

Regeneration plans for Preston Tower

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter

Nearly £1million in funding earmarked for a controversial car park plan in Haddington could be used to improve Prestonpan's town centre instead.

Councillors will be asked to approve proposals to shelve the Whittingehame Drive transport hub plans on Tuesday and divert the cash into helping restore Preston Tower and the doocot to inject new life into the centre of Prestonpan's.

A report to East Lothian Council's cabinet meeting reveals that despite an extension to the time given to use Scottish Government funding for the Haddington proposals, it was not going to be completed in time.

And it asks councillors to agree to move the funding set aside for the project – up to £900,000 – to a new project.

The Scottish Government funding for town centre projects has to be fully committed by the revised deadline of March next year and spent by next September.

The transport hub plans for Haddington would have seen a new car park created on Whittingehame Drive, on the outskirts of the town centre, to encourage people to park and ride to the shops.

However, it was met with a backlash from local businesses and shop owners, who feared the impact it would have on their

customers if they were unable to park outside the shops.

The report to cabinet says: "The grant criteria being extended was particularly welcomed; however, with priorities completely realigned as a result of Covid-19, the head of infrastructure has flagged that the Whittingehame Drive cannot be completed within the extended timeframe.

"The project has also been the subject of significant community representation and, alongside Town Centre Access Strategy work, wide-ranging speculation."

Instead, it suggests the funding is moved to support work on restoring Preston Tower and the doocot in the town, which is already being done in association with the Scottish Historic Building Trust, National Trust for Scotland, Preston Seton Gosford (PSG) Area Partnership, Prestonpans Community Council and the PSG Great Place Project.

It says that work was also estimated to cost between £700,000 and £900,000 and would have a "positive impact" on the town, making the medieval attraction safe for visitors in the future.

It also points out Prestonpans itself has lost out on funding in the past.

It says: "Investment levels in Prestonpans have been lower than in other centres.

"The inclusion of regeneration work on Preston Tower and the doocot together with the work on High Street in the context of the PSG Great Place project would see Prestonpans benefit significantly from this grant award, providing opportunity to add and enhance attractions and public access to those attractions.

"The principal aim of the project is to help reduce local inequalities and contribute to the regeneration of Prestonpans

town centre in collaboration with the local community.”

Preston Tower dates back to the 14th century. The doocot on its land was built in the mid 17th century after Oliver Cromwell had sacked the tower, which has a pit-prison and stands four storeys high.