

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 23rd February 2016
Report of: Executive Director of Economic Growth
Subject/Title: Congleton Public Realm Enhancements
Portfolio Holder: Cllr D Brown, Highways
Cllr D Stockton, Regeneration and Assets

1. Report Summary

- 1.1 As the third largest town in Cheshire East, Congleton is key to the economic prosperity of the Borough. A planned 38% increase in housing provision demonstrates that Congleton is a place where people wish to live and plans are now needed to enhance the town centre as a place to visit and shop.
- 1.2 In 2011 the Town Council produced and consulted on their Public Realm Strategy. This proposed scheme is the first phase to be considered and seeks to conform with the principles of the local strategy. The scheme is supported through the developing regeneration plan, including planned new LifeStyle Centre and provides a complementary link with the adjacent Bridestones development.
- 1.3 The public realm enhancement aims to maximise the opportunities to grow Congletons' economy by stimulating the physical and economic regeneration of the town centre's retail core which will act as a catalyst for:
 - Increasing commercial investment by developers and occupiers
 - Improving the physical appearance of the town centre, and its connectivity, benefitting residents, visitors and businesses
 - Enhancing the 'offer' of the town to residents and visitors, resulting in increased footfall and retention of local spend
 - Extending dwell time and therefore increasing spending opportunities within the local economy
 - Improving the quality of the environment for those who live, work and shop within the town.
- 1.4 The proposed £1m investment to deliver the concept is shown in Appendix A and requires junction enhancements and improved local environment. The existing footways through Bridge Street would be integrated into the scheme and linked to the rest of the town centre. It is proposed that implementation of the scheme would be through the Council's Highway Services Contract.

1.5 The scheme proposes creative design features, lighting and street furniture to add interest to the town to create a space people would want to use and dwell in. An area adjacent to Moody St and High Street is intended to be a flexible space for local events. Overall decluttering through the pedestrianised area will visually improve the street, with minimal cost; help support the surface improvements and streetscape features to create a distinct identity for Congleton

2 Recommendation

2.1 It is recommended that Cabinet

- Endorse the design concept illustrated in Appendix A of this report.
- Give approval to undertake public consultation on the design concept in consultations with the Portfolio Holders for Highways and Regeneration and Assets.
- Delegate to the Head of Strategic Infrastructure, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Highways and Regeneration and Assets, approval for officers to develop this scheme through to construction, including any future revisions to the design, subject to sufficient support for the scheme following Public Consultation.
- Give approval to procure the works through the Council's Highway Services Contract, subject to them securing best value through market testing.
- Note the programme for this scheme.
- Delegate to the Head of Strategic Highways in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Highways and Regeneration and Assets, the details of a post opening scheme monitoring and benefits realisation report.

3. Other Options Considered

3.1 Five variations for the proposed scheme have been investigated, all centred around material quality and scheme extents. The strategy document, which was consulted on in 2011 by the Town Council, included improvements either end of Bridge Street and the existing pedestrianised area.

3.2 The variants considered were:

- Improvements at the Market St / High Street junction; referred to as Festival Square; along with enhancements and replacement of the materials throughout the pedestrainised area and the adjacent side streets. This created a visually shortened , and unimproved, Bridge Street which was necessary to allow for 'tie in' for any subsequent phases of the strategy.
- Improvements at the Swan Bank / Bridge Street Street junction along with enhancements and replacement of the materials throughout the pedestrainised area and the adjacent side streets. This created a visually shortened retail area and exceeded the budget .
- Improvements at both the Festival Square and Swan Bank / Bridge Street junctions. This created a disparate and unrelated improvement for the Town Centre
- Deep Cleaning of the surfacing throughout the pedestrainised area and the adjacent side streets, replacement of the street planters, improved drainage planting and lighting scheme. This variant would not have delivered the aspirations of the Public Realm Strategy with no associated benefits for the town and its local economy.
- The proposed scheme is for junction improvements at each end of the pedestriansied area,integrated and connected by footway improvements, design features, improved lighting and street scene decluttering through Bridge Street. The cost estimate for this is £1.03m

3.3 It is recognised that to realise the Public Realm benefits the finish must be higher quality as this is the first element of the strategy and sets the standard to which all others will aspire. A mid range cost material finish has been selected on the basis that this will give a visually improved Public Realm which is maintainable within existing budgets .

3.4 New appropriately designed surfacing will reduce the need for future maintenance, introduction of low power LED lighting, and improvements to drainage will also make a positive contribution to the highways revenue budgets.

3.5 It is considered that doing nothing is not an option, due to the high public expectation that this scheme will be delivered, the need to undertake an element of highway maintainance anyway and the need to support the local economy of Congleton.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Improvements to the core shopping area of Congleton will help attract inward investment and thereby maintain higher occupancy of vacant retail units. Congleton has the third highest rate of vacant retail units in Cheshire East of 13% against a Cheshire East average of 11.2%.
- 4.2 The intersection areas at the junctions of Mills St /Swan Bank and Market St /Moody St /Bridge St /High St (referred to as Festival Square) will create high quality multi-use spaces. The vision is for Festival Square to be used for occasional markets, festivals, street activity and performances. It will provide a flexible space that will act as a focus for the town centre. Features such as a mounting post for the Christmas tree, retained post boxes and cycle stands make the space not only aesthetically pleasing and suitable for larger gatherings but also functional on a day to day basis.
- 4.3 It is intended that the Swan Bank area will create a connection that enhances the pedestrian experience and contributes towards creating a more accessible town. This area comprises mainly of a one way street running up from Mountbatten Way into the conservation area. It will form part of a shopping circuit linking the currently outlying retail areas back to the town centre core.
- 4.4 The current pedestrianised area of Bridge Street and Duke Street is an important area for key improvements opportunity. The focus is on improving the space through the removal of the posts, bollards and street clutter. This will create improved views and enhance the appearance of the existing buildings and architectural features. The addition of higher quality street furniture, trees, lighting and surface improvements will create a positive pedestrian environment.
- 4.5 Street furniture is a key part of a town's character. If well designed and positioned it contributes to the town's identity and helps to generate income by welcoming and encouraging visitors to use and stay within the public realm enabling them to focus on the retail offering. The street furniture will complement the sponsored Millennium benches that already exist in the Town.
- 4.6 The need for a well lit public realm, ensures safety and ease of movement around the town, as well as the use of light for aesthetic purposes. Feature lighting will highlight interesting buildings and features, under seat lighting will provide interest at street level and create pools of softer lighting and creative fibre optic lighting will add interest as a design feature. Highway lighting will be designed to support the decluttered space. The lighting will not purely be about function, but it will be an important contribution to the town's unique brand.
- 4.7 The paving of surfaces is an important element that will ground the built form and street furniture of the town - The quality of these horizontal planes will contribute to the overall character and sense of place that ultimately promotes 'Quality of Life' within the immediate locality. The quality and finishes of

materials reflect the nature of the project in respect of the use by the pedestrian, rather than the vehicle user and it will have significant importance in the overall improvements to the town.

- 4.8 A simple planting palette will emphasise the street and space hierarchy within the town centre and will complement the other elements of street furniture, lighting and paving materials. Trees and planting will help to frame views and buildings, cast dappled shade, reduce wind tunnelling and bring an element of the natural environment into the very heart of the town.
- 4.9 A Public Consultation exercise will be needed to assess the support for the scheme, develop design elements and give the Town of Congleton the ability to influence the out turn look and finish of the scheme within the budget available.
- 4.10 The scheme will be procured through the Council's Highway Services Contract. This route will ensure the scheme can be influenced by CEC at critical points as necessary. The Council's Service Provider will be responsible for procuring a contractor to undertake the construction works through a competitive tendering process and will ensure a seamless transition and co-ordination with utility works .

5. Background/Chronology

- 5.1 A Public Realm Strategy document was published by Congleton Town Council in 2011. The Strategy is a progression from the Town Centre Plan (2008), which recommended that a public realm plan be prepared to tie together the range of development sites and economic development opportunities identified.
- 5.2 It provides the guidance for Congleton Town Centre, to ensure there is an integrated strategy in place to improve the quality of the environment. It focuses on 12 projects within 10 character areas which are designed to deliver transformational change within the public realm. A number of the project areas were noted as priority for improvement including the Pedestrianised Area (Bridge Street/ Duke Street/ Little Street) and Festival Square (Junction of High Street/ Bridge Street/ Market Street. These would act as a means of facilitating and promoting further development; setting the standard for the remainder of the town's public realm and would also have the most effect on the physical appearance of the town to visitors and shoppers.
- 5.3 In early 2014 the Council announced that £1million for Public Realm improvements would be made available. In December 2014 CEC reviewed the costings, forming part of the Public Realm Strategy document, for the pedestrianised area and Festival Square. This identified that £1m funding would not be sufficient to support the original level and detail of improvements that the strategy document consulted on.

- 5.4 Throughout 2015 a number of variants were explored, scoped, costed and presented to Congleton Town Council. The current design option is within budget and supported by Congleton Town Council. The Design includes enhancements to either end of the pedestrianised area at both Festival Square and Swan Bank, with footway replacement, streetscene decluttering and improved Public Realm features being introduced in Bridge St to integrate the junctions and avoid them looking disparate and unrelated. An outline plan of the area and improvements is included in Appendix A to this report.
- 5.5 The scheme was endorsed through the TEG and EMB process in January 2016.

6. Wards Affected and Local Ward Members

- 6.1. All Congleton Councillors

7. Implications of Recommendation

7.1. Policy Implications

7.1.1 OUTCOME 1 *Our local communities are strong and supportive*

Congleton is seeking to re-establish itself as an attractive location to work and shop as it is to live, providing a desirable, inclusive, sustainable and distinct Town Centre. The pedestrianised main shopping area is a dated and deteriorating environment and is at the end of its maintenance life.

Undertaking transformative changes to the area is necessary to realise benefits for the town in line with the Council's objectives.

7.1.2 OUTCOME 2 *Cheshire East has a strong and resilient economy*

Improvements to the central shopping area of Congleton will help attract inward investment and thereby maintain higher occupancy of vacant retail units.

7.1.3 OUTCOME 4 *Cheshire East is a green and sustainable place*

The improvement elements for the Town are part of a wider strategy for Congleton which is designed to provide guidance for ensuring that an integrated strategy is in place to improve the quality of the environment for those who live, work and shop within the town.

The elements of the strategy proposed focus on improvements to the Public Realm to support sustainable mode of travel. In terms of cycling Congleton is a popular destination for day cyclists exploring the Peaks and cycling routes are important for tourism throughout Cheshire East. In terms of walking, the town is compact, however, the lack of sufficient crossings and

direct safe routes means that walking is not as common as it potentially could be.

7.1.4 OUTCOME 5 *People live well and for longer*

The use of the street for leisure and recreational purposes will be supported through the application of creative design, street furniture and materials which are sympathetic to the town and environment. A comfortable and stimulating public realm that encourages social interaction requires detailed attention to the structure of a space and the elements it contains. It also requires that the issues of security, public art, street furniture, lighting and signage and so on to be looked at in tandem.

7.2. Legal Implications

7.2.1 The Highway's Services Agreement between the Council and Ringway Jacobs (the Agreement) includes within its scope the planned and reactive improvement to street lighting and public realm associated with the Area Network, including detailed design and planned improvement schemes. When commissioning work under the Agreement the Council needs to be mindful of the contract value. The Estimated Total Value (ETV) of the Agreement has not been exceeded and the work can be procured compliantly through the Agreement. Although the Council can use the Agreement it is not obliged to do so. The contract states that the Council may at its sole discretion ask the Contractor if it is interested in providing these services and that they may be delivered on the basis of the Agreement. There is an express statement that for schemes in excess of £250 000 the Council reserves its right to let schemes to other contractors. Schemes of this value are subject to inclusion on the annual/three year work plan and require approval by the Strategic Board, a board made up of Council officers and Ringway Jacob's officers in equal numbers. The market should be tested to ensure that delivery by Ringway Jacobs provides the Council with best value. If the Agreement is not used the Council will need to undertake a compliant procurement process.

7.2.2 There will be a need to modify parking restrictions in High Street to accommodate the shared space principles area at Festival Square. This will require a separate legal process to be undertaken involving a notification/consultation process. The decision whether to alter the existing restrictions must be taken having due regard to any representations received through that process. These are considerations that will be factored in to the overall delivery of the scheme.

7.2.3 In conducting any consultation the Council must adhere to the following:

- (a) the consultation must take place at a time when the proposals are still at a formative stage;
- (b) the Council must give sufficient reasons for any proposal to permit intelligent consideration and response;
- (c) adequate time must be given for consideration and response;
- (d) the product of the consultation must be conscientiously taken into account in finalising the proposals.

7.3. Financial Implications

7.3.1 A budget of £1.1m is included within the 2015/19 capital programme and approval to spend the budget is subject to the Council's governance arrangements.

£1m will be funded from borrowing and £100k from S106 monies already held

Danebridge - Currently holding £92, 500.61 (Ref 06/1323/FUL)

and

Lowe Avenue/ Townsend Road/Walworths Bank Currently holding £11,000 (Planning reference 30376/3) £701.09 (Planning Reference 30482/3)

Congleton Town Council will take responsibility for the maintenance of all feature lighting , projector operation and maintenance, planting maintenance and street furniture maintenance.

The WiFi zone will be further explored in the preliminary design phase of the project. Consultation with Congleton Town Council will determine whether this will be offered as a 'free to use', but restricted download, service.

7.4. Equality Implications

7.4.1 Consideration will be given to those people with particular mobility and disability issues in the design and features of the proposed scheme.

7.5. Rural Community Implications

7.5.1 None

7.6. Human Resources Implications

7.6.1 None

7.7. Public Health Implications

7.7.1 None

7.8. Other Implications (Please Specify)

7.8.1 None

8. Risk Management

Risk	Management Action
The overall scheme fails to meet expectations of the Public.	Public Consultation Planned
Ground conditions result in additional works being required thus eroding the budget available for feature elements.	Contingency budget set at 15%
Proposed gas works through Congleton are further delayed thus disrupting the programme for the scheme	In dialogue with utility company
Public Consultation revealing lack of support for the revised design concept	Scheme does not progress
Unforeseen price increases in commodities and materials results in insufficient budget being available to deliver the scheme	Contingency budget set at 15%
Reputational risk of delivering a scheme that is phased (Bridge St 'tie in' is a reduced design solution)	Public Consultation to promote the positive aspect of the scheme

9. Programme

Feb 16	Cabinet Report for approval to proceed
Mar	Preparation of engagement materials and stakeholder engagement
April	Public Engagement and feedback
May – Aug	Detailed Design and Tender
Sept / Oct	Award contract
Late 2016 / Early 2017	Construction begins (projected to be 6 month build period)

10. Contact Information

10.1 Contact details for this report are as follows:-

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