

Policy and Resources Committee

27th April 2016

Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?

Yes

Public Realm Phase Three

Final Decision-Maker	Policy and Resources Committee
Lead Head of Service	Dawn Hudd, Head of Commercial and Economic Development
Lead Officer and Report Author	Fran Wallis, Local Economy Project Officer
Classification	Public
Wards affected	High Street, East

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That approval is given to go out to tender for the appointment of a design team for Phase 3 of the public realm (North end of Week Street and Gabriel's Hill)
2. That delegated authority is given to the Head of Mid Kent Legal Services to agree and enter into a contract with the successful bidder
3. That members note the parallel piece of work commissioned to produce a Public realm policy for the town centre set out in paragraph 2.12, a draft of which will be presented to the relevant committees in July.
4. That the aims of the project as set out in paragraph 2.9 in this report, and in full in Appendix 1 are approved
5. That approval is given to finance the public realm phase 3 project with capital costs of £3.1m, which include the design fees and the development of the HLF bid.

This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

- Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all – by improving the look and feel of the public realm in the town centre.
- Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough – by improving the look and feel of the public realm, it supports the Council's ambition to attract more premium retailers, as well as supporting existing local businesses.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Policy and Resources Committee	27 th April 2016

Public Realm Phase 3

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report is seeking approval to progress with Phase 3 of the public realm improvement project, which follows on from Phases 1 and 2 which saw the improvements to the High Street. Phase 3 covers the north end of Week Street, from the entrance of Fremlin Walk to the junction with Station Road near Brenchley House; and the entire length of Gabriel's Hill from Jubilee Square down to the junction with Lower Stone Street.
 - 1.2 This report is seeking approval to go out to tender to appoint a design team the brief for which is set out in Appendix 1. Approval is sought for the funding required to carry out this piece of work, and to allow officers to appoint a design team. A report seeking approval of the designs will be presented back to the Committee prior to tendering the construction works.
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2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Economic Development Strategy 2015 – 2031 contains priority actions, one of which is 'enhancing Maidstone town centre – we will promote the regeneration of Maidstone town centre as a high quality retail and leisure destination, and as a place to live and work'.
- 2.2 In December 2015 this committee received a report on the Maidstone Town Centre Strategic Development Plan 2015 – 2020. That report outlined a 5-year plan to ensure that the County Town achieves its full potential as the fastest growing, most dynamic urban centre in Kent, with a high quality environment and unique heritage appeal. The report then goes on to specify how the council will achieve this, and references 'raising the quality of the built environment and public realm'.
- 2.3 Within the 5-year action plan, Public Realm Improvements Phase 3 is referenced as an action for years 1-2 pending further decision. Gabriel's Hill is referenced in the action plan in years 3-5. Officers have brought forward Gabriel's Hill for a number of reasons: it receives high levels of footfall and there is an existing natural link with Jubilee Square and Week Street; including it with the Week Street commission provides economies of scale, but also continuity of the design; the council is aware of investment potential from the owners of the Mall – improving the public realm here will accelerate that investment. In addition, following a positive site meeting with a representative from Historic England, officers have included Gabriel's Hill as it could potentially take advantage of an HLF bid (see point 2.14 below)
- 2.4 The report also references the fact that Maidstone dropped nearly twenty places in the National Retail Hierarchy or shopping centres, from 33rd in 2007 when Fremlin Walk opened, to 52nd in 2013. Maidstone town centre currently competes with neighbouring towns to attract shoppers, but in

particular Bluewater, and Ashford Retail Outlet – both of which have major growth plans.

Phases 1 and 2 Successes

2.5 In 2012/13, Maidstone Borough Council (MBC), in partnership with Kent County Council (KCC), implemented Phases 1 and 2 of the High Street Regeneration Project, to respond to the challenges of developments in retail provision in other areas of the town, which had left the High Street being overlooked by shoppers and visitors. MBC and KCC therefore invested £3.5m in enhancing the public realm around the High Street, and creating Jubilee Square at the upper end of the High Street, and Remembrance Square at the lower end towards the River Medway. Phase 1 was completed in June 2012, and Phase 2 in May 2013. An evaluation of Phases 1 and 2 was carried out in 2015 by Mott Macdonald, it found that the works have had a generally positive impact on the town centre¹. In summary:

- Overall, nearly 85% (283 respondents) from a High Street Survey rated the High Street improvements as good or very good.
- The vast majority of retailers (26 out of 34) rated the improvement works as good or very good.
- Discussions with retailers occupying sites that were registered as vacant prior to the works revealed that an estimate of 45 FTE jobs are now provided on these sites that were not supported prior to the works
- Given that trade in the area is plausibly worth £160m a year, applying a 1% attribution would suggest a turnover increase of £1.6m per annum as a result of the High Street improvements.
- Over a 10 year period, the improvements to the High Street could lead to an uplift of just over £13m in turnover to the local retail economy.

Phase 3 Economic Benefits

2.6 Phase 3 identified three roads in the town requiring improvements to their public realm. In 2015 a 'Pedestrian Environment Review System' (PERS) audit was carried out on the north end of Week Street, Gabriel's Hill and Earl Street². A PERS audit is a tool which allows the quality of the existing and proposed public realm to be quantified. This then allowed MBC to prioritise which roads to improve next to achieve the best return on the investment.

2.7 Week Street was revealed to be the area that would receive the largest increase in public realm quality, with Gabriel's Hill likely to receive the next highest level of benefits to the pedestrian environment. Earl Street is estimated to receive the lowest level of uplift to the public realm, and this is

¹ Maidstone High Street Improvement Works; Economic Impact Assessment, Mott Macdonald 2015.

² Maidstone Phase 3 Improvement: PERS Audit and Economic Impact Assessment: Mott Macdonald 2015

largely due to the existing pedestrian environment being of a higher quality than the other two schemes.

- 2.8 As the PERS audit identified the north end of Week Street and Gabriel's Hill as benefitting the most from improvements to their public realm, this report, and Phase Three of the public realm improvements focusses on these two roads.

Aims of the Project

- 2.9 As per the scope of Phases 1 and 2, the aim of the Phase 3 is to:

- Reduce premises void/vacancy rates
- Increase land and property values
- Increase footfall
- Generate additional expenditure
- Create jobs and employment opportunities

In addition to the above aims, Phase 3 will also:

- Raise the standard of the town centre to attract investors
- Improve the overall image of the town centre

- 2.10 The key objectives of the design brief which consultants are being asked to respond to are as follows:

- To show a level 'shared surface' i.e. no kerbs
- To rationalise street clutter and furniture
- Create a 'gateway' into the town, both from the station, and at the bottom of Gabriel's Hill
- Use high quality materials which are fit for purpose i.e. suitable for daily use by delivery vehicles, easy to clean, maintain, repair/replace
- Be accessible for all
- Be sensitive to the various heritage assets and points of interest
- Represent good value for money
- Be sensitive to the rest of the public realm materials in the town.

- 2.11 A Public Realm Officer Group has been established including representatives from economic development, environmental services, property, finance and parking services. A representative from KCC who was on the group for phases 1 and 2 has also been invited to re-join the group. This group has considered the aims and objectives of phase three, and have had input into the design brief in Appendix 1.

Additional work – for information

- 2.12 In addition to the design brief for Phase 3 of the public realm, consultants have been appointed to carry out a piece of work on public realm and public art. FrancisKnight Public Art Consultants will work with officers and members to produce a policy which can be incorporated into a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The intention is to clarify what materials (including street furniture) should be used and confirm the colour palette etc. should be used in the town centre. They will also be producing a policy on how MBC should be using art to interpret the rich history and heritage of the borough. This policy will be presented to the relevant committees in August for approval of this piece of work before

implementation. The design team working on phase 3 will work closely with Francis Knight to enable their findings to be taken into account in the designs for Week Street and Gabriels Hill.

2.13 An additional piece of work which the design consultants for Phase 3 will need to consider is the works proposed at Maidstone East Station. The Phase 3 design team will be required to work with the Maidstone East project team, to ensure that the two schemes align – for example how the two schemes connect at Station Road –see dotted line in Appendix 2. By timing the Phase 3 works now, MBC can take the opportunity to ensure that the public realm works, and the station refurbishment can coincide.

2.14 An opportunity has potentially arisen for MBC to apply for funding to the Heritage Lottery Fund Townscape Heritage initiative, following a suggestion from a representative from Historic England. The Townscape Heritage programme is for schemes which help communities improve the built historic environment in conservation areas. Officers are currently investigating this further with a view to submitting Gabriel's Hill as a scheme. The HLF bid could be used to complement the public realm works, by making improvements to the built environment e.g. shop fronts. The first stage bid deadline is August 2016. Should the HLF bid be successful the timetable for Gabriels Hill will change and implementation will be later in 2017/18.

2.15 Proposed Timetable

Based on MBC using a compliant framework for the procurement process.

Approval to proceed	27 th April 2016
Go out to tender using a compliant framework	Early May
Deadline for consultants to respond	Early June
MBC project team to review tenders received	Mid June
Appoint consultants	Late June
Inception meeting	Late June
Consultants to carry out surveys e.g. topographical	Early Aug
Initial sketch proposals/ideas back to Members (incl. Ward members)	Mid July
Consultants produce outline designs and consultation materials	End Jul/Aug
Officers report back to P&R with designs	28 th Sep
Consultants produce detailed construction drawings	Oct/Nov/Dec
Procurement process for construction phase	Jan 2017/Feb
Appoint contractors	March
Start on site	May

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 Option 1: Do nothing. Members could choose to reject this report and the recommendations made. The disadvantage of choosing this option is that the north end of Week Street will continue to suffer from continued deterioration in the surface materials, which then affect the look and feel of

the whole street. MBC will not be able to take advantage of tying into the improvements planned at Maidstone East station. Gabriel's Hill will also continue to decline in its appearance, and both streets will continue to struggle to attract new businesses and investment.

- 3.2 Option 2: Members agree to this report and the recommendations as set out at the beginning, in particular agreement to go out to tender, using the design brief as set out in Appendix 1.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 Option 2 is the preferred option for the reasons set out in this report. The success of Phases 1 and 2 on the High Street demonstrate that by improving the public realm, the whole area can experience an uplift.

5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 5.1 Once the design consultants have been appointed, there will be regular meetings with the Public Realm Officer group, and as part of their work, they will be expected to consult with all affected businesses, officers from MBC and KCC, as well as other stakeholders and access groups, including ward members.

6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 6.1 Once approval is given by this committee, the tender will be sent out for consultants to respond to. Following advice from the Procurement Manager, it is most likely that a compliant framework will be used. Tenders will then be scored, as per the design brief in Appendix 1, which states how the tenders will be scored. The appointed design team will engage with stakeholders and develop design ideas. A key requirement of the consultants is for them to produce very early sketches to show their design intent. This will be reported back to members as per the timetable in paragraph 2.15.
- 6.2 The preferred design will be reported back to Committee for approval and to seek approval to go out to tender to appoint a contractor. At this stage detailed designs will then be developed to enable planning applications to be submitted (if required) and construction tender documentation to be produced. A contractor will be appointed and works should start in this financial year.

7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	This project directly delivers the ambition of both corporate	[Head of Service or

	priorities.	Manager]
Risk Management	The project will have a risk assessment undertaken in accordance with the Council's risk management framework	[Head of Service or Manager]
Financial	Funding is available in the capital programme to complete the works subject to the approval of this committee	[Section 151 Officer & Finance Team]
Staffing	At this stage the project will be managed within existing staff resources. Staff input will be needed to support the HLF bid.	[Head of Commercial and Economic Development]
Legal	There is a requirement for Mid Kent Legal services to agree to and enter into a contract with the successful consultant. The potential cost of the consultant will also make the procurement subject to EU procurement rules	Deputy Head of Legal Partnership
Equality Impact Needs Assessment	An EIA will be carried out on the proposed designs to ensure compliance	Policy & Information Manager
Environmental/Sustainable Development	None at this stage	[Head of Service or Manager]
Community Safety	None at this stage. Community safety will be considered as part of the design process and engagement with stakeholders	[Head of Service or Manager]
Human Rights Act	None at this time	[Head of Service or Manager]
Procurement	Appropriate procurement processes in line with the Council's Commissioning & Procurement Strategy will be followed.	[Head of Property and Procurement]
Asset Management	Ongoing cleaning and maintenance of the designs will be considered within the consultation with stakeholders	[Head of Streetscene]

8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Maidstone Town Centre Public Realm Design Brief
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9. BACKGROUND PAPERS