



ADUR & WORTHING
COUNCILS

Executive Members for Resources
10 November 2021

Decision to be taken on or after
18 November 2021

Key Decision: Yes

Ward(s) Affected: Central, Heene, Marine & Selden

Town Centre Improvements Programme - Worthing Town Centre

Report by the Director for the Economy

Executive Summary

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To seek approval to release £200k of funds from Worthing Borough Council's reserves to deliver ongoing improvements to the town centre to support ongoing transition and development.
- 1.2 The programme seeks to deliver proactive interventions to enable Worthing town centre to flourish by ensuring the place looks it's best.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To approve the release of £200,000 for the delivery of the improvements programme from the Building Maintenance Reserve.
- 2.2 To note the programme to improve and further activate Worthing town centre to ensure it is presented to a high level for residents and visitors to enjoy.
- 2.3 To delegate to the Director for the Economy authority to enter into any contracts required for the expenditure of the approved virement.

3. Context

- 3.1 The Council's plan Platforms for Our Places references 1.3 "Attractors for prosperity through place making (town centres, public spaces, public realm, public arts)". Ensuring that our spaces support economic growth.
- 3.2 Within the Council's 'And Then' report the need to support our town centres, in particular our hospitality and leisure industries, in the re-emergence from the covid pandemic called for place based activities and interventions. In addition the prioritisation of improvements to our public spaces including, but not limited to, repair, redecoration and replacement of street furniture, parks, the promenade and associated buildings.
- 3.3 It is recognised that the Covid pandemic has escalated the speed of change to our town centres. An already changing high street was tested further during 2020 through home working and national and local 'lockdowns'. This resulted in a change to consumer purchasing behaviour in favour of online shopping over traditional town centre retail. High Streets, in a period of transition pre-Covid. Worthing town centre remains a good example of such change.
- 3.4 A number of Council led place based initiatives and interventions are underway in Worthing town centre and seafront. These include the introduction of Gigabit infrastructure, new public realm in Portland Road, Railway Approach and Montague Place, new buildings such as the Worthing Integrated Care Centre and works to existing buildings such as Buckingham Car Park. The landscape in and around Worthing is improving and adapting to the changing demographic and demands from residents and visitors.
- 3.5 In responding to this change and in ensuring a safe, attractive and ultimately thriving town centre and seafront, it is imperative that Worthing's public spaces receive the highest standards of attention and care. As communities return to Worthing national trends suggest that the purpose of town centre visits have shifted from retail to a more 'experiential' offer. Attractive green, blue and public spaces are key in drawing in much needed footfall to the town centre.
- 3.6 In Autumn 2021 the Council devised a programme of works in support of four neighbourhood shopping parades, the works to The Strand (Durrington), East Goring, Kings Parade (Findon Valley) and Broadwater were agreed between ward councillors and members of either traders associations or individuals from the local business community. A combination of capital and revenue funded improvements was completed in Summer 2021, with a second phase planned for improvements to Worthing's gateway roads during Winter 2021.

4. About the programme

4.1 The Town Centres Improvements Programme is formed of three parts.

4.1.1 A bi-annual, seasonal programme of maintenance and repair to street furniture, small assets and public spaces.

4.1.2 Revenue support to town centre and seafront projects designed to improve a sense of place, encourage dwell-time and activate public spaces.

4.1.3 Support emerging initiatives through cross departmental working focussed on town centre and seafront improvements such as the Winter Seafront Planting Scheme.

4.2 Planned and agreed 'walkabouts' have been a feature of the working relationship between Worthing Borough Council and Worthing Town Centre Initiative (TCI/BID) over the past decade. The walkabouts, staffed by officers, council members and members of the TCI steering committee, are formed to create a work programme which helps to prioritise small works and repairs. However, the walkabouts were limited to the Worthing BID area and did not include parks or open spaces. A broader view, with a higher standard of improvements is needed.

4.3 The Town Centres Improvements Programme is not a replacement of existing planned maintenance programmes or the need for occasional reactive maintenance. The programme is an opportunity to 'catch up' as a result of the pandemic and deliver an improved town centre from which the existing maintenance programme will continue to maintain. The programme is not for use in capital projects or those associated with the council's major projects. However, it is likely that smaller place based projects will benefit from the additional support.

4.4 Moving forward a better understanding of how the planned maintenance and capital programme may be aligned to continue the programme of works beyond the virement of reserves and in maintaining high standards of presentation.

4.5 West Sussex County Council and Worthing Borough Council are committed to a Growth Deal agreement for a number of public realm improvements to Worthing. Delivery of these capital projects are well underway with the first, Portland Road, due for completion in late Spring/early Summer 2022. The new public realm designs are a contemporary and welcome addition to

Worthing's town centre. However, the new works do accentuate the state of the existing, older, public realm and public spaces. This programme will support uplifting a number of ancillary elements, aligned with the major public realm transformational works highlighted in previous sections.

4.6 The programme is under development and will start in earnest in November 2021, which will align and support the Winter Seafront Planting programme. This is followed closely by a second expansive 'winter walkabout' in late November. To ensure there is robustness to the programme, and ensure delivery, a new post has been created to drive forward this piece of work which, initially, will be a 12 month secondment commencing in December 2021.

4.7 The Town Centres Improvements Programme includes the recruitment (through internal secondment) of Place Project Officer (PPO). A 3 day per week post the PPO will be the operational lead of the programme (please see 4.1) working across council departments, based in the Place & Economy team. This is a 12 month post and it is expected that the Town Centres Improvement Programme will span this period of time.

5. Engagement and Communication

5.1 Creating and maintaining an attractive town centre underpins a successful economic recovery, post Covid. The look and feel of Worthing town centre is high on the agenda of local partners and stakeholders in addition to ward members. The Town Centres Improvement Programme will create a town centre which is fit for purpose at all times of day, safe for the community to move around and inviting as a place to rest, shop and eat. Developments and improvements to the town centre, championed through county communications and Time for Worthing, will assist in building civic pride and further bolster visitor numbers.

5.2 Avoiding duplication of work or existing budgets or funds will be achieved through close partners working with Worthing TCI/BID and in better understanding the existing financial arrangements of WBC Surveyors. This work has started to allow for a quick start in November 2021.

5.3 Building a narrative and a mechanism for evaluation and feedback of the programme while celebrating and reporting on our progress, joining together with local businesses and town centre community, are key tasks in the role of the Place Project Officer and in measuring the overall success of the programme.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 At the end of the 2020/21 financial year, Worthing Borough Council created a reserve for future maintenance requirements of £383,000 to meet future maintenance needs on the Council's assets.

6.2 The report details a programme of works estimated at £200,000 within the town centres and release of funding is requested to support the planned improvements. The Executive Member of Resources can release upto £250,000 from the Council reserves.

7. Legal Implications

7.1 s1 of the Localism Act 2011 empowers the Council to do anything an individual can do apart from that which is specifically prohibited by pre-existing legislation

7.2 Under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council has the power to do anything that is calculated to facilitate, or which is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of their functions.

7.3 Section 1 of The Local Government (Contracts) Act 1997 provides that every statutory provision conferring or imposing a function on a local authority confers the powers on the local authority to enter into a contract with another person for the provision or making available of assets or services, or both (whether or not together with goods) for the purposes of, or in connection with, the discharge of the function by the local authority.

Background Papers

- And Then..Bouncing Back 2020/21
<https://www.adur-worthing.gov.uk/media/Media,157351,smxx.pdf>
- Platforms for Our Places: Going Further 2020-2022
<https://www.adur-worthing.gov.uk/media/Media,156442,smxx.pdf>

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Sustainability & Risk Assessment

1. Economic

- The Town Centre Improvement Programme supports local economic growth in Worthing.

2. Social

2.1 Social Value

- With an increase in good quality town centre residences it is important that Worthing presents itself well to maintain well-being and create a vibrant town centre to both live, work in and visit.

2.2 Equality Issues

An Equality Impact Assessment will be completed as the programme of works is planned during November 2021.

2.3 Community Safety Issues (Section 17)

- Maintaining safe spaces and responding quickly to vandalism assists in reducing the perception of town centre criminal activity. This includes safe travel through the town centre, green spaces and the seafront.

2.4 Human Rights Issues

Matter considered and non identified.

3. Environmental

- In every instance the programme will seek to use sustainable products, environmentally sympathetic planting and employ sustainable travel.

4. Governance

- The programme supports the ambitions of the And Then strategy for economic growth post Covid.