



Future High Streets Fund – FAQs

(updated June 2021)

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. It is part of the Government's wider £3.6 billion town fund. see <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/future-high-streets-fund>

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 were the key challenges for Buxton that you identified?

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 was in contrast to Higher Buxton where independent businesses were performing well and was 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 identified five key challenges:

- The difference between the heritage and perception of the town as a tourism and spa location and the lower quality built environment of the main shopping zone
- Poor pedestrian entrances and gateways. The existing pedestrian route to/from the railway (and site adjacent which is to be redeveloped as new health hub) divert walkers away from shops which reduces footfall for traders and discourages new investment. The existing routes via the car park are unattractive and Spring Gardens pedestrian area is looking tired.
- Significant under-use of upper floors above shops on Spring Gardens- with it being not commercially viable for all of these to be converted to housing or office use
- 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



How did you develop the masterplan?

Using the external funding won at the first stage, we appointed a team of consultants to help us draw up a business plan. The team included urban designers, commercial estate consultants as well as travel and civil engineering specialists and development economists.

The work included:

- Scheme criteria as established by Government which identified eligible and ineligible activities and expenditure.
- Reviewing a range of strategic and planning documents which influence proposals including climate change emergency declaration and action plan
- Talking to property owners and potential new investors to identify new uses for empty buildings and underused areas
- Running consultation events for stakeholder and community groups in November 2019, Public consultation events and online survey in February 2020 and an updated public survey on final proposals in February 2021
- Financial and viability assessment of emerging proposals

The final masterplan and business case was considered by High Peak Borough Councils scrutiny committee, Economy and Growth prior to approval being granted for submission. Details of the decision taken can be viewed online (IED 28 May 2020).

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

The government funding is not allowed to be spent on retail and public money isn't legally allowed to be used to entice or subsidise private retailers. It is worth remembering that the Council doesn't choose which shops operate in the town, and retailers make commercial decisions based on a wide range of factors.

However, a key part of our proposals is to make Spring Gardens more attractive to investors – so we aim to increase footfall through new and improved pedestrian routes – and increase the amount of people living and working in the area – again which will increase the number of people circulating. This footfall is a key factor that potential new retailers use to decide if they want to invest in a location.

In addition, 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 are working closely to access as much funding as possible following Covid to help welcome customers back and support retention and new shops.



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 choose individual users based on the quality or 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 and works hard to increase pedestrian footfall which will attract customers and encourages people to come into the town centre.

Are you changing plans to take into account the Covid Crisis?

The funding awarded is aimed at delivering the outputs in the business plan but there is a great deal of flexibility allowed as both we and Government understand that proposals need to be flexible and adapt both to new challenges and new opportunities.

We will be working on proposals on a phased approach with elements which will take longer to develop or might be more at risk following covid only being fully developed if they are viable as we recover from the pandemic.

Will you be doing further consultation on proposals?

The masterplan is an indicative proposal and was used to help us assess the options and calculate the cost of works. It is not a planning document and so all new development will be consulted upon via the planning processes in the normal way.

In addition a FHSF town stakeholder group is to be established bringing together elected representatives and key community groups to support delivery of the project, act as an external consultative body and to communicate and engage with their memberships or constituents on project objectives, deliverables and progress.



If you are a property owner on Spring Gardens and want to discuss potential funding for your property to help restore its shop front or convert empty or underused upper floor space, please contact the Heritage Action Zone Project Officer in the first instance. Alternatively, please contact regeneration@highpeak.gov.uk

How soon will we see work 'on the ground' ?

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 with the majority of work taking place in 2023 and 2024.

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