



Northumberland County Council

Hexham High Streets Heritage Action Zone Scheme Overview

Version 2.0 - June 2020



Funded by
Historic England

Hexham HSHAZ Programme Partners -
Northumberland County Council, Hexham Town Council and Hexham Community
Partnership

Introduction

The High Streets Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) Programme is a nationwide initiative to secure lasting improvements to historic high streets, funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and run by Historic England.

Northumberland County Council and partners, Hexham Town Council and Hexham Community Partnership, made a successful Expression of Interest to the national programme for Hexham town centre. The partnership was invited to develop a full delivery plan, which was submitted in December 2019 and this is now being amended to take account of the potential impact of Covid-19. It is anticipated that, subject to approval by Historic England, the scheme will be launched in late 2020.

A strong case has been made for investments based on:

- Reduced footfall and a growing number of vacant units in the town centre, with 1 in 5 now empty along Priestpopple, Battle Hill and the Cattle Market
- Significant decline in the maintenance, fabric and use of many heritage buildings and poor quality public realm - the Conservation Area is now classed as 'At Risk' and in need of investment
- Hexham's importance to a wide rural catchment for employment, tourism, shops and services and a need to evolve for future generations

Hexham's High Streets HAZ will deliver a £2.4m programme of improvements to boost the town centre and enhance the Conservation Area, focusing interventions on the target corridor of Priestpopple, Battle Hill and Cattle Market.

Scheme Aim and Objectives

Aim:

To revitalise Hexham's historic town centre making it a more attractive, engaging and vibrant place for people to live, work, invest and visit

Objectives:

1. Deliver improvements that lead to the removal of the 'at risk' status of the Conservation Area, including building repairs, increasing custodianship and maintenance of Hexham's heritage assets for future generations
2. Revitalise the HSHAZ area by increasing occupancy, reducing voids & bringing floorspace back into use
3. Enhance the physical condition, distinctiveness and attraction of the town centre through improved quality of streetscape & public realm
4. Encourage footfall, dwell time and spend in the town centre enhancing long-term sustainability &

protecting jobs

5. Stimulate and accelerate commercial investment to create economic growth in the town centre
6. Engage the local community to shape, participate and deliver plans & activities
7. Increase knowledge, interest & appreciation of the town's heritage & culture

High Streets HAZ Scheme Components

Towns that are awarded HSHAZ funding have all designed schemes to meet national guidance from Historic England, which comprise specific inter-linked components. Below is an overview of the Hexham HSHAZ main components:

Building Grants Scheme - A property grants scheme operating across all years of the programme aimed at improving and repurposing buildings in the HSHAZ target area - Priestpopple, Battle Hill and Cattle Market. The grant process will be based on national HSHAZ guidelines, with applications invited for target properties (not an 'open call') that best meet the criteria including; vacant units (ground and upper floor), buildings requiring improvement that are in a cluster, listed and in a declining condition, larger properties that need repurposing to generate viable uses and commercial buildings with multiple restoration, repair and reinstatement needs.

Public Realm Improvements - Focussed on the key corridor of Priestpopple, Cattle Market and Battle Hill. The existing design, appearance and poor maintenance of this area detracts from the character of the Conservation Area and improvements are viewed as integral to moving towards the removal of the 'at risk' status. Enhancements could include replacing concrete kerbs and paving with natural materials, upgrading the road surface, improving footways and safety for pedestrians, replacing street lighting with 'heritage' style columns and lanterns and reviewing existing old street furniture and installing new planters and seating, with opportunities to consider more sustainable solutions (subject to funding). Designs will be very much community-led with opportunities for engagement and consultation throughout the development process.

Community Engagement Programme - To maximise participation, accessibility, diversity, learning, appreciation of culture and heritage, increasing volunteering and building capacity in local organisations. Over the next few months a Community Engagement Plan will be developed building on the aspirations outlined in the Statement of Community Engagement. The plan will incorporate the following:

- Feedback from the stakeholder engagement event, held in November 2019 and incorporation of ideas, comments and suggestions from organisations and individuals who attended the Hexham Hub Showcase event in January 2020.
- Ongoing engagement with specific stakeholders and delivery partners and development of robust governance arrangements.
- Completion of 'Stakeholder Mapping' to include an assessment of each organisation's interest in the HSHAZ, levels of influence and impact. This will help to determine what is

important to each stakeholder, how they can contribute and influence approach and delivery and highlight the most appropriate strategy for involvement (inform, engage, monitor and consult).

- Creation of a communications strategy that takes full account of the ongoing restrictions caused by Covid-19 and the need to comply with social distancing whilst maximising engagement and participation. This will include an assessment of how stakeholders currently communicate with their trustees, service users, volunteers, staff, local businesses, residents and visitors and the potential to utilise this wide network to promote the HSHAZ.

New approaches will be needed for many of the HSHAZ activities that involve bringing participants together indoors and outdoors. The HSHAZ programme team will work closely with Hexham Culture Network to identify online, digital and ‘creative distancing’ solutions wherever possible.

National Cultural Programme - Managed by Historic England, this will be a coordinated celebration of what is unique about each of the 69 HSHAZ areas, funded through the National Lottery Heritage Fund and supported by Arts Council England. This will offer a creative platform to raise the profile of the importance of high streets and their relationship with heritage.

Hexham Cultural Programme - Hexham Culture Network (the HSHAZ Cultural Consortium), will develop a bid for funding to the national programme to create and commission complementary events and activities. It will embrace diverse elements of arts and culture to attract new audiences to engage with the town centre and heritage in a fun, interactive and innovative way.

Additional Workstreams and Activities

The main scheme components above are supported by multiple workstreams that will underpin delivery of the Hexham HSHAZ:

Workstream Overview	Potential Activities
<p>Research, Recording, Listing & Digital Hexham Town Council will work with local interest groups to coordinate activities and resources, supported by NCC’s Building Conservation Officer and specialist staff from Historic England (Enriching The List</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a resource library (digital and physical) including documents, images, collections, artefacts and records relating to the town centre, key trading families, specific streets and buildings • Undertaking new or gap research on specific historic themes eg; the changing streetscape, or how a building has evolved over time. This will support the design of various capital works, such as public realm improvements and grant-funded property improvements.

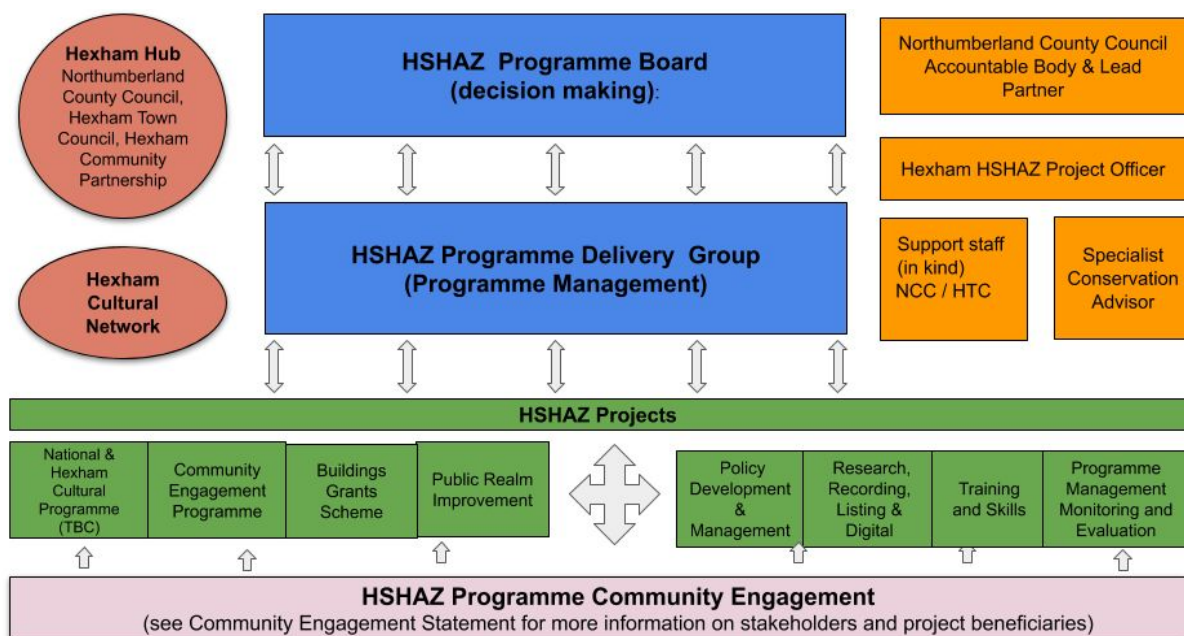
<p>programme).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding knowledge of key listed buildings and non-designated heritage assets to add new details and improve listed entries and records. • Creating imaginative displays (possibly in empty shops windows), events, tours and digital tools/information eg; apps, web content and trails, that showcase heritage assets to a wide audience. • Developing new resources on town centre historic themes for future generations such as oral history eg; recording residents' memories of the changing high street, curating photographs from the community about their favourite buildings and events that have happened, exploring and celebrating local historical events and people.
<p>Training and Skills A cross-cutting project to create training and learning opportunities for businesses/property owners, contractors, technical support staff, local interest groups and the public.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Hard hat' and other tours, study visits, talks and resources to widen learning opportunities • Traditional heritage and conservation skills training • Support for building grant recipients to understand about the long term conservation, maintenance and management of their heritage asset to create a legacy • Training to support volunteering and capacity building to lead events and activities eg; stewards, guides, exhibitions and displays, writing content and customer service training to welcome visitors
<p>Policy Development and Management To support improvements that will enable removal of the 'at risk' status of the Conservation Area, utilise planning tools and expertise available to bring forward high quality developments and conserve the heritage fabric of the HSHAZ area</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting the development of a community-led Conservation Area Management Plan • The potential creation of Development Briefs for specific sites in the target areas • Reviewing existing planning policy that impact on changes to the high street • Promoting the Hexham Shopfront Design Guide, Draft Neighbourhood Plan and Draft Local Plan • Commissioning of condition surveys and other technical reports to support investment decisions
<p>Programme Management, Monitoring & Evaluation Implementing the scheme as a package of related interventions deploying resources effectively, managing the Project Officer and</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management and support for the HSHAZ Project Officer(s) • Completion and updating of scheme management documents and establishing strong governance and approvals procedures, including Annual Reviews • Management of all spend and funding, compliant with

procured suppliers, co-ordinating governance and communications, managing finance and risks and completion of monitoring and evaluation.	<p>Historic England requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring outputs and outcomes, reporting progress, managing risks, assumptions, issues and dependencies • Co-ordination of multiple resources including a procured Specialist Advisor contractor and related technical support • Developing and monitoring a Community Engagement Plan and communications • Working with Historic England to undertake scheme evaluation as part of the national programme
--	--

The activities listed above are an indication of the breadth of the HSHAZ programme and will be extended and shaped by ideas from stakeholders and the community throughout.

Management and Governance

The Hexham HSHAZ scheme has been developed by Northumberland County Council (the Accountable Body) in partnership with Hexham Town Council and Hexham Community Partnership and is backed by a wide range of community and business stakeholders. The diagram below shows the arrangements for managing the programme:



In addition to the structure shown above it is anticipated that a Heritage Working Group will be established to bring together a number of community organisations that are interested in shaping themes of research, collating resources and sharing ideas about multiple aspects of the HSHAZ.

Contact Details

For further information about the Hexham HSHAZ Programme please contact:

Karen Donaldson, Senior Programme Officer (Economic)
Economic Growth and Regeneration Team
Place Directorate
Northumberland County Council
County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF

Tel: 07966 324034

email: karen.donaldson@northumberland.gov.uk

Further Information

Additional information and guidance on the national High Streets Heritage Action Zone Programme is available at: www.historicengland.org.uk