

Key Decision Required:	Yes	In the Forward Plan:	Yes
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CABINET

14 JULY 2017

REPORT OF HEAD OF COMMERCIALISATION, SEAFRONTS & PARKING PORTFOLIO HOLDER

A.7 PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENTS - MILLENNIUM SQUARE, WALTON-ON-THE-NAZE

(Report prepared by Ian Taylor)

PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To seek approvals for public realm improvements to the Millennium Square, Walton-on-the-Naze including funding from the Regeneration and Growth Budget.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Millennium Square located within the High Street Car Park, Walton-on-the-Naze was conceived and developed to provide a meeting place for visitors to the town centre and a focal point for events.

The original design and concept created a shared area of public space used primarily for car parking, but which could also be used for local events on an ad hoc basis but the reality is that the product compromised both and did not perfectly meet either of the ambitions.

The current proposal to address is:

- An enhanced and more attractive public area designed to encourage increased use of high quality public realm in the heart of the town centre.
- To provide options for year round outdoor market pitches or other uses of the public area that will also provide more effective year round use of the car parking area.

The specifications for construction, the preferred design and mood board of materials are attached to the report as Appendix A.

- Estimated costs for delivering this project is £90,000. Project costs can be reduced if required or met as outlined in the financial section of the report.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

That Cabinet notes the content of this report and -

- a) Approves the principle of public realm improvements to the Millennium Square Walton-on-the-Naze as outlined in appendix A.**
- b) Authorises the seeking of statutory or other consents and agreements as may be required.**

- c) Authorises a contribution of £50,000 towards delivery of the proposed scheme to be funded from the Regeneration and Growth budget.
- d) Requests that the Head of Public Realm completes design and costing of the project

And subject to a) to d) above -

- e) Authorises the Corporate Director (Operational Services) in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Commercialisation and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration to invite tenders, enter into contracts or commission works by the Engineering Services Team in order to complete the project within the budget and approvals.

PART 2 – IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

DELIVERING PRIORITIES

The Council's Corporate Plan puts community leadership through the delivery of high quality, affordable services at the heart of everything we do. The public realm improvements in this report will support the visitor as well as the local economy, promote local regeneration and make the most of Council assets. The recommendations if adopted will contribute to the following corporate priorities:

- Deliver high quality affordable services
- Local Regeneration
- Deliver a high quality living environment
- Make the most of our assets
- Effective partnership working

FINANCE, OTHER RESOURCES AND RISK

Finance and other resources

The contract value based on the current estimates is likely to be in the region of £150,000. Project costs could be reduced to nearer £90,000 by:

- reviewing the overall size and features of the area of public realm to be constructed;
- using skilled labour from in-house services for groundworks, construction and landscaping.

The cost of materials and incidentals associated with enhancing the public area adjacent to the car park is estimated at £50,000.

The Millennium Square area of the car park and infrastructure associated with the car park such as the car park surface, re lining, exterior seating, signage and some landscaping requires repair and refurbishment due to age and wear and tear. The estimated cost of these works is £40,000.

It is proposed to undertake much needed car park improvements including an enhanced pedestrian entrance from the High Street at the same time as the improvements to the public realm area to deliver useful economies of scale to help meet project costs

Car park maintenance budgets	£40,000
Regeneration and growth contribution	£50,000

The contribution from the regeneration and growth budget will ensure project costs associated with the improved public realm area are met.

A further contribution towards the cost of the work from the DCLG grant awarded to all bidders for the Portas Pilot Town / Town Team Partner bids in 2012 is under consideration between the local Town Council and the Walton Forum. The most likely agreed use for the grant would be to part fund the temporary cover and electricity supply for market stalls.

Risk

There is a perceived risk of loss of car parking revenue associated with the permanent removal of car parking spaces within the current shared space area of the Millennium Square.

However, the car park is not parked to capacity year round and therefore no loss of income is anticipated.

The occasions when the car park is at capacity are primarily during the peak summer season when visitors are able to park elsewhere in Walton-on-the-Naze. Any reduction in car parking revenue from one car park site on these days will be offset by increased revenue on other car parks.

In addition it will be possible to generate direct revenue from hiring the public area on one off occasions and for more permanent or semi-permanent licensable activities.

Other economic benefits are anticipated in terms of increased footfall to the local High Street and longer visiting time within the town centre which in turn serve to support the local economy.

LEGAL

In coming to decisions in relation to management of assets, the Council must act in accordance with its statutory duties and responsibilities. Under case law following Section 120 of Local Government Act 1972, the Council is obliged to ensure that the management of its assets are for the benefit of the district. The current lease for the market provides for the potential for the tenant, Frinton and Walton Town Council to occupy the whole site each Thursday, on Bank holidays and on up to 28 other days per year (by agreement), subject to:

- Paying £7,300 per year,
- Tending District Council using any left-over space for parking,
- The District Council being able to place a Christmas tree and certain other items as long as they don't interfere with the market

Other conditions not directly bearing on the matter at hand

The lease is not secure under the 1954 Act and ends on 31 March 2018.

The lease terms could be waived or varied with agreement from the Frinton and Walton Town Council or the District Council could wait for the lease to terminate by expiry of the term in a few months.

The proposal adds to rather than detracts from the attractiveness of the current arrangement which should resolve some technical issues. The revised area will be available for use continuously. Discussions on renewal or termination are now due and it may be prudent to consider with Head of Property Services details of the lease and how we could amend it to highlight benefits to both the District and Town Councils.

The land is subject to a restrictive covenant from 1979 which prohibits use for entertainments or any activity that might be a nuisance. The dominant land is the then vicarage. It has not yet been determined whether the dominant property remains in the same ownership or if the current owners would wish to enforce or waive the restriction insofar as it may affect the proposals for the enhanced public area. It may be more appropriate to secure title indemnity than seek agreement with an unknown owner on unknown terms to hold unknown events.

All planning applications made by the Council or on its land must be authorised by decision, this report and recommendations, if approved, provide the authority for a planning application to be submitted under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 if required.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Consideration has been given to the implications of the recommendations proposed and any significant issues are set out below.

The proposals, if agreed, will support the Council's vision to put community leadership at the heart of everything it does, supporting the improvement of town centres, seafronts and Council assets in line with tourism and inward investment strategies and policies helping to reduce ongoing revenue budgets while delivering key services.

Consultation/Public Engagement – The proposal has been consulted upon extensively with local ward members, Frinton and Walton Town Council and the Walton Forum. The proposal if agreed will raise the profile of the Walton-on-the-Naze both within the District and outside.

Crime and Disorder – Improving assets is part of a wider strategy to combat anti-social behaviour by improving the appearance of public realm, generating increased community pride, awareness and responsibility for our District. There is a correlation between neat well managed assets and lower crime.

Equality and Diversity / Health Inequalities

Improvements to public realm will always consider enhanced accessibility. Attractive public realm offering improved accessibility, a wider range of uses and facilities will encourage local people to visit longer and to go out more which in turn have a positive effect on health and well-being particularly for the most vulnerable.

Area or Ward affected – Walton

PART 3 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION

BACKGROUND

The process of considering projects likely to benefit the local community in the run up towards the millennium in 2000 identified the absence of a focal point for outdoor community activities in Walton-on-the-Naze in or close to the town centre, such as Christmas late night shopping, a place of assembly for Remembrance Day parades, the local carnival, charitable fund raising and other activities.

As a consequence, the idea of a town square (later named the Millennium Square) was

devised and developed by utilising one end of the High Street car park, agreed as most central and beneficial to local business and community organisations. The square was intended to remain primarily for car parking, but could be closed for events as and when required.

Highway enhancements scheduled at this time improved the pavements and carriageway in the High Street and both projects were completed at the time of the millennium in 2000.

CURRENT POSITION

Whilst the surrounding High Street and pavements in Walton-on-the-Naze have remained in relatively good condition, the infrastructure associated with the Millennium Square area of the car park requires refurbishment.

The need to refurbish the Millennium Square and to make safe areas of concern in the forecourt area has afforded an opportunity for the Council to consider how best to redesign the square to maximum effect in terms of supporting the local High Street and regenerating the wider visitor economy of the area.

At present the Millennium Square which occupies one end of the High Street car park can only be used for local events if pre booked and the end of the car park is closed for parking.

Without use of the square, the linear nature of the High Street combined with narrow pavements does not make it easy for pedestrians to assemble and therefore to encourage visitors to remain for any length of time close to the local shops and businesses.

The current intended primary use of the square for car parking does not maximise potential benefits which could arise from a permanent area of public open space.

THE PROPOSAL AND WAY AHEAD

The Council considered ideas and indicative costs for the re design of the Millennium Square Walton-on-the-Naze and consulted local community organisations including the Town Council.

The detailed proposal which provided the best value option is attached to this report as Appendix A.

The principles in the design proposal are to:

1. Provide year round public open space with attractive seating, landscaping and lighting thereby encouraging visitors to remain in the town for longer thereby stimulating the local economy.
2. Provide year round space to accommodate the outdoor market for a significant part of the year without a requirement to alter public parking arrangements.
3. Enable the current outdoor market to increase its days of operation without affecting parking arrangements.
4. Provide year round space capable of generating additional income by means of events and / or other licensable activities.
5. Provide covered shelter and electricity as required for the market and other events further increasing the potential to generate income and to stimulate the local High Street economy.
6. Re design and undertake essential repairs and refurbishment of the Millennium Square to visually improve the overall appearance and practical use of the site,

reducing crime and anti-social behaviour, encouraging increased visitors particularly the most vulnerable such as the elderly and people with physical disabilities.

7. Demonstrate options for further improvements to the site such as public display screens, open air theatre / cinema / live performance to encourage additional visitors and for shoppers to stay longer.

The design requires the removal of three large trees at the High Street end of the Millennium Square which are not suitable for a town centre location. These trees are not in the best condition and detract from the overall attractiveness of the area. Their removal will open the site, creating an impression of space and light and will enable the introduction of a visual entrance to the square from the High Street. The current design proposes to utilise the existing centre piece of the Millennium Square to create a new entrance archway.

New planting will considerably exceed existing tree provision and will provide a greater number of new, visually attractive and appropriate trees for a public area of this scale. The square will have additional lighting for the purpose of enhancing the landscape design and to provide improved year round use.

The new permanent year round public area will result in a reduction in parking capacity from 108 to approximately 98 vehicles. However the car park is not used to capacity other than during peak summer months when alternative car parking available elsewhere throughout the town is able to accommodate additional numbers of vehicles.

The effect of the small reduction in parking spaces in the Millennium Square will not be loss of revenue, but a requirement for some car park users to walk a little further from vehicle to the High Street.

The space available to the market will be substantially smaller but provided with cover and dedicated power supply. This will lead to a reduction in rent but this could be offset by other income streams. The improvement of the car park combined with the introduction of new, high quality public realm in the heart of the High Street may help generate additional income both directly from new licenced concessions and indirectly by anticipated increased footfall in the surrounding shops.

Improved quality public realm generates positive attitudes towards areas and helps deliver economic growth as well as improved visitor numbers either from tourism or from local residents.

CONCLUSION

Increased housing development in the immediate area, increasing numbers of holidays taken in the UK including weekend as well as day trips affords a genuine opportunity for Walton High Street to find ways to encourage and attract new business.

This proposal will help provide a year round stimulus for local businesses as well as a means to enhance the summer visitor economy, complimenting and building on other public realm improvements to the Walton area.

A relatively low level investment in the regeneration of this important part of the High Street will enhance and improve the quality of life of residents as well helping to shape future investment in the local High Street and wider visitor economy of the area.

Attractive, high quality public realm not only enables businesses and the local community

to take pride in their own town centre, but the space if used in a range of different ways can help to increase footfall, thus supporting the vitality and future viability of the town.

Public realm space offers many benefits ranging from simple feel good factors arising from a busy street scene, but also general therapeutic qualities during quieter periods encouraging people to leave their homes and to visit the town, staying longer and extending community involvement in the town centre. This has a disproportionate benefit to the most vulnerable including the elderly, lonely, or those often housebound for a variety of reasons.

Public events help create and sustain community spirit and cohesion as well as provide opportunities for increasing revenue to local businesses and the local authority.

All of these ideas and uses for improved public realm have important benefits in creating attachments to the town centre which is often at the heart of any growing community.

The original concept for the Millennium Square was a proven success and the new proposed improvements will build on that success helping to promote Walton-on-the-Naze and the wider District and most importantly of all help generate direct income to the District Council from managed events and licensable activities and income to local businesses by encouraging more visitors and longer staying in the town centre..

BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR THE DECISION

None

APPENDICES

Appendices A1 and A2 - Details of the Town Square design proposals.