

WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM

11 September 2013

ST MAURICE'S COVERT AND OTHER TOWN CENTRE ENHANCEMENTS

REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (BUILT ENVIRONMENT)

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RECENT REFERENCES:

WTF176 – Streetscene in the Retail Centre -12 September 2012

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This paper updates members on progress towards carrying out enhancements to St Maurice's Covert and other City Centre sites following the decision in September 2012 to support the setting up of a "virtual" Public Realm Team and to specifically progress an enhancement project for St Maurice's Covert. The Town Forum allocated a sum of £10,000 for initial work of investigation and preparation of a scheme of enhancement at the Covert, and also a growth sum to cover the establishment of a temporary half post to assist the Historic Environment Team to lead on the enhancement projects and other initiatives relating specifically to the built town centre environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Winchester Town Forum

- a) note the progress made so far on Town Centre Enhancement work
- b) suggest any additional issues they would like to see included in the brief for consultants.
- c) A further update report be brought back to the Town Forum in January 2014.

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DETAIL:

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Following discussions in November 2011 and again in September 2012, the Town Forum resolved to commit to support some initiatives which would assist the Council to bring about improvements to a number of issues within the retail centre of the City. These issues included promoting better and more timely maintenance of buildings on the High Street and side streets where they are exhibiting a poor state of repair and threaten to create a shabby impression. Other issues relating to pigeon mess, empty shops and specific sites including St Maurice's Covert were also discussed. The establishment of a "virtual" public realm team consisting of a broad cross-section of officers was commended. Such a group would look at a number of issues which detrimentally affect the ambience and image of the city centre and would work together to resolve them.
- 1.2 Since much of the work relates to historic buildings and the conservation area, and requires a high degree of specialist knowledge and expertise, it was recognised that additional support was required in that team to allow for greater concentration on town centre matters. To this end it was resolved to allocate £45,000 towards the temporary employment of a half FTE post within the Historic Environment Team to assist with the additional workload brought about by this initiative.
- 1.3 In addition to the added staff resource, it was also agreed to allocate £10,000 per year up to 2016/17 financial year towards improvements. It is suggested that some of this year's budget be spent on producing the feasibility and design stages of enhancements. The aim would be to make the space more interesting and attractive to the public and to generally enhance it as a walking route between the High Street and the Cathedral quarter. This report gives a specific update on the St Maurice's Covert initiative.

2 Update

- 2.1 Since confirmation of the budget allocation at the beginning of this financial year progress on the recruitment has been delayed due to continuing high work commitment and a back log of work created within the Historic Environment team. However, the process has now begun and it is hoped to have someone in place soon.

- 2.2 Discussions have however been held at officer level as to the best way of bringing about enhancement of the Covert and what form that enhancement might take. At a site meeting held in 2012 a number of ideas for enhancement were put forward. One such proposal was to deal with the unattractive proliferation of bins to the rear of the building. The proliferation of bins throughout the city centre shopping area can be a high profile issue – not least as a result of the incident where 3 buildings were severely fire-damaged when they were ignited using combustible materials in unlocked bins. Bins have been located to the rear of St Maurice's Covert on market days over the last year or so. They give a poor visual backdrop to the route through to the cathedral but a new location has been found which doesn't over inconvenience the market traders who use them and keeps them out of sight. Storage is also secure overnight.
- 2.3 The future of other bins which proliferate over the city centre is also being pursued by Neighbourhood Support Officers and some have already been relocated. Proposals to deal with the remaining sites are being developed in conjunction with Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service because of the link with the arson risk.
- 2.4 In addition, the Historic Environment team has been able to establish a line of communication with owners and management companies of 3 of the properties in The Pentice to bring about appropriate repairs to the timber work which has been neglected for a long time. Members will be aware that there has been scaffolding and boarding in place for some time and this is necessary to protect the areas whilst the complicated details of repair and ownership/party wall responsibilities are negotiated.
- 2.5 With regard to St Maurice's Covert itself, officers are in the process of developing a brief which could be used to commission and direct consultant designers to make proposals for physical enhancements within the covert. A small number of options should be developed from this process which will give a variety of cost options to choose from. The brief will explain that the space is used frequently for ad hoc charitable sales, and the flower stall uses a small corner of it on a regular basis. The recommendations arising from the consultant's findings will need to be costed out and implementation of any of the chosen proposals will only follow when funds have been agreed.
- 2.6 Officers believe that there will be considerable scope to improve the environment by work on the lighting within the Covert, but do not wish to prejudice other innovative ideas which may come from the consultants. It may also be appropriate to consider re-locating the cycle racks so that they are out of the main thoroughfare (but still available for use) and re-configuring the security camera so that the mirror is either removed or made less conspicuous. The access through the space will need to be kept open and inviting, and the paving which has only recently been replaced should not be altered unless absolutely essential as part of the enhancement. The link to the Cathedral is considered important and officers believe more could be made of this with the co-operation of adjacent land owners.

- 2.7 There is little more to be reported at this stage but it is envisaged that by the end of the year, a more detailed analysis of options will be available to report back to the Forum. It is therefore proposed that a further update report be presented to the Forum at their January meeting.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

3 SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND CHANGE PLANS

- 3.1 The proposal to enhance St Maurice's Covert as part of an overall strategy of improvements in the City Retail Centre accords with two of the outcomes of the sustainable Community Strategy. These are High Quality Environment – *Protect and improve our landscapes and townscapes* and Active Communities – *Maintain current low levels of crime, seeking to understand better why and where there is a fear of crime and what we can do to prevent it.*

4 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 4.1 An annual budget of £10,000 from 2013/14 up until 2016/17 was approved in the 2013/14 process (£40,000 in total).
- 4.2 The cost of engaging a consultant to carry out initial work to develop proposals will be covered within the £10,000 budget approved for 2013/14... Once proposals have been formalised, further discussions will need to be held with regard to the physical improvements.

5 RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- 5.1 There are no foreseen risks.

6 BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None.

7 APPENDICES

None