

Littleport Business & Community Centre Concept Paper

Key Project Information

Project/Programme Name	Littleport Business & Community Centre (CPCA Market Towns Programme - Littleport)		
Submitting organisation	East Cambridgeshire District Council		
CPCA Directorate	Economy & Growth		
CPCA Service	Business		
Primary Strategic Objective	Ambitious Skills and Employment Opportunities and Enabling Resilient Communities		
Accountable Owner	Steve Clarke / Grace Crawford		
Delivery Responsibility	Littleport Town Council		
Location of Project	Littleport		
Funding type	CPCA part-funded, partner led	Included in the MTFP?	Yes
MTFP Allocation Detail	CX1609 – Market Towns Programme Littleport		

Brief Description Project/programme purpose: (single line only)

The proposal is to provide match funding to unlock the business element of a community building that will go ahead as part of a section 106 agreement that is also part funded by Littleport Town Council within a new approved residential development.

The change request is to reallocate the Market Town budget for Littleport which is now available as a result of the cancelled E-space project, together with a small underspend on the completed Littleport shopfront project. The total CPCA investment will be £927,538. Which represent 41% of the total project costs for the proposed scheme: £2,244,214.

Detailed Description of the project/programme purpose: (be as full and descriptive as you can)

Issue

The population of Littleport is slightly over 10,000 residents, with planned growth which will see an increase to approximately 15,000 residents in the next 3-5 years. Littleport Town Council are committed to serving its residents and providing local facilities that meet the needs of its local community. To support employment growth in the Town, it needs to take into consideration increasing local job opportunities and the skills and facilities required by the business community to develop and grow.

Background (Cancelled Space Project)

The CA MTFP funding was shared equally across the 10 market towns, with district authority leads able to bid for up to £1m capital funds for each town. Proposals invited to support the mobilisation of each Masterplan and against activities which address the needs of the local economy. The Council has flexibility on the investment, if it is aligned to its masterplan, and that the Council must determine and prioritise where it is invested, in accordance with the Towns Fund Guidance.

The original Littleport Market Town Programme proposal was developed in line with the Littleport Masterplan (Littleport Vision 2030) and its stated ambition to support business growth in the town.

An unsuccessful LUFT 2 bid (Levelling Up Littleport) at a cost of £4.9 million to develop the E-Space North Business Centre was considered within a significantly reduced funding envelope. Several redesigns for a scaled down build including a modular option, was costed at £2.24million. £0.8 million over budget. As no additional funding is available to support the E-Space project, the alternatives are to request the CPCA to reallocate the balance of funding, £925,000 market town funding plus an additional £2,538 underspend from the completed Littleport Shop Front project, totalling £927,538 as proposed in this paper.

Officers have met with Littleport Ward Members and Littleport Town Council to identify an alternative project that could be delivered through the Market Town Programme Funds. A community facility is being developed as part of the stage 2 housing development east of the A10. The CPCA investment will enable the proposed community facility to be expanded and incorporate business support and training facilities for which there is an identified need in the Littleport Masterplan.

New Project Proposal & Strategic Fit (New Business & Community Centre)

The proposal is to provide match funding for a new community building that is part of a section 106 agreement within an approved residential development. The location is within an area of the Town that is currently seeing the most growth and is designated for future planned growth between the A10 and Ely Road, heading towards Portley Hill and Ely.

The new building will have a business focus and supporting the delivery of the Masterplan, will be part of the Littleport's Business Growth Zone.

Alongside the growth in housing in the town, the facility will provide a flexible space with a business centre focus that will complement the existing Espace North business Centre. Collaborating with external organisations and local businesses, educational providers, community groups, and the other facilities available within the Town, to provide a network of support for both residents and businesses, which will in turn create a resilient community and support growth.

The building will offer a flexible space that could accommodate a range of facilities and activities. This will include office space for short term hire, desk space for hire for home workers with limited space at home, a meeting and training venue as well as a facility for providing outreach services in the town for the local community.

The building will be used for a variety of purposes:

- Littleport Town Council having offices within the building and manage the facility. They will look to employ an apprentice as part of the staff team. The centre would look to provide managed services –a managed reception area for hirers of the space / some office facilities, photocopying, internet access, large format screens.
- Have the facility to offer work experience opportunities for young people attending the local college.
- Provide a location for organisations that support businesses to hold seminars and workshops, and signposting services.
- Office Space for short term hire - offer space for small businesses, or start-up companies who have no offices of their own, to rent office space and meeting rooms on a short-term basis.
- Office Space for Home workers – provide short term hire office facilities for residents that work from home to reduce isolation and connect with other like- minded people, as well as providing space to hire to conduct in-person or internet-based meetings, conduct interviews, etc.
- Training venue - aiming to establish the facility as a venue for adult skills, including bootcamp provision.
- Provide Conferencing Space –to work in conjunction with the other spaces for hire within the Town to offer appropriate spaces for a variety of events, and activities, but not conflict with the facilities already in place.
- Outreach Space for Doctors – potentially a space to provide the local Medical Centre to offer outreach services within the community. An initial agreement has already been reached with the local surgery to rent space if the project goes ahead.

Demand

Littleport is undergoing rapid growth due to planned housing developments, creating increased demand for local business infrastructure, flexible workspaces, and community services. The proposed community business hub will address the current lack of suitable office spaces and public service venues, enhancing both economic activity and social cohesion. Key demand drivers include local business expansion, increased remote working, and the need for accessible training and healthcare services. See attached Letters of Support.

Long-Term Financial Sustainability

The hub's financial sustainability is underpinned by diverse income streams, including rental income from office spaces, meeting rooms, and event spaces. Annual business-as-usual (BAU) costs are estimated as **£70,000**, covering maintenance, staffing, utilities, and insurance. Rental income is projected to offset operational costs by Year 2 of operations, and to be close to **£130,000** by year 3, ensuring long-term viability. Additionally, the project's alignment with S106 and CIL funding frameworks supports its ongoing financial resilience. A full operational budget will be provided and set-out within the business case.

The building will be managed directly by Littleport Parish Council staff. The Town Clerk will have overall responsibility for the running of the building. A Facilities/Amenities Officer will be recruited for day to day running as well as a Caretaker. Operational running costs will be funded through rental income and precept.

Outputs

- **Physical Outputs:** Construction and operational launch of a multifunctional community business hub, offering office spaces, meeting rooms, and event venues.
- **Service Outputs:** Delivery of key outreach services, including healthcare, job training, and educational programs.
- **Key Outcomes:** Increased local business growth, job creation, enhanced community cohesion, improved healthcare access, and contributions to regional sustainability goals.

Without MTPF Littleport Business Community Hub would be half the floorspace across only one storey and essentially be a simple function room only. With a coordinated approach, however, the funding ensures the project meets both immediate community needs and long-term economic objectives. It is anticipated a footfall of approximately 2000 people per month (based on the GP surgery hiring the building for the satellite clinics, office staff, caretaker and other business users). See attached Floorplan Designs.

Optioneering

The Littleport Masterplan details several projects that were considered for the long list of options for MTPF funding;

1. **A Littleport business growth zone** – REPF & MTFP 'E-space Extension'
2. **A10 Roundabout Project** – Original MTPF project for Littleport considered in 2021
3. **The creation of a 'Gateway area' close to the railway station**
4. **Options for Littleport town centre** – MTPF Shopfront Project completed
5. **New Littleport Country Park** – Second MTPF project for Littleport considered
6. **Housing and amenity development** – working in partnership with developers
7. **Sustainable Travel** – SPF 'Cycleroute feasibility study'
8. **Investment in skills** – SPF Digital Inclusion Project
9. **Continued Improvement in digital connectivity** – MTPF Digital Connectivity Project

Four short list options were assessed for LTC's Business Community Hub (that covers outputs for 1, and 8 of the above):

1. **Do Nothing:** No upfront costs but fails to meet demand, hindering economic growth.
2. **Renovate Existing Building:** Lower initial costs but limited flexibility and higher maintenance expenses.
3. **New Purpose-Built Hub (Chosen):** Best aligns with Littleport's growth plans, offering flexible business spaces, a space for skills, and long-term financial sustainability.
4. **Lease Existing Commercial Space:** Quick implementation but lacks customization and incurs higher operational costs.

The **preferred option**—developing a new, purpose-built hub—maximizes economic, social, and environmental benefits while ensuring alignment with Littleport’s strategic goals. This will be detailed as part of the business case.

Timelines

<i>Proposed Start Date</i>	<i>Expected Duration of Project</i>	<i>Details of factors driving start and duration (why proposed start and end date have been chosen)</i>
February/2025	Sept/2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning approval as Reserved Matters: January /February 2025 (inc. project management determined) • Land transfer: March 2025 • Appointment of contractor & design: April/May 2025 • Build period: June 2025 - August 2026s • Handover & Completion: September 2026

Impact of not proceeding

If the project does not proceed there will be MTFP funds designated for Littleport remaining. This proposal is to secure that the remaining budget is invested into Littleport as committed. In addition, Circa £1.25million of associated match funding for the development (106 & SIL) is being included in the project, the benefits detailed above will not be realised.

No other projects of this scale and impact have been identified, although a number of smaller projects have been considered.

- Skate Park/Pump track £155,000
- Town Centre Upgrade to promote tourism £90,000 (Historic town centre tour with QR codes; information board; telephone box refurbishment; new benches with historical artwork; new windows and doors for the existing village hall – all in line with the Littleport masterplan

Whilst these would be of benefit, they would not deliver the economic benefits of the proposal.

The impact of the CPCA not contributing is that the project will not be at the scale described, and the impact on job growth, diversification, and economic growth in Littleport will not be achieved.

The Market Towns Programme aims to drive targeted growth and regeneration in each of the key towns. The allocation of this funding will enable the proposed community facility to be expanded (to a 2-storey building) and to incorporate business support/training provision (for which there is an identified need within the Masterplan). The centre will also link with the existing E-Space Business Centre and the new housing development with the high street. There are plans to integrate an onsite Doctor Surgery which will also drive-up footfall in the area.

Financials (Estimates)

Current Estimate for Total Cost of project/ programme	Funding structure and CPCA Contribution	Estimated cost for creation of business case
Total project cost: £2,244,214.	Match funding: S106 (Index Linked value 10 Oct 24) £1,063,880 LTC CIL funds match funding £252,796 CPCA funding:	No costs associated (The business case is being produced by East Cambridgeshire District Council in consultation Littleport Town Council.)

	CPCA Marketing Town Programme (Littleport)) £927,538 Total CPCA funding requested: £927,538	
--	---	--

Cap ex?	Yes	Rev Ex	No	Combination of Rev & Cap Ex?	N/A
---------	-----	--------	----	------------------------------	-----

Assumptions or risks that could increase or decrease the total cost

1. No allowance for VAT
2. Cost plan is based on current market rates (4Q2024)
3. No allowance for Archaeological works, professional fees, statutory fees, or loose furniture (these costs have been covered directly by Littleport Town Council)
4. All excavated material assumed to be inert.

Benefits (Benefits must be measurable)

Type	Description	Assumptions or risks that could increase or decrease the total benefits
Financial benefits	<p>The main financial benefits will be job creation, diversification, and economic growth in Littleport. LTC will be directly receiving rental income for hire of facilities. This will be quantified as part of the full business case.</p> <p>The benefits and measures will be further defined in the Business Case.</p>	<p>Main risk associated with usage and effective marketing and promotion of facility.</p> <p>Assumptions on use need to be further tested particularly around business aspects.</p>
Non-financial benefits	<p>Relocation of Town council offices from the Barn to the new building will release another building for community use. Proposal is to develop this as a business and community asset for the town supporting high street footfall and community use. This will be a 2-storey building totalling 512.5sqm of floorspace, employing 2 FTE roles (facilities officer & caretaker) and the Town Council will also look to take on an apprentice administration role. It is anticipated a footfall of approximately 2000 people per month (based on the GP surgery hiring the building for the satellite clinics, office staff, caretaker and other business users.)</p> <p>The benefits and measures will be further defined in the Business Case.</p>	<p>Assumption around attracting visitors and community use needs to be determined through engagement.</p>

Risk, Assumptions, Issues and Dependencies (RAID)						
Known Risks	<p>Successful procurement and appointment of contractor within timescale. CPCA funding not confirmed and the project cannot proceed.</p> <p>Site surveys to be carried out and BNG assessment to be determined – no indications of any issues but cannot be discounted until surveys have been completed. All pre-development fees are being covered by Littleport Town Council.</p> <p>Project will include a 5% design & 5% contingency as mitigation measure for which LTC have budgets to cover,</p> <p>There is little risk of low occupancy rate as LTC have several letters of intent to rent spaces.</p>					
Known Assumptions	<p>Planning approval as Reserved Matter to be concluded promptly by January /February 2025.</p> <p>Land transfer to Littleport Town Council to be completed by the end of March 2025 Site has been agreed as part of the housing development and CIL funds allocated so this should proceed as expected.</p> <p>Any funding comes with a charge on the title of the land so that the CPCA can recover the funds if such actions take place.</p>					
Known Issues	N/A					
Known External Dependencies	<p>Project management will need to be determined.</p> <p>Appointment of building contractor.</p>					
Known internal Dependencies (tick which shared service is required)	Comms	Procurement	Legal	Finance	HR	Policy & Insight
	[v]	[v]	[v]	[v]	N/A	[v]