

REFURBISHMENT OF HEREFORD CITY CENTRE

Report By: Director of Adult and Community Services

Wards Affected

Central.

Purpose

1. To consider the process that was undertaken in respect of the refurbishments to Hereford City Centre.

Financial Implications

2. None.

Background

3. The Council is committed to the upgrading and refurbishment of the Hereford City Centre and allocated a budget of £2,000,000 for this work in April 2005. The current phase of work is the refurbishment of High Town, and this follows on from the completion of work in Eign Gate and High Street. Completion of High Town will be followed by other areas of the city centre depending on the balance of the budget available, priorities assigned, and the estimated refurbishment costs.
4. Officers started work on the project with the Council's consultants, Owen Williams, in May 2005. Work started with a definition of the requirements for the city centre, based largely upon the work done for the City of Living Crafts report. The authors of this report had consulted widely to obtain public views on what was required from the centre and what changes they would like to see. The underlying message was that the public wanted to see less clutter around the city centre and more use made of the space available, for events and entertainment. Based on this requirement, Owen Williams, and their sub-consultants at the time, RAA Architects, developed detailed designs and costings for the refurbishment.
5. Extensive consultation on the purpose of the refurbishment took place in parallel with the development of designs, leading to the first public consultation exercise from 22nd to 29th October 2005. This initial consultation with the public concentrated on the features in the design rather than full details. This was due to the complexity of presenting multiple options to the public covering different areas of the city centre using different paving patterns, lighting, street furniture, planting etc. This approach recognised that a second round of consultation on detailed issues would be required once the more general layouts had been agreed.
6. The October consultation resulted in 259 written responses. There was a preference for one option, which was also supported by other consultees including Hereford City Council, and this was taken forward to check its practicality and produce detailed designs in readiness for tendering the work in February 2006. The tender documents left open the details of street furniture and lamp columns to be provided so that these aspects could be subject to a further round of consultation in February. The need for

the contractor to stop work for the duration of the Three Choirs Festival was included in the contract. The start date for refurbishment work in High Town was chosen to follow the May Fair, to make maximum use of the summer months when the weather could be expected to be favourable.

7. A public consultation on street furniture took place from 10th to 18th February 2006. This consultation produced a good response, with 611 written responses received. These responses provided a very clear steer that some general design points which had been taken forward from Eign Gate were not wanted in High Town. The use of stainless steel was considered too cold, and the dual column lamp column design was particularly disliked. The Project Board and Cabinet Members involved agreed that in the face of such clear views the furniture designs should be revisited. A landscape architect firm, Camlin Lonsdale, was employed to take the results of consultation into account while ensuring that the overall look of High Town would be coherent and not a combination of differing styles.
8. The contract for High Town refurbishment was awarded to Wrekin Construction in April 2006, and work started in High Town on 8th May 2006. On 4th May the architects made a presentation to Cabinet Members on design principles for street furniture and lamp columns. At this point specific street furniture and lamp columns were not identified but the principles of wooden slatted benches with arms and backs, and multi-purpose lamp columns was agreed.
9. Since May the work in High Town has generally proceeded on schedule. Retailers have been kept informed of progress by regular bulletins, and all shops affected by the work have been visited by the construction team to agree the fine details for completing work outside shop windows and doorways. No shops have lost any trading time as a result of the work, and in a number of cases the construction team has gone to extra efforts to help retailers, for example in speeding up work at the top of Bewell Street to minimise the impact on local traders. The size of individual phases was adjusted to enable construction to cease at the end of Phase 2 so that High Town could be left in a good state for the Three Choirs Festival, with no contractors materials on view. The organisers of the Festival were kind enough to write to the Hereford Times expressing their gratitude for this. The project team also liaised with the Parks Department regarding the planters provided by Hereford in Bloom to avoid compromising Hereford's chances of winning an award. It is pleasing to note that Hereford did indeed secure a gold award for Britain in Bloom.
10. The design, commissioning, production and delivery of street furniture has been proceeding in parallel with the paving work. These items will be installed as a work package before the end of the scheme in mid-November, and will require some small areas in High Town to be fenced off as the work progresses. This last phase of work around the Old House will also introduce improvements to the original design that have been suggested by the new architects, to simplify the build process, provide a more coherent design throughout the city centre, and enable the scheme to be more easily extended to other areas. "Heritage pathways" are planned as an enhancement to the High Town street scape with the path, highlighting the entrance to Capuchin Lane and identifying areas of Hereford that can be found beyond the entrance, should be delivered and installed during the current phase. The remaining paths will be installed in the New Year, probably when the contractors return for the next phase of work.
11. The opening ceremony for the refurbishment of High Town will take place on 21st November 2006, and be carried out by the Chairman of the Council. By that time the

detailed design and costing exercise for Widemarsh Street and Bewell Street will be complete and the next area to be refurbished in 2007 will be confirmed. Every effort will be made to coordinate work in the city to minimise the impact on traders and the public.

Recommendation

THAT, subject to any comments that Members may wish to make, the report be noted.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- None identified.