

CABINET

Lancaster – Public Realm 9 December 2008

Report of Corporate Director (Regeneration)

PURPOSE OF REPORT				
To advise that the NorthWest Development Agency has offered funding for the Council to prepare detailed design proposals to enhance streets and places in the city centre that are its priorities for improvement and to seek authority to proceed.				
Key Decision	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Non-Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Referral from Cabinet Member
Date Included in Forward Plan	27 th November 2008			
This report is public				

RECOMMENDATIONS OF COUNCILLOR BRYNING

- (1) That the Head of Financial Services is authorised to amend the Council's General Fund Revenue Budget for 2008/09 and that proposed for 2009/2010 to provide for expenditures in preparing design proposals for the city centre subject to these expenditures being fully funded by grant income from the NorthWest Development Agency (NWDA) up to a maximum of £90,000 in costs
- (2) That, to meet NWDA programming requirements, Cabinet delegates to the Corporate Director (Regeneration) authority to select and commission consultants for the required design work after a proper competitive process in accordance with Council procedures.
- (3) That the Head of Planning Services to report to Cabinet on the design options prepared and subsequent public consultation into these in order that Cabinet can then select its preferred options.
- (4) That Cabinet notes there are issues concerning the management of traffic on adopted highways within the pedestrian zone that may require resolution before any designs can be finalised and request a further report on this be submitted to Cabinet as early as possible in the New Year.

1.0 Introduction

Context

- 1.1 The city centre with its history and enviable townscape, is a major economic driver for the District and very important for employment. Lancaster's historic centre is undoubtedly the District's foremost heritage asset and, as the District's main retail and business area, it is a critical driver in the local economy.
- 1.2 Despite its undoubted qualities though the centre to an extent under performs in both economic and social terms. The main reasons for this are that the retail offer is not as good as it should be, heritage assets are under-exploited, some historic buildings are deteriorating and critically, most public places in the city centre are not of sufficient quality.
- 1.3 The condition and appearance of many streets and spaces is poor. There are few places where it is pleasant for people of all ages to stop and rest or linger a little. There is little in the public realm to uplift people and fire imaginations. Key spaces are fragmented and disconnected so pedestrian visitors can find it very difficult to read the geography of the centre and to locate its key features and attractions. Further, vehicles often compromise pedestrian accessibility within the pedestrian zone and pedestrian movements outside are constrained by traffic.
- 1.4 The geography of the centre can also be quite hard to comprehend. Despite magnificent achievements such as the Millennium Bridge it can feel that the centre has turned its back to the river. St George's Quay is quite difficult to find. Signage to / from the railway station is poor. During the daytime the Castle area quite rightly has a quite, more reflective feel to it than does the commercial centre nearby but at night the Castle precincts are less inviting and pedestrian connections to the centre are drab and quite poorly illuminated.
- 1.5 All this shapes peoples' perceptions of the city centre and in turn is a drag on business investment, customer footfall and expenditures. This undermines the efforts of many organisations, both public and private, to help sustain the centre. The Council has a key role, for example through its planning services to try to ensure that any change in the fabric of the historic centre is only for the better and through its street cleansing services. To date, however, the Council has not sought to drive any wide scale uplift.

Project development

- 1.6 The Council's City Centre Strategy (2003) describes how rejuvenating public realm is integral to what is required to develop and grow the centre and makes detailed proposals.
- 1.7 Public interest in the condition of the centre has latterly focused largely on Market Square. In 2006 Cabinet instructed that officers seek peoples' views on how Market Square might be improved. A consultation in March / April 2007 established a strong consensus that the Square needed improving. The Council at this time, however, could not make significant progress with this.

- 1.8 However, the context was developing. The NWDA produced a Position Statement in March 2007 for Historic Towns and Cities in England's Northwest. This identifies Lancaster as a growth city where there is a particular potential to raise economic performance by exploiting its outstanding heritage assets. It recognises that investment into Lancaster makes a strong fit to the Regional Economic Strategy and identifies spatial priorities for investment that are consistent with the Council's aspirations as stated in the City Centre Strategy. The Position Statement suggests a geographic scope and focus for activity extending from the canal corridor west through the commercial centre and via the Castle Quarter down to the historic quayside.
- 1.9 Complementary to this, the adopted Lancaster District Core Strategy (July 2008) identifies the centre as a Regeneration Priority Area. It advocates that via design-led regeneration the centre should be strengthened as a shopping destination, enhanced as a historic city visitor attraction with a restored and enhanced environment, as the District's main centre for office based employment and as a cultural centre.
- 1.10 Close alignment of the regional, NWDA and Council policy positions now makes prospects for bringing forward and delivering public realm improvement projects in the city centre very much more encouraging. With the encouragement of the NWDA officers have focused on a set of projects grounded in the community's and the Council's strategic ambitions. To identify priorities officers first reviewed the strategic policy context including the City Centre Strategy and this work informed preparation of an application to NWDA for £90 k of funding to prepare to a detailed design stage a series of projects to upgrade public spaces in the city. NWDA has now approved the funding application for design work, subject to contract. This report details the proposal and sets out the options by which the Council might proceed.

2.0 Proposal Details

- 2.1 As a preliminary stage officers will prepare a Design Code for public realm in the city centre as a whole. This be founded in an analysis to understand contexts, constraints, needs and opportunities. The Code should set parameters for future change to public realm and help ensure that change is for the better. The code should identify the palette of surfacing materials and treatments that will be acceptable, identify appropriate types / styles of signage, street furniture and lights (including columns and fixings) and cover the planting and management of street trees, Finally, the Code should set objectives for how specific public spaces might be improved and thereby provide the framework for undertaking the design work now proposed.
- 2.2 Subsequent to this designs will be prepared for a range of locations in the centre. The locations proposed are all within the strategic axis as proposed by the NWDA in its 2007 Position Statement. Improvement projects for these and improvement of these would fit to the City Centre Strategy, best help address deficiencies in the centre and give most support to the centre's heritage and retail offers. The locations with outline aims for these are as follows:

Location	Outline aims
Market Square	Transformation into a civic space that is definitively the heart of the city
Market Street	This main route between the commercial centre and the Castle area is poorly lit and dingy at night and could be transformed using innovative lighting techniques
Sun St Square / Sun Street	To enhance these historic places only yards from Market Street so they offer a much more enriching experience
Horseshoe Corner	Footfall is highest here and with sensitive interventions this could be made into a real place
Upper and Lower Church Street, Frances Passage and Gage Street	These key linking routes are all to a varied extent in poor condition and less inviting than they should be and warrant improvement.
Castle Hill and Castle Park	The setting to the Castle here could be improved through sensitive restoration of historic features, improving certain surfacings and addressing signage and other elements that clutter and despoil views.
Castle and Quay greenspace	The green areas of Vicarage Meadow and Quay Meadow feel half forgotten and while are of undoubted quality much more could be made of these to the benefit of local people and visitors alike and to make better connections down to the historic Quay.
Castle precincts signage	To make the area and links to adjacent areas more legible for visitors

- 2.3 The design work will have two stages:
- 2.4 Stage 1 Preparation of outline design options in the form of pictorial visions, supported by provisional cost estimates; stakeholder and community engagement
- 2.5 Stage 2 Selection of preferred options and detailed design work, specification and costing work on these.
- 2.6 The NWDA requires as a condition of its funding that the Council procures expert external consultants to undertake the design work itself. The procurement must be competitive in accordance with Council procedures but the NWDA does further require that the selection be made from its panel consultants. The Council would lead stakeholder and community engagement. Selection of preferred options would be for the Council.

2.7 The following project programme is proposed:

Activity	Programming (end date)
Confirm parameters for the project	05/01/09
Issue project brief for landscape design services and invite tenders	05/01/09
Complete Design Code	31/01/09
Appoint an appropriate multi-disciplinary private sector consultancy for landscape design services	31/01/09
Produce pictorial visions as design options	30/03/09
Undertake community and stakeholder engagement on design options over two weeks in early April	15/04/09
Agree and confirm preferred design options	15/05/09
Detail up and cost preferred options	30/06/09

2.8 Subject otherwise to the ongoing effects of the “credit crunch” and economic recession, the Council should be well placed to deliver discrete improvement projects just as soon as delivery funding might be secured (on a project-by-project basis and as determined by the Council’s priorities). Project works will best be funded from a mix of sources including hopefully NWDA but also perhaps from the Council (via its Capital programme) and via any S106 planning contributions.

2.9 At this early stage it is envisaged that the Council will want to make the improvement of Market Square its top priority for delivery.

3.0 Details of Consultation

3.1 The project will involve a significant element of community engagement given the designs will inform projects that will have a lasting impact on the public realm and many people and organisations will rightly want to contribute to options selection. The engagement should involve exhibition of options in the centre itself and will require innovative promotion to generate the maximum interest.

3.2 Officers have consulted with the NWDA and the County Council, its key partners in preparing the project proposal. NWDA has a significant role given it is providing all funding for the design stage and further, officers anticipate that the Council will be heavily reliant on the NWDA for future delivery funding.

3.3 The County Council has a key role in that as Highway Authority it is responsible for the management and maintenance of the adopted highway and a majority of the locations proposed for the design work are within the highway or impact upon it. County Council officers have advised that in principle they welcome the City Council bringing forward this project subject to all design proposals having proper regard to highways considerations. One such consideration is the management of traffic on adopted highway within the pedestrian zone and it is apparent that there are issues concerning this that will need to be resolved before any designs affecting these are finalised.

4.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

4.1 The options are:

- (i) to proceed as set out in this report and prepare designs for the locations proposed, utilising the funding available from the NWDA
- (ii) not to proceed and decline the funding offer from NWDA

4.2 A comprehensive policy review and close liaison with the NWDA informs Option 1 and its priorities for design work. Option 2 would lose for the Council any opportunity to drive forward improvements to public realm in the city centre.

5.0 Officer Preferred Option (and comments)

5.1 Option 1 is preferred given what is proposed fits very well to the Council's policy framework and has won the funding support of the NWDA and the encouragement of the Highway Authority

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 This proposal is entirely consistent with Council and NWDA aspirations for the City. It presents the Council with a significant opportunity to drive forward improvement in the quality and attraction of the historic and commercial centre of Lancaster to increase vitality and footfall thereby helping sustain the centre and strengthen its economic performance.

RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK

The proposal fits well to the Council's policy framework, specifically the City Centre Strategy (2003) and Core Strategy (2008).

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

The views and needs of disabled people and community safety considerations will be factored for in preparing design proposals. The Design Code will direct the use of as sustainable materials as possible and practice in sustainable construction will inform the detailed design proposals. There are no implications otherwise for diversity and no implications for Human Rights and Rural Proofing.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The total expenditure of £90K outlined in the body of the report will be split £25K in 2008/09 and £65K in 2009/10 and will be fully funded by NWDA grant. There will be no impact on the Council's financial resources. Expenditure will be incurred and claimed for in arrears as is

normal in these situations, however the amount involved can be contained easily within daily cashflow limits.

Members should note that there will be no clawback of grant if the Council is unable to do the subsequent works as this is a standalone study, i.e. the Council will need to put a further bid for funding to the NWDA subject to the outcome of the design proposals.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments to add.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments to make

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Planning Services Files

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