

Subject:	Funding Proposal for ABD Centre – Digital Skills	Status:	For Publication
Report to:	Cabinet	Date:	26 th November 2025
Report of:	Economic Development Officer	Lead Member:	Economic Development
Key Decision:	☒ Forward Plan ☒	General Exception ☐	Special Urgency ☐
Equality Impact Assessment:	Required:	No	Attached: No
Biodiversity Impact Assessment:	Required:	No	Attached: No
Contact Officer:	Andrew Dean	Telephone:	01706 252480
Email:	andrewdean@rossendalebc.gov.uk		

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 That Cabinet provides a grant up to £72,000 for the ABD centre, (a Council owned asset) to expand its capacity, enabling the delivery of more digital courses and transforming the building into a high-quality, inclusive digital learning hub for the wider district as part of “The Bridge” element in the Capital Regeneration Projects Levelling Up Fund Allocation.
- 1.2 To Delegate Authority to the Head of Legal, Director of Resources and Director of Economic Development in consultation with the Lead Member for Economic Development and Resources to procure any consultants necessary and enter into any agreements related to this project.

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 The ABD Centre in Bacup is Council owned but is run by a Registered Charity called the Aged, Blind and Disabled Charity. It is already providing digital literacy skills courses up to a Level 2 to residents of the borough making them more attractive to employers and increasing the affluence of the area.
- 2.2 The Capital Regeneration Project Funding supported by Levelling Up Funding (LUF) provides us with an allocation to support connecting local residents and businesses with appropriate skills.
- 2.3 It is proposed to use some of the allocation (which is Capital) to invest in the ABD centre, allowing it to expand its capacity to bring a wider range of digital skills.
- 2.4 This proposal fulfils our objective under the Enterprise heading of the Bacup 2040 Masterplan to incorporate digital technology to ensure businesses remain relevant and provide training to keep knowledge current.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Part of the LUF allocation is earmarked for making a positive impact on digital skills, enterprise, inclusion, and visibility. The project is known as ‘The Bridge.’
- 3.2 This allocation is Capital funding only, which can relate to building enhancements, purchase of equipment or refurbishment.

- 3.3 The original proposal to LUF had suggested an alternative building for The Bridge, however, this proposal has been met with several challenges, such as the management of the facility following the funding, which cannot be resolved in the LUF spending timescale, which is March 2027.
- 3.4 The LUF funding allocated to RBC, must be spent in town centres where there is other spend. The LUF projects in Rossendale are centred in Bacup and Rawtenstall.
- 3.5 An exercise has taken place to source several locations for The Bridge to be located however the challenge regarding resolving the long-term running in the LUF timescales, remains.
- 3.6 Due to the popularity of courses, which are programmed in by the ABD centre, it has been identified as an appropriate venue to host skills training that will benefit residents, supporting education and employability across the valley.
- 3.7 The ABD centre in Bacup is already a proven, community-driven hub for learning. The centre welcomes over 350 visitors weekly, (around 2% of Bacup's population) and consistently delivers digital literacy courses to at least 10 people each week across the borough in partnership with Nelson & Colne College/Lancashire Adult Learning, part of East Lancashire Learning Group.
- 3.8 The building is owned by the Council. Financially, it is already sustainable, supported by a mix of grant and rental income, making it a stable platform for further investment.
- 3.9 Currently the rooms, IT equipment and connectivity are limiting the types of courses that can be offered. A £72k investment will significantly expand its capacity, enabling the delivery of more digital courses and transforming the building into a high-quality, inclusive digital learning hub for the wider district.
- 3.10 Importantly, the ABD Centre is already doing some the work envisioned for The Bridge project, and it's managed by a registered charity, aligning closely with local values and needs. While not suitable as a full-fledged tech start up hub, its strength lies in digital skills development and modern tech learning, making it an ideal candidate for supporting inclusive digital education and pre-startup exploration.
- 3.11 There is currently no dedicated learning site in Rossendale. Post investment, the ABD centre has the potential to expand into ESOL, English, Maths and other courses which can directly benefit residents such as paediatric courses, Prince2, (project management) or as a test centre for the driving theory test. Due to an existing partnership with the DWP, the facility can also be used by residents for job searches. These courses can be a blended solution of in person or online courses with learners being able to utilise the computers in a quiet space if their homes are noisy or chaotic.
- 3.12 This grant would lift the building further after previous investments such as the High Street HAZ, decarbonisation improvements, flooring and lift improvements.

4 DETAILS

- 4.1 Because of the existing relationship with Nelson & Colne College who are partnering with the ABD centre to provide digital courses, certain improvements to the building have already been identified through learner and course provider feedback that would enhance the learning experience and allow for more advanced courses to be delivered.

These courses will include:

- Programming skills
- Python
- Website Design
- AI integration
- Basic Skills to Level 2

- 4.2 The costs are Capital up to a value of £72k, (including contingency) and involve improving and increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the digital equipment. The works can be delivered in 3-6 months.

Procurement and Management of the works

- 4.3 The grant would be given to the Aged, Blind and Disabled registered charity
- 4.4 The ABD centre would carry out the work with RBC oversight. The grant will be released in instalments upon approval by RBC and the work will be paid for upon presentation of invoice.
- 4.5 Ongoing maintenance of the new equipment and the lift will be the responsibility of the ABD Charity.

Infrastructure and Capacity post investment

- 4.6 Through this funding the ABD centre will gain increased capacity to provide courses to 15 learners at a time.
- 4.7 Improvements to the technology available and the addition of a breakout room will expand the potential portfolio of courses that can be provided up to 13 sessions per week to a maximum capacity of 195 learners per week. The addition of high-speed Wi-Fi will accommodate online training.
- 4.8 Delivery could commence from summer 2026.
- 4.9 In comparison, the original bid for levelling up funding set a goal of reaching 390 learners per annum from 2027/28

5. RISK

- 5.1 Prices can increase leading to under estimated costs.

Mitigation - We are confident the costs are currently accurate and as a council owned building we have a certain amount of control over contractors and quotes. Our facilities team have worked closely with the charity to improve the building in the past without issues.

- 5.2 Charity may fail to attract learners/course providers to attend courses.

Mitigation – The existing delivery of courses is continuing to see good levels of uptake. The college has already agreed to deliver more advanced courses at the ABD centre upon completion of this project. The building remains a council owned asset and the rooms will be significantly upgraded which in turn helps the overall offer of the building in attracting organisations willing to rent the space.

5.3 College could withdraw support

Mitigation – The college are already providing courses at the ABD centre and have been approached to provide the courses envisioned in this report

5.4 New equipment may still not achieve the desired results

Mitigation – We have assembled the list of modifications needed in consultation with the requirements of the college and a tech veteran

6. FINANCE

- 6.1 This project is in line with the requirements of the Levelling Up Funding and will have to fit within the approved envelope and pipeline of works ensuring that outcomes as originally envisioned are delivered within the available budget of £516,462

7. LEGAL

- 7.1 All necessary procurements will be carried out in accordance with the Council's Constitution and Public Procurement Regulations with all necessary legal agreements being completed as necessary. A separate grant agreement will be drafted to manage the funding between parties

8. POLICY AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Any policy implications are included in the body of the report. There are no equality implications.

9. REASON FOR DECISION

- 9.1 This funding would enhance the skills and employability of Rossendale residents whilst enhancing a council owned asset.
- 9.2 The funding also fulfils our objective under the Enterprise heading of the Bacup 2040 Masterplan to incorporate digital technology to ensure businesses remain relevant and provide training to keep knowledge current.

No background papers.