

Report to: Cabinet



Date of Meeting 27 November 2024

Document classification: Part A Public Document

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## **Cranbox Modular Space Delivery in Cranbrook Town Centre**

### **Report summary:**

This report provides an update on the Cranbox project. This project delivers new commercial floorspace within Cranbrook Town Centre. The project has been developed by EDDC with the support of Cranbrook Town Council. The project has been awarded funding through the Devon & Torbay Net Zero Capital Programme, subject to Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) sign off.

### **Is the proposed decision in accordance with:**

Budget Yes  No

Policy Framework Yes  No

### **Recommendation:**

That Cabinet note:

1. Studio 4 have been appointment through an NHS procurement framework to support the delivery of a planning application for the scheme, to the value of £25k from the Enterprise Zone programme budget.

That Cabinet agree:

1. To accept the funding from the Devon & Torbay Net Zero Capital Programme, following MHCLG sign off.
2. EDDC act as Accountable Body for the grant funding, with Cranbrook Town Council delivering the project.

### **Reason for recommendation:**

To support the delivery of Cranbrook Town Centre through the delivery of additional commercial floor space, using grant funding from the Devon & Torbay Net Zero Capital Programme.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

Climate Action and Emergency Response  
 Coast, Country and Environment  
 Council and Corporate Co-ordination  
 Communications and Democracy  
 Economy

- Finance and Assets
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

## **Equalities impact** Low Impact

## **Climate change** Medium Impact

**Risk:** Medium Risk; This project needs to be delivered within a tight timeframe but provides an excellent opportunity to delivery new commercial floor space, supporting the development of Cranbrook town centre. EDDC will work in partnership with CTC to delivery this scheme, utilising procurement frameworks to accelerate delivery.

## **Links to background information**

### **Link to Council Plan**

Priorities (check which apply)

- A supported and engaged community
- Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
- Resilient economy that supports local business
- Financially secure and improving quality of services

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. Cranbox was initially conceived in 2014 to create local jobs and address deficits identified in a community needs analysis for Cranbrook carried out by the then Community Development Officer. The needs analysis identified a lack of community, retail and social infrastructure in Cranbrook, which, at the time, did not have the neighbourhood shops or the pub in the town centre.
- 1.2. The growth of indigenous economic activity was part of a wider health and wellbeing strategy developed within the Cranbrook Health Impact Assessment (HIA) promoting community cohesion, identity, and security and also within the Cranbrook Economic Development Strategy that recommended a business ladder approach to be adopted, with Cranbox forming a critical part of that. The HIA and Economic Development Strategy would go on to form the underpinnings for the Cranbrook Plan and Cranbrook Masterplan.
- 1.3. The initial concept for Cranbox was designed to provide modular and easily transportable accommodation quickly and cheaply for small and start-up businesses and community services. Modular designs and mobile units could be scaled and located as needed and arranged to enclose outdoor spaces to host informal social gatherings, community or cultural events, or serve as commercial spaces for business occupiers.
- 1.4. Strong economic activity at Cranbrook is critical to delivery of a sustainable community and the transport strategy for Cranbrook by reducing out-commuting which would otherwise risk overwhelming key points in the local highway network at peak periods.
- 1.5. Over time, the project proposition has evolved into a more fixed modular community, retail and business hub. The intention is to provide this project as a long-term asset for the community fitting within the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach which underpins the strategy for Cranbrook going forward. In addition to being revenue generating for the community, it will also ensure that the required infrastructure is delivered at the point of need rather than if and when it would become commercially viable.

## 2. Current project

- 2.1. In early May 2024 the Cranbox project was submitted to the Devon & Torbay Net Zero Capital Programme, a £16m fund which forms part of the Devolution package. Cranbox was one of three projects submitted within East Devon. £1.9m was sought to deliver the scheme, which will be owned and operated by Cranbrook Town Council.
- 2.2. The funding bid drew on the results of a feasibility study was funded and developed by the Exeter and East Devon Enterprise Zone with the support of Cranbrook Town Council. This work was undertaken in by LDA Design in 2022, following a procurement exercise.
- 2.3. The Cranbrook Town Centre Masterplan, adopted by Strategic Planning Committee in October 2024, identifies the area that Cranbox could occupy and identifies its role and function within the town centre.

*"This priority structure should be designed to delivered rapidly to fulfil a pioneering role in the Town Centre. As it will be one of the first structures to be built on TC2 it, along with The Tillhouse, has an important role in defining the extents of the Town Square. It will also complete the high street frontage opposite the existing retail units and apartments on the south side of the road.*

*CranBox needs to be designed to enable easy, rapid and low cost adaptation of the space it contains so it can be partitioned or opened up according to need or demand. This enables the town to trial different configurations of space, both open and enclosed, as businesses and the community grow and evolve to have different needs."*



Figure 1 Proposed location of Cranbox scheme - from Cranbrook Town Centre Masterplan

- 2.4. EDDC has been advised that the CCA panel has approved funding for the project. It is proposed that EDDC is the Accountable Body for the Cranbox scheme, entering into a funding agreement with CTC. A copy of the funding agreement from the CCA is provided in Appendix A. CTC would lead delivery of the scheme, own and operate.
- 2.5. The scheme also needs to gain planning permission to ensure delivery. EDDC (through the Enterprise Zone Programme) commissioned LDA Design to undertake the initial

feasibility study in 2022. EDDC can also access procurement frameworks, including the NHS framework that allows direct procurement. EDDC are procuring 'Studio 4' to prepare the planning application, with this work undertaken in partnership with CTC. The use of Studio 4 is proposed and currently working with CTC to develop schemes for other buildings within the town centre. CTC will then submit the planning application to EDDC for determination. The use of the procurement framework will reduce the timescale to prepare and submit a planning application within the timeframes required by this funding agreement.

2.6. The proposed location of Cranbox is land at TC2 (to the north of the high street). This land will be transferred to EDDC as required by a Cranbrook s.106 agreement. At present the land transfer process is being progressed has not concluded. There are outstanding issues to be resolved with Devon County Council regarding the Stage 2 ground investigations report and the services to the site. But the EDDC team is working to have completed the transfer of the land by late December 2024.

### **3. Conclusion**

3.1. The Cranbox project represents a critical step in the ongoing development of Cranbrook Town Centre, supporting both the local economy and community infrastructure. The modular space concept aligns with the town's growth strategy, providing flexible, low-cost accommodation for businesses, services, and community activities. The project's evolution from an initial idea to an adaptable hub will play an essential role in reducing out-commuting and fostering local employment.

3.2. With the approval of funding from the Devon & Torbay Net Zero Capital Programme, and EDDC acting as the Accountable Body, this project is well-positioned to deliver tangible benefits to Cranbrook. The collaboration with Cranbrook Town Council will ensure that the scheme is developed and managed in a way that reflects the needs and aspirations of the local community, while meeting the goals of sustainability and economic resilience.

3.3. However, timely delivery is essential to meet funding agreements, and challenges such as gaining planning approval and land transfer must be carefully managed.

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### **Financial implications:**

The financial details are contained in the report; associated costs are to be met from within existing budgets (£25k from the EZ programme budget) or from external funding.

### **Legal implications:**

There are no substantive legal issues to be added to this report.