

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

6th MARCH 2018

Town Centre Improvement

For Decision

Portfolio Holder(s)/ Briefholder

Cllr Farquharson
Cllr Huckle
Cllr Nowak

Senior Leadership Team Contact:

M Hamilton, Strategic Director
S Hill, Strategic Director

Report Author:

Nick Thornley, Paul Wyeth

Statutory Authority

Localism Act 2011 – ‘general power of competence’.
Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

Purpose of Report

- 1 To consider a request for funds to support a programme of works to enhance Weymouth Town Centre.
- 2 To obtain funding for a temporary, Conservation Enforcement Officer as recommended by the budget working group; to update members on the outcomes this new officer will be expected to achieve; and to provide a description of the anticipated differences to the conservation area these outcomes will have made by 31st March 2019.
- 3 To agree to the advertising and appointing of a Conservation Enforcement Officer for 15 months to carry out the tasks as indicated in the targeted outcomes section and to agree to provide funding for the salary of this additional role of £40,000 from the one off project reserves budget.

Recommendations

- 2.1 That Management Committee agree to allocate £50,000, from the one off project reserves budget to the Town Centre Management Budget to support works to improve the ‘look and feel’ of Weymouth Town Centre.
- 2.2 That Management Committee agrees to allocate £40,000 from the one off project reserves budget to fund the salary of the new Conservation Enforcement Officer.

Reason for Decision

- 3.1 To fund physical improvements to Weymouth town centre for the benefit of residents, visitors and businesses.
- 3.2 To provide dedicated conservation enforcement in the Weymouth Town Centre to improve the condition of buildings and shopfronts in the conservation area. This is required to assist in the removal of the Conservation Area from Historic England's "At Risk" list.

Background and Reason Decision Needed

Town Centre Management and Physical Improvements

- 4 In June 2017, the Council resolved to allocate £100k for the appointment of a Town Centre Manager for a two year fixed term, and to provide a small project enabling budget (approx. £21,000 after salary and on costs). Weymouth's first Town Centre Manager, Ed Warr, was appointed last August.
- 5 The Town Centre Manager post is managed by the Head of Economy, Leisure and Tourism and sits well alongside other officers in this team including the Weymouth Harbour Master, the Weymouth Beach team, Leisure team (progressing the sculpture trail and Esplanade lighting projects) and the Economic Development team (support for Weymouth BID, expertise on external funding such as Coastal Communities, experience of working with the County Council on highways matters, etc).
- 5 **Town Centre Priority Projects.** To date, a number of key projects have been identified for the Council to address and to work with others to resolve in coming months including:
 - Ongoing management of the enhanced pedestrianisation of St Mary and St Thomas Streets (new bollards and daily locking-unlocking regime)
 - Extension of the enhanced pedestrianisation to other town centre streets
 - Physical refurbishment of the streets including:
 - Reinstatement of brick pavers installed in the 1980s at over 30 locations throughout the town centre where they have been removed for safety reasons and replaced with black tarmac
 - Refurbishment and replacement of 40 damaged litter bins and street furniture (12 bins already replaced)
 - Refurbishment of utility company fixtures and fittings
 - Carriageway repairs and replacement of faded road markings at over 6 locations in the town centre
 - Replacement of out of date visitor and pedestrian signage from the railway station arrival point and then throughout the town centre
 - High pressure washing of pedestrian areas

6 It is anticipated that these repairs and improvements will significantly improve the appearance of the town centre and improve the shopping and visitor experience and navigation through the town.

7 **Partnership Building:** In addition to identifying and seeking solutions to the public realm issues identified above, the Town Centre Manager has been making contact and establishing working relationships with key partners including:

Dorset County Council (Highways)

Weymouth BID

Weymouth Chamber

Melcombe Regis Board and Team Around Melcombe Regis

Dorset Police

Town Centre businesses

Dorset Waste Partnership

Community Groups such as the Lions, weyPROGRESS and the Access Group.

Other DCP teams, particularly the team concerned with the Weymouth Town Centre Conservation Area.

RNIB (in relation to A-boards).

3GS officers to tackle litter hot-spots.

8 **Management.** The Town Centre enhancement works are managed through quarterly meetings of:

A Town Centre Officer Group – Town Centre Manager, Economic Regeneration Officers, Beach Manager, Planning and conservation Officers and DCC Highways officers.

And overseen by

A Town Centre Member led group - Leader, Economy Briefholder, Tourism Briefholder, and Transport and Infrastructure Briefholder, Weymouth and Portland Chamber of Commerce and Weymouth BID and Town Centre Officers as above

9 Through discussions with Dorset County Council, it is clear that, for financial reasons, highway repairs are only carried out where this is necessary for health and safety reasons. Tarmac is used rather than replacing block work (this policy applies in towns with similar paving such Blandford and Christchurch). The County Council is only able to reinstate pavers if the cost of this, relative to tarmac, is covered by the Borough Council.

10 The County Council has provided costs against a list of proposed works in the Town Centre. It is proposed to address these works in two phases.

Phase One – reinstatement of the brick pavers in approx. 30 locations, out of date signage removal and replacement, and road markings in various locations, particularly zebra crossing markings

Phase Two – Removal and replacement of town centre signage to support pedestrian movement across the town centre. Resurfacing of key areas of the highway in the town centre.

Phase one is budgeted by DCC at £20000, Funds are already in place (Town Centre budget, Economic Regeneration budget, Melcombe Regis project budget, £5000 from the BID) and the County Council has made provision in its work plan to deliver the first phase now with works to start no later than mid-April.

Phase 2 is budgeted at approx. £50,000 and is the subject of this request for funds.

11. Regular updates on the work in the Town Centre are provided using social media channels, working with the Communications Team.
12. **Future projects:** Plans for the next 6 months under the Town Centre Manager, working with colleagues and key partners, include:
 - Submitting an application for Purple Flag status (a scheme operated by ATCM, requires an application fee, similar to Blue Flag for beaches and Green flag for parks). This could be supported by the BID.
 - Developing a working relationship with weyPROGRESS and to make use of volunteer input where possible.
 - Agreeing the transfer of the County Council's A-board management protocol and progressing a change if appropriate
 - Delivering the introduction of a pedestrianisation scheme in St Albans and other town centre streets. Requires a Traffic Regulation Order from the County Council.
 - Support for a new community toilets scheme
 - Return of a hanging baskets scheme.
 - Evaluating and applying for major funding schemes, with the County Council, in order to carry out a programme of works to transform Weymouth Town Centre (current scheme put in place at least 30 years ago and is tired and outdated).
 - Review transport plans in relation to planned site developments (study commissioned with the County Council in 2016).
 - Supporting plans to apply for Coastal Communities and other funds once the details are announced.

Town Centre Conservation

- 13 **Historic England – Conservation at Risk** - In September 2017, Historic England registered the Weymouth Town Centre Conservation Area as being "At Risk". The reasons given for this were:
 - The poor condition of listed and non-listed buildings in the Conservation Area.
 - The poor condition of the public realm in the Conservation Area.
 - The high level of shopfront designs that are not appropriate for the Conservation Area.
- 14 **Scrutiny Report** - A request for a scrutiny of the Weymouth Town Centre Conservation Area was submitted by Councillor James Farquharson and at the meeting on 6 October 2016, the Scrutiny and Performance Committee agreed to include the review on their work plan. The request for scrutiny had asked in particular for consideration of the following:

- *With the town centre regeneration programme moving forward (part of the adopted Town Centre Masterplan) there is an urgent need to discover if conservation policies and its operation will present any conflicts that could disrupt progress;*
- *Also, more broadly, to discover how the Conservation Area policy and operation provide powers to enforce appropriate maintenance of existing town centre listed buildings. As well as enabling developments within and around those buildings to support their current and future viability and borough-wide economic and cultural vibrancy.*

15 On 31st October 2017 a report was presented to the Management Committee by Cllr. Claudia Moore, which documented the findings of the Conservation Scrutiny and gave recommendations.

These recommendations were:

The Scrutiny Working Group propose that a bid for £200,000 is supported by Scrutiny and Performance Committee and recommended to be submitted to the Management Committee for investment in the Weymouth Town Centre Conservation Area to secure the following 5 key improvements.

- 1. Put forward a business case to secure funding from Historic England towards Conservation Area improvements;*
- 2. Provide a clear shopfront and advertisement design guide for the town centre to steer new development to protect local distinctiveness and quality of historic assets;*
- 3. Provide Enforcement by removal of A boards in the town centre, monitoring of developments and use of Section 215 notices to secure maintenance and repairs of buildings;*
- 4. A Conservation Officer to Support the Heritage Champion for the town centre (promoted by the BID) and Town Centre Manager (with facelift improvements to the pedestrianised area);*
- 5. Manage any funding from Historic England and bid for grants from the Arts Council and Heritage Lottery, to spend on restoring some Council owned buildings as a positive example to encourage others to do the same;*
- 6. There is recognition of the fact that aspects in this report rely on working in partnership with the Weymouth BID. Therefore if the Weymouth BID was to get a no vote and cease to continue in the future, the borough council should use a proportion of the levy currently paid to the Weymouth BID, in order to deliver this project.*

The decision at the Management Committee was to approve the findings of the Scrutiny Report and to pass the recommendation of £200k funding to the Budget Working Group for their consideration.

16 **Budget Working Group** - On the 7th December 2017 the Budget Working Group met and decided that only £40,000 could be provided for conservation in the town centre. It was further decided that this should be used to employ a single conservation enforcement officer for 15 months but before finally confirming the funding a report should be submitted to the

March Management Committee on what outcomes can be expected from the Officer and what difference to conservation will have been made by 31st March 2018.

- 17 **Targeted Actions and Outcomes by 31st March 2019** - The new Conservation Enforcement officer will be tasked with targeting the three areas of concern highlighted by Historic England, these being:

a. ***The poor condition of listed and non-listed buildings in the Conservation Area.***

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- By 31st March 2018, dialogue will have been made with owners of the 30 properties on the target list.
- By 31st March 2019, enforcement action (Section 215) will have been initiated against owners of up to five buildings who are unwilling to repair their properties.

TARGETED OUTCOMES

- By 31st March 2019 there will be a noticeable improvement to the external appearance of buildings within the conservation area, to such an extent that Historic England no longer see this as a reason for the Conservation Area to be at risk.

b. ***The high level of shopfront designs that are not appropriate for the Conservation Area.***

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- By 31st March 2019, the Shopfront Design Guide will have been written and presented to committee for approval.

TARGETED OUTCOMES

- By 31st March 2019 there will be a Shopfront Design Guide in use as Supplementary Planning Guidance. The Design Guide will be reviewed by Historic England and agreement will be sought from HE that with the guide in place, they no longer see shopfront design within the conservation area as contributors to the "At-risk" status.

c. ***The poor condition of the public realm in the Conservation Area.***

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- The officer will be responsible for providing advice to the WPBC town team, the Town Centre Manager and Dorset County Council, to assist in the ongoing programme of improvement to the public realm within the town centre conservation area.
- The officer will further be responsible for investigating funding streams for public realm improvements within the Town Centre conservation area, including Heritage Action Zone funding.

TARGETED OUTCOMES

- By 31st March 2019 there will be a noticeable improvement to the existing public realm elements that are of concern to Historic England.

- By March 31st 2019 a thorough review of funding sources for public realm improvements within the conservation area will be complete and funding applications initiated (if applicable)

Implications

Corporate Plan

Building a stronger local economy

Improving quality of life

Financial

Funds to be drawn from the one off project reserves budget

Equalities

No implications

Environmental

Improves the physical environment and appearance of Weymouth Town Centre Improvement to Conservation Area to assist its removal from Historic England's "At Risk" list.

Economic Development

Improving the town centre will make Weymouth a more attractive venue for visitors and shoppers

Risk Management (including Health & Safety)

No implications directly associated with this report

Human Resources

Recruitment of a conservation enforcement officer for a period of 12 months

Consultation and Engagement

DCC Highways

Weymouth BID

Weymouth Chamber

Appendices

None

Background Papers

None

Footnote

Issues relating to financial, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.

Report Authors: Nick Thornley, Trevor Hedger, Ed Warr, Paul Wyeth.

Telephone: 01305 252474

Email: nthornley@dorset.gov.uk , pwyth@dorset.gov.uk

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