

Communities, Housing and Environment

21st March 2017

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

No

Phase 3 Public Realm

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

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. To recommend that Policy & Resources (P&R) Committee approve the change in scope from the original proposed project, to now include the southern end of Week Street.
2. To recommend that P&R Committee approve the outline designs for all of Week Street and Gabriel's Hill/Lower Stone Street.
3. To recommend that P&R Committee approve the proposed materials for Week Street and Gabriel's Hill/Lower Stone Street
4. To recommend that P&R Committee approve the additional capital budget of £900k to cover the increased costs for the Southern section of Week Street.
5. To recommend that P&R Committee approve the proposed consultation materials and methodology.

This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

- Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all – by improving 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
CHE Committee	21 st March 2017
HCL Committee	4 th April 2017
P&R Committee	26 th April 2017

Phase 3 Public Realm

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the Phase 3 Public Realm project and to put forward the latest proposals. A key change for members to consider is the change in scope of the project. When Phase 3 of the Public Realm was first presented to P&R Committee on 27th April 2016, the proposal was to upgrade the north end of Week Street (from Fremlin Walk to Maidstone East Station) and Gabriel's Hill/Lower Stone Street. However following discussions with various members, officers and designers, it became clear that the whole length of Week Street should be considered.
 - 1.2 Clearly by increasing the scope of the project, there is a consequent increase in costs. The original scheme was estimated to cost £3.1m, based on a cost per m² for phases 1 and 2 as a guide, and approval was given by P&R Committee to finance the project at a cost of £3.1m. Approval will therefore be needed for an increase in the capital budget.
 - 1.3 An external design team was appointed which is led by PRP who are landscape architects, and Conisbee who are engineers. In addition, a cost consultant has been appointed, as well as a Principle Designer.
 - 1.4 The appointed design team (PRP) have been working on designs for the scheme starting with 'sketch ideas'. These were presented to the Chairs and Vice-chairs of Communities, Housing and Environment Committee (CHE), Heritage, Culture & Leisure and P&R Committees in January 2017, to seek agreement on the design intent. Appendix 1 of this report shows the outline designs and sketches which will be incorporated into consultation materials.
 - 1.5 This report outlines the proposed consultation method with stakeholder groups, and public information sessions, which will use images in Appendix 1.
 - 1.6 The information in this report is to be considered by CHE Committee, and will also be considered by HCL Committee, before being presented to P&R Committee who will be the ultimate decision-maker regarding the design, increase in scope and budget.
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2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In April 2016 a report was presented to P&R Committee, seeking approval to go out to tender for the design stage of Phase 3 of the Public Realm – specifically the north end of Week Street and Gabriel's Hill/Lower Stone Street. The intention is to follow the successful completion of Phases 1 and 2 of the public realm, which brought improvements to Jubilee Square and Remembrance Square on the High Street.

- 2.2 In 2015, Mott MacDonald was appointed to carry out an evaluation of Phases 1 and 2. The consultants were also tasked with carrying out a PERS audit (Pedestrian Environment Review System) on the north end of Week Street, Gabriel's Hill and Earl Street. 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.
- 2.3 The north end of 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 largely due to the existing pedestrian environment being of a higher quality than the other two schemes. As a result of the PERS audit, the focus of Phase 3 of the public realm became the north end of Week Street and Gabriel's Hill.
- 2.4 The southern end of Week Street (Fremlin Walk to the High Street) was not originally considered for any public realm works, due to the reasonable standard of existing materials, and the success of the retail sector along this section. However, as discussions progressed with Members, officers and the design team, the question of improving the southern section was frequently raised.
- 2.5 Improving the public realm in this southern section of Week Street will not lead to a reduction in vacancy rates or an increase in employment as all the units are let (excluding the fire-damaged properties). This part of Week Street falls within the primary shopping area and benefits from the highest levels of footfall in the town. However the Public Realm Design Guide, which was adopted by HCL Committee on 1st November 2016, sets out the importance of having some cohesiveness to all future public realm work. Not including this section of Week Street will create a jarring disjointed aesthetic look to the primary shopping area and potentially reduce the beneficial improvement to the town's sense of place created from the investment at either end of this section of road. It is therefore 'common sense' to include this section of what is essentially the same road – Gabriel's Hill and Week Street following the line of the old Roman road.
- 2.6 If this committee supports the recommendation to include the southern section of Week Street there are clearly cost implications to doing so, due to the increased area. As part of the project, a cost consultant (Gleeds) has been appointed to provide a cost breakdown for the scheme. Survey work (including topographical surveys and utility searches, as well as road coring) has been carried out to ascertain certain details which will help to refine the scheme design and costs.
- 2.7 As mentioned previously, the chairs and vice-chairs of the three relevant committees have already seen sketch designs of the scheme. The purpose of this was to ensure that the Design Team were 'heading in the right direction' in terms of design style. They have used the Public Realm Design Guide to steer their thoughts and ideas, drawing on the heritage and history of the town.

- 2.8 In accordance with the design brief which was given to the Design Team, they have been liaising with Network Rail who are currently working on improvements to Maidstone East Station. The aim is to ensure that the two schemes work together, so that when people arrive at the station there is a clear sense of welcome, identity and direction to draw people into the town along Week Street.
- 2.9 The proposals have been seen and discussed by the Project Officer Group which consists of officers from MBC from Regeneration & Economic Development, Finance, Environmental Services, Parking Services, Property and Procurement, as well as colleagues from Kent County Council (KCC) Highways.
- 2.10 Appendix 1 shows the proposed designs for the entire length from Maidstone East Station to the junction of Palace Avenue and Lower Stone Street (outside Gala Bingo). This is a 'pedestrian only' area between 10.30am and 5.30pm with only slow moving delivery vehicles in the space outside of these hours. Much of the space is flat without a kerb and the intention is that this design approach should be continued along the whole project area. The report also highlights current issues such as street clutter and vehicle dominance as well as a lack of connectivity with side roads, and the station.
- 2.11 The designers have used patterns in the paving to create Squares along the length of the road, and art and interpretation will be used to create a sense of place and character in each square. The art will draw upon Maidstone's heritage. For example the Square by St Faith's St will use the iguanodon as a sense of identity, which will connect with the museum.
- 2.12 The designers have also installed greenery into the streetscape. Due to the location of underground services, there are only a few limited places where trees can be planted and the exact location will be subject to trial holes. In addition it is hoped that green walls can be installed to add to the vibrancy. Any greenery will be installed to be low-maintenance.
- 2.13 The proposed materials for the surface are Charcon paving which is an 'off the shelf' material. This means that it is easily available, and would not attract a commuted sum from Kent Highways for maintenance purposes. The paving is available in a variety of colours and finishes to give the required effect. In addition to the Charcon, there will be some places where Kentish ragstone is to be laid. These will have text engraved into them to highlight key historic points in Maidstone.
- 2.14 Trial areas of these paving materials are being prepared, to be laid in Week Street to allow MBC's Street Cleansing Team to carry out various tests to check the ease of cleaning with the various methods which they currently use. In addition, the manufacturers have provided their own suggested cleansing and maintenance methods.
- 2.15 Once the designs have been approved by CHE, HCL and P&R Committees, there will be an 8-week period of consultation and information sessions. The proposed methodology is to contact stakeholder groups including the Cycle Forum, Disability Network and Old People's Forum to seek comments from

them directly relating to the designs. In addition, flyers will be sent to all the businesses along the entire length, outlining the proposals and directing them to a webpage with more details. Public roadshows will also be held allowing people (public and businesses) to see the designs. One Maidstone will assist with communicating to the business community.

- 2.16 Following the stakeholder consultation and public information sessions, the Design Team will collate any feedback and comments which will then be reviewed by the Project Officer Group. The Design Team will then be in a position to draw up the detailed design and construction drawings and to prepare the tender documentation for the construction phase. A report will be taken to P&R Committee seeking approval to go out to tender for the construction phase. At this stage we will have a much clearer idea on the costs, as the designs are refined, and the Cost Consultant has more detailed and accurate information about the construction. In order to tender for the construction phase the project team and Gleeds will work together to ensure that the Council's contract standing orders are followed.
- 2.17 As mentioned at the beginning, due to the increase in scope, there is an increase in costs to the project. Gleeds has been appointed to provide cost information. The current design proposals for the entire length of Week Street and Gabriel's Hill/Lower Stone Street is currently estimated at £4m. This is inclusive of all fees, as well as a contingency. As the project progresses, the costs will be refined further. Approval is therefore required from P&R Committee to the increase in capital budget by £900k.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 There are a number of recommendations contained within this report however there are three main options available to Members.
- 3.2 Option1 – is to recommend an increase to the scope of the project to include the whole section of Week Street. By agreeing to this, the committee will need to acknowledge the associated increase in costs.
- 3.3 The main advantage to this option is that despite the increase in costs, it is the 'common sense' approach. Other benefits include cost effective project management and construction work if the entire section is completed in one go with disruption kept to a minimum. Whereas if the southern section of Week Street was deferred to a later phase of construction, then businesses along here would experience considerable disruption from the construction of two separate phases of work.
- 3.4 Option 2 - is to *not* recommend the increase in scope, or associated costs. The project would proceed as originally planned, just doing the north end of Week Street and Gabriel's Hill/Lower Stone Street. Although the costs would be kept to the proposed level, the concerns set out in paragraph 2.5 would not be addressed. The southern section of Week Street already looks in relatively poor quality in contrast to the High Street and Jubilee Square – this would be exacerbated if the northern end of Week Street was also improved.

- 3.5 Option 3 – is to recommend that the whole of Week Street is delivered as Phase 3 with Gabriel’s Hill being delivered as Phase 4 maintaining a commitment for an allocation in the capital programme in future years. The designs would still be completed for the whole scheme.
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4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 It is recommended that Members approve option 1 to increase the scope and subsequent costs of the project, to include the entire length of Week Street. As outlined elsewhere in the report the reasons to carry out the public realm improvement works remain the same – it is the change in scope that is key.
- 4.2 Once members have recommended the increase in scope and cost, they must then make a recommendation on the designs themselves. The brief which went out to the Design Team was agreed by P&R Committee in April 2016, and the designs which have been produced respond to that brief. Key points from the design brief include:
- A level shared surface
 - Rationalise street furniture and clutter
 - Create a sense of place
 - Use of high quality materials
 - Low-cost and easy to maintain
 - Public art to be incorporated
 - Making it easier for pedestrians to navigate
- 4.3 A key focus of discussions with the Design Team has been around finding the balance between a high quality public realm and one which is easy to maintain. The Design team fully acknowledge the needs of MBC to keep its maintenance costs low. As mentioned previously, sample patches of paving are to be laid to test how well the materials cope with the daily dirt, grease and grime, and how easily they can be cleaned.
- 4.4 The Design Team have used the Public Realm Design Guide in their ideas and concepts to ensure that the art and heritage and interpretation are incorporated into the streetscape. The effect is to create a sense of arrival and place, and uniqueness to ensure that Maidstone does not end up with a bland public realm which could be anywhere in Britain. The designs have drawn on the rich heritage, highlighting points of interest along the way.
- 4.5 As well as a creating a public realm which looks good and creates a sense of place, it needs to be functional. Although the space is proposed to be a level surface and more pedestrian friendly, it must also be remembered that this is a route along which large delivery vehicles travel and stop. The Design Team have been mindful that the proposals will still function for deliveries.
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5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 5.1 The proposed consultation and information method follow the same method which was used for Phases 1 and 2. As mentioned previously there are certain key stakeholder groups which must be consulted on, as well as the business themselves who are going to be directly affected by the project. There will be an opportunity for the public to see the designs as well.
- 5.2 As mentioned previously, the brief and scope of this project have already been agreed in April last year. However the scope and costs are now proposed to be increased. The project therefore needs a recommendation from this committee and HCL Committee and ultimately a decision by P&R committee.

6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 6.1 If this committee agrees to the recommendations then the report will then go before HCL committee on 4th April. If they are also in agreement then it will then go before P&R Committee on 26th April.

7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	By making the town centre more attractive to businesses as well as increasing the vibrancy of the town	Head of Regeneration & Economic Development.
Risk Management	A risk register is managed as part of the project management process.	[Head of Service or Manager]
Financial	Funding of £3m for this project exists within the current capital programme, as detailed earlier in the report. It is likely that the proposed increase to the capital budget of £900,000 will need to be financed through borrowing as current plans allocate all alternative funding sources by 2018/19. Officers will endeavour to find the most cost effective solution to borrowing when the need arises. Current indicative PWLB rates for 50 year borrowing would attract interest costs of £663,570	[Section 151 Officer & Finance Team]

	over this period. The revenue implications to this include minimum revenue provision of £18,000 per annum.	
Staffing	The project is currently being managed with existing resources	Head of Regeneration & Economic Development.
Legal	Legal will be consulted and involved in any variation of existing contracts.	Team Leader – Contracts and Commissioning [Legal Team]
Equality Impact Needs Assessment	This will be undertaken during the consultation process.	[Policy & Information Manager]
Environmental/Sustainable Development	The scheme is designed to be low maintenance using easily accessible and where appropriate, local materials	[Head of Service or Manager]
Community Safety	The Community Partnership and Resilience Manager is consulted on the designs	[Head of Service or Manager]
Human Rights Act	Not applicable.	Head of Regeneration & Economic Development.
Procurement	Procurement will be carried out in accordance with the Council’s contract standing orders in consultation with the Procurement Team.	[Head of Service & Section 151 Officer]
Asset Management	Not applicable	[Head of Service & Manager]

8. REPORT APPENDICES

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

- Appendix I: Maidstone Public Realm Outline Proposals

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS