

**South Lakeland District Council**  
**Overview and Scrutiny Committee**  
**Friday, 04 February 2022**  
**Economy, Culture and Leisure Portfolio Holder**  
**Report**

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**Portfolio:** Cllr Robin Ashcroft

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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

### **Economic Inward Investment**

SLDC plays 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 £9.6m 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 the Cumbria Infrastructure Fund. SLDC is continuing to work with CLEP and National Highways to finalise remaining funding agreements and the progress and monitoring requirements. Most recently following project cost increases SLDC, Highways England and Cumbria County Council have increased their financial contributions to ensure delivery of the project. SLDC now intends to increase its contribution to the scheme to £634,399.34.
- 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. The Council is continuing to ensure that the funding requirements from the ERDF funding is met through branding and material requirements, submitting claims and providing regulation progress and monitoring reports.
- South Lakeland House renovations – SLDC successfully secured £440k of LEP funding to support the creation additional business space. This funding supported the £2.9million overall project cost and will create new flexible, modern workspace available to rent.
- GSK Masterplan – A masterplan has been commissioned by SLDC to guide the future development of the GSK site in Ulverston following the company's recent decision to reduce its operations on the site. This Masterplan 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.
- Kendal Vision – SLDC has agreed to partner with Kendal Futures on the further development and delivery of Kendal Vision. The Council will contribute £285,000 over the next three years to put in place a Vision Manager, Action Groups, and provide funding for feasibility studies and development work.

## **Business Support, Sector Development and Visitor Economy**

The 2020 Business Premises Survey had a 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 of all different sizes. The results obtained will feed into the Local Plan Review.

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 2021 Business Premises Survey is now live and will close on 31 January 2022. The Council will be encouraging businesses to take part in the survey through press releases, newsletters and social media.

Following on from the Covid-19 pandemic the Council is continuing to provide essential services with assistance from Partners including Cumbria Chamber of Commerce and Cumbria Tourism, providing business support, making a significant financial contribution to delivering free support to start-ups and existing businesses and delivering the Covid-19 Recovery Marketing Plan. The Covid-19 Marketing Plan has been developed to restore consumer confidence following the pandemic and inspire visitors to visit the area safely. This supports a Council priority to work across boundaries to deliver sustainable growth by working with partners to deliver an effective economic response to the Covid crisis and promote unique value propositions, as well as helping to shape the wider recovery plans for the area being co-ordinated by Cumbria LEP.

It has been acknowledged that South Lakeland's economy is heavily reliant on the Visitor Economy, which has been drastically impacted following the Coronavirus pandemic. As a result, the Council agreed to support a separate Welcome Back campaign led by Cumbria Tourism, which has been designed to attract and disperse visitors across South Lakeland in a safe and responsible way. This campaign is a coordinated countywide approach to encourage visitors to our town centres and to shop locally within Cumbria.

Following the successful bid for funding through the Reopening the High Streets Fund, the Council submitted a successful bid for additional 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 part of this funding the Council is continuing to seek ways to boost the look and feel of high streets, run and support publicity campaigns encouraging people back into the high streets and improve green spaces whilst working in accordance with the ERDF Funding regulations. The funding has supported the installation of footfall counters in key town centres across the District to monitor the footfall as well the extension of the Marshals contract who have patrolled in Windermere, Bowness and Ambleside over the weekends and bank holidays, providing support and reassurance to visitors, businesses and local communities.

The Portfolio Holder for Economy, Culture and Leisure established an Economic Renewal Strategy Group for South Lakeland, which included representation from MPs, major employers and partners from around the district. This group has allowed the Council to better understand

the challenges being faced and each meeting focuses on a key topic, which have included Brexit, Advanced Manufacturing, Town Centre Investment and the Visitor Economy.

The second stage of the refurbishment works to the remaining office space in South Lakeland House is currently underway. This will create an attractive and rentable office space creating a new enterprise centre for start-up businesses and building 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. The works are expected to be completed by January 2022. The Council has begun marketing the space available to encourage businesses to make contact to express an interest.

In November 2021, the Council sponsored and presented the Green Ethical Business Award at the In-Cumbria business awards. This award category will be presented to the business who has shown initiative and a drive to reduce its carbon emissions and following a new carbon neutral method of working.

### **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.

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.

The indoor market when comparing to the high street nationally has kicked on and is going from strength to strength with new market traders coming on board. The new market officer has brought the traders together and working hard to improve the offer in both the indoor and outdoor market. Footfall has certainly improved and traders are reporting that trade has been strong. Investment has also taken place with a new sound system, WIFI connection, and new stalls to the centre of the market, and a new Facebook page soon to be launched along with new lift agreed as part of the Capital programme. Work is also ongoing to produce an investment strategy for the market.

## **Arts and Culture**

During 2020/21 the Covid-19 pandemic saw temporary closures of the district's cultural venues, theatres, museums and heritage attractions which had a significant impact on programme and operations, some of which will remain unable to fully operate into 2022. Due to restrictions, any events were also unable to take place on Council land throughout 2020 and up to May of 2021. Since Covid restrictions were lifted, some events have taken place.

Events organised by the council's Strategic Cultural Partners were able to go ahead this year including Lake District Summer Music, Kendal Torchlight, the Lakes International Comic Arts Festival and Kendal Mountain Festival, which promotes South Lakeland and supports the district's economy.

The Council's support to its Strategic Cultural Partners helped in enabling the District's cultural and heritage organisations to be successful in securing crucial financial investment through the national Cultural Recovery Fund administered through Arts Council England, National Lottery Heritage Fund and the British Film Institute with over £1.7 million investment secured. The Council has also supported the development of Covid contingency plans for the operation of the Strategic Cultural Partners throughout the year.

The work undertaken by the LSCER partnership to bring together key stakeholders to work and innovate to realise the vision for Morecambe Bay, by piloting a new 'Cultural Compact' has been paused following the Local Government Reorganisation announcement. The model connects localities' distinct and different cultural assets to boost future creativity, investment, innovation, jobs and prosperity. The cross-sector membership of the Cultural Compact intends to bring together Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships, Universities, Colleges, Businesses, Cultural, and Creative Organisations. The model will be revisited as Local Government Reorganisation plans are developed.

The Council has also been a supportive partner and investor 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 caused delays to the completion of the £6.5 million Wordsworth Grasmere until May 2021. However, the Trust's ambitious plans have now been delivered and the transformative Wordsworth Grasmere family friendly attraction featuring Dove Cottage, an upgraded museum, garden, family and community learning space is now open to the public. The Brewery Arts Centre also delivered their objectives and ambitions by refurbishing, reinvigorating and digital upgrades the venue to improving the cinemas, theatre, music venue, creative studios and welcome areas and has opened up.

The council has been working in support of the Farmer's Arms development at Lowick by Grizedale Arts. The Farmers Arms project will expand the work of The Valley project, acting as a gateway into the Crake and providing a much-needed dynamic creative and industrious rural hub. It will be a new model cultural institution delivering economic and cultural benefit and reinvention in the Crake Valley.

The Council continues to work with its creative partners, Craven District Council, Lake District and Yorkshire Dales National Parks on the 'Great Place Lakes and Dales' initiative. This programme promotes the development of sustainable, resilient and creative communities that helps to retain and attract younger people to South Lakeland and Craven districts.

### **Grants - Covid Recovery Response**

The Council administered a number of emergency grant schemes to businesses through online application forms 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 six Cumbria District Councils, a total of £400,689,531 has been distributed across the various schemes. To date South Lakeland District Council has distributed the highest number of grants through the eight different grant schemes than the other six District Councils with a total of £149,023,978.

The total amounts the Council has paid for each grant scheme is as follows:

- Round 1 Grants (SBGF/RHLGF/LADGF) - £66,476,000
- LRSG, CBLP, Christmas Grants - £49,277,168
- Additional Restrictions Grant - £4,014,659
- Restart Grants - £29,256,151

The Council took the decision to utilise a four-week application window for all ARG applications, which were assessed after the closing date (July 2021). This enabled the Council to distribute the funding fairly, as opposed to on a first come first served basis.

The Council's 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.

Recently, the Town Hall welcomed back Comic Arts Festival and Kendal Mountain Festival. SLDC officers are currently working with UCE to look to agree a new long term lease for Coronation Hall and Ulverston Market Hall. Discussions are ongoing to determine what Capital investment is needed in the assets to help the UCE improve its offer and help increase revenue. Officers are currently working through the detail and will be bringing report to Cabinet to seek support for any investment and long-term lease agreements.

### **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 seven properties in or near the Square, two of which are underway.

The delivery of the above project will be the priority for the Council's new Conservation Officer, 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 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.

Work is currently ongoing to prepare the Listed Building application and Tender for Abbot Hall Gallery after the Council secured £500k of NCRF funding which will mean that essential maintenance works can be undertaken to help Lakeland Arts re-open the Gallery to the public in Summer 2022. Work on the implementation of the Burton Heritage at Risk scheme continues, as more grants are being taken up by homeowners in the Square, and the work to The Royal Hotel's exterior nears completion. The Cartmel CAMP will be presented to Cabinet at the end of the year, and consultation events are being planned in partnership with the village society and local schools prior to its adoption in the New Year.

Libby is now involved in the review of the shopfront design guide and its implementation in the key market towns, with a focus on enhancing the design of shopfronts in listed buildings and across the Kendal Conservation Area in partnership with the Kendal BID team and Kendal Futures. There are a number of key local authority heritage assets, including the Castle Dairy in Kendal, and the Lido in Grange over Sands, which she is also assisting to bring forward to support economic and cultural regeneration, which respects the unique character of these incredible listed buildings. The development management team have dealt with 69 listed building consent applications over the last 12 months, which Libby is also lead officer for.

November 2021 sees the launch of the county wide local list project, which aims to enable members of the public to identify and nominate their favourite buildings and sites via an App. Further information on how to get involved is available on the Conservation pages of the SLDC website or by contacting Libby direct.

Historic England's 2021 Heritage At Risk register was published in early November 2021. The Heritage at Risk Register includes historic buildings and sites at risk of being lost through neglect, decay or deterioration. It includes all types of designated heritage assets, including Conservation Areas, which are designated and assessed by Local Planning Authorities. For a list of South Lakeland-located At Risk heritage assets (within and outside the national parks), please [see here](#) (pages 23-29). Heritage plays an important part of South Lakeland's distinctive character and the local authority remains committed to conserving our built heritage.

### **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 a total of 99 volunteer groups were established across Cumbria. SLDC was 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.

Following the pandemic, Cumbria saw 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 had been working with the County Council and partners including District Councils and NHS.

### **Leisure and Recreation**

The feasibility study for Ulverston Leisure Centre is ongoing and the Council has liaised with user groups and GSK regarding future proposals. The study has undertaken consultation with user groups and will also consult with the Town Council. A report will be considered at Cabinet to formally agree the facilities mix and delivery options.

Due to the pressures that arose from the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council worked to support GLL from the period April 21 to November 21. The Council received monies from the National Leisure Recovery Fund to a value £174,237 and made payments of this money to GLL for support from 1st December 2020 to 31st March 2021.

During the pandemic a temporary recovery centre and a drive thru testing facility was hosted at Kendal Leisure Centre which was unable to offer usual leisure services in accordance with lockdown restrictions at the time.

Leisure Centres have re-opened and the current provider has been working hard to improve its offer and sustain itself in what has been a very turbulent 18 months. TSLDC secured £55k of NLRF grant funding from Central Government and the Council has now agreed to support the Leisure provider with a deficit payment of £169k.

GLL have been working hard on their offer to customer by digitising processes for users and re-designing services to become more efficient. Uptake of swimming classes in Kendal saw 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 has been working 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. A Morecambe Bay Prosperity & Resilience Strategy has been produced identifying key priorities and opportunities for the area.

There remain ambitious plans to seek national investment for various strategically important projects to support economic vibrancy around Morecambe Bay. This work is now being co-

ordinated in line with the ongoing discussions around Local Government Reorganisation for Cumbria.

### Tracking Information

<b>Signed off by</b>	<b>Date sent</b>	<b>Date Signed off</b>
Section 151 Officer	N/A	N/A
Monitoring Officer	N/A	N/A
CMT	N/A	N/A

<b>Circulated to</b>	<b>Date sent</b>
Lead Specialist	N/A
Human Resources Lead Specialist	N/A
Communications Team	N/A
Leader	N/A
Committee Chairman	N/A
Portfolio Holder	12/01/22
Ward Councillor(s)	N/A
Committee	04/02/22
Executive (Cabinet)	N/A
Council	N/A