



North Devon Council

Report Date: 27th March 2024

Topic: UK Shared Prosperity Fund Update

Report by: Place Manager, Economic Development & Regeneration

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. In early 2022 the Government published its broad social and economic [Levelling Up White Paper](#), and within this, the [prospectus for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund](#) (UKSPF).
- 1.2. Following the successful submission of an Investment Plan for these funds which was approved by Full Council in July 2022, North Devon Council was allocated £1,214,999 in January 2023, for the three financial years of 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25.
- 1.3. Further to that allocation for UKSPF, North Devon was allocated £1,091,259 which covered the years 2023/24 and 2024/25 under the [Rural England Prosperity Fund](#) (REPF) managed by Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).
- 1.4. The purpose for this report is to update Members on the progress made with delivering projects under both the UKSPF and REPF.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. That members note the progress towards delivering the 3 year Investment Plan and associated projects contained within it.
- 2.2. The proposed publicity activity is approved.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1. To update Members on progress to date.
- 3.2. It is important that the delivery of the UKSPF and REPF is transparent and clearly communicated both internally with Officers and Members and externally with members of the community and businesses.

4. REPORT

- 4.1. The primary goal of the UKSPF (the successor to European Structural Funds) is to build pride in place and increase life chances across the UK, categorising investment priorities under three investment themes:

- Communities and place
- Supporting local business
- People and skills



North Devon Council proposed investment under each of the three themes. Communities & Place and Supporting Local Business spend was eligible from January 2023 to March 2025, with People & Skills only becoming available in April 2024 to March 2025.

4.2. The primary goal of the REPF is to support the aims of the government’s Levelling Up White Paper and Future Farming Programme. It funds capital projects for small businesses and community infrastructure. This will help to improve productivity and strengthen the rural economy and rural communities. The REPF objectives sit within the UKSPF investment priorities for:

- Communities and Place
- Supporting Local Business

North Devon Council proposed investment under both of the two themes. Spend for the REPF was from April 2023 – March 2025.

4.3. There have been a couple of notable changes to the budget allocations and interventions supported under the UKSPF investment plan for North Devon, as shown below:

Original intervention	Budget	Moved to (fully/partial)	Justification
Communities & Place			
E7: support for active travel enhancements in local area	£25,000	Fully moved to E6: local arts, culture, heritage & creative activities	A joint e-bike scheme with Torridge was being discussed at the time of our investment plan submission. However on further investigation this was not deemed suitable/possible to implement as there are a wide range of private sector e-bike providers (hire and purchase) and a publically funded scheme could risk distorting the market. After some consultation with Highways regarding another option, due to the lack of ‘ready to go’ schemes and the limitation of the budget available here, we took the

			decision to move the budget to a strand that was currently very active with project delivery and could weave in sustainable transport and communities as a theme of activity.
E13: Community measures to reduce the cost of living	£25,000	Fully moved to E14: Funding to support relevant feasibility studies	This allocation was intended to support the development of a resources website that would signpost people to support if they were facing issues related to the cost of living. However, by the time the investment plan was approved, a website had already been organised with partners such as OND. Also we were delivering the Household grants provided by central government and so the need for this funding allocation fell away.
Supporting Local Business			
E16: Open markets and town centre retail & service sector	£100,000	Partial move of £89,000 to E30: Business support measures to drive employment growth	£11,000 remains in this intervention to provide a bespoke business advice service to the town centre businesses and pannier market traders. The budget moved, was to support the business support programme delivered under E30 by ND+ which included retail and service sector business advice and micro grants.

4.4 Government allows up to 30% change of budget between interventions within each theme without the need for any formal change request. The changes we have made to our original investment plan as detailed above, fall within that 30% limit so no formal change request has been submitted. The changes are noted by Government as part of our 6 monthly reporting process. No changes have been made or are proposed for the REPF.

4.5 The spend for both REPF and UKSPF during the first full year of activity has been slow but steady, with a lot of project development taking place with partners prior to any funds being released. Due to slight delays in getting MOU's in place, Government allowed a full roll-over of funds from the 2022/23 year to 2023/24, which has been our first full year of project delivery. Government have confirmed that any underspend from year two (2023/24 financial year) will be rolled over and that no funds will be lost as long as they are fully spent by March 2025. The current position with North Devon's spend to date is:

Fund	Allocation (revenue)	Allocation (capital)	Spend as at end Feb 2024
UKSPF	£949,600*	-	£190,516.27
UKSPF	-	£265,399	£22,625.82
REPF	-	£1,091,259	£50,993

*£350,000 of this allocation is under 'People & Skills' theme which only comes into operation in April 2024.

4.6 The projects and deliverables

Communities & Place, Supporting Local Business, People & Skills

Interventions	Projects/Indicative Budget/Activity	Communications activity
E1: Improvements to town centres and high streets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Town Centre Enhancement Scheme (£155,399): small grants for shop/commercial building enhancement and public realm improvements in key locations such as town centres, high street, tourist hotspots. Individual grants or collaborative grants – led by business, town/parish council or NDC FHSF Public Realm (£50,000): some possible provision to support public realm improvements linked to FHSF scheme in Cross Street/Butchers Row Bus Station Development (£50,000): 	<p>We will be putting together a series of releases for social media showing pictures of before/after for buildings receiving enhancement grants, town centre cleaning and bin replacements.</p> <p>An overall press release to detail the full range of investments across the district will also be</p>

	Reinstating a waiting air for the public, including a café and toilets within the building.	prepared. For larger projects such as the bus station development – an opening event will be planned.
E1. Summary of outcomes	Capital investments will improve derelict or rundown buildings, improve town centre and high street appearances, build back pride in places and increase the footfall to town centres and encourage dwell/spend time.	
Actual Spend @ end Feb 2024	Spend on enhancement grants and town centre public realm: £22,625.82	
E6: Support for local arts, culture, heritage and creative activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events Coordinator (£10,000): to put together a programme of celebratory events on the reopening of the Pannier Market • Events Programme (£12,500): free events open to the public within the Pannier Market • Cultural Board Grants (£32,500): making available small grants for cultural organisations to be part of a ‘show and tell’ event organised via the Cultural Board alongside other identified priorities from ND cultural town team action plans • Screen Devon contribution (£10,000): developing infrastructure to boost the film industry and associated creative industries in North Devon under the umbrella of Screen Devon 	<p>Publicity has already taken place around some of the Pannier Market events since its re-opening.</p> <p>Further promotion of the awarding of cultural grants will take place – with short videos of some of the activity.</p>
E6. Summary of outcomes	Linked to delivery of the Flourishing Culture, these investments will increase cultural participation, increase the number of events and boost footfall in key locations such as town centres and key attractions. The Screen Devon contribution will go towards the formalisation of an organisation to coordinate and attract more film industry activity in our areas.	
Actual spend @ end Feb 2024	<p>£10,000 for the events coordinator to celebrate Pannier Market opening</p> <p>£12,500 on events associated with the Pannier Market opening</p>	
E9: Funding for impactful volunteering and/or	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer Connect (£60,000): Boost volunteering opportunities and placements across North Devon – through recruitment of Volunteer Connector across 3 years via NDVS 	Press release on progress and possible interviews with new volunteers and

social action projects		their placements.
E9. Summary of outcomes	1 job created (volunteer connector). Increase of volunteers and volunteer placements, development of Devon Connect portal with ND content	
Actual spend @ end Feb 2024	£40,000 spent to date on employment of coordinator	
E14: Funding to support relevant feasibility studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Support for CLTs (£25,000): upfront costs supported for the development of CLT proposals (via Jaimie Jeyes) 	Press release at point of delivery – potential to link to wider CLT news story.
E14. Summary of outcomes	Feasibility report/pre planning support for an existing or new CLT to help them move forward with capital programmes.	
Actual spend @ end Feb 2024	No spend	
E16: Investment in open markets and improvements to town centre retail and service sector infrastructure, with wrap around support for small businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retail Boost Support (£11,000): Dedicated strand of the Business Boost offer for retail businesses delivered by ND+ over 2 years 	Promotion of the successful engagements will take place once the service has been delivered.
E16. Summary of outcomes	Working with smaller and flexible retailers, such as Market traders to deliver training that will boost their business potential and embed new skills around digital tools and marketing.	
Actual spend @ end Feb 2024	£5,500 spend	
E17: Development and Promotion of the Visitor Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Tourism Project (£20,000): Delivered via the Biosphere – engagement with tourism businesses to improve carbon footprint and offer a more sustainable product over two years • Visit Exmoor (£3,450): contribution towards improving the North Devon content on the website • Town Visits (£6,550): Develop marketing library for town visit websites to use – aerial footage, interviews, photos, consistent ‘branding’ 	<p>Events have been publicised as they are held, via the Biosphere and NDC social media.</p> <p>Further work will be profiled via the Town Visits as they complete their marketing works – this may coincide in a tourism marketing event to show case the offer we have.</p>
E17. Summary of outcomes	Tourism still plays a huge role in the North Devon economy. This strand of funding has been working with various partners to help build a more	

	consistent and high quality marketing profile for North Devon. The Nature Tourism project is working with businesses to look at ways in which they can reduce their carbon footprint and put nature at the heart of their visitor offer.	
Actual spend @ end Feb 2024	<p>£7,000 spent on Nature Tourism Project</p> <p>£3,200 spent on Town Visits</p> <p>£1,450 spent on Visit Exmoor</p>	
E21: Funding for the development and support of appropriate innovation infrastructure at the local level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean Maritime & Green Energy Officer (£40,000): employed by ND+, for a one year term, a joint post with TDC to deliver the outcomes of the Marine/Green Energy Strategy for Northern Devon and to coordinate inward investment enquiries to the area associated with any sector, but particularly the Floating Off Shore Wind industry. 	The new Officer will post updates on work they are carrying out and promote any events that might be delivered during their post
E21. Summary of outcomes	Work has been taking place to shape the role and make preparations for recruitment through North Devon + as the host for the job role. The post will be advertised from mid-March with an appointment in early April.	
Actual spend @ end Feb 2024	No spend	
E23: Strengthening local entrepreneurial ecosystems, and supporting businesses at all stages of their development to start, sustain, grow and innovate, including through local networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sector Development Activities (£20,510): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Makers Map, collaboration with NDMA and Petroc to produce a map of manufacturing companies across ND ○ Heritage Construction Skills launch event ○ Marine/Green Energy Strategy ○ Harbours, Ports and Jetties study • Further Ecosystems development (£37,840): projects will be programmed into further inward investment or sector development activities for year 3 (24/25) 	<p>The Heritage Constructions Skills event was publicised and further promotion will take place at the time.</p> <p>The studies will be promoted once they have been finalised.</p> <p>The makers map will have an event around it once it is completed and set to go live.</p>
E23. Summary of outcomes	Working across multiple sectors, this strand of work will promote growth within existing industry as well as develop the opportunities to attract new sectors particularly in the clean maritime and green energy fields. The Makers Map is going to profile the high quality range of manufacturing companies in the area, and we are working towards the same for the creative industries. There will be a further sector development programme put in place for the 24/25 year working with more of our existing sectors.	

Actual spend @ end Feb 2024	<p>£2,118.77 towards the Heritage Skills event</p> <p>£3,747.50 towards the Harbour, Ports Jetties study</p>	
E27: Funding to develop angel investor networks nationwide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop North Devon Angel Network (£30,000): working with TechSW to develop the Angel Investment network across North Devon and Torridge with partners such as TDC, Chamber of commerce, Petroc, ND+. 	<p>The project is in early stage development but promotion of key events and successes will be posted at the appropriate time.</p>
E27. Summary of outcomes	<p>The project will bring together a network of Investors with investment-ready businesses to help circulate the wealth within North Devon and accelerate the growth of local businesses.</p>	
Actual spend @ end Feb 2024	<p>No spend but the full £30,000 is in contract with Tech South West to deliver.</p>	
E29: Supporting decarbonisation and improving the natural environment whilst growing the local economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decarbonisation Projects (£56,250): contract with the Biosphere to further develop the natural capital market place and develop strands of the aquaculture enterprise zone business case. This is also being jointly funded by Torridge District Council through their UKSPF investment plan. 	<p>The Biosphere team will be promoting the work they are starting to undertake around the development of marine industries (aquaculture and others) and their Smart Biosphere sensor project.</p>
E29. Summary of outcomes	<p>Work has been slightly delayed as staff changes were made. However, work will progress at pace now with development plans in place to help deliver improvements to the natural capital in North Devon and Torridge.</p>	
Actual spend @ end Feb 2024	<p>No spend but the full £56,250 is in contract with the Biosphere.</p>	
E30: Business support measures to drive employment growth, particularly in areas of higher unemployment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Boost Programme (£234,000): delivery by ND+ over 2 years. Business support programme supported with a micro grants scheme 	<p>ND+ and NDC promote the programme via social media to encourage greater take-up.</p> <p>We will compile a summary of support given and run a press release to coincide with the new financial year – to help promote further interests.</p> <p>Some case studies on individual businesses will be developed also.</p>

E30. Summary of outcomes	Good range of businesses taking up the support – which is aimed at those already in business and wishing to grow, not pre-start or start-ups. So far 27 businesses have received free support with 8 also attracting a micro grant to help them deliver their growth plans.	
Actual spend @ end Feb 2024	£105,000 spend to date on business advice and micro grants	
E33: Employment support for economically inactive people: Intensive and wrap-around one-to-one support to move people closer towards mainstream provision and employment, supplemented by additional and/or specialist life and basic skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future Skills and Employment Hub (£150,000): (linked to E35 below) Partnership with DCC to set up a hub in Barnstaple with dedicated outreach to Ilfracombe. Employed Hub Coordinator will provide advice and signpost to skills and employment opportunities. Link with existing provision and guided by a network of hub partners (Petroc, ND+, DWP, Seetec, NDVS, etc.) 	A press release and opening event will be planned once the Hub is in place and the coordinator recruited. Lots of events will be promoted as part of this provision throughout the year.
E33. Summary of outcomes	Preparation work has been taking place with Devon County Council to get the delivery agreement in place. Discussions taken place with Libraries unlimited for a space within Barnstaple to set up a central hub where a dedicated coordinator will be based (new job funded by this money). Also looking at outreach space in Ilfracombe – with the work hub a potential space to be used there.	
Actual spend @ end Feb 2024	No spend – allocated funds are only available from April 2024	
E35: Activities such as enrichment and volunteering to improve opportunities and promote wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future Skills and Employment Hub £100,000): (linked to E37 above) See description above, this is linking with the Hub activity above to provide a ‘soft’ entry to the labour market through volunteering 	As above.
E35. Summary of outcomes	Linked to E33 above.	
Actual spend @ end Feb 2024	No spend – allocated funds are only available from April 2024	
E37: Tailored support to help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage Construction Skills Hub (£100,000): develop the heritage 	A taster engagement event was held at Arlington Court

<p>people in employment, who are not supported by mainstream provision to address barriers to accessing education and training courses. This includes supporting the retention of groups who are likely to leave the labour market early</p>	<p>construction skills hub, including boot camp skills programme and web-based database/information on available heritage construction companies. Working with Petroc, ND+ and National Trust, plus businesses to develop</p>	<p>last year and a video clip of the event was posted to our social media channels.</p> <p>Once the Hub is more established there will be more opportunities for publicising events and hopefully the introduction of bootcamps specifically for heritage construction skills.</p>
<p>E37. Summary of outcomes</p>	<p>A taster/interest building session was held in Arlington Court at the end of 2023 to raise awareness of this developing project. That has created a core of interested traders and students from Petroc in taking forward a Heritage Construction Skills Hub – where we will look to build awareness of existing heritage crafters and encourage new entrants in all fields. Working with Petroc to run a series of bootcamps in key skills.</p>	
<p>Actual spend @ end Feb 2024</p>	<p>No spend – allocated funds are only available from April 2024</p>	

Rural England Prosperity Fund

Communities & Place

Supporting Local Business

<p>Investment in capacity building and infrastructure support and Capital grant funding for creation and improvements to local rural green spaces</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ilfracombe Seafront Projects (£293,259): two capital projects for Ilfracombe – shelter/toilets for the seafront and developing seating area on the Lime Kiln at the Watersports Hub 	<p>We have press coverage as both of these projects are completed.</p>
<p>Summary of outcomes</p>	<p>Provision of new toilets and a shelter on the seafront will further deliver the aspirations in the Seafront Masterplan and the planning application is due to be submitted with the procurement process being prepared alongside that.</p> <p>The Lime Kiln project is underway with contractors appointed and the works due to complete in April/May. This will provide an excellent extension to the popular Lime Kiln Café, as well as being an open</p>	

	viewing platform for residents and visitors even when not using the café.
Actual spend @ end Feb 2024	No spend to date, but £85,000 is committed in a contract, with the remaining funds also being committed in contract by April/May and spent shortly after.
Micro investment in the rural economy – tourism, agriculture, community businesses, innovation and carbon reduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural Grants Programme (£798,000): delivered by ND+ in a 'LEADER' style grant scheme over two years – grants from £2,500 - £25,000 for rural businesses, including farming, tourism, and social businesses. This fund excludes Barnstaple under the rurality criteria ND+ are collating applicant details and we will do some individual publicity around the first successful projects to complete.
Summary of outcomes	There have been 4 open calls for applications since the scheme opened in mid-2023 which resulted in 21 applications received and likely 15 will be approved. The claims are retrospective, so projects must complete before the money is paid out – we have had 4 applicants complete so far. Solar panels, tourism infrastructure/diversification and rural business innovation are some of the eligible themes. Further rounds of funding will open in April 2024.
Actual spend @ end Feb 2024	Grant claims paid on completed projects is £50,993

4.7 Most of the funds within the UKSPF and REPF are committed in contracts or ring-fenced within a grant funding agreement. Most of these agreements make payments retrospectively and therefore funds are released at the end of the contracted period. Given the very small value of funds that aren't yet fully committed to a project or contract/agreement, we are confident that all our UKSPF and REPF allocation will be spent by the set deadline of end of March 2025.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Officer time has and will continue to be involved from Place, Property and Regeneration team together with support from Finance, Procurement, Parks and Climate Change officers.

5.2. Government provided a cost of burden grant of £20,000 to all authorities to support the implementation of their Investment Plans. As the REPF capital programme had not revenue stream attached to it for administration, NDC transported the £20,000 to ND+ to manage the Rural Grants Programme. The team there are also delivering the Business Boost support programme and associated seed fund grants.

6. EQUALITIES ASSESSMENT

6.1. There are no equalities implications anticipated as a result of this update report.



7. ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

7.1. There are not any environmental implications anticipated directly as a result of this report, as the purpose of this report is to update on progress of the delivery against our UK Shared Prosperity Fund investment plan. Individual projects within the wider action plan that will follow will highlight any specific environmental impacts associated with any of those interventions when they come forwards.

8. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

8.1. The submission of the investment plan supports the wider delivery plans of the Council in achieving our corporate priorities and towards financial security in unlocking government funding to deliver upon the priority interventions.

8.2. Individual projects that come forwards under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund investment plan will support the corporate priorities of climate and environment and pride of place and prosperity.

9. CONSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

9.1. Article 4.5.15

10. STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

This report contains no confidential information or exempt information under the provisions of Schedule 12A of 1972 Act.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The background papers are available for inspection and kept by the author of the report.

12. STATEMENT OF INTERNAL ADVICE

The author (below) confirms that advice has been taken from all appropriate Councillors and Officers:

Dominie Dunbrook, Place Manager, Economic Development & Regeneration