Lakes and Dales' initiative delivering the remaining programme and action plan to promote the development of sustainable, resilient and creative communities which will in turn retain and attract younger people to South Lakeland and Craven districts to influence, support and create our future economy.

Grants - Covid Recovery Response

The Council has administered a number of emergency grant schemes through online application forms for businesses in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The variety of grants available has helped businesses and individuals of all sizes and sectors, safeguarding businesses and jobs throughout the district.

Collectively across the 6 Cumbria District Councils a total of £393.8m has gone out so far across the various schemes. To date South Lakeland District Council has distributed the highest number of grants through the 8 different grant schemes than the other 6 District Councils with a total of £146,680,537.

Most recently, the Restart Grant scheme closed to new applicants as of midnight on 30 June 2021. We were able to accept applications after this time, however we are currently working through the remaining Restart Grant applications received before the deadline, and we are able to make payments through the Restart Grant up until the end of July 2021.

The Additional Restrictions Grant was a discretionary grant available to businesses with fixed property costs who are excluded from the Restart Grant and met the eligibility criteria.

Government confirmed that a limited ARG top up amount was available to South Lakeland alongside a small amount of remaining ARG from the previous round. We were required to evidence a clear demand for this top up amount, which is the final amount we will receive from Government through this particular scheme.

We utilised a four-week application window for all ARG applications and assessed applications after the closing date (7 July). This way we could distribute the funding fairly, as opposed to on a first come first served basis.

The Councils strategic cultural partners demonstrate a high importance to the district's cultural offer and have been particularly adversely affected by the Covid-19 restrictions. Their support was invaluable and they have continued to receive a grant payment for the previous and current financial years.

Public Halls and use of community assets for the promotion of arts and culture

Prior to the Coronavirus outbreak, the Council had been supporting cultural and local events for communities through the use of public halls.

All Council owned properties were closed during the national lockdowns and events that were due to take place were cancelled in accordance with Government guidance. All public spaces within the Council owned buildings had social distancing measures and sanitation points installed.

The refurbishment works to Kendal Town Hall are now complete except for the District Council Chamber. The refurbishments have altered the access and usage of the Town Hall and South Lakeland House for both visitors and employees, as well as providing flexible business space. The new and improved spaces will be more suitable to the needs of cultural and local events in the future.

SLDC are looking forward to welcome back existing stakeholders/ users as well as new users such as Women's Community matters to the Town Hall. The work has created a more flexible space and additional meeting rooms/ m2 for the community to meet in. Work has also been undertaken to overcome some real issues with the building previously experienced such as heating and ventilation.

Heritage, Events and Heritage Listed Buildings and built environment

The Burton-in-Kendal Partnership Scheme in Conservation Areas (PSiCA) scheme is jointly funded by the District Council and Burton-in-Kendal Parish Council, with matching funding from Historic England. The aim of the PSiCA scheme is to see the Conservation Area removed from Historic England's Heritage at Risk register, following a 3 to 4 year programme of public realm improvements, grant-aided repairs to historic buildings and wider management and planning guidance. The enhancement scheme of the village Square is almost complete and grant offers have been made for repairs to 7 properties in or near the Square, 2 of which are underway.

The delivery of the above project will be the priority for the Council's new conservation officer Libby Mee, who has been employed to assist the Development Management team regarding listed buildings and work within Conservation Areas. The extent of her remit has recently been amended to incorporate planning policy and strategy team support, which will enable her to lead on the adoption of the Cartmel Conservation Area Management Plan (CAMP) and also the Burton in Kendal CAMP this year. She is also the lead for the development of a local list for Cumbria in partnership with conservation officers across the county and funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Governments.

Voluntary Sector Engagement in Relation to Culture and Leisure

In partnership with the Customer, Commercial Services and People portfolio, the Council has worked with a number of community groups across the district to improve local play areas such as Abbot Hall, Maryfell, Rayrigg Meadow and Millerground. These improvements have encouraged young families to utilise the facilities available, which in turn supports their health and wellbeing.

During the Covid-19, pandemic, 99 volunteer groups were established across Cumbria. SLDC has been part of the Cumbria Local Resilience Forum establishing support through the emergency support helpline for people at high risk and those who do not have support available from family or friends. The helpline coordinated the supply of essential food, medicines and supplies. The Community Resilience group is continuing to work closely with community volunteer groups to match requests with local support networks.

As a result of the pandemic Cumbria has seen widespread community and voluntary sector support and informal support, including neighbourhood WhatsApp groups and community Facebook groups, alongside a commitment from existing community emergency planning groups, local churches, faith groups, and formal voluntary sector organisations who have been working with the County Council and partners including District Councils and NHS.

Leisure and Recreation

A feasibility study for Ulverston leisure Centre is ongoing and the Council is continuing to liaise with user groups and GSK regarding future proposals. Upon completion of the feasibility study a formal consultation period will be held with user groups and the Town Council and once this has been concluded a report will be considered at Cabinet to formally agree the facilities mix and delivery options.

In light of the Covid-19 pressures, the Council has been working to support GLL for the period from April 21 to November 21. The Council is also being asked to receive monies from the National Leisure Recovery Fund to a value £174,237 and to make payment of this money to GLL for support from 1st December to 31st March 2021.

Kendal Leisure Centre hosted a temporary recovery centre and a drive thru testing facility during the Coronavirus pandemic. The leisure services at both Ulverston and Kendal Leisure Centres have now reconvened in accordance with Government guidelines.

Leisure Services are now back open although with social distancing measures in place, this is affecting service user numbers. This is having an impact on the classes/ facilities on offer but Greenwich Leisure Ltd are working hard on their offer, digitising the process for users and re-designing services to become more efficient. Uptake of swimming classes in Kendal has seen one of the highest uptakes in the country.

Licensing and Gambling

Virtual Licensing Committee meetings have been held throughout the Coronavirus pandemic to ensure the responsibility for licensing functions in respect of the Licensing Act 2003. Since some of the Covid related restrictions were lifted, from 7 May 2021, we returned to in person meetings with social distancing measures in place.

Cross Authority Economic initiatives

SLDC continues to work in partnership with Lancaster City Council and Barrow Borough Council to increase the economic prosperity of the Lancaster and South Cumbria region. The three councils have been working closely to develop a more sustainable economy and jointly promote the area as a place to live, study and build a career. There remain ambitious plans to seek national investment for various strategically important projects to support economic vibrancy around Morecambe Bay.

Work has continued through the Joint Committee to refine and focus proposals for a growth deal type programme to attract significant public investment to transformational growth projects and importantly drive Coronavirus resilience to the region's economy. A Morecambe Bay Prosperity & Resilience Strategy has been produced identifying key priorities and opportunities for the area. Future Plans will be influenced dependant on the outcome of the Local Government Reorganisation submissions. All three administrations continue to back The Bay unitary bid, with leaders of Barrow Borough Council, Lancaster City Council and South Lakeland District Council saying a Bay unitary alongside a new North Cumbria authority covering Allerdale, Carlisle, Copeland and Eden is the best solution for local communities.

Collaborative working on the Cross-Bay initiative known as the Cultural Compact has been progressing. The Bay area was selected as one of only two “rural” areas in the UK by Arts Council England for an innovative new approach to releasing untapped economic potential through investment in culture.

Signed off by	Date sent	Date Signed off
Section 151 Officer	Not applicable (N/A)	N/A
Monitoring Officer	09/07/2021	11/07/2021
CMT	12/07/2021	13/07/2021

Circulated to	Date sent
Lead Specialist	12/07/2021
Human Resources Lead Specialist	N/A
Communications Team	N/A
Leader	N/A
Committee Chairman	N/A
Portfolio Holder	09/07/2021
Ward Councillor(s)	N/A
Committee	N/A
Executive (Cabinet)	N/A
Council	N/A