

ROCHFORD TOWN CENTRE ENHANCEMENT SCHEME

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report outlines a scheme for the enhancement of the Rochford Market Square and environs.
- 1.2 The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a statutory requirement on Local Authorities to formulate and publish proposals for the enhancement of designated Conservation Areas.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Members will recall that a capital sum of £100,000 has been identified in the budget for enhancement schemes in Rochford Town Centre.
- 2.2 The Rochford Town Centre Working Group met on 29th January 2001 and discussed a design sketch for enhancement of the Market Square. A copy of the notes from that meeting is appended to this report as Appendix 1.
- 2.3 The Working Group concluded that the design sketch provided a framework to move forward to detailed design, followed by consultation and then implementation later in the year. See Appendix 2 to this report.

3 OUTLINE OF THE SCHEME

- 3.1 The main features of the proposed scheme are:-
 - widening of the pavement on all three sides of the Square and re-surface using slabs and brickwork
 - provision of pavement buildouts at the entrance and exit to provide safe pedestrian crossing points
 - slightly widen existing traffic island and surface with slabs and bricks - re-install horse trough, seats, bins and Parish bollard, etc.
 - pedestrian tables or contrasting surfacing to link corner buildouts with central island
 - all existing cycle racks to be removed and replaced with Sheffield type racks on East side of the Square
 - rationalise all signage and road markings

- replace existing light fittings with Conservation style brackets and SON light units (better illumination)
- reverse the current flow of vehicles around the Square
- re-align the kerbs at South Street/West Street junction to improve turning movements and to create a safer space for pedestrians on the corner.

4. DISCUSSION

- 4.1 The Town Centre Working Group did raise a number of concerns about the proposed scheme. In particular, the Group considered the implications of reducing the number of car parking spaces from 29 plus 2 disabled to 18 plus 2 disabled.
- 4.2 However, the Group concluded that one of the primary aims of any enhancement scheme must be not only to improve the built appearance and character of the Town Centre, but to create a safer environment for pedestrians.
- 4.3 It is considered that the enhancement scheme as presented would have positive benefits for the Town Centre. On the other hand, Members will need to consider whether the loss of car parking spaces is acceptable.
- 4.4 Certainly, some enhancement works could be undertaken without any change to the current parking arrangements, but this would be to miss the central aim of the scheme to improve the environment of the Square for non-car users
- 4.5 Taking all views into account, it is considered that the scheme as outlined merits support.

5. THE WAY FORWARD

- 5.1 It is proposed that a Consultant be appointed to prepare design drawings for the scheme. Since most of the proposed works will be in the public highway, it is understood that there is no alternative other than to appoint the County Highways own consultants to this task. At this stage, costs for this work are not known, but are estimated to be no more than 10% of the total scheme costs.
- 5.2 Once a detailed design has been prepared, it is proposed to undertake a public consultation exercise, the results of which will be reported back to Members in due course, in order that a final decision can be made on the implementation of the scheme.

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- 5.3 The design and consultation stages, together with a report back to Members, will need to be completed by July 2001 in order to allow sufficient time for scheme implementation.
- 5.4 The aim of the consultation exercise would be to engage all businesses and residents within the town centre, as well as publicising the proposals as widely as possible to obtain views from visitors, shoppers, and so on.

6 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The scheme has been designed to enhance the Rochford Conservation Area and to create a safer, friendlier pedestrian environment. It is anticipated that improvements in the town centre will have a positive economic benefit for the town.

7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The total scheme costs are estimated at £99,000 including an allowance of 12.5% for design and supervision and a 10% contingency. The proposals are therefore within the budgeted figure.
- 7.2 In addition, English Heritage has invited Rochford Council to make a bid for resources under the Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme (HERS). A total of £15,000 has been offered to the Council in the 2001/2002 financial year, subject to matched funding being available. Therefore, it is proposed that the estimate for the current scheme include a grant contribution of £15,000 from English Heritage.
- 7.3 The closing date for a bid to the HERS Scheme was 16th March 2001 and action has been taken under the urgency procedures to ensure this opportunity for additional funds is not lost.

8 RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**
- (1) That the detailed design of the Rochford Town Centre enhancement scheme be prepared.
 - (2) That a public consultation exercise be carried out.
 - (3) That the outcome of the consultation exercise be reported back to this Committee in due course. (HPS)

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