

Agenda Item 62.

TITLE	Wokingham Town Centre Environmental Improvement Programme – Phase One
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on 24 September 2015
WARD	Emmbrook, Evendons, Norreys and Wescott
DIRECTOR	Heather Thwaites, Director of Environment
LEAD MEMBER	John Kaiser – Executive Member for Planning and Transport

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Phase one of an Environmental Improvement Programme for Wokingham town centre.

RECOMMENDATION

Executive is asked to agree:

- 1) the release of s106 funding and funding from the Wokingham Town Centre Regeneration Project up to a maximum of £1.5m and subject to the receipt of at least an equivalent match funding sum from Wokingham Town Council; and
- 2) that all decisions necessary to implement the scheme are delegated to the Director of Environment in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Transport and the Executive Member for Regeneration.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The Town and Borough Councils are working together to develop a proposal for environmental improvements to Wokingham town centre; phase one of a wider programme would be commenced focussing on the main public space around the market place/Old Town Hall.

Funding is required to progress the project through feasibility, consultation and implementation.

This project is being developed by a joint officer working group comprising representatives of both Councils. From this Council's perspective the project will be overseen by the Wokingham Town Centre Coordination Board.

Background

In June 2010 the Council adopted the Wokingham Town Centre Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document (The SPD) and this envisioned certain development opportunity sites as well as establishing the concept of a more welcoming and friendly destination for people by creating an environment of streets and spaces that are great to shop in or visit. Section 8 of the SPD pictures a quality town centre environment and set the basis for further work which was initiated at the time though paused until now to enable the allocation of resource to the proposals.

There has long been a desire to improve the environment of Wokingham town's market place and it is sensible as this is the main public space in the town to identify this as phase 1 so as to set the scene for future environmental improvement projects in the town. As other elements of the town centre regeneration proceed it is also timely to try to deliver this first phase of the environmental improvements.

Analysis of Issues

Wokingham town centre is currently undergoing considerable regeneration through private investment and the Borough's own proposals. To capitalise on these improvements and to ensure a quality refurbishment of the environment befitting of the town, it is appropriate to consider a concurrent environmental improvement programme. This would provide a focus for future similar works elsewhere in the town.

Joint working between the Borough and Town Councils has highlighted the Market Place as an appropriate area for the phase 1 of the works. There is scope to significantly change the area and make it an improved facility opening up opportunity for greater use of the public spaces in the future.

Primarily the project will look at surfacing materials and street furniture along with access arrangements.

The feasibility work will look at options for the area, materials, services and access arrangements. Options for removing the bus lane around the town hall will be investigated but no other major changes to traffic or parking are envisaged. Access to properties on the market place will be maintained in line with occupiers' needs.

As this would be a highway scheme, the works would be permitted development not requiring planning permission and accordingly, a suitable level of consultation will be carried out for any proposals in partnership with the Town Council.

Whilst phase 1 will be the Market Place and this will be worked up in detail, the further phases will be identified so that they can be programmed in the future as and when resource becomes available.

Funding

The town council has committed to funding at least half of the cost of the work. The Borough's contribution will be funded from the town centre regeneration project and existing s106 funds. S106 funds utilised will be those collected for town centre projects, including contributions towards leisure facilities.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£250,000	Yes	Capital / s106
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£1,250,000	Yes	Capital / s106
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	0	N/A	Revenue

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

None

Cross-Council Implications

None

List of Background Papers

None

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