

Lead Member for Planning and Infrastructure**21 October 2022****King Street Car Park Improvements**

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
Planning and Infrastructure PAC	Monday 17 October 2022
Lead Member for Planning and Infrastructure	Friday 21 October 2022

Will this be a Key Decision?	No
Urgency	Not Applicable
Final Decision-Maker	Lead Member for Planning and Infrastructure
Lead Head of Service	William Cornall, Director of Regeneration and Place
Lead Officer and Report Author	Jennifer Stevens, Head of Environment and Public Realm
Classification	Public
Wards affected	High Street Ward

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to outline the proposals for improvements to King Street Car Park to improve the visual appearance of the site whilst still maintaining the biodiversity value.

The Planning and Infrastructure Policy Advisory Committee is asked to consider the proposal and provide a recommendation to the Lead Member of the Executive for Planning and Infrastructure.

Purpose of Report

Recommendation

The report makes the following recommendation to the Lead Member for Planning and Infrastructure:

1. That the proposed Planting and Maintenance Scheme to improve the King Street Car Park, as detailed in section 2 of the report, be approved.
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King Street Car Park Improvements

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure • Safe, Clean and Green • Homes and Communities • A Thriving Place <p>The proposals within this report support the Council's objectives for a <i>Safe Clean and Green</i> environment as well as <i>Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure</i>. The improvements are designed to improve the visual appeal of the car park which is a key part of the Town Centre's parking infrastructure as well as maintaining and improving biodiversity value and recognising operational constraints.</p>	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage is Respected • Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced • Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved • Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected <p>The report recognises the importance of enhancing biodiversity in a key Town Centre location.</p>	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Risk Management	<p>Already covered in the risk section – if your risk section is more than just a paragraph in this box then you can state 'refer to paragraph ... of the report'</p>	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Financial	<p>The proposals set out in the recommendation are all within already approved budgetary headings and so need no new funding for implementation.</p>	Finance Manager

Staffing	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Legal	There are no legal implications arising from the report	Senior Lawyer (Planning) Mid Kent Legal Services
Information Governance	The recommendations do not impact personal information (as defined in UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018) the Council Processes.	Information Governance Team – either Anna, Georgia or Lauren to review and approve.
Equalities	The recommendations do not propose a change in service therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment	Equalities & Communities Officer
Public Health	We recognise that the recommendations will not negatively impact on population health or that of individuals.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Crime and Disorder	Whilst the proposal is unlikely to have any significant impact on crime and disorder, it is recognised that improved maintenance regimes can have a positive impact on reducing anti-social behaviour.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Procurement	The work will be carried out internally so there is no procurement requirement.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Biodiversity and Climate Change	The implications of this report on biodiversity and climate change have been considered and align with the actions to enhance and increase biodiversity in the borough and town centre.	Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In 2013, the King Street multi-storey car park was replaced with an open-air short stay car park in the heart of the town centre. The car park is considered a prime location for visitors to the County Town due to its proximity to Town Centre shops and restaurants.
- 2.2 King Street Car Park has 53 bays which generate on average £5,150 per bay per year.
- 2.3 However, since its redevelopment, the car park has lacked a managed planting scheme and has largely been left to grow wild. Whilst this offers some benefit for biodiversity and habitat creation, complaints have been received about the impression this unkempt and unstructured appearance gives to visitors. The pictures below show the overgrown vegetation along the boundary with Church Street and along the back of the car park.



Image 1: Current condition of King Street Car Park

- 2.4 The aim of this project is to improve the visual appearance of the car park whilst maintaining biodiversity value and minimising ongoing maintenance costs. The site itself offers a number of challenges including the steep slopes, the southerly aspect and its use. Anti-social behaviour, littering and trampling of the ground behind vehicles is commonplace and therefore needs to be considered when designing the planting regime.
- 2.5 It is the intention to divide the land into separate zones based on their gradients and the current landscaping. The diagram below shows how this is intended to be laid out, with retention and restoration of the existing beech hedge, reduction and maintenance of the buddleia and the creation of new aromatic and native planting areas. Within these areas it is also intended to include log piles and bug hotels for habitat creation and enhancement of biodiversity. If possible, habitat gabions will be incorporated into the design.



Image 2: Conversion of gabions to habitat

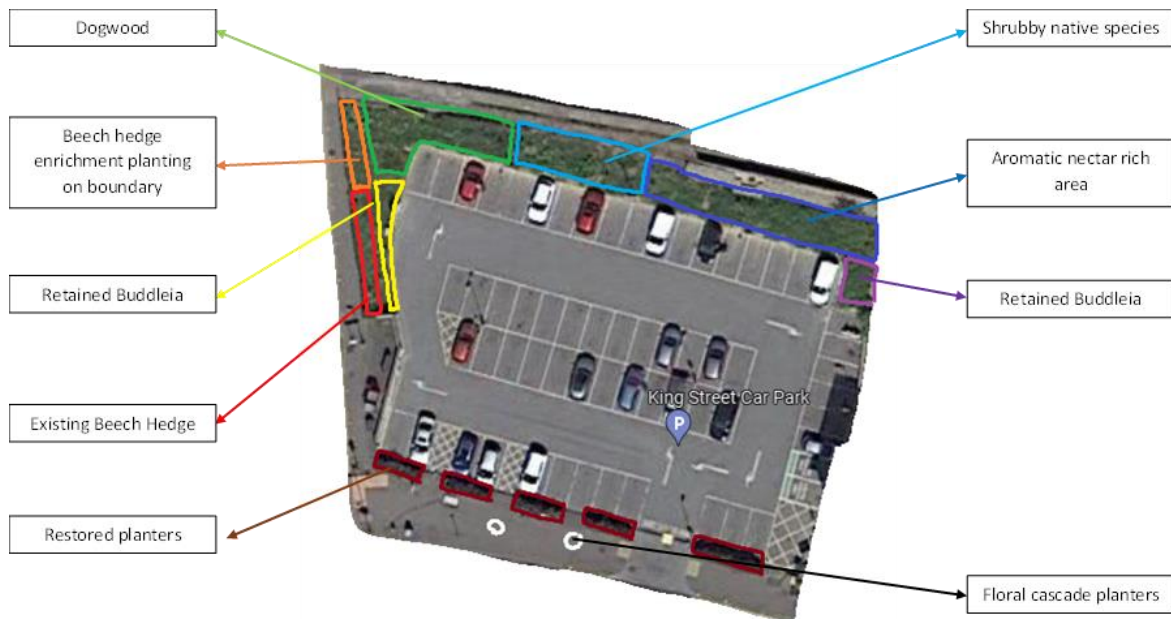


Image 3: Outline plan of the new planting zones

2.6 The aromatic nectar-rich area is sited on the area backed by the stone gabions. Potentially the gabions could, with additional work create good habitat too, example shown in Image 2. This will include plants such as Winter Savoury, Rosemary, Marjoram and Wood Sage



Image 4: Example of plants to be incorporated into Aromatic Nectar-rich Area

- 2.7 The native planting area will feature in middle of the land at the back of the car park and will involve new planting infilling between the existing dogwood and hawthorn. This will include Guelder rose, dogwood and spindle hedge plant.



Image 5: Example of plants to be infilled between the dogwood and hawthorn at the back of the site.

- 2.8 Further planting around the site will include crab apple trees and beech whips to reform the original boundary hedge along Church Road.
- 2.9 Along the front boundary of the car park there are six large wooden planters which house *Photinia* 'Red Robin'. These will be repaired and treated to preserve their life and the existing plants will be retained and pruned. To incorporate seasonal and colourful flowering plants into the scheme, tiered planters like those placed in Jubilee Square will be installed on the wide pavement outside the car park.

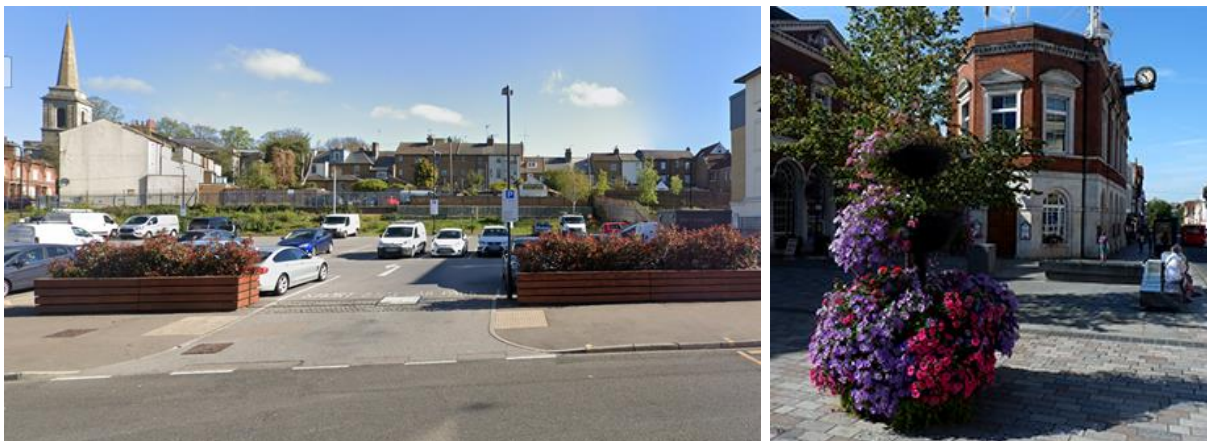


Image 6: Planters outside King Street Car Park and example of floral planters in Jubilee Square

- 2.10 It is intended that this work will be carried out during the Autumn and Winter this year.
- 2.11 The work will be funded from Parking Services existing budgets and it has been designed to minimise ongoing maintenance costs. The anticipated cost for this work is £2,000.
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3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 The Policy Advisory Committee could recommend to the Lead Member for Planning and Infrastructure that the proposal set out within this report is implemented. This is recommended as it will significantly improve the visual appearance of this key car park whilst ensuring that effort is paid to protecting the biodiversity of the site.
 - 3.2 Alternatively, the Committee could decide to recommend alternative improvements to the car park which would further enhance the sites visual appearance or biodiversity value.
 - 3.3 The Committee could recommend that no work is carried out on site and the areas highlighted are left to remain wild. This option is not recommended due to the impact this is having on the appearance of the car park and access route into the Town Centre.
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4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 It is recommended that the planting and maintenance scheme outlined in this report is adopted for King Street Car Park as it looks to balance an impactful visual appearance with maintaining biodiversity within a town centre environment.
 - 4.2 This scheme has been designed by the Parks and Open Spaces Manager with the constraints of the site in mind.
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5. RISK

- 5.1 There is a reputational risk to the Council if this key site is not maintained to some degree but given the importance of maintaining and enhancing biodiversity within the Borough, this must be balanced.
 - 5.2 Therefore the proposal has sought to create an attractive green space around the car park with native and aromatic plants and the inclusion of log piles and bug hotels.
 - 5.3 There will also be interpretation boards installed around the site to raise awareness of Go Green Go Wild initiatives and encourage visitors to look out for wildlife within the Town Centre.
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6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 6.1 Informal feedback has been received about the importance of this site for invertebrate habitat and biodiversity, and this has been taken into account when designing the scheme.

6.2 This issue will be considered by the Planning and Infrastructure Policy Advisory Committee on 17 October 2022.

7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

7.1 Following recommendation from the Committee, the Lead Member of the Executive for Planning and Infrastructure will take the decision whether to implement the improvements.

7.2 If this is agreed, work will start in late Autumn / early Winter and will be publicised through local and social media.

7.3 Interpretation boards will also be installed around the site to ensure visitors are aware of the Go Green Go Wild initiatives.

8. REPORT APPENDICES

None

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None