

WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM

22 January 2014

ST MAURICE'S COVERT UPDATE

REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (BUILT ENVIRONMENT)

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RECENT REFERENCES:

WTF193 – St Maurice's Covert and other Town Centre Enhancements – 11 September 2013

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Following the meeting of the Forum on 11 September 2013 it was agreed that a sub-group would meet to discuss taking forward the project at St Maurice's Covert and that a further update would be given on its progress in January 2014.

The Town Forum allocated a sum of £10,000 in the current financial year's budget 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. The meeting was held on 20 November 2013 when it was agreed that the Head of Historic Environment would draw up a brief for consultants to be engaged to design enhancements at the Covert.

This paper updates on progress made with the establishment of the new temporary half post, and summarises the agreed basis of the brief proposing a timetable for action.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Winchester Town Forum:

- a) Notes the progress made to date and the plans of the sub-group to take the project forwards.

WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM

22 January 2014

ST MAURICE'S COVERT ENVIRONMENTAL ENHANCEMENTS PROGRESS REPORT

REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (ECONOMIC PROSPERITY)

DETAIL:

1 Introduction

- 1.1 At the Town Forum meeting of September 2013, Members of Town Forum discussed the progress of various activities within the Town Centre and specifically the project to make environmental enhancements to St Maurice's Covert. Progress on the latter had been delayed due to the limited capacity within the Historic Environment Team, whilst other elements of Town Centre maintenance had been receiving timely and detailed attention from officers with likely outcomes becoming evident in the near future as a direct result. Following the meeting of the Forum on 11 September 2013 it was agreed that a sub-group would meet to discuss taking forward the project at St Maurice's Covert and that a further update would be given on its progress in January 2014. This report gives details of the sub-group's work since that meeting.
- 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 for a 2 year period 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 to the Covert. Some of this year's budget will be spent on producing the feasibility and design stages of enhancements. A brief will need to be produced to invite a short list of companies to propose designs for improvements to the Covert. The sub-group will agree the brief before submission to the design companies. The aim of the meeting in November was to ensure that agreement was achieved on the direction the work should take so that design aspirations would be included in the brief

2 Update

- 2.1 The sub-group met on 20 November 2013 chaired by Cllr Ian Tait. It was agreed that prior to the issue of briefs to designers, some "landlord" type issues needed to be clarified. These include the possible restrictions applied by existing covenants on the building which might have been imposed at the

time that the land was passed over to the Council. It also includes investigation into the extent of the licence agreed for the Flower Stall. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services has advised that a covenant in favour of the Church Commissioners was imposed as part of the sale of the land to the City Council, which requires the Covert to be kept as public open space and restricts its enclosure by any means or building within it. There are also covenants requiring the Debenhams windows within the Covert to be retained unobstructed. Charity sales have been allowed in the past without objections. In terms of the Flower Stall, this now operates as a street trading licence, as part of the market, since the adoption of street trading controls in 2011 (report LR358 refers).

- 2.2 It was further agreed that other parties (stakeholders) with a potential direct or indirect interest in slightly wider enhancements should be invited to collaborate with the Council to take forward wider-ranging complementary enhancements benefitting the pedestrian environment to the rear of the Covert. These were Winchester BID, Debenhams, the Cathedral and the Wessex Hotel but the Head of Legal and Democratic Services also recommends that the Diocese and the Parochial Church Council are also consulted. These stakeholders have not yet been directly contacted as the landlord issues need clarifying first.
- 2.3 The aspirations and reach of the project were agreed after discussion. It was concluded that because there continues to be a desire to keep a central space for sales and other functions within the Covert, and due to the circulation routes possible through to the rear, there was little scope to change the ground level format (which would be restricted in any event by the covenants on the land) and that enhancements should concentrate on imaginative lighting combined with possible work to the rear which would subliminally direct pedestrians through the Covert to and from the direction of the Cathedral. The passageways would benefit from de-cluttering by relocating the cycle racks and ensuring that the bins were also relocated on a permanent basis. The sales which take place within the space are generally only for charitable bodies and, although performing an important community function, might benefit from a review in terms of set up, design of layout and programming. This consideration would need to be undertaken in tandem with the commissioning of designers but would not form part of the brief.
- 2.4 A new temporary member of staff has now taken up post within the Historic Environment Team in order to create extra capacity for handling additional work within the Town Centre. Members will recall that this is a part time post which is funded for two years.

3 Time frame

- 3.1 It is unlikely that the brief will be ready before mid to end of February, but that if agreed by the Sub-group, it could be sent out to potential design consultants in March. The timing of this means that the use of the £10,000 allocated for spending in 2013/14 would not be achieved and it is likely that a budget carry

forward will be required. The position will be reviewed at the end of the financial year to ensure a request for a carry forward of budget is put forward for approval if required. Similarly, since the new officer has only taken up post in January, the bulk of the £22,500 funding for 2013/14 is also not forecast to be spent and a similar request for a carry forward of budget will be made at the end of the financial year. Given the need to allow for draft design time and submission followed by commission, it is not likely that the formal design work would be commissioned until April/May 2014.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

4 SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

- 4.1 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.*

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 5.1 An annual budget of £10,000 from 2013/14 up until 2016/17 was approved in the 2013/14 budget process (£40,000 in total).
- 5.2 A further £45,000 was allocated to cover the cost of additional staff resource within the Historic Environment team. This funding was divided into two years: 2013/14 and 2014/15 both for £22,500. As the recruitment process and start time for the officer was delayed, a request will be made for the carry forward of funds to cover the entire 2 year staff contract which runs from January 2014 to January 2016.

6 SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

- 6.1 This is part of the programme of Retail Centre improvements which supports the first theme of the Economic Prosperity Strategy and Change Plan:
- “We exploit the District’s cultural strengths, heritage and historic environment...to stimulate a modern and creative approach to business.”
- 6.2 Encouraging landlords to make improvements to their premises to support the wider impact of the streetscene also support the fourth theme, which asks businesses to be ‘good neighbours’
- 6.3 The third theme of the High Quality Environment Change Plan is ‘Protect and improve our landscapes and townscapes’, which is also an objective for this programme of work.

7 RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

7.1 There are no risks identified at this stage.

8 BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

8.1 None.

9 APPENDICES

9.1 None