

# Crawley Borough Council

## Report to Overview and Scrutiny Commission 16 March 2015

### Report to Cabinet 18 March 2015

## Queens Square Environmental Improvement Scheme

Report of the Head of Planning and Environmental Services PES/169

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### 1. Purpose

- 1.1 Crawley Borough Council (CBC) and West Sussex County Council (WSCC) are working together and investing £3m to regenerate Queens Square.
- 1.2 The report seeks Cabinet approval of the design concept for Queens Square to be developed further into a detailed design for the submission of a planning application later in 2015.
- 1.3 The report also seeks delegated authority for approval of the final design, to spend up to the allocated budget for the scheme and to appoint a contractor to construct the scheme, following a procurement exercise.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To the Overview and Scrutiny Commission:

That the Commission consider the report and decide what comments, if any, it wishes to submit to the Cabinet.

- 2.2 To the Cabinet:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

- a) Approve the final design concept for the Queens Square Environmental Improvement Scheme;
- b) Delegate authority to the Head of Economic and Environmental Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development to approve the detailed design;
- c) Delegate authority to the Head of Economic and Environmental Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development to spend up to the allocated budget for the scheme;
- d) Delegate authority to officers to undertake a procurement exercise in accordance with the Procurement Code to select a suitable Contractor to construct the scheme;

- e) Delegate authority to the Head of Economic and Environmental Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development to enter into a contract with the successful bidder for the construction of the scheme.
- f) In the event that the new post of Head of Economic and Environmental Services is vacant at the applicable time, the above delegations will be undertaken by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development.

### **3. Reasons for the Recommendations**

- 3.1 Approval of the design concept for the scheme is required in order for the project team to undertake detailed design and prepare a planning application for submission in mid-2015. This will be closely followed by the selection and appointment of a contractor, to commence construction in early 2016.
- 3.2 The scheme will transform Queens Square into a high quality, inviting, distinctive and enjoyable public space that will become a destination in its own right, encouraging more people to visit, stay and make use of the space, drawing new investors, retailers and other activities into the town centre.

### **4. Background**

- 4.1 Queens Square lies at the heart of Crawley town centre and was originally opened in 1958 by HM Queen Elizabeth II. In the 1970s, the road along the northern side of the square was closed and the area was fully pedestrianised. The square was resurfaced in 1995 and, in 2005, the Pavilion was constructed to introduce modern retail accommodation and create a more sheltered space.
- 4.2 There have been a number of physical improvements to the square in the past including public art, new paving, lighting and seating. However, these are looking tired and need to be upgraded or repositioned.
- 4.3 Despite a generally good standard of maintenance and a programme of activities in Queens Square, the area has been experiencing a steady decline in its popularity as a shopping destination and a number of retailers have closed or relocated to the refurbished County Mall. Furthermore the square is an area of fragmented ownership and has suffered from a lack of inward investment from freeholders.
- 4.4 Several units are either empty or occupied on short term leases and commercial advice suggests that regeneration of the public realm is essential to securing a successful future for the town centre. In parallel to this project and as part of a wider town centre regeneration programme, the newly formed Economic Development team at CBC is delivering a new approach to engaging with key stakeholders in the town centre, including building owners, occupiers and commercial agents, in an effort to stimulate new interest and investment in the area.
- 4.5 Towards the end of 2013, WSCC (as the primary landowner) and CBC agreed to work together and invest £1.5m each in the project, which is expected to make a significant contribution to breathing new life into Queens Square and act as a catalyst for wider regeneration and economic growth in the town.

- 4.6 In 2014, a design brief was issued and, following a robust procurement exercise, Burns + Nice were appointed to design the new square. A comprehensive consultation process followed and this has been key to understanding exactly what improvements are required in the area.

## 5. The Consultation Process

- 5.1 Consultation has been managed as a two stage process:

### 5.2 Stage One Consultation

- 5.2.1 This was a process of consultation by questionnaire distribution at the start of the project to explore how people currently use the area, how they feel about it and how they would like to use it in the future.

- 5.2.2 Consultation took place from 7 July to 1 August 2014 using a range of methods including an online questionnaire, face to face interviews, local and social media briefings and individual meetings with key stakeholders and Members. The response was extremely positive with more than 750 questionnaires completed and a full consultation report summarising the results has been produced.

- 5.2.3 One of the most important questions asked was '*What would attract more people to Queens Square?*' and the most popular answers were categorised as follows:-

- The need for an improved retail offer
- Improvements to the spatial layout; open, accessible, adaptable
- Green elements and trees
- Water feature as a focal point
- Increased / improved seating
- Café culture / alfresco seating
- Improved lighting

- 5.2.4 These findings, together with the objectives set out in the original design brief, were used by Burns + Nice to inform the concept design development for the scheme. The initial findings were presented to Members at a workshop in October 2014 and as a result of feedback received, three concept designs (**Formal, Curves and Diagonals**) were developed further, forming the basis for the Stage Two consultation.

### 5.3 Stage Two Consultation

- 5.3.1 The purpose of the Stage Two consultation was to remind people about the project aims and objectives, to refer back to the findings of the Stage One consultation and to invite feedback on specific elements within the three concept designs.

- 5.4 During the Stage One consultation, respondents told us that they wanted to see a 'large, open, adaptable space for events'. In order to explore this in more detail, the Stage Two consultation also asked people to tell us '*What type of events they would like to see in Queens Square*'. This information has helped to determine the size and type of space required and is being used by Economic Development team at CBC to develop and deliver an exciting programme of events in the town centre, as part of the town centre regeneration programme to encourage visitors to come and stay longer.

- 5.4.1 Consultation took place during November and December 2014 and this involved :-
- An exhibition aimed at the local business community in the Civic Hall
  - Public exhibitions at The Gym in Queens Square over a two week period.
  - Online questionnaire and information on both council websites
  - Trade, local and social media coverage
  - Targeted meetings with individual stakeholders
  - Letters sent to over 250 property owners, leaseholders and occupiers in Queens Square and surrounding areas, key strategic partners and the wider business community.
- 5.4.2 A total of 85 responses were received and a full report of the findings has been produced. Detailed analysis of the results has identified the preferred design concept to be '**Curves**'. This design is to be taken forward to the final stage of design development and will include the following key principles:
- Accessibility: universal accessibility for all users at all times in the Square.
  - Movement: the design will encourage movement to the centre of the square by creating an interesting focal point that invites people in and emphasises the curves of the planters to guide people across the square.
  - Events: the design will ensure that space is available for a range of events.
  - Sub-spaces: smaller spaces will be created for specific activities particularly when major events are not taking place.
  - Lighting: high quality lighting and way finding will be ensured to improve the legibility and navigation of the area.
  - Curved planters and landscaping will be designed to provide contrast against the strong rectangular shape of the square and soften the stark geometry of the surrounding buildings.
- 5.4.3 Illustrative plans of the final design concept are shown in **Appendix A**.

## **6. The Bandstand and Martlets Tree**

- 6.1 A key weakness of the existing square is the number of physical obstacles (including the bandstand and 'Martlets Tree' public art installation) that inhibit the flow of pedestrian traffic and limit the opportunities for use.
- 6.2 The bandstand, which was built in 1891 and stood at Gatwick Racecourse for more than 60 years, is not well used in its current location and the improvement scheme is the ideal opportunity to move it to a more appropriate and sympathetic location.
- 6.3 In November 2014, a delegated decision was taken by the Leader of the Council, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development and the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture, to relocate the bandstand from Queens Square to Memorial Gardens where it is expected to attract greater community use.
- 6.4 The bandstand will be refurbished and redecorated as part of the relocation and a planning application will be submitted later in 2015. If approved, the bandstand will be relocated at the same time as the wider improvement scheme works are due to begin.
- 6.5 The Martlets Tree, originally installed in 1999, will also be relocated to a more sympathetic and suitable environment and this is being progressed as part of a wider review of public art in the town centre. The artist is aware of and understands the need for relocation and has been reassured that the piece will be restored to its original standard as part of the move.

## 7. Programme

- 7.1 The current programme anticipates the following key milestones:-
- April – May 2015 Detailed design stage
  - May 2015 Planning application submitted
  - July 2015 Planning application determined
  - Aug – Dec 2015 Tender and appoint contractor
  - Early 2016 Site mobilisation and works commence on site
  - Mid 2016 Anticipated scheme completion

## 8. Ward Members' Views

- 8.1 There is support from Members generally for the scheme following consultation briefings and Members' workshops held in July and October 2014. Detailed consultation with ward members will occur as part of the planning application process.

## 9. Implications

### 9.1 Staffing

Resources are in place to manage the project and there are no additional staffing implications associated with these recommendations.

### 9.2 Financial

A total of £1,500,000 has been allocated within Crawley Borough Council's Capital programme for the delivery of the Queens Square Environmental Improvement Scheme. A total of £1,500,000 has been allocated within West Sussex County Council's Capital programme for the same.

### 9.3 Legal

A construction contract will be entered into following a robust procurement exercise, in accordance with the Procurement Code.

An agreement with WSCC for the future maintenance and management of the scheme area will be formalised once the detailed design has been completed and costed.

### 9.4 Environmental

Environmental sustainability has been considered throughout the design process and, where feasible, measures will be taken to minimise energy consumption, waste production and pollution emissions. Environmental impact assessments will be undertaken for all working practices and products associated with the final scheme and assessed through the discharge of the planning conditions.

## 10. Background Papers

- [Report FIN/270 to Cabinet 4 July 2012 - Budget Strategy 2013/2014-2017/18](#)
- [Queens Square Stage One Consultation Report 11 November 2014](#)
- [Queens Square Stage Two Consultation Report 27 January 2015](#)

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# Queens Square Illustrative Plan





