



## Future High Streets Fund – FAQs

### What is the Future High Street Fund?

It's a £675 million Government fund to help regenerate 100 town centres across the country as attractive places to live and work and respond to the shrinking demand for retail space.

The fund is made up of two stages – an initial grant for selected local areas to develop proposals and a second competitive application for those selected areas to get funding to put the proposals in place.

Buxton was chosen as one of first 50 towns and has received £134,500 to develop detailed proposals and a business case for funding.

The government has made no guarantee of further funding being available for each town and it remains a competitive process.

### Why is Buxton the only High Peak town to receive this funding?

Each Council could only put one town forward and, in order to qualify, the area needed to have a higher rate of empty shops than the national average. In High Peak that meant we could only have put forward the Spring Gardens area of Lower Buxton or New Mills.

As we already provide a regeneration grant to New Mills Town Council, and no large scale initiative for the town centre had been identified, it was agreed that Spring Gardens in Buxton would be the focus of our bid as it stood the best chance of securing investment.

### What are the key challenges for Buxton?

Spring Gardens is the main shopping area in Buxton and, like many other town centres across the country, it is struggling because many national retailers and banks are closing branches. This is in contrast to Higher Buxton where independent businesses are performing well and is also at odds with the heritage architecture in the rest of the town and the image of Buxton as a tourist and spa town.

We have identified five key challenges:

- The difference between the heritage and perception of the town as a tourism and spa location and the lower quality primary shopping zone
- Poor pedestrian entrances and gateways - especially between Spring Gardens and the railway station, car parks and the site next to the railway station which is being redeveloped as a hub for health and public services. Pedestrian areas within Spring Gardens are also looking tired
- Significant under-use of upper floors above shops on Spring Gardens
- Resident dissatisfaction with the primary shopping zone and the need to balance the provision of shops and services for residents with those aimed at visitors
- Low level of start-up and small business growth



### What are the next steps?

We have appointed a team of consultants to help us draw up a business plan. The team includes urban designers, commercial estate consultants as well as travel and civil engineering specialists and development economists.

They are looking at:

- finding new uses for empty buildings and underused areas - including the upper floors of buildings and any underused car parking areas
- improving pedestrian links to and from Spring Gardens and the railway station and the site next to the station
- how to increase leisure, housing or business use in the town centre – which will help sustain footfall for shops as well as providing places for people to live or work
- Opportunities to build in improved broadband, electric vehicle charging, cycle hire and environmental improvements.

They will also be looking at the best options for putting these measures in place. This might include considering whether the Council should purchase land or buildings; work in partnership with other investors; or provide incentives for property owners to do it themselves.

### Will you use funding to re-open empty shops on Spring Gardens ?

No. The government funding cannot be spent on retail. Retailers make commercial decisions based on a wide range of factors when choosing where to locate stores – most of these factors are outside of the Council’s influence.

However, if our bid is successful we could use the funding to transform the public areas in the town centre, to make it an attractive place that people want to come to. We can also use funding to convert space no longer required as shops for new uses.

We have also secured nearly £1 million of Heritage Action Zone funding which can be used to upgrade shop fronts and repair commercial buildings – and this will be launched in April 2020.

### Why doesn't the Council reduce business rates to help attract or retain shops?

We share residents concern about the changes in national retailing which are leading to empty shops across many towns including Buxton.

Business rates are set nationally by Government (Valuation Office), and we only collect the amount payable by each business. Legally we do not have the ability to offer a discount or give preferential tax deductions to certain retailers to encourage them to either come to or stay in the town.

There are a number of discounts or exemptions for business with low rateable values. [Further information](#)





### **How can Buxton get better quality shops?**

The Council makes planning decisions on whether a property is suitable for retail or other uses but we do not have the power to make these decisions based on the quality of the retailer or to choose the products that they sell. If an existing shop is taken over by a new trader, including a charity shop, they do not require any permission from the Council to do this.

The main ways that the Council can influence the High Street, are by taking an 'open for business' approach that promotes the town and welcomes new companies and providing a clean, safe and attractive environment which will attract customers and encourage people to come into the town centre.

### **Who will decide what goes in the business case?**

The criteria has been set by the Government and any proposals will need to deliver clear economic benefits. This means not everything we may want to see happen can be funded.

The Council is leading on the business case, supported by our consultants but the proposals are overseen by a Board of local stakeholders.

The Board includes representatives from: Buxton Crescent Heritage Trust; University of Derby; Buxton & Leek College; Buxton Opera House; Buxton Festival; Vision Buxton; Buxton Town Team; East Midlands Chamber; D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership; Marketing Peak District & Derbyshire; Derbyshire NHS Foundation Trust; Buxton Civic Association; High Peak Access Group; Parkwood Leisure; Buxton Crescent Hotel & Thermal Spa; Derbyshire County Council; and High Peak Borough Council.

### **Will there be consultation on proposed changes?**

Yes. There has already been strong support for our application and we received letters of support from more than 20 business, public sector, voluntary & community stakeholders as part of our initial successful shortlisting application.

We are already doing one-to-one consultations with property owners and stakeholders in the town.

In late November 2019, we are sharing some initial option ideas with members of the Board and in January we will be broadening this out to include the general public. We are also working with Buxton & Leek College to ensure that younger residents' ideas and feedback are heard.

### **How much money can we ask for?**

It is expected that most towns will ask for between £5 million and £10 million in their business cases. It is also expected that this will bring in significant amounts of other money from the private sector both in the short and longer term.



### When will we know if our Business Case for funding has been successful?

The bid will be submitted to the Government on 30 April 2020 and a decision is expected by Autumn 2020.

### If we are successful how soon will the changes be made?

The first steps will be:

- working to submit a planning application for any changes that are required
- working with the property owners
- tendering for works

It is likely that work 'on the ground' would start in mid-2022.

### How can I get involved?

There are a number of ways to get involved or share your ideas.

- If you are a property owner in Spring Gardens area you should have already been contacted by our consultants. If not, and you would like to speak to them, please e-mail us at address below.
- If you are already a member of one of the stakeholder groups identified on the Board, then share your ideas or comments via your representatives.
- There will be a public consultation in the early 2020 when everyone will be able to view the options and share their views.

Alternatively, please contact [regeneration@highpeak.gov.uk](mailto:regeneration@highpeak.gov.uk)