

ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO AND DECISION OF LITTLEHAMPTON REGENERATION SUBCOMMITTEE ON 13 JUNE 2019

PART A : REPORT

SUBJECT:

Progress report on the delivery of the enhanced public realm scheme in Littlehampton town centre

REPORT AUTHOR: Caroline Gosford

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EXTN: 37854

PORTFOLIO AREA: Economy Group

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

In April 2019, the Coastal Communities Fund awarded Littlehampton £2,452,295 to deliver the first two phases of the approved enhanced public realm scheme in Littlehampton town centre. This report provides an overview of the scheme and progress to date.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Littlehampton Regeneration Sub-Committee notes the report.

1. BACKGROUND:**1.1 Introduction**

1.1.1. Improvement of the town centre public realm is viewed as an important issue for the town, and it features in many policy and strategy documents for Littlehampton as explained below.

1.1.2. Littlehampton Coastal Communities Team: Economic Plan 2017 - Three key objectives identified by this stakeholder group:

1. To improve the public realm in the town centre and connectivity between the town centre, riverside and seafront.
2. To enhance public realm on the riverside, seafront and adjoining greens.
3. Increase private sector investment in the town, increasing retail prosperity.

1.1.3. This project meets Objective 1, and will plan to deliver Objective 3. Objective 1 is covered by the wider public realm scheme incorporating five phases. In terms of Objective 2, the riverside public realm has already been radically uplifted as part of a £22m Environment Agency flood defence scheme which has won landscape awards. Additionally there are existing consulted-upon and approved public realm designs for the seafront and adjoining greenspace.

1.1.3. Littlehampton Vision Masterplan 2004 sets the key principles - “To build upon on the Town’s distinctive character, Littlehampton will be a successful, competitive and connected town. The town will provide an attractive, vibrant and safe place to live, work and visit with an excellent range of facilities for all ages and groups.”

1.1.4. This project contributes in particular to the objectives to improve connectivity, create feature points and places around the town and to better utilise Littlehampton’s natural assets. “The legibility of the town relates to how easily people understand what opportunities a town centre has to offer in terms of uses and spatial relationships. Movement around the town centre is fundamental to the success of Littlehampton. Destinations, either buildings or places, should be created around the town centre to encourage movement, particularly between the retail core and civic area, riverside (East and West Banks) and the seafront.”

1.1.5. Waterfront Strategy 2009 highlighted three distinct but disconnected areas which require interconnecting to improve the visitor pedestrian experience. These are the Town Centre, Seafront and the Riverside.

1.1.6. Wayfinding Signage Plan implemented in 2014, incorporating the above 3 areas of the town to improve the connectivity of pedestrian movement in Littlehampton. This piece of work delivered the installation of new Monolith directional signage around the town, riverside and seafront.

1.1.7. 9 Big Ideas for Littlehampton 2015 This defined ways to enhance the existing routes to improve linkages and connectivity between the Town Centre, Seafront and Riverside based on workshop feedback. This strategy plan formed the basis for improving pedestrian movement across the town to enhance the overall experience for the local community and visitors to the area.

1.1.8. Littlehampton Neighbourhood Plan 2014 Vision is as follows: ‘To fundamentally improve the economic, environmental, and social wellbeing of individuals and communities in the town, particularly those in the most deprived areas. To enhance, improve and protect existing community infrastructure and propose new where appropriate, that will deliver excellent local and accessible facilities to all of the Littlehampton population’. The improvements to the public realm meet this vision.

1.2 Design Phase

1.2.1 During the design phase in 2016, the public, council officers and Members from all 3 tiers of local government, stakeholders and traders were all fully involved and engaged in the design process so their local knowledge could be used to greatest effect. The design process started with a walking tour with key stakeholders to identify the main issues in each area of the town centre, and the approved designs mitigate for, and where possible resolve the identified issues.

1.2.2. A widely publicised 3 week public consultation was conducted on the concept designs which were adapted as a result of consultation, and put forward for formal approvals. The public consultation showed overwhelming support for the public realm improvements from both the public and traders as shown below:

- 'A design reflecting Littlehampton's maritime heritage and history' (87%)
- 'A restrained colour palette to reflect the seaside' (80%)
- 'The use of paving to provide subtle cues of the seaside' (79%)
- 'Referencing natural patterns to provide a timeless identity' (79%)
- 'Details that reflect boat building and craftsmanship' (76%)
- 'The use of Tamarisk trees; a quintessential seaside tree' (73%).
- 'Creating spaces' (94%)
- 'Celebrating the arrival experience' (88%)
- 'A special shopping and dining' (88%)
- 'Creating a sequential experience' (81%)
- "Less is more" (79%)
- 'Slowing traffic' (72%)

1.2.3. The public realm designs were approved by West Sussex County Council's Joint Eastern Area Committee as the local highways authority. They were also approved by Arun DC through Littlehampton Regeneration Sub Committee on 6th July 2016 (which included many Littlehampton Town Council Councillors) and by Full Council in July 2016. The same report received approval to deliver the scheme in phases as funding becomes available, to seek external funding to deliver the scheme, and put in hand relevant legal agreements with West Sussex CC (Section 278 Agreement) and Network Rail (to improve their land).

1.3 Evidence of need and objectives

1.3.1. The existing town centre public realm is dated and the layout restricts how it can be used for events. This is in contrast with the new high quality riverside public realm and iconic and quirky seafront structures like the Longest Bench and Stage by the Sea. Pedestrian routes from the station towards the town centre are not obvious and road crossings are tricky.

1.3.2. The main objectives of the public realm scheme are to improve connectivity between town, riverside and seafront, create safer and more intuitive pedestrian routes around the town and attract more, and higher-spending visitors to the town to stay longer and spend more to sustain and grow the town's businesses.

1.3.3. The town has been losing ground compared to local competition especially since the departure of Waitrose from the town centre to nearby Rustington. This is evidenced by the steady rise in vacancy rates to the current level of over 10% which is higher than the national average, and the ongoing anti-social and low-level criminal behaviour that is blighting the town. National retail trading conditions are the harshest in living memory as evidenced by the demise of dozens of high street chains. National policy states that town centres need to adapt to becoming less about retail and more service-orientated to maintain footfall and spend, and to offer a better visitor experience to compete in the new online world. While small scale initiatives are tackling these issues such as shop front grants and retail training, this transformational project requires large scale investment.

1.4 Applications for funding

1.4.1. In 2016, an application for c £5m was made to Coastal Communities Fund to deliver the entire town centre public realm scheme. Unfortunately the application was

unsuccessful.

1.4.2. An Expression of Interest was submitted by the Council to the Coastal Communities Fund in 2018 for funding to deliver two phases of the approved four phase shovel-ready public realm scheme for the town centre. The Council was invited to submit a full bid.

1.4.3. The bid was made by the Council on behalf of Littlehampton Coastal Communities Team, a multi-agency partnership tackling town centre issues. The Council will be the Accountable Body and responsible for adherence to grant terms and conditions.

1.4.4. The bid was awarded the full sum requested of £2,452,295 in April 2019. It was one of the larger awards made by Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for this round of funding. The funding is to deliver the public realm works and revenue costs for associated staffing to deliver this project. The public realm enhancements are for the area of the High Street precinct and pavements/junctions to the railway station where a new and attractive gateway to the town is planned. An Illustrative Plan of the scheme is attached as Appendix A.

1.4.5. The Council delivered a similar successful public realm improvement scheme in Bognor Regis town centre which has provided the evidence of economic growth to underpin the successful bid. The overall aim of the Coastal Communities Fund is to improve the economic fortunes of seaside towns through the creation of new jobs and new businesses and attracting more visitors. In Bognor Regis this has translated into reduced vacancy rates, investment in the improvement of business premises, attraction of higher quality new businesses, increased footfall and turnover, all of which are a proxy for new jobs. Additionally it was the catalyst for major investment in the railway station which it is hoped to replicate in Littlehampton.

1.4.6. In March 2019, Cabinet approved a report which endorsed the submission of the bid to the Coastal Communities Fund and authorised the grant spend and delivery of the public realm project.

2. PROPOSAL(S):

2.1. Since the formal grant award letter, officers have been working to liaise with key stakeholders and recruit the professional team to deliver the project

2.2. A meeting has recently been held with Southern Rail (Govia Thameslink) to discuss the plans around the station. These involve modifying the car park entrance for ease of access and creating a pleasant gateway arrival area to replace the narrow pavement currently available while retaining taxi parking. They are fully supportive and appreciative of the planned enhancements. They plan to work up an enhancement scheme for the railway station itself involving their staff and the public.

2.3. A meeting has recently been held with Sussex Police CCTV expert to look at re-siting the camera and tower at the top of the precinct to enable the key sight line toward station and south of precinct to be opened up. The proposed new site within a lamp column on the other side of the road will provide better coverage than existing, and it is also proposed to add a new camera at the junction with Duke Street to provide better coverage within the precinct (there is funding within the budget for this). This enhanced

coverage will be valuable in tackling the pervasive anti-social and criminal behaviour that the town is currently suffering from.

2.4. Plans are being made to temporarily relocate the Friday and Artisan markets for the duration of the works.

2.5. Independent research surveys with the public and traders have been commissioned to create a “before” baseline. The public survey is aimed at a mix of residents and visitors and asks questions about how often people visit the town centre, how long they stay for and how much they spend on what. The trader survey asks about the current trading conditions and their views about the town centre, and their level of confidence for the future and likelihood of employing more staff. This will be repeated 2 years after the project is complete to enable the impact of the project to be measured. The researchers will be in town in June 2019.

2.6. A Communications Plan is being drawn up to ensure all relevant parties are kept up to date with the project. This is particularly pertinent for traders and it is planned that they will be able to remain open for business throughout the works which will be delivered in small sections.

2.7. Additional officer liaison meetings are proposed with Littlehampton Town Council as they are a key partner in this project.

2.8. Once a professional team is in place, detailed designs can be completed and the construction project tendered. When the tenders are returned, more information will be available about the delivery methodology i.e. sequencing and phasing of the works and this will be communicated when it is available to all relevant parties.

3. OPTIONS:

To note the contents of the report
OR Not to note the contents of the report

4. CONSULTATION:

Has consultation been undertaken with:	YES	NO
Relevant Town/Parish Council	X	
Relevant District Ward Councillors	X	
Other groups/persons (please specify) Public, WSCC JEAAC, traders, Traders Association, stakeholders	X	

5. ARE THERE ANY IMPLICATIONS IN RELATION TO THE FOLLOWING COUNCIL POLICIES: (Explain in more detail at 6 below)	YES	NO
Financial	X	
Legal	X	
Human Rights/Equality Impact Assessment		

Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime & Disorder Act		
Sustainability		
Asset Management/Property/Land	X	
Technology		
Other (please explain)		

6. IMPLICATIONS:

Financial: Oversight and management of grant fund monies.

Legal: Possible Section 278 Agreement with West Sussex County Council required.

An exchange of letters with Southern Rail/Network Rail is required to enable the Council to work on, and improve their land outside the railway station.

Asset Management: Ongoing maintenance of replaced bins and new benches and trees.

7. REASON FOR THE DECISION:

These improvements support the strategic vision for the town centre and the regeneration of Littlehampton

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Appendix A – Illustrative Plan

Previous reports

- [Littlehampton Regeneration Sub Committee minutes](#) July 2016
- [Full Council minutes](#) July 2016
- [Cabinet minutes](#) March 2019