

TITLE OF REPORT: FISH HILL SQUARE ENHANCEMENT SCHEME: CONSULTATION ON PROPOSED MASTERPLAN

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLANNING AND ENTERPRISE MANAGER

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 To inform Members on the progress of the Fish Hill Square Enhancement scheme and to seek comments on the proposal as part of the consultation process.

2. FORWARD PLAN

- 2.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key decision and has not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Royston Town Centre Strategy was adopted in June 2008. The aim of the Strategy is to provide a comprehensive framework to promote integrated development and enhancement of Royston town centre over the next 10 to 15 years that will seek to benefit its future economic viability and vitality while emphasising its historic character and local identity as a market town. The Action Plan, adopted as part of the Strategy, identified a number of Opportunity Sites – one of the key sites is Fish Hill Square at the northern end of Market Hill and Fish Hill.
- 3.2 The enhancement of Fish Hill Square will benefit the town centre overall as it will provide a new public square to act as a focal point. The square is currently used for short-term surface car parking and known as St John's Car Park. There are a number of retail units, businesses and cafes and the attractive County Court building (Grade II Listed) overlooking the square.
- 3.3 In May 2010 the Council appointed BDP to prepare design proposals for the square and to follow the project through from concept to implementation. A design proposal was prepared following previous consultation events, meetings and surveys.
- 3.4 Joint Briefing sessions were held with Royston Town Council and Royston District members in June and July to discuss ideas and issues with the consultants BDP and to agree the proposals for public consultation.

- 3.5 The consultation was launched on Saturday 28th August 2010 with an event at the John Street Car Park, Fish Hill Square, Royston. Representatives from the Council and BDP were present to answer any questions and discuss comments about the proposal. The exhibition boards are now on display in Royston Library until the 23rd September 2010. The content of the exhibition and comment forms are also available on the Council's website at www.north-herts.gov.uk until 23rd September 2010.

4. ISSUES

- 4.1 The key aims of the scheme are to:
- Deliver a well designed high quality scheme that becomes a focal point for the town centre
 - Create a space that retains its local identity and is safe and inviting to visit
 - Enhance the square by providing an aesthetic setting for the iconic buildings fronting onto the space.
 - Create a new flexible public space that can be used for activities such as pavement cafes, specialist markets, and events.
 - Minimise the dominance of vehicles and the impact of parking within the square. Relocate removed parking spaces elsewhere within the town centre.
 - Use robust, maintainable and aesthetic materials.
- 4.2 The proposed Masterplan achieves these aims by creating a flexible open space in the eastern part of the square which is the sunniest side of the square. This space could contain trees, benches, lighting and a landmark feature. A short stay loading bay is proposed next to it at the northern end of Fish Hill. On the western side are 8no parking bays set at right angles to the buildings. There would be an access road following the line of Market Hill to allow vehicular access to businesses and residences in the surrounding area. The Masterplan is attached at Appendix 1.
- 4.3 Currently in John Street car park there are 4 bays outside the Court House and 10no bays in the centre. The proposed Masterplan creates 8 bays along the western side of the square. The Parking relocation plan shows how the remaining 6 spaces could be relocated along the eastern side of Market Hill. The Parking Relocation plan is attached at Appendix 2.
- 4.4 The consultation launch event was well attended and generated a lot of discussion. Three quarters of the completed feedback forms received so far at the time of writing this report are positive about the proposals. Many people like the idea of creating an outdoor space that can be used for a variety of events, and are positive about the proposed changes to parking in the square. There were numerous suggestions as to what else people would like to see in the area including trees, public art, seating, better lighting, pavement cafes and specialist markets. One of the concerns expressed was that any scheme should not be overly modern in design.
- 4.5 Visitors to the exhibition were also asked for their views on a possible sculpture in the square and what, if anything, it should represent. Just over half of those who expressed an opinion on this were keen on the idea of a sculpture and many of the ideas for what form this might take relate to Royston's history, such as using images from the Royston Cave or making reference to the town as King James' hunting home.

- 4.6 A possible new name for the square is also being considered as part of the consultation, given that the area is not officially known as Fish Hill Square and many refer to it simply as John St Car Park. Of those that commented on this, the majority were in favour of officially naming it Fish Hill Square, while other popular choices were Court House Square and King James Square.
- 4.7 Further comments received to the consultation will be verbally reported at the meeting.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Terms of Reference in relation to Area Committees apply to this Report. There are no legal implications arising from this report in respect of seeking formal public comment on the proposed design scheme.
- 5.2 In the event that the design scheme is agreed, there will be legal implications regarding working on the highway and allowing for a Section 278 Agreement, the procedure for any Traffic Regulation Orders required and dealing with any involvement of private land in the case of requiring necessary consents.

6. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There is a capital budget of £460K for the project funded from Growth Area Funding (GAF). A requirement of GAF funding is that it must only be spent on capital projects. Any potential impact on parking income as a result of the proposal will need to be addressed through Cabinet. Discussions are taking place with other services to ensure that the proposed scheme can be maintained within existing budgets.
- 6.2 With regard to risk there are reputational risks associated with the non-delivery of the project, and addressing the relocation of short term parking as a result of the proposed scheme. The Council's risk register is being updated to reflect this area of risk. A risk register for the project has been prepared, and will be maintained by the Project Team. A CDM co-ordinator has also been appointed for the project, to manage health and safety risks under the CDM 2007 Regulations.

7. HUMAN RESOURCE AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The officer time involved in the enhancement project is identified as part of the Corporate Business Planning Process for Strategic Planning and Enterprise.
- 7.2 All efforts will be made to meet and exceed the Council's equalities plan when consulting with the local community on the design scheme and the implementation plan for the project.

8. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS

- 8.1 Officers undertook a series of workshops and attended various meetings as part of the preparation of the Royston Town Centre Strategy. Outputs from these sessions provided a good baseline for understanding the issues raised in relation to the future enhancement of Fish Hill Square.

- 8.2 BDP, since their appointment in May 2010, has undertaken a variety of stakeholder meetings and briefing sessions.
- 8.3 Briefing sessions have also been held with Royston District members and with the Royston town Council, to keep members up-to-date on progress.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 That Royston & District Committee are asked to note the progress to date and to provide any comments on the proposed Masterplan at Appendix 1 for Fish Hill Square as part of the consultation process.

10. CONTACT OFFICERS

Louise Symes, Project Manager, Tel: 01462 474359
Helen Leitch, Landscape and Urban Designer, Tel 01462 474513

11. CONTRIBUTORS

Jodie Penfold, Group Accountant , tel: 01462 474332
John Ironside, Corporate Strategic Planning & Enterprise Manager, tel: 01462 474626

Appendix 1 Proposed Masterplan

Appendix 2 Parking Relocation plan