

Accept and Spend the accepted Stronger Towns Funding for Greening the City

Decision maker: Cabinet member Infrastructure and transport

Decision date: Monday 23rd January 2023

Classification

Open

Decision type

Non-key

Notice has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 9 (Publicity in Connection with Key Decisions) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

Wards affected

Widemarsh, Greyfriars

Purpose

To approve the acceptance and spend of Stronger Towns £403,655.00 funding to complete delivery of the three elements of the project; community grants, sedum bus shelters, and active travel measures on the Great Western Way in Hereford.

Greening the City aims to improve the appearance, environment and perception of the City of Hereford significantly and will complement, and add value to, a number of current and planned policy initiatives including Hereford City Centre Improvements Project, Hereford City Centre Transport Project, countywide Active Travel Measures and two projects that have received funding as part of the Accelerated Funding phase – e-Bikes and tree planting. These “sense of place” elements will look to change perceptions of the city by introducing significant amounts of greening. This will lead to a more welcoming and unique place to visit and spend time within, leading to increased footfall in the city centre as well as longer dwell times.

The Greening the City project will be delivered within three elements:

- Active Travel Measures on the Great Western Way, between Widemarsh Common and Barton Road;

- Installation of sedum bus shelters at locations identified within the city; this will add to and support the existing roll out programme;
- Community greening grants – these grants will be offered to community groups to undertake greening to areas in need of visual improvement, more greenery or greater biodiversity.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- To accept and spend the £403,655 (capital) of Stronger Towns funding offered by government,**
- Authority is delegated to the Service Director for Highways and Transport in consultation with the Cabinet Member Infrastructure and Transport to make all operational decisions required to complete the implementation of the Stronger Towns, Greening the City project.**

Alternative options

1. Do nothing. Not delivering Greening the City would significantly reduce the budgetary pressure on the overall Towns Fund programme and enable all other Towns Fund projects to proceed - benefiting a wide range of community projects. However, there would be nothing within the Towns Improvement Programme to address the connectivity issues north / south across the city. Communities south of the river would not benefit from improved walking and cycling routes in the city centre.
2. Deliver a wider range of active travel measures as opposed to green infrastructure or signage. Whilst this option would benefit the connectivity elements to the Town Improvement Plan and enable an increased focus on improving the connectivity across the city, this option would detract from the desire to improve green infrastructure and wayfinding elements of the project; these were identified as important within the community consultation completed in preparation for the submission of the outline business case.
3. Deliver a wider range of green infrastructure measures as opposed to active travel measures or signage. Improving the visual appearance of the city through the targeted use of green infrastructure has been identified during the community consultation as a key driver for the project and one of the critical success factors. Adopting this route would detract from the active travel and improved wayfinding elements of the project that were identified as important within the community consultation. In addition, there is uncertainty whether the project would get sufficient private sector engagement to spend the whole budget on green infrastructure. This is particularly an issue when green infrastructure would be required to be located on private sector owned land or buildings.

Key considerations

4. Greening the City aims to improve the appearance, environment and perception of the City of Hereford significantly and will complement, and add value to, a number of current and planned policy initiatives including Hereford City Centre Improvements Project, Hereford City Centre Transport Project, countywide Active Travel Measures and two projects that have received funding as part of the Accelerated Funding phase – e-Bikes and tree planting. These “sense of place” elements will look to change perceptions of the city by introducing significant amounts of greening. This will lead to a more welcoming and unique place to visit and spend time within, leading to increased footfall in the city centre as well as longer dwell times.

5. In addition to making Hereford a more attractive place to live, work, study, visit and invest, the Greening the City project will also emphasise the importance of green interventions to help achieve the targets outlined in the Towns Fund Guidance and in the Council's Carbon Management Plan 2020/2021, Local Transport Plan including the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, The County Plan and the Herefordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.
6. It will generate increased connectivity and accessibility, create an enhanced sense of place, and generate a different visitor offer leading to increased visitor numbers and subsequent increased employment.
7. On 28 June 2022 Cabinet approved that the council submit the Stronger Towns Fund Full Business Cases for the Greening the City project. The Government has subsequently awarded the project £403,655 of funding, this decision now seeks Cabinet Member approval to accept the grant and to spend the remaining £403,655 to deliver the project.

Community impact

8. The Hereford Town Investment Plan and Vision identified the aspiration for Hereford to become a "greener" city, both in terms of its sustainability credentials but also visually through the introduction of new and enhanced green infrastructure.
9. This project recognises that Hereford's Town Investment Plan is a city wide programme informed by extensive stakeholder engagement and is designed to foster stronger community cohesion and pride in place. As mentioned above, a number of interventions are proposed for the city centre, to spread the benefit to all communities within the city.
10. The Greening the City project will deliver a small delegated Community Green Grant scheme, managed by the Council with oversight by the Stronger Towns Board, aimed at addressing areas in the city in need of visual improvement, more greenery or greater biodiversity.
11. Grants will be awarded to groups in the city who can demonstrate direct knowledge of need for intervention and who can better engage their community to engender a sense of pride and ownership. The Council will set parameters for eligibility, reporting and benefit, and provide advice on how interventions can maximise biodiversity gain. Financial capital grant awards will be in the low thousands of pounds enabling multiple groups to benefit.
12. Hereford City Council have been consulted on the design of the overall Greening the City project and on the community grant scheme to ensure there is no duplication with their grant funds and to assist in community engagement, particularly with potential eligible applicant groups.
13. Greening the City aims to improve the appearance, environment and perception of the City of Hereford significantly and will complement, and add value to, a number of current and planned policy initiatives including Hereford City Centre Improvements Project, Hereford City Centre Transport Project, countywide Active Travel Measures and two projects that have received funding as part of the Accelerated Funding phase – e-Bikes and tree planting. These sense of place elements will look to change perceptions of the city by introducing significant amounts of greening. This will lead to a more welcoming and unique place to visit and spend time within, leading to increased footfall in the city centre as well as longer dwell times.
14. In addition to making Hereford a more attractive place to live, work, study, visit and invest, the Greening the City project will also emphasise the importance of green interventions to help achieve the targets outlined in the Towns Fund Guidance and in the Council's Carbon

Management Plan 2020/2021, Local Transport Plan including the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, The County Plan and the Herefordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

15. It will generate increased connectivity and accessibility, create an enhanced sense of place, and generate a different visitor offer leading to increased visitor numbers and subsequent increased employment.

Environmental Impact

16. Greening the City aims to improve the appearance, environment and perception of the City of Hereford significantly and will complement, and add value to, a number of current and planned policy initiatives including Hereford City Centre Improvements Project, Hereford City Centre Transport Project, countywide Active Travel Measures and two projects that have received funding as part of the Accelerated Funding phase – e-Bikes and tree planting. These “sense of place” elements will look to change perceptions of the city by introducing significant amounts of greening. This will lead to a more welcoming and unique place to visit and spend time within, leading to increased footfall in the city centre as well as longer dwell times.
17. In addition to making Hereford a more attractive place to live, work, study, visit and invest, the Greening the City project will also emphasise the importance of green interventions to help achieve the targets outlined in the Towns Fund Guidance and in the Council’s Carbon Management Plan 2020/2021, Local Transport Plan including the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, The County Plan and the Herefordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.
18. Stronger Towns Fund is part of the Government's plan to level up the UK economy.
19. The Environment Bill, which is currently progressing through Parliament, is anticipated to be the most radical environmental legislation to date and includes the introduction of general duty to enhance biodiversity in England and Wales, as well as the introduction of biodiversity net gain for any future developments
20. Department for Transport’s Cycling and Walking Investment Plan (2016); Gear Change 2020; NICE: Physical Activity and the Environment
21. Gear Change – Government’s vision for cycling and walking indicates some of the key drivers and design principles for introducing active travel measures and infrastructure.
22. Support Herefordshire Council's target to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030 by following the Green Infrastructure Plan.
23. The project supports the following County Plan objectives:
24. Delivering improvements to cycle and walking infrastructure within the city, this aspect of the programme will directly address the priority to improve and extend active travel options throughout the county. The project will provide enhanced active travel infrastructure around the city centre by making improvements to the Great Western Way cycle route between Barton Yard (Sainsbury’s) through to Widemarsh Common (EN2).
25. Introducing greenery to the city, through engagement of local community groups will provide a unique and distinctive feature that will differentiate Hereford from other towns and cities as well as boosting biodiversity and bringing a range of other benefits. Through the use of native species this project will directly contribute to the priority - seeking to enhance the county’s biodiversity (EN7). There is an additional cross over with priority EC5 in promoting and supporting tourism. Progressing a program of bus shelter replacements will help to deliver the council's identified Local Transport Plan objectives:

- Provide a good quality transport network for all users – by being proactive in our asset management and by working closely with the public, Highways England and rail and bus.
- Make journeys easier and safer – by making bus and rail tickets compatible and easier to buy and use, by providing 'real time' information at well-equipped transport hubs, by improving attractiveness, legibility and signage to walking and cycling routes and by helping people feel safe during their journeys.

26. The environmental impact of this proposal has been considered through the service specification and includes appropriate requirements on the contractor/delivery partner to minimise waste, reduce energy and carbon emissions and to consider opportunities to enhance biodiversity. This will be managed and reported through the ongoing contract management.

Equality duty

27. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

28. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. Our providers will be made aware of their contractual requirements in regards to equality legislation.

Resource implications

29. The grant award from Stronger Towns has been approved and the tables below explain how the grant is planned to be spent to deliver this project.

Funding streams (indicate whether base budget / external / grant / capital borrowing)	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Future Years	Total
Stronger Towns Capital Grant	0	£35,000	£368,655	0	£403,655
TOTAL	0	£35,000	£368,655	0	£403,655

Estimated capital cost of project	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Future Years	Total
Active Travel Improvements	0	0	£267,500	0	£267,500
Sedum roof bus shelters	0	0	£57,000	0	£57,000
Community greening grant funding	0	£25,000	£15,000	0	£40,000
Project Management fees (internal)	0	£10,000	£12,000	0	£22,000
Contingency	0	0	£17,155	0	£17,155
TOTAL	0	£35,000	£368,655	0	403,655

30. Ongoing maintenance of the works undertaken by the community grants will need to be supported by the community grant applicants, and they will need to be able to demonstrate how this will be achieved within their funding application. There is no ongoing maintenance budget for this element.
31. Sedum bus shelters are maintenance free, but an annual inspection is required. The cost of this will be met within the service budget.
32. Improvements to the Great Western Way as part of the Active Travel Measures will not result in any ongoing maintenance costs, and general maintenance of the route will continue in line with the current arrangements.
33. All procurements carried out under this decision will adhere to the Council Procurement Rules.

Legal implications

34. There are no legal implications arising directly from accepting Stronger Towns funding offered by government. The Authority must comply with any governance decisions.
35. It is anticipated that any funding will be provided by way of a Section 31 ring-fenced grant under the Local Government Act 2003. The Stronger Towns funding offered by government

may have associated requirements and obligations and these will need to be assessed by the Authority.

36. The value of the proposed improvement works is below of the UK's procurement threshold for tendering therefore all procurement processes for the delivery of the project will be compliant with the council's contract procedure rules.
37. The council's legal team will deal with the preparation and completion of the necessary legal documentation.

Risk management

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
<p>If cost overruns occur due to construction or cost inflation of materials, a change of project scope, or design may impact the scale of project delivery.</p>	<p>The Project Management Team are engaged to manage the project and ensure that project scope is kept to the brief. Cost overruns would inevitably then mean that less is delivered but the risk of overall budget being exceeded would be significantly reduced.</p> <p>Soft market testing has occurred on the bus shelters giving real time market cost information, however this was prior to the submission of the full business case to stronger towns and costs may therefore have increased in the meantime.</p>
<p>Demand may not exist for the community grant scheme and if not, this may lead to reduced take up and lack of spend.</p>	<p>Early engagement has taken place with the city council over the communication with potential community groups. A range of responses have been received back all of which are in favour of the scheme and identify specific projects which groups are looking to fund.</p> <p>There is additional engagement of organisations such as Hereford BID, Hereford City Council, Chamber of Commerce, and Hereford in Bloom to establish potential demand.</p>
<p>There are considerable works being undertaken across the city by the council, there are similar interactions or aspirations to Greening the City. It is important that all projects align and complement each other. If not, there is risk that projects duplicate activity.</p>	<p>Project Management resource has been identified for all projects. Project Managers are aware of project alignment.</p> <p>Communication between the various projects leads - HCCI, transport Hub, Quiet Routes, Greening the City - has taken place and alignment considered. Projects are comfortable who is funding what activity.</p>

Stakeholder engagement needs to be well planned and regular. If it is not managed as such, local buy in and engagement may not be achieved.

The project will involve Hereford BID, Hereford in Bloom and Hereford City Council as key stakeholders in the project through a combined Steering Group that brings in their experience and knowledge of the city and the business base. Engagement has already taken place with the City Council and Hereford BID. Specific engagement will be held on the active travel measures when detailed designs have been drawn up and published. This is part of the statutory process. In addition there is ongoing engagement by the council with residents and businesses across the city regarding the production of a city wide masterplan. This includes a focus on transportation and active travel measures.

Procurement activities fail to obtain suitable or interested suppliers for the project elements.

Early soft market testing has occurred for the bus shelter element of the project. It is very likely that suitable suppliers for these elements will come forward. It is unlikely that these suppliers will be found in county. All procurement opportunities under this project will be included on the council's e-tendering portal and will also be advertised on the governments Contracts Finder service, where applicable.

Consultees

38. The City Council have been contacted regarding the project and in particular the community grant element. City Council officers have assisted in the communication and publicity to community groups. They have confirmed that City council officers are available to act in an engagement capacity and communicate with community groups across the city.
39. To assist the demand assessment of the Community Green Grants the City Council sent out an email on behalf of the project team to community groups asking for initial demand and outline expressions of interest. This registered a number of expressions of interest overwhelmingly in support of the Grant concept. Responses have identified several potential areas of activity including:
 - Introducing new green spaces into existing industrial spaces
 - Growing salad and vegetable crops at a community centre
 - Adding planters and living walls to the urban space around a community facility
 - Wildflower and bulb planting in a city park
 - Replacement of felled trees in a number of locations across the city
 - Planting fruit trees to break up densely covered industrial estates.
40. Initial expressions of interest indicating potential demand in the Community Green grant have been received and show a positive response. Organisations responding include: South Wye

Development Trust, Hereford Tree Warden Group, Aylestone Park Association, Hereford Yoga Community Interest Company, Hereford Wildlife Trust, Tower Road Park Group, Hereford in Bloom, Friends of Bartonsham Meadow, Hereford Business Improvement District

41. Once the business case has been agreed and funding approved the Council will work with the Hereford City Council, Hereford Business Improvement District (BID), and groups above to communicate the announcement of the grant funding. Organisations will be encouraged to collaborate to ensure there is no duplication of projects and to maximise the potential creation of green corridors throughout the city. Hereford BID as a representative of over 500 businesses including multiples and independents from a range of sectors. Meetings have been held with the BID specifically around the community grant elements.
42. The BID have also already undertaken small scale community works that will complement and inform the community grants scheme. The lessons learnt from these interventions will be used to inform the development of the community grant criteria.
43. The BID Business Plan highlights projects and priorities that BID members want the BID to lobby for or to develop themselves. The Business Plan includes reference to a cleaner better presented city/public space, and improvements to the appearance and maintenance of the city. The BID business plan and continuation of the BID was voted on by businesses in the BID area and received 81% of votes in favour of continuing with the BID arrangements and delivering the Business Plan.
44. Several partners identified in the above list could be directly involved in the project delivery. The council will consider setting up a project consultative group formed from organisations in the list above, the function of this group would be to continue to provide community feedback and engagement. Whilst the strategic intent and ambition will be broadly set out by the council, representative views will be sought on the detailed delivery – for example, the proposed implementation of green infrastructure – the appropriate mix of species – the best locations for interventions.
45. Throughout the design stage of the active travel measures on the Great Western Way, a specific communication plan will be developed in order to ensure that local businesses, community groups and residents are kept informed of the works.
46. Installation of sedum bus shelters is in addition to existing roll out, and the location of these shelters has been identified in consultation with the council's Transport team and the cabinet member for transport and infrastructure.

Appendices

None

Background papers

None identified

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Governance	John Coleman	Date 20/12/2022
Finance	Karen Morris	Date 10/01/2023
Legal	Patricia Haywood	Date 12/01/2023
Communications	Luenne Featherstone	Date 16/12/2022
Equality Duty	Carol Trachonitis	Date 16/12/2022
Procurement	Lee Robertson	Date 14/12/2022
Risk	Kevin Lloyd	Date 19/12/2022

Approved by	Ross Cook	Date 12/01/2023
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