

## LOUGHBOROUGH AREA COMMITTEE – 6TH JANUARY 2020

### Report of the Strategic Director for Housing, Planning and Regeneration, and Regulatory Services

#### Part A

#### ITEM 10 BEDFORD SQUARE GATEWAY PROGRESS

##### Purpose of Report

To appraise the Loughborough Area Committee of progress made towards the delivery of the Bedford Square Gateway public realm improvement project.

##### Recommendation

That the report be noted.

##### Reason

To ensure that members of the Committee are kept fully informed of interventions to support the long term vitality and viability of Loughborough Town Centre.

##### Policy Justification and Previous Decisions

The Corporate Plan 2016 – 2020 is committed to the creation of a strong and lasting economy in Charnwood. In support of that overarching commitment the plan aims to support initiatives which will support our towns and villages to thrive and specifically calls for the preparation of a new and revitalised town centre masterplan for Loughborough.

The masterplan was approved by Cabinet on 12 April 2018 (Cabinet Minute 120: 17/18 refers) and recommended a series of improvements to the public realm between each of the major gateways to the town centre and the pedestrianised area at its core. It specifically endorsed the principle of improvements to the Bedford Square Gateway, including Wards End and Devonshire Square, which had been the subject of an earlier public consultation exercise.

##### Implementation Timetable including Future Decisions and Scrutiny

The project will be progressed to detailed design stages to inform a two day public exhibition at the end of February 2020. Consultants will then be instructed to prepare construction drawings in consultation with the highway authority and the preferred contractor with a view to the commencement of capital works in October 2020 with completion by October 2021.

The scheme will be designed so as to be delivered in phases subject to the availability of funding.

## Report Implications

The following implications have been identified for this report.

### *Financial Implications*

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report

### *Risk Management*

There are no specific risks associated with this report

Background Papers:                      None

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## **Part B**

### Background

1. Proposals for improvements to the public realm within Bedford Square, Wards End and Devonshire Square were first promoted through the first Loughborough Town Centre Masterplan (2007) as one element within a comprehensive package of public realm improvements across the town centre.
2. A detailed scheme was prepared in 2009 following a commission let to landscape architecture consultancy Bellinger Design. Following public consultation and a report to Cabinet the scheme was approved as a basis for submitting bids for funding from third parties. (Minute 205: 08/09 refers).
3. The scheme failed to proceed when provision made in the capital plan to pump prime partner funding was necessarily redirected to meet escalating costs of public realm projects elsewhere in Loughborough.
4. The project was resumed in 2016 when businesses petitioned the Council calling for improvements to the public realm to redress a perceived imbalance in investment across the town. In particular it was contended that the Inner Relief Road and related improvements to the public realm along the former "A6 corridor," together with the opening of "The Rushes" and the new Cineworld complex had shifted the focus of the town centre resulting in lower footfall in the Bedford Square "quarter" leading to challenging trading conditions, higher turnover of tenancies and persistent shop vacancies.
5. Consultants were engaged to prepare revised and updated concept plans which were the subject of public consultation in October 2016.
6. Progress on the project was paused while the issue of public realm improvements generally was revisited through the preparation of the revised Town Centre Masterplan adopted in 2018. The masterplan endorsed the principle of improvements to Bedford Square as part of a town wide approach to the public realm. However, the originally appointed consultants lacked the capacity to revise the concept plans to accommodate the comments received through the public consultation.

### Current Programme

7. In October 2019 a new consultancy team, Wood, was appointed following a competitive tendering process. Guided by a specification informed by the previous consultation exercise and a task and finish group formed by members of the Loughborough Town Team a revised concept plan was prepared and endorsed by the full Town Team on 2 December 2019.
8. Work is now focusing on the preparation of draft detailed designs which will inform cost estimates and be offered up for stakeholder engagement through a two day exhibition towards the end of February 2020.
9. The consultants will then prepare construction drawings and specifications informed by the feed back from the stakeholder engagement. In parallel work

will commence on the preparation of the draft Traffic Regulation Orders which will be required to control access, parking and loading within the scheme area.

10. Only when the design work has been completed will the full construction costs be fully apparent. Accordingly the scheme will be designed in discrete elements to permit its phased implementation as and when funds become available.
11. Subject to the identification of priorities and sufficient funding it is anticipated that construction works could commence from October 2020 with completion within 12 months. In any construction programme close liaison will take place with businesses to avoid peak trading periods and otherwise minimise disruption.

### Funding

12. The Capital Plan had been prepared on the assumption that the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP) would match funding committed by the Council in the sum of £390k, delivering an overall project budget of £780k. In the event the LLEP offered a contribution of only £130k reducing the project budget to £520k. That adjustment is reflected in the Capital Plan Amendment Report considered by Cabinet on 16 December 2019.
13. Efforts are being made to identify supplementary sources of funding including the Retained Business Rates Pilot which will come into effect in 2020/21 along with other emerging initiatives to encourage and support regeneration in towns across the country. The scheme has potential to be part of the palette of projects which might be considered under the emerging Town Deal

### Appendices

None