



The Auckland Project

**Independent Evaluation
of the National Lottery Heritage Fund Project**

Interim Final Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Auckland Project is undertaking an ambitious regeneration scheme in Bishop Auckland, County Durham. This report presents an independent evaluation of a key component of The Auckland Project's work: the restoration and development of Auckland Castle, which has been supported by a grant of altogether £12.4m from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF). This evaluation, commissioned by The Auckland Project, has been undertaken by Fred Robinson and Ian Zass-Ogilvie of St Chad's College, Durham University.
2. Auckland Castle, an impressive Grade 1 Listed Building, is the historic home of the Bishops of Durham. The Church Commissioners decided to sell the Castle, including a remarkable and valuable set of paintings, Francisco de Zurbaran's 'Jacob and his Twelve Sons'. In 2012, Jonathan Ruffer, an art collector, philanthropist and financier, who was born and brought up in the North East region, bought both the paintings and the Castle, with the intention of ensuring that this heritage would be secured for the future and would be made accessible to the public.
3. A charity, subsequently named The Auckland Project, was established to develop the Castle as a visitor attraction. A small staff team was recruited and a successful application for funding was submitted to NLHF. Work on the restoration of the Castle began in 2016 and it opened to the public in November 2019 – but had to close in March 2020 because of the Covid-19 pandemic. A new Faith Museum is also being developed, but is yet to open.
4. In addition to the Castle, The Auckland Project has been developing other visitor attractions, including a Mining Art Gallery and a Spanish Gallery. It has acquired the Binchester estate which includes the remains of Vinovium Roman fort; has bought a number of buildings around the Market Place in Bishop Auckland; and has also acquired the Weardale Railway, a heritage line. The Auckland Project aims to use these assets to promote a wide-ranging process of regeneration and revival in the area. Complementing this, Jonathan Ruffer has also set up another charity, 11Arches, which stages Kynren, a popular heritage-based show acted by local volunteers.
5. The NLHF project has six 'Approved Purposes'. These are: the repair and conservation of Auckland Castle; presentations in the Castle that tell the story of the Bishops of Durham; creation of a Faith Museum exploring Faith in Britain; associated learning projects, skills training and apprenticeships; a volunteering programme; and community engagement.
6. The Castle has now been restored to a high standard through the NLHF project. It features the Georgian Gothic Throne Room and the opulent Long Dining Room with the Zurbaran pictures – providing an insight into the importance and power of the historic Prince Bishops. The Private Apartments present the later Bishops in their domestic settings, giving a sense of their interests and activities. Alongside the Castle, the Faith Museum is intended to provide a wider perspective, looking at the role of Faith in Britain from prehistory through to today. The Faith Museum has been subject to many delays, due to changing requirements, design and construction challenges, and debates over content. It is hoped that it will open in autumn 2022 -- more than three years later than planned.
7. Development of the Castle and the Faith Museum provided opportunities to do work with schools and with local communities, including talks, pop-up museums and heritage skills

sessions. To help secure local benefits, apprenticeships were offered in different departments of The Auckland Project. Prior to the pandemic, many local volunteers were recruited to help at the Castle and other facilities. And various engagement events have taken place, including community consultations and food-based initiatives.

8. Managing and delivering the NLHF project was difficult, especially for The Auckland Project itself and for Meldrum, the main contractor. There have been long delays and big cost increases on the capital works caused by structural problems, late changes and improvements to the scheme, design challenges, protracted debates about the content of the Faith Museum and other issues, including complex project management. The scheme as a whole will be completed several years later than planned (extended from a 3 year timescale to an expected 7 years) and more than 50% over budget (total cost was originally budgeted at £20.5m and is now estimated to be £32.1m). However, the extra costs have been borne by The Auckland Project, while the NLHF contribution has remained unchanged.
9. It is not possible to make reliable forecasts of future visitor numbers. The Castle was popular and well-received when it opened in November 2019, although visitor numbers were modest -- but the opening was in winter. It closed again for a planned winter break in January until mid-February 2020, and then reopened only to close again in mid-March 2020, owing to the pandemic 'lockdown'. When the Castle reopens in July 2021 visitor numbers will be restricted and it is expected that most visitors will be from the local area.
10. The Auckland Project wants to do much more than run visitor attractions; the aim is to revive Bishop Auckland. There are some hints of possible revival, but there is certainly still an air of decline in the town centre. The Auckland Project has brought some employment, apprenticeships, educational opportunities, volunteering opportunities and community activity. And it has brought renewed hope. Perhaps its main contribution so far has been to focus attention on Bishop Auckland and its economic and social problems -- and potential. As a result, new infrastructure investment is being planned by the public sector, with the aspiration that Bishop Auckland will become a successful visitor destination -- and consequently have a more vibrant economy.
11. In relation to this evaluation, we are able to say that **the agreed Approved Purposes of the NLHF scheme have been achieved, apart from the completion of the Faith Museum**. Given that construction of the new Faith Museum building has been completed, it is reasonable to expect that the displays will be agreed and installed in time for opening in autumn 2022.
12. The evaluation points to lessons arising from the experience of The Auckland Project and the NLHF scheme. These are:
 - Projects need to be well developed before implementation.
 - Effective project management is essential.
 - Delays happen and need to be managed.
 - Acquisition of property needs to be carefully considered.
 - Stay focused on 'purpose'.
 - Connecting with local communities is crucially important.

There can be no doubt that The Auckland Project is ambitious, remarkable and different. It is to be hoped that it will prove sustainable -- and that it will help secure the lasting revival of Bishop Auckland.

1. Introduction

The Auckland Project is undertaking an ambitious and remarkable regeneration scheme in Bishop Auckland, County Durham. It is funded principally by philanthropist Jonathan Ruffer, but a significant part of its work is also supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF). This Evaluation Report focuses particularly on the work supported by the NLHF, but necessarily also considers the wider context of The Auckland Project as a whole.

The central element of the whole regeneration scheme – and the focus for the NLHF project -- is Auckland Castle, the historic home of the Bishops of Durham. In 2012 the Castle was sold by the Church Commissioners and acquired by the Auckland Castle Trust (which was later renamed The Auckland Project), a charitable organisation established by Jonathan Ruffer. Subsequently, the NLHF (formerly the HLF, the Heritage Lottery Fund) awarded a grant of altogether £12.4m to The Auckland Project to help meet the costs of developing the Castle and an associated Faith Museum.

A condition of that award was that The Auckland Project would commission an independent evaluation of the NLHF project, which would ‘tell the story of [the] project, its achievements and lessons learned’(1). That evaluation has been undertaken by Professor Fred Robinson and Ian Zass-Ogilvie of St. Chad’s College, Durham University. The evaluation commenced in January 2018 and continued until mid-2021, by which time most of the NLHF project had been completed.

We have called this an Interim Final Report because the NLHF project has not yet been fully completed; in particular, work on the Faith Museum is still underway and it is not expected to open until autumn 2022. But it is also an interim assessment as a consequence of the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. In March 2020, at the start of the first ‘lockdown’, Auckland Castle was closed after only a few weeks of operation and the decision was taken to not reopen until mid-2021, at the earliest. So the evidence that we expected would inform the evaluation, such as data on the numbers and characteristics of visitors over a period of at least a year, has obviously not been available. At this stage, we can therefore only tell the story of the project so far, but we can, nevertheless, set out achievements and lessons from the experience of its development.

This independent and detailed evaluation is based on interviews and the analysis of documentary material. Since January 2018 we have interviewed many staff and stakeholders and have also had informal conversations with them and with members of the community. We have been given access to the minutes of the meetings of both the board of trustees and the Leadership Team of senior managers, and we have read policy papers, reports and media coverage. We have greatly benefitted from the candour, cooperation and support offered by everyone at The Auckland Project.

This report starts with the story of the origins and development of The Auckland Project. That is followed by a review of progress on each of the elements (the ‘Approved Purposes’) of the NLHF scheme. The report then looks at the management of the NLHF project and that is followed by discussion of impact and outcomes. We end with conclusions about achievements and lessons to be drawn from the evaluation.

2. Background: Faith, Hope and Charity

2.1 Origins

It might be said that the origins of The Auckland Project are to be found in the seventeenth century (or perhaps even many centuries before that). But it could also be argued that really it is a story that is largely about events over the past decade, though linking ancient themes with the opportunities created by modern finance and philanthropy. Whichever way the history is presented and understood, there is no doubt it is an intriguing story – and one that still has a long way to run.

Auckland Castle, in Bishop Auckland, County Durham, is a hugely important ecclesiastical site, home to the powerful and wealthy Bishops of Durham for a thousand years. After the Norman Conquest, the Bishop of Durham was granted exceptional and extensive powers to act as a political and military leader to help control the troublesome north of England and maintain a buffer zone between England and the Northumbria-Scottish borderlands. The ‘Prince Bishop’ ruled the lands between the Tyne and the Tees on behalf of the monarch. He could raise taxes, mint coins and hold his own parliaments; he was, in effect, the second most powerful man in England. Prince Bishops were far more important and influential than other English bishops. They lived as grand nobles, owning castles and manors and demonstrating their power through pursuits such as hunting and patronage of the arts. Auckland Castle became one of the most important bishop’s palaces in Europe, considered to be surpassed only by the Vatican and the Palace of the Popes in Avignon.

The Bishop of Durham retained some substantial secular powers until the Great Reform Act of 1832 and the death of Bishop Van Mildert, last of the ‘Prince Bishops’, in 1836. Subsequently, the property of the See, including Auckland Castle, was transferred to the Ecclesiastical (later Church) Commissioners.

Over the centuries Auckland Castle has served as a manor house, hunting lodge, palace, a retreat and a religious and political centre. In the 1830s the Bishop’s other residence, Durham Castle, was donated to accommodate the newly-established University of Durham, and Auckland Castle became the Bishop’s sole residence. Bishops of Durham lived at Auckland Castle until 2010 -- and the present Bishop still has an office there.

One of the most important assets of the Castle is a noted series of paintings of ‘Jacob and his Twelve Sons’ by Francisco de Zurbaran (1598-1664). These full length paintings of the Patriarch Jacob and his sons, the founding fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel, were acquired by Bishop Richard Trevor (Bishop of Durham from 1752-1771) in 1756. (In fact, one of the 13 pictures – of Benjamin -- is a copy, commissioned by Bishop Trevor after he was unable to buy the full set at auction). In acquiring and displaying these pictures, it is believed that the Bishop wanted to emphasise the Jewish roots of Christianity at a time when Jews in Britain were subject to restrictions and discrimination. In the House of Lords, Bishop Trevor had steered an Act of Parliament to emancipate the Jews, enabling Jewish immigrants to become British citizens; the Act was passed in 1753, but was controversial and unpopular—and was thus repealed two years later. The Bishop displayed these striking and provocative pictures in the Castle’s purpose-built gallery, the Long Dining Room, so they would be seen by his many influential and powerful dinner guests, thus making a strong plea for social, political and religious tolerance – an issue that still resonates today. The paintings were, and still are, bound together with the Castle and its historic function; for these paintings, the context certainly matters.

The Zurbaran paintings led, ultimately, to the establishment of The Auckland Project more than 250 years later. In 1997 the Church Commissioners reviewed the Church of England's assets in response to financial pressures. In the Durham Diocese, the Commissioners took the decision to sell the Zurbaran paintings, Auckland Castle's most valuable asset. That decision was successfully challenged by the Bishop Auckland Civic Society, supported by the then Bishop of Durham, Michael Turnbull. But in 2003 the Commissioners re-asserted their intention to sell the paintings. A local campaign, supported by Bishop Tom Wright, was mounted, which stressed the importance of the Zurbaran paintings in relation to both the Castle and the local community – a significance not fully appreciated by the Church Commissioners.

That campaign was also successful, but when Bishop Tom left in 2010 the Commissioners again attempted to sell the pictures, during the interregnum. A further campaign was initiated, this time involving substantial media publicity, notably in the *Northern Echo*, and also support from the local community. A book about the pictures by a local GP, Dr Robert McManners (2) was produced and a specially commissioned oratorio was performed in Durham Cathedral. A working group led by Sir Paul Nicholson, Lord Lieutenant of County Durham, campaigned to keep the Zurbarans at Auckland Castle and local MP Helen Goodman started a petition. Durham County Council became involved; in partnership with the Church Commissioners and Historic England they commissioned a detailed study of the Castle and its future prospects (3). In relation to the Zurbarans, the County Council warned that Listed Building Consent could be required to move the paintings out of the Castle. Keeping the Zurbarans in County Durham, preferably in the Castle, became something of a local cause celebre. In response to the campaign and resulting adverse publicity, the Church Commissioners postponed the sale.

Jonathan Ruffer, a City financier born and brought up in the North East, and who has a great interest in Spanish art, had been following these developments. He stepped in with an offer to buy the paintings, with the intention of keeping them in the Castle, respecting their historical context and keeping them in trust for the people of the North East. After lengthy and difficult negotiations, in July 2012 Ruffer eventually succeeded in buying not only the paintings (for £9m) but also – and with some misgivings -- buying the Castle (for £2m). The idea was to keep the paintings in their rightful place, and refurbish and reopen the Castle to the public. The development of a 'Faith Museum' was also mooted at this time. The Castle was vested in a charity, the Auckland Castle Trust, which was registered with the Charity Commission in March 2012, and renamed The Auckland Project in 2017. The paintings are vested in a separate but related charity, the Zurbaran Trust.

To develop the project a small staff team was initially recruited and accommodated at the Castle. It was decided to seek some external funding for much-needed works to the Castle and related developments. With help from Durham County Council's Regeneration Team, an outline bid for NLHF funding was prepared and submitted in 2013. That secured an award of £1m from the NLHF to fully develop the proposal, supporting work on design and feasibility. Architects Purcell were brought in to help with the development of a Master Plan. That planning work subsequently led to an award of £9.0m from NLHF, confirmed in 2015. After that, in 2016, a further supplementary grant of £2.4m was secured. The award of substantial funding from NLHF undoubtedly boosted the confidence of the small staff team at The Auckland Project and that provided a basis for developing further initiatives.

In 2013, The Auckland Project (at that time the Auckland Castle Trust) opened the unrestored Castle to the public, and in 2014 a café was also established, located in the Castle's library. During 2014 the

Castle opened six days per week and offered some limited interpretation and activities. Paid visitor numbers in 2014 were 15,000; that grew to 30,000 in 2016.

At the end of 2016 the Castle was closed and building works started. While the Castle was closed for building work, the Zurbaran paintings were removed – apparently only the second time they had left the Castle since they were purchased by Bishop Trevor in 1756. The opportunity was taken to loan them for display in galleries in the US and Israel.

The Auckland Project 's growing staff team moved out of the Castle when building work was underway and relocated to a functional and under-occupied 1970s government office block, Vinovium House, next to Bishop Auckland bus station, staying there until the end of 2020.

The restored Castle finally reopened in 2019, but unfortunately then had to be closed again because of the Covid-19 pandemic, in March 2020. It is due to reopen in July 2021.

2.2 Development of The Auckland Project

The Castle and its Zurbaran paintings are central to The Auckland Project and, of course, were the original elements that gave rise to the Project in the first place. But the whole enterprise has grown and developed well beyond just developments at the Castle, and now encompasses a larger and more ambitious programme of regeneration. The Auckland Project's intention is to bring about substantial change in Bishop Auckland through a process of renewal that stimulates economic, social and community development. The Castle and other visitor attractions are conceived as 'catalysts' for change and community revival.

In parallel with the NLHF-supported scheme at the Castle, The Auckland Project acquired a number of town centre properties, some of which have been used to create visitor attractions complementing the Castle. Around Bishop Auckland's Market Place – not far from the Castle -- several disused buildings were acquired, often opportunistically and at relatively low prices.

An imposing set of buildings -- the former Barclay's Bank (once the Backhouse Bank) and the adjacent Barrington House (formerly Barrington School) – was acquired in 2014 and has been extensively refurbished to house a Spanish Art Gallery. Due to open in autumn 2021, this will focus on the Spanish 'Golden Age' of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is seen as a means of 'contextualising' the Castle's Zurbaran paintings, and will be the largest collection of Spanish art in the UK outside London. Nearby, Durham University is setting up the Zurbaran Centre for Spanish and Latin American Art and Culture at 10 Market Place, another building bought by The Auckland Project.

Across the road from the Spanish Gallery, a former bank chambers building was bought to house an important collection (the 'Gemini Collection') of paintings about coal mining which were donated by Dr Robert McManners and Gillian Wales, local collectors who were keen to support the activities and vision of The Auckland Project. The Mining Art Gallery, opened in October 2017, was in fact the first new visitor attraction to open and has proved popular, especially with local people in this former coal mining area.

Nearby, a former supermarket (now called 'Number 42') was acquired and was first used to display and make local art and craftwork. It is now planned to use the ground floor as a 'community hub' accommodating the activities of various local organisations.

Also in the Market Place and near the Castle gatehouse, The Auckland Project built a strikingly – and controversial -- modern welcome building, known as the Auckland Tower. This is where the visitor is expected to begin their visit, getting their bearings from the top of the Tower (from the 15 metre viewing platform) and buying tickets. The Tower opened in October 2018.

Several other substantial buildings in the Market Place, including two closed hotels and empty office buildings have been bought by The Auckland Project and await development; eventually they may possibly become hotels, restaurants or used for other purposes. It is unclear when these buildings will be brought back into use – some require extensive and costly restoration work. The thinking has been that opportunistic purchase is justified since the process of regeneration will bring new activities and new uses for redundant buildings. That, in turn, will lift values, and generate a virtuous circle of economic development -- better to buy now and capture the increase in value. There is also another motive for acquisition: a wish to protect these buildings from inappropriate development that might compromise the wider scheme.

In addition, beyond the town centre, the former golf course at Flatts Farm was bought in order to protect the area from development that might detract from the Castle and, more particularly, to provide a site for an historical pageant called Kynren, a night show inspired by the Puy du Fou attraction in France. That is run by a separate charity, 11Arches (named with reference to the nearby Newton Cap viaduct), also supported by Jonathan Ruffer. Kynren has 1000 volunteers, mainly from the local area, and in that way contributes to community development, local civic pride and intergenerational connection -- as well as bringing in both visitors and revenue. Kynren had to be cancelled in 2020 owing to the pandemic. When it takes place again in 2021 it will be supplemented by a daytime show (titled 'Fina and the Golden Cape') and theme park attractions and facilities. Both shows are scheduled to run in August and early September 2021.

Further acquisitions by The Auckland Project have included the extensive Binchester Estate (including the important remains of Vinovium Roman Fort), which was bought from the Church Commissioners for £2m, and also Bishop Auckland Golf Course which had originally been part of the Castle parkland.

In March 2020, The Auckland Project bought the Weardale Railway, a heritage line running from Bishop Auckland to Stanhope. The railway was owned by a US company, British American Railway Service, and run largely by volunteers of the Weardale Railway Trust. British American Railway Service (ultimately owned by Iowa Pacific) was struggling and eventually went into administration. This opportunistic purchase was seen by The Auckland Project as a way of saving an asset that can help to establish Bishop Auckland as an attractive and eclectic visitor destination. Since the acquisition, work has been undertaken to repair and renovate the line -- Durham County Council agreed to provide substantial financial support to update and repair bridges. It is hoped to run some train services during 2021. There is even a long term ambition to reopen the whole route from the main line connection at Darlington not just to Stanhope, but beyond that to Wearhead.

Most recently, in May 2021, The Auckland Project bought the 32-bed Park Head Hotel on the outskirts of Bishop Auckland. It is a fully operational hotel and will continue with the existing staff. This is intended to support and benefit from the growth of tourism linked to The Auckland Project's attractions – and marks the beginning of the organisation's new approach to enterprise development.

Some projects have been proposed but, in the event, not carried out. In particular, the Walled Garden restaurant, which was to be accommodated in a series of glass domes designed by Japanese architectural practice SANAA, proved too costly to build and there were doubts about its commercial viability. Hence, it was decided not to proceed with it in the foreseeable future. There have also been tentative proposals for a Family Dining Restaurant.

In the years following the purchase of the Castle in 2012, The Auckland Project grew to become a fairly large enterprise, directly employing around 120 people by the start of 2020. Even before the pandemic, it had been decided to restructure the operation and cut costs, and by 2021 staffing levels had been reduced by half. That reflected the fact that building work was tailing off and, with all facilities closed (apart from the Castle's park), fewer staff were needed. Restructuring was also necessary to create an organisation geared to running visitor attractions rather than managing and delivering physical developments.

The scale of the enterprise has continued to provide an impressive demonstration of philanthropic ambition and commitment. Jonathan Ruffer's financial contribution, initially £11m for the purchase of the Castle and the Zurbarans, has become a commitment of at least £130m in The Auckland Project alone (that leaves aside other investments such as the 11Arches expenditure on Kynren). Most of Ruffer's financial contribution (amounting to about 90% of The Auckland Project's expenditure) has come from his charitable trust. His formal role has changed over time; he stepped down from the position of Chair of The Auckland Project board of trustees in July 2018, instead becoming known as the Founder. He and his wife, Jane Ruffer, have made a home in Bishop Auckland and continue to be very much involved in the development of the Project.

2.3 Purpose

What is it all for? From the start there has been a good deal of thinking and discussion, both inside and outside The Auckland Project, about the aims and *purpose* of the whole scheme. In a fluid situation where new opportunities arise, and in a project shaped and led by a thoughtful and creative philanthropist, it can be difficult to discern exactly what the purpose is or ought to be. But 'purpose' has become central. The Auckland Project's plans say purpose needs to be 'felt, embedded and lived – it is our organisational DNA'.

It is clear that the purpose is about bringing new life, new opportunities and new hope to Bishop Auckland, a town which has seen long term economic decline, has its share of social problems and which has a visibly struggling town centre. The stated purpose is to *revive* Bishop Auckland, using 'Money, Power and Faith' to promote a 'Revival for Mind, Body and Spirit' -- and change how people think, feel and live. For Jonathan Ruffer, it is a work of the Spirit, inspired by faith in God; and it is about fostering hopefulness and spiritual renewal as well as new employment (4). He talks of 'The Beauty of Holiness and the Holiness of Beauty' (5). For others, the focus is perhaps more prosaic: it is principally about dealing with old buildings and creating a sustainable visitor destination that can attract an audience and generate jobs.

There can be a tension between commercial imperatives and pursuing community regeneration. These two perspectives, though not mutually exclusive, can produce different priorities and objectives. For example, it can affect decisions about ticket prices and concessions – and whether to maximise revenue or affordability. Another example would be whether to prioritise local training opportunities or maximise profit when setting up a café. In practice, it can mean finding a compromise, striking a balance between different objectives. In order to manage that balance, The

Auckland Project has recently been restructured with two 'arms' of the organisation: Regeneration and Enterprise.

There is a concern about *process* in relation to purpose; The Auckland Project has always emphasised the need to 'work with people, not for them' – and not be about 'bestowing blessings'. But that can be hard to do in an organisation that is inevitably hierarchical, professionalised, and necessarily concerned with delivery and longer term sustainability. In any project like this it is difficult to get to the point where the local community feels such a project is theirs, and is not just imposed by a powerful agency pursuing its own ideas and plans.

EXCLUSIVE: Church arranged to auction Zurbaran paintings



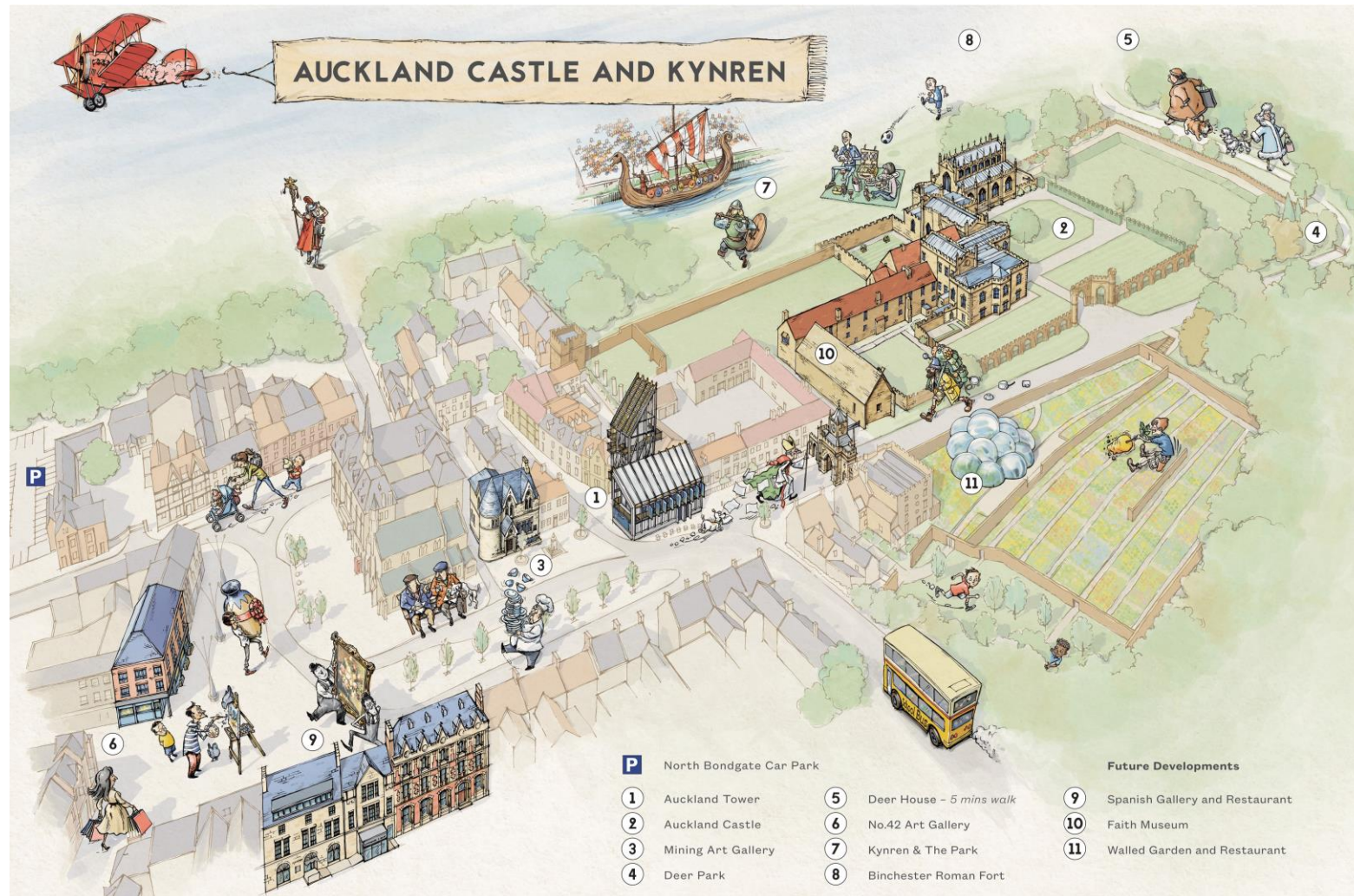
Secret plan to sell our treasures

FULL STORY - PAGES 2 & 3 HISTORIC JOURNEY - PAGE 16

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LEADING THE FIGHT: The Northern Echo's front page on Friday

start of Zurbaran campaign, Nov 2010



3. The NLHF project - 'Auckland Castle: Creating Faith in a Better Future'.

The NLHF-supported project is called 'Auckland Castle: Creating Faith in a Better Future'. It is very much about physical development (repairing and conserving the Castle, plus developing an associated Faith Museum), with presentation, promotion, apprenticeships and volunteering all tied into that. Most of the NLHF project comprises capital costs.

When The Auckland Project was awarded £9.0m funding in June 2015, NLHF specified the 'Approved Purposes' of the grant. These are:

- *Repair and conserve the building fabric of Auckland Castle.*
- *Represent the State Rooms and deliver an exhibition focusing on the Prince Bishops of Durham and their relationship with the Castle and Bishop Auckland.*
- *Construct an extension to the Scotland Wing to house an education suite and permanent and temporary exhibitions exploring 5,000 years of Faith in Britain.*
- *Engage people with the heritage of Auckland Castle through delivery of an extensive programme of formal and informal learning activities and skills training, including 34 apprenticeships.*
- *Engage 400 new volunteers and deliver a programme of volunteering opportunities.*
- *Engage wider audiences and the local community of Bishop Auckland with the Castle's heritage.*

These six Approved Purposes (quoted verbatim here) form the basis for monitoring expenditure and progress.

In 2015, NLHF had agreed to contribute £9.0m towards a total 'eligible cost' of £16.793m. After that, a successful supplementary application for a further £2.4m was submitted in 2016, bringing the total NLHF grant to £12.4m (that includes the initial feasibility funding of £1m). The supplementary application in 2016 was concerned with adding a basement to provide dedicated storage and collections handling space at the Faith Museum – it had been realised that such provision would be needed, especially to meet the exacting requirements of institutions lending artefacts.

The original completion date or Grant Expiry Date (agreed with NLHF in 2015) for the whole project was 30 June 2018. As a result of considerable slippage, that was later extended to March 2019, then to April 2020, and then to October 2020. The current proposed Grant Expiry Date has been revised to 31 July 2022, to take into account further slippage on the delivery of the Faith Museum and impact of Covid-19. The NLHF has pointed out that the maximum Delivery Phase allowed for Heritage Grants is 5 years; this extension, 'agreed in exceptional circumstances', will make the Delivery Phase for this project 7 years.

The Castle opened to the public in November 2019, while the Faith Museum will not open until autumn 2022.



Auckland Castle, before NLHF project building works.



Auckland Castle during construction works, with Scotland Wing Extension (Faith Museum) in foreground.

4. Progress on the ‘Approved Purposes’ of the NLHF project

4.1 ‘Repair and conserve the building fabric of Auckland Castle’.

Auckland Castle is a nationally important Grade 1 Listed Building set within an historic landscape. The Castle comprises a complex of buildings, including:

- St Peter’s Chapel. Said to be the largest private chapel in Europe. Built originally as a Great Hall for Bishop Hugh du Puiset (traditionally known as Bishop Pudsey, Bishop 1153-1195). This is the oldest surviving part of the Castle. Transformed into a chapel in the 17th century by Bishop John Cosin, who was appointed following the restoration of the monarchy and the episcopacy.
- State Rooms. Including the Throne Room – for the Prince Bishop. Long Dining Room – created to contain Zurbaran’s paintings of Jacob and his Twelve Sons.
- Private apartments – where bishops and their families have lived.
- Scotland Wing. Sixteenth Century building on two floors with vaulted basement. Previously accommodated the Diocesan offices, until 2014.

The Castle and its parkland have been developed and remodelled over the centuries. In 1791, Bishop Barrington (1734-1826) commissioned renowned architect James Wyatt (1746-1813) to remodel the interiors of the Castle, creating an imposing staircase and several state rooms. The conservation work which has been undertaken through the NLHF project returns much of the Castle to the Georgian Gothic style of Wyatt’s original scheme.

Relatively few changes have been made to the building in the last 200 years – hence much of the fabric has survived unaltered. Investment in the past few decades by the Church Commissioners has been limited, but essential repairs had generally been carried out and some updating was completed. When The Auckland Project acquired the buildings in 2012 it was apparent there was much to be done to restore and conserve the Castle in order to create a viable visitor attraction.

The adjacent 150 acre park (known as the Deer Park), which had been managed jointly with Durham County Council (and previously, also with Wear Valley District Council) since the 1950s, was transferred to The Auckland Project by the County Council. The park also requires some restoration.

Before it was bought by The Auckland Project (then the Auckland Castle Trust) in 2012 the Castle was open to the general public only sporadically and partially, receiving only 800 paying visitors in 2011/12, although it was used for meetings, wedding receptions and concerts. The park, however, has been freely accessible to the public for over a century.

Progress.

Following the NLHF grant award in 2015, pre-contract surveys of the Castle were undertaken, archaeological investigations were commissioned and enabling works carried out. Asbestos was stripped out and removed. The archaeological investigations, assisted by Durham University, were important and necessary, bearing in mind that the site had previously had little archaeological attention.

Purcell’s were appointed as architects for the scheme and Turner and Townsend were brought in to undertake Project Management. Tenders were issued for the construction work and Meldrum Construction Services, a company based in Gateshead, was appointed. Meldrum started on site in

June 2017. (Meldrum was also subsequently contracted to undertake construction work on The Auckland Project's Spanish Gallery).

It had been envisaged that it would be possible to open the restored Castle to the public in summer 2018 and then open the Faith Museum in summer 2019. But that proved unachievable. For several reasons, there has been considerable slippage in the timetable.

One of the main problems was movement in the west gable of the existing Scotland Wing. This part of the building was found to have inadequate foundations, and it appears that adjacent excavations for the new extension to house the Faith Gallery resulted in movement and a visible crack in the gable end. That led to investigations and site stabilisation and consolidation works, all adding many weeks delay.

Other issues included numerous design changes requested by The Auckland Project while construction work was underway. By far the biggest change was the addition of a basement to the new Faith Museum extension, but there were many other changes that had to be incorporated. Being a very old building, it is not surprising that many features and problems were uncovered as work progressed, such as the discovery of a Tudor serving hatch and a fireplace, and fragments of historic wallpaper. In the Bishops' Private Apartments over 30 layers of historic wallpaper, spanning about 200 years, were uncovered and a wall decorated with Victorian block printed wallpaper was revealed in the Morning Room. These discoveries took time to deal with, as conservation plans had to be drawn up, agreed and implemented. Meldrum, the contractors, had limited experience of historic buildings and struggled at times with the complexity of the job and the many variations and challenges. Turner and Townsend, Project Managers working on behalf of The Auckland Project, also struggled to keep this complex and difficult project on track.

By the end of 2018, the completion of repairs and conservation work to the Castle was in sight. Roof repairs and repointing were largely done and most of the scaffolding on the main part of the building was down. Specialist conservation work had been done to decorative plaster work, window frames and fireplaces. Decoration had been completed in most rooms and specially commissioned carpets, curtains, lighting and furniture were ready. In response to the added complexities of project management, The Auckland Project strengthened their team by the appointment of Focus as additional Project Management consultants to help reduce and manage contract variations and ensure outstanding tasks were completed. Another company, Hicktons, was also brought in to run 'design freeze' meetings and monitor progress on site. Even so, there were some significant late variations to the scheme, such as changes to the café, lifts and the shop.

During 2019 the existing Castle buildings were handed over to The Auckland Project by Meldrum. Defects and snagging works continued after that, with the very last items being dealt with in 2021.

Initially, in June 2019 a small suite of rooms in the Castle -- the North Apartments or the 'Victoria Flat', now renamed the Bishop Trevor Gallery -- was opened to the public. These apartment rooms had been built for Bishop Trevor and never before been open to the public. The Bishop Trevor Gallery (which is not part of the NLHF funded project and was a late addition to the scheme) has been earmarked for the display of paintings on loan from private collections -- and it was essential that it was opened on time in order to meet the agreed timetable for loan arrangements. The first exhibition was on *The Origins of British Landscape*, with works by Thomas Gainsborough, George Stubbs and Claude Lorrain. That was followed in October 2019 by the display of Nicolas Poussin's *Triumph of Pan* (1636), lent by the National Gallery under their Masterpiece Tour initiative which lends a major work for display at three regional venues. In addition there were three drawings by

Poussin from the Royal Collection on display and paintings by other artists that place the Poussin work in context. When the Castle reopens in July 2021, the Bishop Trevor Gallery will host a new exhibition, *Beauty in the Everyday: Dutch and Flemish Masters at Auckland Castle*.

In November 2019, a few months after the opening of the Bishop Trevor Gallery, the main part of the existing Castle was ready and opened to the public. The 'Bishop's Kitchen' café and the shop opened at the same time.

It should be noted that some elements of the Castle complex that are not part of the NLHF project are also being restored through The Auckland Project. The West Mural Tower, which once served as a defensive gatehouse, has been subject to extensive conservation work. This Grade 1 Listed structure dates back to at least the fifteenth century and was very dilapidated. It is expected that it will be used to accommodate small groups, particularly school visits. Work is ongoing on conservation and repairs to the prominent 18th century Robinson Arch and Clock Tower at the entrance to the Castle grounds. Work is also being done to the Castle Curtilage, including repairs to the Wyatt Arch, the gateway to the Arrivals Court. In the coming years restoration work will be undertaken in St Peter's Chapel -- which again is outside the remit of the NLHF project. The 17th century Walled Garden nearby has also been subject to restoration work, including planting during 2019 and is expected to finally be finished in 2023. Gardens next to the Castle are to be restored, supported by a recently-awarded grant of £212,000 from Historic England.

4.2 'Represent the State Rooms and deliver an exhibition focusing on the Prince Bishops of Durham and their relationship with the Castle and Bishop Auckland'.

The Auckland Project's Curatorial Team and external consultants have developed ideas and plans to give visitors an insight into life in the Castle over the centuries. Each room is intended to provide an impression of the life and works of a particular Bishop, highlighting a period or episode in their lives. The aim is also to give a sense of everyday life in the Castle. The State Rooms have been returned to their original Georgian Gothic splendour, as designed by James Wyatt in the 1790s. The Private Apartments, where the Bishops lived with their families and now opened to the public for the first time, are set in various periods, from the 1830s to the present day (6). Much effort and thought has gone into restoring the Castle and presenting the story of the Bishops of Durham in an authentic way.

In 2016 the Curatorial Team drafted a programme for room settings and interpretation. Casson Mann was appointed as Exhibition Designers. Preparatory work was undertaken, including the analysis of historic paint samples, conservation of wallpaper fragments, and conservation assessment of fixtures and fittings to inform the specification of room treatments.

The State Rooms (and also the Private Apartments) were repaired, conserved and decorated. Efforts have been made to achieve authenticity by using surviving drawings for Wyatt's scheme, consulting an historic inventory made by Bishop Barrington's secretary (William Emm), looking at the designs for Wyatt's work elsewhere (notably at Fonthill Abbey in Wiltshire), and through analysis of historic paint samples. Research at Durham University Palace Green Library uncovered receipts for materials when the Wyatt works were done which gave evidence of the original colours used in the Long Dining Room.

Archival material has been used to prepare stories and treatments, conveying the work of the Bishops and lives of their families. In particular, archival material has been given by the families of

Bishop Ian Ramsey (1966-72) and Bishop Habgood (1973-83). Photographs taken during Bishop Turnbull's episcopate (1994-2003) and from Bishop Tom Wright's time (2003-10) have been acquired. Bishop David Jenkins' daughter has contributed her memories of family life at the Castle in the 1980s. The Auckland Project has also been collecting oral histories from people who worked in the Castle or were associated with it in order to secure memories of what life was like there.

The approach essentially features one Bishop per room, but not in strict chronological order. Of course, not all Bishops can be included, only a selection. The intention has been to create an immersive and self-guided experience, with sound and visual projection, rather than written text, used to tell the stories of the Bishops. Visitors can sit at the Bishop's desk and read his papers and pick up replica items. There are no ropes or barriers keeping people back. Volunteer 'room engagers' have the task of making visitors feel welcome (6).

Visitors are first introduced to the ecclesiastical role of the Bishops of Durham by entering the Castle at St Peter's Chapel, built by Bishop Cosin (1660-72), a classical high churchman. They are invited to pause for reflection and prayer. In the Chapel's Vestry, there is a display of church plate made of solid silver overlain with gold which was commissioned by Cosin, as well as Eucharistic vessels and also vestments. Pieces of music commissioned by Cosin can be heard.

Visitors then move into the Gentlemen's Hall (or 'Great Vestibule'), at the start of the State Rooms. Here, a projected film gives an introduction to the Castle and the Prince Bishops. Next, the Ante Room, set in 1793, introduces Bishop Shute Barrington who commissioned James Wyatt to restructure the Castle in the Georgian Gothic style. One can overhear a conversation between Bishop Barrington (1791-1826), James Wyatt and William Emm (the Bishop's secretary), discussing plans for the Castle.

Next is the magnificent and impressive Throne Room, as designed by Wyatt and set in 1806. There is a soundscape of a lavish party hosted by Barrington here. The Bishop's support of William Wilberforce's movement to abolish the slave trade is a feature of the conversation. Through this soundscape visitors can apparently eavesdrop on guests' gossip, as ladies play cards and a string quartet plays.

In the Long Dining Room, which is dominated by the powerful Zurbaran paintings, the impression is given that Bishop Trevor (1752-71) and his dinner guests are having their dessert – and quotes from their conversations are on the printed table cloth. The reasons behind the Bishop's acquisition of the paintings are given, aided by an interactive touchscreen presentation.

The Breakfast Room is the first of the bishops' private apartments. Here the focus of the room is Bishop William Van Mildert (1826-36), the last of the Prince Bishops. Visitors can overhear a discussion between Van Mildert and Charles Thorp, Archdeacon of Durham, about the Reform Bill crisis. Van Mildert, an important politician in the House of Lords, was a traditionalist who was opposed to reform (as a result, his effigy was burned by reformers in the Castle grounds). There are facsimiles of documents on the table to pick up and read.

The Bishop's Study is next, set in 1938, and recreated using contemporary photographs. The study features Bishop Henson (1920-1939) and relates to the political atmosphere on the eve of the Second World War. Henson was strongly against the policy of appeasement, as can be seen in the speeches, pamphlets and letters on his desk. One can pick up these facsimiles and also hear extracts from his diaries.

In the Small Drawing Room, set in 1892, the intervention of Bishop Westcott (1890-1901) in a coal mining dispute is featured. He had a close relationship with the mining communities of County Durham and was instrumental in negotiating an end to the bitter miners' strike of 1892. An immersive audio-visual projection brings this episode to life.

In the Morning Room, set in 1911, visitors hear about Mary Moule, wife of Bishop Moule (1901-20). She was very active in the Diocese, especially in the mining communities; there is a hamper of food ready for the Aged Mineworkers garden party.

Next is the Jenkins Room, set as a 1980s bedroom as used by Rebecca Jenkins, daughter and press secretary of Bishop David Jenkins (1984-94). A vintage TV set shows controversial interviews with the Bishop and satirical footage of him from *Spitting Image*. The intention is to encourage visitors to make up their own minds about the Bishop's actions and words.

The Ramsey Room, set in 1969, focuses on Bishop Ian Ramsey (1966-72). Footage projected from a vintage 'Cinecam' shows the so-called 'busy bishop' at work. There is a briefcase of facsimile papers that demonstrates his hectic schedule, including his academic work and contributions in the House of Lords. A toy box with reproduction 1960s toys provides an opportunity for young visitors to play. This is accompanied by memories of the Ramsey and Habgood children (Bishop Habgood, 1973-83) who grew up at the Castle.

Lastly, there is a reminder that the Bishop still has his office at Auckland Castle. In the Butler Room, there is a touchscreen and visitors can hear recorded material from the present Bishop of Durham, Paul Butler, who became Bishop of Durham in 2014. He answers questions about his ministry, his faith and the Castle.

Developing this visitor experience involved some challenges. There were delays in the repair and conservation work on the Castle which resulted in delays to the fitting out and presentation of the rooms. In addition, the contract with Casson Mann was brought to an end and another firm, The Hub, was brought in to undertake the exhibition fit-out and related work.

A good deal of the interior work had been done by the end of 2018; by then, room decoration was largely complete, curtains and other textiles had been made, and cabinetry such as bookshelves was being fabricated. Specialist craftspeople had been commissioned to make 100 metres of blue silk damask curtains and the Throne Room's 10 metre long carpet. Historic lighting (colza lamps with sconces and replica argand lamps with torchiere stands) was procured from specialist makers. Reproduction and original furniture was acquired, including reproductions based on designs used elsewhere in Wyatt's work. Bedroom furniture from the 1980s was bought and used as part of the setting for home life in Bishop Jenkins' time. Paintings for display were chosen from the Castle's own collection and portraits of the Bishops of Durham from 1494 to the present day were loaned from the Church Commissioners.

By June 2019 the State Rooms and most of the Private Apartments had been handed over to The Auckland Project for completion. Various conservation trades then came in, undertaking floor finishing, fitting picture rails and lights, and conservation cleaning. Some repainting, in the Throne Room, Gentlemen's Hall and Great Stair was found to be necessary to attain the required standard. After that, the artworks were hung and fitting-out completed.

The Castle, including the Bishop's Kitchen café located in the former medieval kitchen, finally opened to the public on 2 November 2019. The Castle was subsequently closed for a planned winter break in January 2020. It reopened in February but then, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, had to close

again in March 2020. It is planned to reopen most of the Castle at the beginning of July 2021, with a system of pre-booked timed tickets. To allow for social distancing, some parts of the Castle, including the Bishop's Kitchen café, may initially remain closed. However, visitors will be able to take tours of the Walled Garden for the first time, although the Walled Garden is still under development and may not be completed until 2023.

4.3 'Construct an extension to the Scotland Wing to house an education suite and permanent and temporary exhibitions exploring 5,000 years of Faith in Britain'.

The idea of creating a space that explores the idea of Faith evidently fits well with the history of Auckland Castle – and it aligns with the interests and concerns of Jonathan Ruffer. The intention is to look at how Faith has shaped lives and communities in Britain and Ireland and to encourage visitors to think about what Faith means today.

The Faith Museum ('museum' may be a misnomer) is to be housed in two floors of the existing Scotland Wing (the former Diocesan offices) of the Castle and in an entirely new building, an extension to the Scotland Wing. The lead architects, Purcell, and the construction company, Meldrum, are the same as for the Castle as a whole. Concept architects Niall McLaughlin Architects (designers of the Auckland Tower), were appointed to design the new Scotland Wing Extension, working in partnership with Purcell. The design of this new building had been the subject of an architectural competition, and McLaughlin came up with a contemporary ashlar stone-clad reinforced concrete structure with steeply pitched roof. Most unusually, the roof is covered with heavy ashlar stone panels, matching the ashlar walling.

Progress.

Archaeological investigations were carried out in advance of planning permission being sought in 2016. Construction of the Scotland Wing Extension commenced in 2017 and at that time it was expected that the Faith Museum would open at Easter 2019. That has proved unachievable and was, in any case, probably overambitious, if not unrealistic.

The original timetable had to be revised principally because The Auckland Project decided on a major change to the specification, involving the construction of a basement to the new extension (also including a loading bay and goods lift). That basement was deemed necessary when it was realised that a dedicated facility was needed to receive and store loan items. That added to the timescale but, in addition, movement in the adjacent gable of the existing Scotland Wing resulted in further significant delays. It was found that the gable end of the Scotland Wing did not have adequate foundations and that led to movement once the excavations started. It has been argued that site investigations should have identified the problem with inadequate foundations, but it has also been said that that part of the site had not been accessible to undertake such investigations. In any case, it took months to stabilise and this problem delayed excavations for the basement. It was not until autumn 2018 that soil nailing was complete and construction of the section of the new extension closest to the affected gable could recommence.

Delays also resulted from the nature and design of the roof and its heavy covering, which presented challenges for structural engineering and a considerable increase in cost over a more traditional slated roof. These issues also led to significant delays, and Meldrum made a successful Extension of Time claim for costs directly associated with the roof design issue. Meldrum's handover of the building to The Auckland Project was timetabled for September 2019, but that was found to be

unachievable. Further unwelcome delays occurred in the summer of 2019 as a result of birds found nesting in the eaves of the existing Scotland Wing, near the new extension under construction. The pandemic brought yet more delays, especially during the first 'lockdown' when there were material and labour supply issues, and social distancing requirements – but the work did continue.

In addition to the challenges associated with construction of the building, it has proved difficult to determine the content of the Faith Museum. Unlike most museums it will not have its own permanent collection; it was always envisaged that it would house artefacts on loan from other museums. It would therefore tell the story of Faith by displaying artefacts on loan, some of which might otherwise be in store and rarely seen. At the outset, The Auckland Project's Curatorial Team therefore began to develop relationships with other museums and started identifying items that might be loaned. Ideas about the story that might be told were developed through consultations with acknowledged experts on a specially convened Faith Advisory Panel. Staff from The Auckland Project also held consultations with local groups and recorded interviews about perceptions of Faith with a sample of local people; the intention was that these might help to shape the content of the Museum and also form part of an archive on contemporary meanings of Faith in the Bishop Auckland area. There have also been items donated for the museum such as Methodist 'tickets', objects relating to Jewish festivals, and a Salvation Army trombone.

During 2017 the plans drawn up by the Curatorial Team were reconsidered by The Auckland Project's Trustees. The original idea had been to present a chronology, with the first gallery being prehistory and the last featuring multi-faith 21st century Britain and Ireland. The Trustees had doubts about such an approach and that simple chronological concept fell out of favour and was rejected in favour of a more thematic view. It was decided that the various galleries would instead tackle themes such as Formation, Expression, Challenges and Power, arranged across four galleries. It was envisaged that many of the loan requests (relating to about 400 objects) would remain unchanged from the earlier scheme, although presented in a different way to bring out themes rather than periods. In discussions about narratives and content, Jonathan Ruffer took a more central role, as 'executive curator' of the Faith Museum.

As for the design of the space, in the absence of clarity about what is to be presented, and how, a flexible approach was taken, involving additional electric sockets and adaptable sectional timber flooring, for example. Moreover, it was appreciated that reliance on time-limited loans would mean turnover of artefacts, necessitating flexibility in the design of the space.

As ideas changed, the contract with the original Exhibition Fit Out designers Casson Mann was ended. A new brief was prepared and new designers, Studio MB, were appointed in August 2020. (Studio MB is also working on the Spanish Gallery).

New appointments to the Curatorial Team (a Senior Curator and a Consultant Curator) were made at the start of 2020. There was another rethink about the narrative and content of the museum. It was decided to combine the chronological and thematic approaches, with an overarching idea of the 'Cloud of Witnesses' – telling stories of people who have done things through Faith. Much effort has gone into trying to develop a visitor experience that would combine interest and challenge, and would be intelligible, accessible, and not obscure -- while still having many of the loan items previously agreed with other institutions. By May 2021 agreement had been reached on much of the content of the Faith Museum (about 65% of the object list was confirmed by that point), but it was still unclear what would be going into Gallery 3, which is probably the most striking and important space – it is the biggest gallery, under the exposed roof trusses. All these debates about approach and content over the past three years have meant delays. The pandemic has resulted in difficulties

and delays too; for example, it has not been easy to confirm loans from other institutions while they were closed and their staff were on furlough.

Practical completion of the building (but not its contents) has been achieved, with handover of the building to The Auckland Project on 23 November 2020. The Faith Garden, alongside the Faith Museum, and the roadway to the museum's loading bay were handed over on 4 March 2021. The opening of the Faith Museum is now planned for autumn 2022.

4.4 'Engage people with the heritage of Auckland Castle through delivery of an extensive programme of formal and informal learning activities and skills training, including 34 apprenticeships'.

Learning and skills activities

The Auckland Project has always sought to go beyond a concern with restoring buildings and developing visitor attractions. The greater aim is to support individuals and communities, using the Castle and heritage as vehicles for change. One way of doing that has been to create learning opportunities associated with The Auckland Project's capital regeneration schemes.

Since 2015 – up until the Covid-19 pandemic -- there has been close involvement with schools, specifically targeting schools within a 5 mile radius of the centre of Bishop Auckland in order to build local relationships, while still welcoming visits from schools further afield. The Auckland Project's Education staff went into schools to talk about the Castle, the Prince Bishops and local history. Artefacts in handling boxes or presented in small 'pop-up museums' have been taken into schools and also to community venues. Prior to its closure for construction works, school groups and other local groups were brought into the Castle – many visiting it for the first time. After the Castle closed it was more of a challenge to tell the story of the Prince Bishops and convey the importance of the Castle and Bishop Auckland. However, visits to the Castle's park were still possible and were encouraged; for example, children took part in treasure hunts, hiking and forest school activities in the park, although some activities had to be curtailed once building work started. In 2015, 2016 and 2017 youth camps were held in the park, developing out of focus group discussions with young people in Shildon that had revealed such a need, especially amongst young people who were not able to get away on holiday. There was also a 'Youth Invasion' event in 2014 and 'Heritage Hunters' activities in 2014 and 2016.

As part of the engagement process, 'Past and Present' guided tours of the town centre were organised and talks about local history and The Auckland Project's plans were given to a wide range of local groups and organisations. This aspect of the NLHF project also involved volunteers. Some volunteers led guided tours, for example; another group of volunteers catalogued the Castle library. Heritage Craft Skills sessions have been run for local people of all ages to try activities such as stone carving, felting, illumination, weaving, stained glass and herbology. A 'Young Archaeology Club' also proved popular.

In autumn 2019 The Auckland Project worked with two groups of young people, from St John's School in Bishop Auckland and from Ferryhill, eliciting their artistic response to Poussin's 'Triumph of Pan' on loan from the National Gallery and on display in the Bishop Trevor Gallery. This initiative encouraged their engagement with classical painting and themes relevant to their own lives.

The Auckland Project delivered learning activities in line with the NLHF project plans and continued such activities until the pandemic meant the cessation of all those activities. In the staff restructure in 2020, most of the staff involved in these learning programmes were made redundant, primarily

because of the pandemic. However, a Learning Officer attached to the Faith Museum was appointed and programmes with schools are now being prepared and facilities are being developed, including spaces for educational activities in the Scotland Wing and in the new Faith Museum building.

Apprenticeships

The principal pathway into work experience and then possibly into employment has been through apprenticeships. The Auckland Project had a target of delivering 34 apprenticeships by 2018. Over the period 2015 to 2018, 25 individuals (of all ages) had been recruited as apprentices directly by The Auckland Project. Additional financial support for the apprenticeship scheme came from the Garfield Weston Foundation. Some of the apprentices have had more than one apprenticeship opportunity, engaging in different experiences over more than a year. Therefore, altogether 43 apprenticeship opportunities had been offered to these 25 individuals up to March 2018. Apprenticeships have been available in business administration and finance, horticulture, catering, joinery, curatorial services, events management, visitor services, communications and social media, with some connections also to community engagement activities and skills. In addition to The Auckland Project's apprenticeships, the contractor Meldrum took on 4 apprentices (in construction and the built environment; civil engineering; bricklaying; and electrical and plumbing trades).

There is a strong link with Bishop Auckland College, which has managed and mentored the apprentices in conjunction with individual departments of The Auckland Project. Apprentices are of all ages and are from a variety of backgrounds, some having to overcome considerable barriers to learning and employment. The Auckland Project decided to pay apprentices the age-appropriate national living wage, as opposed to the lower apprentice rates. These apprenticeships have been well-regarded locally and there has been no difficulty recruiting people to them. The apprentices themselves have acquired marketable skills and, by March 2019, about half of them had gained formal qualifications. Some were able to find employment with The Auckland Project as it grew and recruited more staff, and some obtained jobs in other companies. As at March 2018, 7 of the 25 had been taken on as permanent employees at the Auckland Project, 3 had been recruited to jobs in other organisations, 1 had gone back into education, 1 was unemployed and the remaining 13 were, at that time, continuing as apprentices.

Even before the pandemic, slippage in the timetable for the project as a whole presented some problems. In particular, the delay in developing restaurants and cafes made it difficult to find work experiences for catering apprentices. Instead, catering apprentices have provided food for staff of The Auckland Project and for the community through programmes to reduce 'holiday hunger' experienced by some local children and young people during the school holidays. The Auckland Project's 'Incredible Edible Holiday Hunger' pilot project in the summer of 2019 produced 200 meals per day (6000 meals altogether) which were distributed by partner agencies, drawing on the relationships that had been built up between The Auckland Project and local community organisations. This provided meals to over 750 individuals as part of activities that were non-stigmatising, open to all. During the pandemic, that approach was continued through 'Closed Doors, Open Hearts', an initiative supported by external funding, which involved apprentices preparing meals which were then distributed to the local community.

4.5 'Engage 400 new volunteers and deliver a programme of volunteering opportunities'

From the outset, The Auckland Project acknowledged the importance of volunteers to support the operation of visitor destinations -- and help make them economically viable. The role of volunteering in enriching the lives of individuals is also recognised; volunteering can help build an

individual's confidence, self-esteem and skills. The impact on The Auckland Project's target communities is important too; most volunteers are local.

As part of the NLHF project, 400 new volunteers were to be recruited. In November 2015 a Head of Volunteering was appointed, who successfully attracted a steady flow of new volunteers, adding to the group of existing volunteers who had shown visitors round the Castle in the past. By April 2020 there were 367 registered volunteers (compared with 156 in early 2016). There is turnover, and up to that date 581 individuals had volunteered – hence the target of 400 had been achieved.

Some people volunteer in only a single place and role, while others like to move around and try different roles. They have come from a range of backgrounds, including student volunteers from Durham University. About 60% of volunteers are female. There is a programme of induction and training for volunteers, a volunteering strategy, and a handbook for volunteers, role profiles, and active management to retain and develop the volunteer workforce. The commitment can be considerable; for example, volunteers at the Castle had to undertake 10 training sessions to prepare for their roles.

The intention is that volunteering opportunities should become more inclusive, with increased support available for volunteers who might need additional help to take on a volunteering role. During 2019 the Head of Volunteering had introductory sessions with partner agencies such as the Jobcentres, Mental Health Matters and Durham County work coaches, with a view to widening volunteer recruitment. More proactive volunteer recruitment was also anticipated.

The options for volunteers inevitably changed over time. Until it was closed for building work, volunteer guides worked at the Castle; after closure, there was a small programme of 'behind the scenes' tours instead (allowing a glimpse of work in progress at the Castle) and volunteer-led 'Past and Future' heritage tours of the Market Place. In addition, while it was closed, a group of volunteers has been cataloguing and digitising the Castle's library and archives. New volunteering opportunities have subsequently arisen, including educational work, with volunteers supporting heritage-based activities with local schools, and pop up museums in schools and public venues. Volunteers have also been involved in transcribing oral histories.

Archaeological digs close to the Castle and at the Roman Fort at Binchester have generated many volunteering opportunities. The dig on the south side of the Castle in the summer of 2019 involved 65 Durham University students and 12 volunteers, and uncovered the remains of Bishop Bek's fourteenth century chapel. At Binchester, 73 volunteers took part in the dig in summer 2019.

The opening of the Mining Art Gallery (in October 2017), followed by the opening of the Auckland Tower (in October 2018), the Bishop Trevor Gallery (in June 2019) and the Castle (in November 2019) provided many new volunteering opportunities for people to assist visitors with practical help and interpretation. At the Castle, over 100 volunteers were registered as 'room engagers' by the time it opened. Volunteers at all these venues have been trained to have a 'light touch', leaving visitors to experience what they see, offering information only when it is wanted.

As with other elements of the NLHF project, slippage in the timetable created challenges for the planned development of volunteering. There has been the difficulty of recruiting volunteers too soon, in anticipation of an opening that is then delayed.

When venues were closed down in March 2020 as a consequence of the pandemic, the volunteers were, of course, stood down. It is understood that many of them – especially the older and more vulnerable volunteers -- were grateful that The Auckland Project had made a clear decision at that

time not to reopen until at least mid-2021. The volunteer workforce will be brought back for the reopening in July 2021. And, as a result of reductions in the number of paid staff, volunteers will be more important than ever in helping to run the visitor attractions – and help hold down costs at a time when visitor numbers and revenue will be constrained.

4.6 ‘Engage wider audiences and the local community of Bishop Auckland with the Castle’s heritage’.

Auckland Castle has always been set apart from the local community. Although the park was publicly accessible, few local people had the opportunity – or probably the desire – to enter the Castle and many knew little of its history or purpose, other than knowing (perhaps) that it was the home of the Bishop of Durham.

From the start, The Auckland Project sought to change this and open up the Castle to the public, engaging communities with the local heritage. Community engagement was undoubtedly necessary for the success of the NLHF bid, but much more than that, it is regarded by The Auckland Project as being crucially important in achieving the aims of the whole scheme.

In 2014 The Auckland Project commissioned consultants JURA to draw up an Activity Plan for a wide-ranging Engagement Programme (7). This front-loaded programme, implemented by staff appointed to the ‘Engagement Team’, was designed to build relationships with the local community in advance of the opening of the Castle and other attractions. Although the NLHF-funded element of the Engagement Programme ended in 2019, engagement activities continued after that – until the pandemic and the staff restructure, which resulted in the Engagement Team being much reduced.

Engagement activities have mainly been concerned with the area within a 3 mile radius of the Castle, but have been focused particularly on the two most disadvantaged wards, Woodhouse Close and Shildon.

Some of the elements of this engagement activity were developed in the first few months of the NLHF project. In late 2015, the initial Community Outreach programmes were started, involving ‘Know your Heritage’ courses and ‘Breaking down Barriers’ talks. The Know your Heritage course working with a group of unemployed people developed into the ‘Stepping Stones’ initiative, which was a support group that enabled people to learn new skills and access training. The Community Outreach Officer led a ‘Heritage Hunters’ group and heritage skills events were also set up. Heritage Hunters was an integrative project involving teenagers from the traveller community, children from local primary schools and children with disabilities. This project was runner-up in the national Angel Awards given for best contribution by young people to heritage activity.

The Auckland Project encouraged local people to come into the Castle while it was still open, before building works began. For example, it was used to host a Christmas Market, a Carol Service and an ice rink in 2015. In 2016 there was entry to the Castle during the Bishop Auckland Food Festival and 7,000 people came into the Castle over the Festival weekend, most visiting for the first time. A local history event for 350 children from Bishop Auckland schools was held in the Castle in 2016, involving work with artists and performers. Children from Woodhouse Community Primary School performed their version of Beowulf in the Castle’s chapel in 2016. In the Castle’s parkland, there was a series of drama-based summer activities led by local theatre group Jack Drum Arts. During 2019, a Parkland Explorers initiative for children was set up, offering ‘forest school’ activities.

Outreach work has included presentations to many groups in Bishop Auckland and surrounding areas about the work of The Auckland Project and its plans for the future, as well as pop up museums and heritage tours. There have been some general consultations to gauge the community's views on The Auckland Project and what it aims to achieve, and also more specific consultations – for example talking to local people about Faith and what might be presented in the Faith Museum. The Auckland Project has also held workshops with the Bishop Auckland Business Network to help inform local businesses about plans and progress.

Members of the Engagement Team ran various groups in the local area. There was, for example, a weekly group for people with dementia and their carers (the Dementia Friendly Heritage Group, latterly meeting at the Baptist Church). In Shildon, children at St John's Primary School had the opportunity to explore aspects of local football heritage at an after-school group called 'Heritage Kicks'. More challenging initiatives have been tried: in 2018, the Engagement Team ran a pilot history club project in Deerbolt High Security Young Offenders Prison at Barnard Castle. A significant focus of engagement activity has been the Woodhouse Close Estate; an example of work there was the 'Falling on your Feet' dance and health programme for a group of older people, meeting at Woodhouse Close Church. In Shildon, a youth group for teenage girls called 'Confidence in me' was set up in conjunction with the careers team at Sunderland University. The aim was to help them make choices about college and their futures -- all the participants went on to take college courses.

Engagement activity has been multi-faceted, testing different ideas and interventions and assessing results. It was not always easy to sustain engagement activity in the face of delays to the regeneration programme. At times, enthusiasm and expectation were generated, only to be undermined by the disappointment of another postponement – it became clear that opening dates should only be announced to the local community when they are certain. Reopening of the Castle in particular came to be seen as crucial in showing the community that The Auckland Project would deliver on its promises.

NLHF funding for the engagement activities that formed a part of the NLHF project came to an end in March 2019. However, the work of the Engagement Team continued after that, with funding from The Auckland Project's own resources. In 2019, The Auckland Project launched the 'Partner Schools' programme which supports 22 schools in the local area, giving their pupils access to historical, cultural, and environmental educational opportunities. New facilities for schools were also developed, such as space in the restored West Mural Tower and in the Learning Suite in the Castle's Scotland Wing.

One recent development was an innovative project on 'Social Haunting'. This explored inherited 'ghosts' of collective memory, particularly past industrial cultures and the trauma of de-industrialisation. Exploration was done through conversation, music, art and poetry. This enabled people to express themselves and ultimately work towards redirecting their energies to look to the future.

The Auckland Project has also worked with the local community and local agencies to restore and develop an abandoned allotment at Woodhouse Close. This involved working with many different people supporting them to learn new skills and grow produce. Although work on the allotment ended, it helped form the basis for The Auckland Project's 'Incredible Edible' initiative, leading to long-term plans for establishing sustainable farming at Binchester. It also fostered relationships with a wide range of partner organisations.

Some formal engagement activity has recently been developed through (video-based) consultations with representatives of faith communities in the North East about the purposes and content of the Faith Museum. Consultations with this Multi-Faith Panel have been undertaken by the new Learning Officer for Faith, who is also going to be collecting artefacts and memories in the community. In addition, engagement work has moved into community development and support. During the first 'lockdown' in 2020, The Auckland Project supported local communities by preparing and distributing over 20,000 meals and 1,000 emergency food packages through an initiative called 'Closed Doors, Open Hearts'. Produce from the Walled Garden was also distributed. As that initiative evolved, The Auckland Project's role became more complementary, supporting existing local organisations to prepare and distribute food.

In Woodhouse Close, The Auckland Project launched a new community initiative in 2020, funded by the Garfield Weston Foundation. This project aims to tackle some of the 'root causes' of the area's problems by focusing on reducing health inequalities through community development work, community empowerment and social prescribing initiatives. It is intended that it will help to develop more effective multi-agency work and strengthen local partnerships to deliver more effective interventions. The project is planned to run for three years.



Completed presentation: the Long Dining Room, with Zurbarán paintings.



Completed presentation: the restored Throne Room.



Completed presentation: the Small Drawing Room. AV displays tell the story of Bishop Westcott's (1890-1901) intervention in a coal mining dispute.



Completed presentation: Bishop Hensley Henson's (1920-39) study. Visitors can sit at his desk and read his papers concerning his opposition to the Government's policy of appeasement.



A Volunteer Castle Engager, Daniel Elcoat, in the Long Dining Room



The Parkland Explorers programme for local schools

5 Management of the NLHF project

Managing and delivering the NLHF project has proved to be a challenge for all involved -- most especially The Auckland Project itself and Meldrum, the main contractor.

The Auckland Project was an entirely new organisation, essentially a start-up business, and staff and trustees faced a steep learning curve. While trying to build the organisation, The Auckland Project submitted a funding bid to NLHF for a project that would turn out to be more complex and more difficult than they may have realised. The success of that bid at an early stage in the organisation's development meant that it had to move on to delivery despite limited management capacity. The organisation now is more mature and experienced than it was at the start of the NLHF project, but it is still developing, and still having some difficulty responding to challenges. There has been continued restructuring to try to address this.

There is no doubt that staff at The Auckland Project are very committed to the regeneration of Bishop Auckland and have invested a great deal of effort into making it a success. Staff have brought much experience and expertise, but they are trying to do something that is unusual and innovative. As far as we are aware, there is nothing else quite like this initiative -- combining philanthropy, culture-based regeneration and community renewal.

Managing the repair, conservation and re-presentation of the Castle and developing the Faith Museum has certainly stretched The Auckland Project's staff. Some of the difficulties have stemmed from the issues that are inevitably going to be encountered in historic buildings, such as the discovery of unexpected architectural features or unknown structural problems. In particular, the absence of adequate foundations beneath part of the Scotland Wing and movement in the structure when work got underway presented significant difficulties and led to considerable delays to the programme.

In addition, difficulties and delays have stemmed from the many changes to the scheme that The Auckland Project has required. The biggest of these was the late decision to build a basement below the Faith Museum, but a great many smaller variations have been effected. In some cases that was because ideas about how the buildings are to be operated have changed, so curatorial staff have changed their requirements. A general point is that it has become apparent that a 'design freeze' could have helped to avoid costly variations. A pause in the construction work might also have helped to manage changes. Conservation issues, structural problems and numerous variations have certainly stretched the main contractors -- who themselves had limited experience of complex historic buildings and this type and scale of project.

As the timetable slipped, The Auckland Project sought to get back on track by bolstering project management by bringing in additional external consultants. Latterly, Turner and Townsend have shared project management functions with consultants Focus and Hicktons. During the later stages of the capital works contract, design freeze meetings were introduced and weekly meetings held to resolve problems and build stronger relationships of trust. A project control engineer was brought in by Turner and Townsend to produce and continually update comprehensive planning charts in order to keep track of what needs to be done, highlight problems and avoid clashes of activity.

There developed a sense of urgency and a more concerted effort to avoid creating additional work and further delays. The pressure to get the Castle open came from several directions, including NLHF and from within The Auckland Project itself. There was a feeling that it had become 'emotionally' very important to open the Castle not least to show a sometimes impatient local community that

promised developments are going to be delivered. The original intention had been to open the restored Castle in summer 2018; that opening finally took place in November 2019. The Faith Museum is more behind schedule – originally expected to open in 2019, that is delayed until at least autumn 2022.

Costs are considerably greater than initially envisaged. The original total cost of the project, as agreed with NLHF, was £20,520,200 and the NLHF grant towards that would be £11,400,000. In May 2020, the total cost was estimated to be £32,087,116 (see Table: Castle & Faith Financial Summary NLHF – May 21). The NLHF contribution remains unchanged at £11,400,000. **The total estimated cost has thus increased by £11,566,916, an increase of 56%.**

The two main capital components (the Castle and the Scotland Wing Extension) account for most of the costs – and most of the increase in cost. Repair and conservation work on the Castle and Existing Scotland Wing was originally costed at £6,762,800 and the latest Total Project Cost under that heading is £10,905,151. That is a difference of £4,142,351, a 61% increase. The Scotland Wing Extension for the Faith Museum saw an even bigger proportionate increase; initially costed at £4,363,700 and now expected to cost £8,562,550, almost twice the cost agreed at the inception of the project (a 96% increase). As the Table shows, some other costs increased significantly as well – professional fees, for example.

Costs have risen for a variety of reasons. Costs increased as a result of additional work stemming from changes to designs and specifications, unforeseen technical issues and the discovery of historic features. Delays added to costs, and variations and problems had knock-on effects such as extra professional fees, including commissioning additional external consultants. Some of the additional costs came about because The Auckland Project sought to make improvements to the scheme as it progressed; in that respect the NLHF grant can be regarded as having levered considerably more private sector investment than had been anticipated.

As a new and evolving organisation, The Auckland Project took time to develop effective project management. There were too many layers of management and a reliance on external consultants – an issue that has recently been addressed by the appointment of a new Project Director in 2020, who has brought more of the project management ‘in house’. Furthermore, at times it proved difficult to ensure strict financial discipline in an organisation with a limited amount of bureaucracy and supported by a generous philanthropist – there was a tendency to assume extra funding would be provided if needed.

In 2020, as a result of the trustees’ concern to cut costs and improve the prospects for financial sustainability, it was decided to undertake a radical restructure of the staff team. It was also recognised that the organisation’s activities were changing – as it was shifting from the management of capital projects and towards the operation of the attractions and facilities. At the same time, the pandemic led to the closure of the attractions, which meant that many staff members were no longer needed, at least in the medium term, and that change added a further dimension to the restructure. Many were furloughed. In the end, 54 staff were made redundant. Salary costs were therefore substantially reduced – and overall running costs more than halved. At the end of 2020 The Auckland Project, with fewer staff, vacated Vinovium House, moving to office accommodation in Kingsway (behind the Spanish Gallery) and Number 42 in the Market Place.

The restructure split the organisation into two elements: a ‘Regeneration’ Division focusing on regeneration and community development and an ‘Enterprise’ Division which will focus on generating income from the attractions and associated facilities. It is hoped that Enterprise will

eventually make a surplus to support the Regeneration activity. A new Enterprise CEO was appointed to work alongside the existing CEO in 2021.

Castle & Faith Financial Summary NLHF
May 21

Reference	Cost Heading	Description	Original Agreed NLHF Starting Budget	Approved Transfers	Latest NLHF Agreed Budget	Claimed to Date	Remaining to Claim	Additional Cost TAP only	Total Project Cost
1.01	Repair and Conservation Work	Castle and Existing Scotland Wing	6,762,800	875,700	7,638,500	7,638,500		3,266,651	10,905,151
1.02	New Building Work	Scotland Wing Extension	4,363,700		4,363,700	4,363,700		4,198,850	8,562,550
1.03	New Building Work	Energy Centre	905,600		905,600	905,600			905,600
1.04	Other Capital Work	Haul Road	225,000		225,000	171,682	53,318		225,000
1.05	Other Capital Work	External Works - Faith Garden	135,300		135,300	72,601	62,699		135,300
1.06	Other	Surveys and Archaeology	189,000	77,000	266,000	266,000		85,302	351,302
1.07	Professional Fees relating to above	Professional Fees	1,542,200	63,100	1,605,300	1,605,300		1,829,984	3,435,284
1.08	Other Costs (Capital)	Exhibition and Interpretation	1,871,500	707,300	2,578,800	889,246	1,689,554	395,617	2,974,417
1.09	Other Costs (Broadwalk)	Broadwalk	150,000		150,000	3,820	146,180		150,000
Total Capital Costs			16,145,100	1,723,100	17,868,200	15,916,449	1,951,751	9,776,404	27,644,604
2.01	New Staff Costs	New Staff Costs	828,400	147,100	975,500	975,500			975,500
2.02	Training for Staff	Training for Staff	5,000		5,000	2,225	2,775		5,000
2.03	Traning for Volunteers	Volunteers and Apprenticeships	89,400		89,400	89,400			89,400
2.04	Professional Fees relating to above	External Consultants (Heritage Skills Coordinator)	105,000	(105,000)					
2.05	Other Costs (Activity)	Activity Programme	223,000	(16,950)	206,050	170,792	35,258		205,897
Total Activity Costs			1,250,800	25,150	1,275,950	1,237,917	38,033		1,275,797
3.01	Recruitment	Recruitment	6,000		6,000	294	5,706		6,000
3.02	Publicity and Promotion	Marketing and Comms	319,000		319,000	245,348	73,652		319,000
3.03	Evaluation	Evaluation	35,000	14,050	49,050	41,870	7,180		49,050
3.04	Other	Removal and Return of Collections	232,000		232,000	219,478	12,522		232,000
3.05	Full Cost Recovery	ACT FCR	670,000		670,000	670,000			670,000
3.06	Contingency	Contingency - Capital Works	875,700	(875,700)					
3.07	Contingency	Contingency - Professional Fees	77,000	(77,000)					
3.08	Contingency	Contingency - Activity Plan	37,100	(37,100)					
3.09	Contingency	Contingency - Other	2,100	(2,100)					
3.10	Inflation	Inflation - Capital Works	707,300	(707,300)					
3.11	Inflation	Inflation - Professional Fees	63,100	(63,100)					
3.12	Volunteer Time	Volunteer Time	100,000		100,000	100,000			100,000
Total Other Costs			3,124,300	(1,748,250)	1,376,050	1,276,990	99,060		1,376,050
1.10		TAP Contingency						1,790,665	1,790,665
Total TAP Contingency								1,790,665	1,790,665
Total Costs Supported by NLHF			20,520,200		20,520,200	18,431,356	2,088,844	11,567,069	32,087,116



The Scotland Wing Extension, built to accommodate the Faith Museum.



The Scotland Wing Extension – upper floor of Faith Museum (May 2021)

6 Impact and outcomes

At this stage it is not possible to say much with certainty about the effects that The Auckland Project is having, or will have, on the local area and its communities. But we can make some tentative observations.

6.1 Attracting visitors.

The Castle opened in November 2019, closed for a scheduled winter maintenance break from early January to mid-February 2020, and then had to close again – along with the other visitor attractions - at the start of the first ‘lockdown’ in March 2020. The opening of the Faith Museum is still some way off. So we cannot know how successful these attractions will be in bringing in visitors.

What we do know is that the first visitor attraction, the Mining Art Gallery, had good reviews and was well-received, particularly by local people. It opened in October 2017 and had a steady flow of visitors, averaging about 50 people a day. Generally, it attracted a local audience. The gallery is not large, but could have accommodated more visitors without difficulty.

The second paid-for visitor attraction to open was the Bishop Trevor Gallery, which opened in June 2019. Again, that was well received and had a steady flow of visitors, averaging about 40 people a day in its first two months of operation. Over the opening weekend, the Bishop Trevor Gallery had 96 paying visitors. It is a small gallery, occupying just a small part of the Castle (though visitors were also able to see the adjacent St Peter’s Chapel). The Bishop Trevor Gallery (and St Peter’s Chapel) are now part of the whole Castle experience.

When the whole of the Castle opened, it attracted an initial influx of visitors, indicating pent-up demand, particularly from local residents, who were keen to visit once it was, at last, open. After that, there was a big drop in visitor numbers in the run-up to Christmas. Over the two months of November and December 2019, the Castle had an average of 1,000 visitors a week (some of those were repeat visits and about a quarter of visitors were on complimentary or discounted tickets).

It is likely that many more people would come if additional activities are offered alongside the visitor attractions, especially activities designed to appeal to families looking for a day out. Before the pandemic, such activities, linked to heritage themes, were being planned; for example, there was to be an event providing the opportunity to ‘Train like a Tudor Prince Bishop’ on the May Bank Holiday 2020. There were also to be culinary events at the Castle, including a monthly Dining Club and seasonal afternoon teas. As other – competing -- visitor destinations in the North East, such as Beamish and The Alnwick Garden have shown, it is necessary to put on family-based activities and continue to renew and invest to develop and sustain public interest and generate repeat visits.

Various estimates of potential visitor numbers have been put forward at different times. It would be fair to say all have been guesses. For example in 2014 it was thought that there would have to be **210,000** paying visitors a year to make the Castle and related sites financially sustainable. The HLF Second Round Application submitted in February 2015 said that the Castle would achieve ‘an estimated **150,000** visitors a year’. Others have said that there could be many more visitors than that, notably the Ernst & Young *Field of Dreams* report (2016) commissioned by The Auckland Project, which estimated **430,000 visitors a year to The Auckland Project’s sites and Kynren** and, as part of that, **over 190,000 visitors just to the Castle by 2020**. That report notes that Durham Cathedral attracts 600,000 a year, while Bowes Museum gets 100,000, and Beamish 750,000. (Durham Cathedral does not charge visitors while Bowes and Beamish do).

Market Research for The Auckland Project, undertaken by consultancy Blue Marble in 2016, gave an **‘overall estimate of 250,000 unique visitors per year’** to Auckland Castle. That research looked in some detail at what the audience might be, identifying different market segments. According to that analysis, it was expected that the Castle and associated sites would be particularly appealing to more educated and affluent visitors, and people with an interest in history, the mind, spirituality and the outdoors.

Visitor numbers are hard to predict and depend upon a number of factors. Among those factors is the timing of the opening of attractions and facilities, as well as the development of activities for visitors, particularly families with children. Another issue is the availability and cost of car parking and the convenience of road access (The Auckland Project proposes a new eastern access road). A key factor is ticket prices. Before the pandemic, full price entry for the Castle, Tower and Mining Art Gallery was £12.50 for an annual pass, allowing repeat visits.

A few months before the pandemic, the thinking about visitor numbers was that the aim should be to attract **168,000 paying visitors a year (14,000 a month) when the main sites are open (comprising the Castle, Faith Museum, Mining Art Gallery, Spanish Gallery, Auckland Tower, Walled Garden)**. That had been calculated to be the break-even point, the number needed to sustain The Auckland Project’s visitor destinations in the medium to long term (that is, in five years’ time as set out in The Auckland Project’s draft Business Plan in autumn 2019). That would be the break-even position on running costs, with income equal to expenditure – with a smaller workforce focused on looking after visitors rather than capital projects. However, that seemed to be a hard target to achieve in light of experience after the Castle opened.

Previously, informed by the Blue Marble report, it had been thought that marketing should be particularly aimed at the more affluent potential visitor from outside the North East, the kind of visitor inclined to be drawn to history, art and heritage. That subsequently changed; it was decided that the best approach would be to focus, at least initially, on promoting the Castle to residents of County Durham. That change of emphasis reflected a reconsideration of what might be realistic and feasible, given the relatively small numbers of tourists who come to County Durham and the North East from elsewhere and the difficulty of finding those distant audiences and communicating with them. It also stemmed partly from an acknowledgement of the limitations of opening a visitor attraction in wintertime (the Castle opened in the November of 2019); at that time of year a low-key opening is generally considered appropriate, targeting primarily the local (County Durham and Darlington) audience. It was intended that the promotional effort would subsequently be stepped up and broadened, attracting potential visitors living in Tyneside (an hour away by car), then Teesside and then from further afield. Attracting visitors from Tyneside and Teesside is going to be essential for the achievement of commercial sustainability.

For marketing and promotion purposes a database has been built up, with basic contact information for about 6,000 people who have signed up to receive information about The Auckland Project. Most of these are people who have already visited the existing sites, while some will have signed up having just visited the website. The Tessitura ticket sales system, used by other similar organisations, was introduced in 2019 and this should eventually enable some meaningful analysis of visitors, particularly their geographical origin and socio-economic group, based on postcode profiles. Ticket scanning was introduced to log the number of visitors at each of the sites, so providing information on visits as distinct from ticket sales. In the future, visitor surveys may be commissioned.

Prior to the pandemic, marketing and promotion was undertaken by The Auckland Project’s staff through contacts with the travel trade in order to bring in groups; through contacts with the print

media (particularly *The Northern Echo* and ‘hyper-local media’ such as *The Bishop Press*); and advertising via the website, emails, and social media. Social media (eg Facebook and TripAdvisor) posts were monitored, as was engagement with The Auckland Project website. Attempts were also made to develop some collaborative marketing with Kynren and with other heritage-based visitor destinations in the North East, such as Bowes Museum, Durham Cathedral, Beamish, Locomotion and Raby Castle. A London-based PR agency, Flint, was retained for national-level media activity. During 2019 the advertising budget was scaled back as a result of the decision to focus initially on the local audience.

The Auckland Project recognises that it may not be easy to attract visitors. The local/regional market comprises a limited population, with a relatively low propensity to visit cultural destinations. The North East has low levels of inbound tourism from overseas and from the rest of the UK, and relatively low levels of day visits by both residents and incoming visitors. The hope is that these challenges can, to some extent, be overcome by creating a loyal audience who will visit regularly and also bring along family and friends who are visiting them (those who are visiting friends and family in the North East are the largest inbound group of visitors to the area). It is also hoped to create a product that appeals to a wide audience – and that will eventually develop to attract long-distance visitors.

During 2020 there had to be a major rethink. The pandemic and the organisational restructure meant expectations had to be revised. Capacity to promote The Auckland Project was cut back -- the restructure resulted in the loss of the Marketing and Communications staff team. It is anticipated that when the sites reopen, in July 2020, only relatively small numbers can be safely accommodated – initially, the Castle may only be able to offer 96 pre-booked timed tickets a day and might not be able to open the café, impacting income. The focus will be on attracting ‘hyper-local’ visitors, with minimal spend on advertising. Looking ahead, there is a great deal of uncertainty about the visitor market, and the progress and management of the pandemic, which makes it difficult – if not impossible – to forecast visitor numbers and income generation. The Auckland Project hopes that, after a cautious reopening in 2021, the organisation and the attractions will be ‘match ready’ for a strong season in 2022.

6.2 Reviving Bishop Auckland.

Prior to the pandemic, there were some signs that Bishop Auckland was starting to revive – although local perceptions differed. Of course there will always be sceptics who will never accept that things are improving, and there are those who are critical of Jonathan Ruffer and The Auckland Project which they feel has ‘parachuted in’ and is going to provide things that are ‘not for us’. On the other hand, there are also many people in Bishop Auckland who are delighted and grateful that Ruffer has chosen to invest in their town -- and some whose lives have been enriched by becoming volunteers, apprentices and employees.

It is far too early to say what the impact of The Auckland Project (and its sister project, Kynren) will ultimately be. But there are indications of welcome change. The most direct consequence of The Auckland Project -- and particularly the NLHF project -- is investment in the Castle. Auckland Castle is one of the town’s greatest assets and its repair and restoration was overdue. Whatever happens, the Castle and its associated buildings and grounds have been saved from further decay. In addition, a number of properties have been acquired and their future secured, notably buildings to house the Mining Art Gallery and the Spanish Art Gallery.

The Auckland Project has certainly brought some key buildings back into use – which has had a substantial and positive impact on the south side of the Market Place. However, several important buildings in the Market Place have been acquired but remain empty and it is not known what will happen to them – or whether there will be the resources to renovate them and bring them back into use. There is a local view that these unused buildings represent the negative effects of The Auckland Project's intervention, an undesirable impact resulting from opportunistic property acquisition. But if The Auckland Project does produce a significant economic uplift these buildings could well be refurbished to accommodate hotels, bars, restaurants and offices in the future.

The Auckland Project has brought new employment. Before the pandemic and the organisational restructure, about 120 staff were employed at The Auckland Project. Contrary to popular opinion, many of those staff members came from the North East, some of them (notably the apprentice staff) from Bishop Auckland and adjacent settlements. (Of the 114 members of staff in August 2019, 83% lived in County Durham). After the restructure in autumn 2020, staff numbers had halved, to under 60 – but could increase again in the future. Add to that a supply chain of builders, professional consultants and other suppliers of a wide range of goods and services, at least some of them locally based. If we posit that about one third of the expenditure on the NLHF project has been spent on wages, salaries, goods and services in south west Durham, that would amount to an input of £10 million into the local economy (and perhaps three times that amount for the whole of The Auckland Project's regeneration initiatives). Such sums are not trivial – but neither are they anything like sufficient to solve Bishop Auckland's economic and social problems.

There is no doubt that The Auckland Project and especially Kynren (run by sister Charity 11Arches) have, to some extent, put Bishop Auckland on the map. The Auckland Project as a 'brand' may not have become established (Kynren is much better-known). There is, though, a new interest in a town which, it would be fair to say, is not well known or highly regarded even within the North East. Jonathan Ruffer's intervention is known about (if sometimes only vaguely) and talked about; there is a view that something is happening in Bishop Auckland. That more optimistic outlook has encouraged some businesses to invest in the town, which in turn has generated more positive media stories.

Local residents often say that the economic decline of Bishop Auckland is most depressingly apparent not only in the Market Place but particularly in the adjacent areas of Newgate Street and Fore Bondgate and in the half empty Newgate Centre shopping mall. The northern end of Newgate Street, including the Newgate Centre, traditionally formed the retail core of the town. Now, it is characterised by shabbiness and empty shops – like many other town centres, but probably worse than most. It is said to have the highest vacancy rate of any town centre in County Durham and some of the lowest property values. It has undoubtedly been much affected by the continued growth of the retail park on the southern edge of the town at Tindale Crescent, St Helen Auckland – now undergoing yet more expansion with the establishment of a new Retail and Leisure Park next to the existing retail development. Nevertheless, some new businesses have started to move into the town centre and their owners do often say that they have been encouraged by the sense that Bishop Auckland is on the way up, citing the investment and possibilities brought about by The Auckland Project and Kynren. A good example, often mentioned as an early sign of revival, is the 1950s-themed Fiteas Vintage Tea Room in the Market Place, not far from the Castle.

On Newgate Street the Station Hotel (owned by Star Pubs & Bars) has been substantially revamped and the new Tap and Tun pub (owned by Amber Inns) has taken the premises previously occupied by Poundworld. New local independent businesses have started on Newgate Street, including Bishop Auckland Social Enterprise (BASE), which provides space for small businesses and community uses;

Factory 2k studio and nightclub in a former ballroom above BASE; and Honey Bee health store. Recently, an orthodontist's practice (Queensway Orthodontics) moved into the restored former Co-op Bank premises at 10 Newgate Street, and two new cafes opened (The Fox's Tale and The Reading Room). These are small but hopeful signs of regeneration that counter the trend of closures by chain stores nearby (including Dorothy Perkins, M&Co, Brighthouse, Thomas Cook, TUI, H Samuel and WH Smith), and consequently temporary leases to charity shops. There was talk of Beales reopening their department store on Newgate Street, but that came to nothing. Instead, plans have been submitted (approved in October 2019) to convert the upper floors of the premises into either a hotel or apartments; if it goes ahead, the reuse of this Grade 2 Listed building, formerly the Co-op, would be a significant symbol of regeneration – though interestingly with only a limited retail element (possibly three shop units on the ground floor). A planning application to convert another significant building on Newgate Street, the former McIntyre shoe shop, into a bar and restaurant was submitted in late 2020.

The narrow and historic street of Fore Bondgate -- once the town's main shopping street -- has seen quite considerable change, with the further development of the Bondgate Gallery, and the opening of a second gallery on the street, The House of Smudge. Before the pandemic, new openings included a florist's shop, a café (The Auckland Cupcake Co.), a second tattooist (Inkheart), and two gift shops (Tinkers Treasures and Labyrinth). Fore Bondgate now has only a few empty shops and no longer has an atmosphere of dereliction – although it is certainly not busy. These independent businesses will be hoping to attract people visiting the Castle, the Mining Art Gallery and the Spanish Gallery.

The sense of possibility that The Auckland Project and Kynren have brought has also prompted other public sector initiatives. Indeed, it could be said that a major impact of The Auckland Project has been to lever-in public investment, primarily in infrastructure. Durham County Council has invested in streetscape improvements in the Market Place and, in 2019, began refurbishment of the Town Hall, an impressive but underused Grade II Listed building that dominates the Market Place. Investment of £1.5m in the Town Hall was used to revamp its theatre auditorium, create a new café and bar, and improve the public library and art gallery. Bishop Auckland was successful in bidding for Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) status which has brought a new focus on the town centre and also a grants regime for improvements to historic buildings (such as the former Co-op Bank in Newgate Street). The HAZ initiative, supported by Historic England and Durham County Council, will run for a 5 year period (2018 – 2023). A new Town Centre Masterplan for the area, overseen by local partnership Brighter Bishop Auckland chaired by the Bishop of Durham, adds to the growing impetus for regeneration. The Plan focuses on attracting visitors to the town through development of the evening economy, food, culture and infrastructure.

In autumn 2019 it was announced that Bishop Auckland was one of 100 towns that had been successful in bidding for the government's newly-established Towns Fund. Support from the Future High Streets Fund programme, amounting to £19.8m, was confirmed in December 2020. That will be used to improve transport, hospitality and leisure provision, and to restore vacant buildings. This has been followed by a complementary bid for £46.8m from the Stronger Towns Fund, which includes funding of £15.7m for a new Eastern Access Road to The Auckland Project's attractions, improvements to the railway station in support of the Weardale Railway, and other infrastructure projects (8). The principal aim is to stimulate the local economy through heritage-based tourism. It is very much about helping to make The Auckland Project a success and turning Bishop Auckland into an important visitor destination. The bid was developed by a newly-formed partnership board, Bishop Auckland Stronger Towns Board, which has key representation from The Auckland Project.

Bishop Auckland Town Council and the 'Town Team' are also active and no doubt encouraged by the work of The Auckland Project. The Town Team, a group of volunteers, organises popular celebration events in the Market Place. Another group of volunteers, the Town Ambassadors is also active, welcoming visitors to Bishop Auckland. The annual Bishop Auckland Food Festival goes from strength to strength, attracting more than 29,000 visitors in 2019. In 2019, Bishop Auckland was awarded Gold and judged the best town in the 'Large Town' category of the Northumbria in Bloom competition. Also in 2019, Bishop Auckland received several Durham Environment Awards – including awards for Auckland Tower, the restored West Mural Tower and Kynren's volunteers. But all of this, while welcome, has to be put into perspective; the town centre still has a sad air of decline and new visitors would be unlikely to realise that things have recently been getting a little better. There remains a lack of demand for retail property here, as in other towns. And – even with grant support – there is a big gap between what it costs to refurbish some of these town centre buildings and their subsequent market value.

What impact does The Auckland Project want to make? Debates among staff and the trustees have brought about renewed emphasis on 'purpose', with that purpose being considered to be much more about reviving people and communities, and less about saving buildings and attracting visitors. Developing the Castle as a visitor attraction is seen as worthwhile but essentially a means to an end. Defining that 'end' is difficult – it is not clear what 'success' would look like as far as The Auckland Project is concerned.

The impacts on buildings, town centre business development, and public sector investment are important but not the whole story. The impact on the local community is also a major part of the story – and clearly central to The Auckland Project's purpose. It remains to be seen how many visitors will come and what the impact of that will be on the local economy and employment.

For now, it may be said that The Auckland Project has had a positive impact on the community through volunteering and employment opportunities, educational engagement activities and community support initiatives. Measuring wider community impacts is difficult. At present, The Auckland Project does not have big enough impacts to be measurable by monitoring secondary data on employment and unemployment, health, housing and education. Any impact would be swamped by other factors and attribution would not be possible. That might change in the future as The Auckland Project grows and develops. It may be – as some suggest – that the full impacts will only really be seen in 20 or 25 years' time.



Bishop Auckland Market Place – vacant buildings acquired by The Auckland Project (May 2021)



Newgate Street in Bishop Auckland (May 2021)

7 Some conclusions: achievements and lessons

7.1. Achievements

The primary focus of this Interim Evaluation is the NLHF project. In relation to that, we are able to say that **the agreed Approved Purposes of the scheme have been achieved, apart from the completion of the Faith Museum.** The Castle buildings have been restored, the Castle displays have been completed, engagement and learning activities have been delivered, apprenticeships have been provided and volunteers have been recruited. The Faith Museum has been built, but it is not yet ready to open since its content has not been finalised. The scheme's completion will be several years later than planned (extended from a 3 year timescale to an expected 7 years) and more than 50% over budget – but the extra costs have been borne by The Auckland Project, not by NLHF.

The NLHF scheme and the wider actions and activities of The Auckland Project have brought economic, social and cultural benefits to the people of Bishop Auckland, including employment, volunteering opportunities and sense of hope for the future. But it is not known how much The Auckland Project will be able to do to revive Bishop Auckland. The Auckland Project wants to take a leading role in the transformation of the area; it is as yet unclear whether it will be able to do that.

Nor is it known whether the Castle and the other attractions will be able to achieve financial viability. At present, it looks like they will continue to rely on philanthropic support for years to come. Perhaps when all the attractions are open and running activities, when there are hotels, restaurants and cafes and a heritage railway, Bishop Auckland will be a visitor destination able to compete with other places. That would bring in many visitors, economic activity and sufficient revenue to support community initiatives. That is the kind of vision The Auckland Project has; it remains to be seen if it can be achieved.

7.2 Lessons

Much has been learnt from this NLHF project --there are lessons that could well be helpful to others implementing comparable projects in the future:

1. **Projects need to be very well developed *before* implementation.** The NLHF project was not fully developed and staff, structures and processes were not all in place when it secured funding and construction began. There were difficulties arising from design changes, overstretched management, construction problems, delays and additional costs. As the project progressed, greater discipline and a 'design freeze' methodology would have been very helpful in keeping to the timetable and avoiding cost overruns.
2. **Effective project management is essential.** There need to be clear lines of communication, with specified points of contact and clarity about who identifies issues, who reports them, who deals with them, and who checks that action has been taken. At The Auckland Project such processes have not always been fully in place, or worked as well as they should have done. Given the immaturity of this new organisation, NLHF might have offered more help and advice on project management.
3. **Delays happen and need to be managed.** Staff at The Auckland Project have learnt to manage delays – for example revising education and engagement programmes, and/or postponing promotional and advertising campaigns. One lesson that has been learnt through experience is that opening dates should only be announced or included on promotional materials when it is certain those dates can be kept.

4. **Acquisition of property needs to be carefully considered.** Opportunistic investment for the long term future can be justified, but there is a danger in acquiring property that stands empty for a long period of time and creates a perception or reality of project blight. It can also result in management overload, with management thinly spread across many potential initiatives and activities linked to acquired land and buildings. It may be better to sell or lease buildings so they are brought back into use. The broader lesson is to keep focused to ensure delivery and not over-diversify by accretion of properties and activities.
5. **Stay focused on 'purpose'.** The Auckland Project is determined to be different – not just another tourist attraction but imbued with higher motives and values. It wants to revive and regenerate Bishop Auckland, but it has been difficult to stay focused on that purpose while necessarily being concerned with buildings and bringing in visitors. As The Auckland Project has found, purpose has to shape everything else.
6. **Connecting with local communities is crucially important.** Community regeneration needs to be rooted in the community. The Auckland Project is not yet sufficiently connected with the locality to be in a position to deliver the local community revival that it aims to achieve. The shift from engagement to community development has not been easy. The development of reciprocal and empowering relationships with residents and local agencies is going to be crucial. Enabling local people to influence and even direct The Auckland Project is going to be necessary if it is to be embedded and 'owned', in line with its purpose.

There can be no doubt that The Auckland Project is ambitious, remarkable and different. It is to be hoped that it will prove sustainable – and that it will help secure the lasting revival of Bishop Auckland.

Notes

1. Requirements for the evaluation as set out in the grant letter from NLHF to The Auckland Project, June 9 2015.
2. This account of the significance of the Zurbarans and the campaign to keep these paintings in Bishop Auckland draws substantially on Robert McManners' book, *Zurbarans at Auckland Castle*, Gemini Productions, 2010 and contemporary reports in *The Northern Echo*.
3. *Auckland Castle Conservation Statement*, by Alan Baxter & Associates LLP, 2011. This study was commissioned jointly by Durham County Council and the Church Commissioners, in association with English Heritage. It provides a comprehensive overview of Auckland Castle, its significance, condition and possible capacity for change in the future.
4. See 'Interview: Jonathan Ruffer on Christianity and giving', in Paul Vallely: *Philanthropy*. London, Bloomsbury, 2020. Also interview in Monk magazine -- [JONATHAN RUFFER Angel of the North - MONK Interview](#)
5. This references Bishop Cosin Bishop of Durham (1660-72) who believed that beauty would lead people to God; also to Psalm 96 v 9: 'O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness'.
6. A guide book has not yet been produced, so the foregoing account presents the curatorial scheme in some detail.
7. *Auckland Castle Project – Activity Plan*, JURA Consultants, 2015.
8. See [Bishop Auckland Town Investment Plan Executive Summary \(durham.gov.uk\)](#)

Photo credits: all from The Auckland Project, except photos on p. 44, from Fred Robinson.

Appendix

The Auckland Project – Timeline

1997	Church Commissioners take the decision, in principle, to sell the Zurbaran paintings for financial reasons. That decision is challenged by Bishop Auckland Civic Society, with the backing of the Bishop of Durham, Michael Turnbull
2005	Church Commissioners agree that they will re-assess decision to sell the Zurbarans in 2010
2010	During the interregnum following departure of Bishop Tom Wright, the Church Commissioners again decide to sell the Zurbaran paintings. Local campaign opposes that decision.
2010-12	Jonathan Ruffer in protracted negotiations to purchase the Zurbaran paintings
2012	<p>Auckland Castle Trust incorporated at Companies House (February) and registered with Charity Commission (March). Jonathan Ruffer appointed Chair; Rowena Hackwood appointed CEO</p> <p>Completion of acquisition of the Zurbaran paintings, together with the Castle and Deer Park from the Church Commissioners (July). (Bishop of Durham has 30 year lease of offices in Wyatt Wing and has continued access to Chapel and Oratory)</p> <p>Plans to acquire Flatts Farm, a disused golf course – with possible development of a themed visitor attraction modelled on Puy du Fou, France</p> <p>Idea of Faith Museum emerges</p> <p>Initial application to National Lottery Heritage Fund (then the Heritage Lottery Fund) submitted</p> <p>Walled Garden project conceived. Also possibility of a geothermal project discussed.</p>
2013	<p>NLHF awards grant of £9.0m for Castle and related activities (June)</p> <p>Appointment of Purcell as architects to HLF project</p> <p>£1m secured from Garfield Weston Foundation</p> <p>Initial planning for a Welcome Building (the Auckland Tower) and extension to the Castle’s Scotland Wing for a Faith Museum</p>
2014	<p>Acquisition of Backhouse Bank (Barclays Bank) building for Spanish Art Gallery (January). Adjacent Barrington House (a former school) subsequently acquired. David Ronn appointed CEO</p> <p>Plans for Auckland Tower submitted for planning permission (?)</p>

	<p>Eleven Arches Trust set up to run Kynren, with Anne-Isabelle Daulon as CEO and Co-Founder.</p> <p>Queen's Head and Postchaise hotels in Market Place are acquired</p> <p>Binchester Estate, including Vinovium Roman Fort, acquired from Church Commissioners</p>
2015	<p>Second Round application submitted to NLHF (February 2015)</p> <p>Car park in North Bondgate leased from Durham County Council</p> <p>'No 42' project in Market Place developed – to offer retail and studio provision for small businesses</p> <p>Memorandum of Understanding with Durham University, relating to Spanish Art gallery and research</p> <p>Former Groundwork Building in Market Place acquired</p> <p>Geothermal Project deferred</p> <p>Decision to develop Mining Art Gallery at Old Bank Chambers. To house Gemini Collection of mining art, gifted to The Auckland Project by Dr Robert McManners and Gillian Wales</p>
2016	<p>Kynren opens (June)</p> <p>David Maddan appointed CEO (July)</p> <p>Supplementary funding application (for £2.4m) submitted to NLHF to support provision of storage and collection handling space in basement of new Faith Museum</p> <p>Bishop Auckland Golf Course acquired (site was formerly part of the original Castle parkland)</p> <p>Castle Bar in Market Place acquired</p> <p>Auckland Castle closes for building works (December)</p>
2017	<p>The Auckland Project staff move from the Castle to Vinovium House</p> <p>Meldrum Construction Services commence Castle works (June)</p> <p>Bids for external funding for an Eastern Access Road being developed</p> <p>Plans for Spanish Gallery and West Mural Tower being developed</p> <p>'Brand name' changed to 'The Auckland Project' (September)</p>

	Mining Art Gallery opens (October)
2018	<p>Main enabling works for Walled Garden undertaken</p> <p>Jonathan Ruffer recognised as ‘Founder’ of the Auckland Project. Hands over role of Chair of the Trustees to board member Nick Turner (July). Jane Ruffer remains Chair of Leadership Team</p> <p>New Project Management company Focus Design brought in to oversee Castle scheme.</p>
2019	<p>Walled Garden soil removal completed and planting underway</p> <p>Concerns about Wyatt Arch – initial remedial works done.</p> <p>Agreed that The Auckland Project’s sites would be open 5 days per week (Wed – Sun).</p> <p>Bishop Trevor Gallery opens (June)</p> <p>Bob Bigley becomes Chair of the Trustees</p> <p>Further buildings purchased, including Champagne Bar, Grosvenor House, 28 Market Place, 20 Silver Street and former Home Bargains building. Also land at Park House Farm.</p> <p>Auckland Castle reopened to the public (November)</p> <p>Plans being considered to move staff out of Vinovium House by end of 2020 into Market Place properties, including No. 42 and the former Job Centre building.</p>
2020	<p>Purchase of Weardale Railway (March)</p> <p>All attractions and facilities (apart from the Castle’s Deer Park) close down because of the Covid-19 pandemic (March)</p> <p>The Auckland Project runs ‘Closed Doors Open Hearts’ project, distributing food parcels during first ‘lockdown’ period.</p> <p>Restoration work starts on Robinson Arch and Clock Tower</p> <p>Restructure of The Auckland Project and staff redundancies (September). Staff move out of Vinovium House (December).</p> <p>Bid to the Government’s Stronger Towns Fund submitted by Durham County Council.</p>
2021	<p>Edward Perry appointed as CEO (Enterprise)</p> <p>Planned reopening of Auckland Castle and Mining Art Gallery, and also Walled Garden tours (July).</p>