

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Overview and Scrutiny Committee **DATE:** 10th April 2012

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WARD(S): All.

PART I **FOR INFORMATION**

ART AT THE CENTRE-POST IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW

1. **Purpose of Report**

To note the contents of this report about the “Art at the Centre” -High Street Enhancement Scheme following its completion in 2009.

2. **Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action**

The Committee is requested to note the report.

3. **Community Strategy Priorities–**

- **Economy and Skills**

Providing employment for local people by offering diverse jobs to match the community needs and give support to develop a local work force

- **Health and Wellbeing**

Promote healthier lifestyles, support independent living to the vulnerable and the elderly and promote healthier lifestyles and longer life expectancy.

- **Housing**

Ensure a wide range of housing and access to housing set in high quality settings.

- **Regeneration and Environment**

Improve public spaces and instil a sense of pride in our community and the local environment, promote sustainable public transport, reduce CO₂ and keep environment clean and green.

- **Safer Communities**

Reduce crime and fear of it and deal with the causes of crime and anti-social behaviour

4. **Other Implications**

(a) **Financial**

No financial implications. Certain financial matters remain restricted in view of commercial confidentiality.

(b) Risk Assessment None specific to this report. Report of past working highlights significance of risk assessment being kept up to date or when changed circumstances arise to prevent unforeseen financial and time consequences and requires continuing management oversight of risks during project time.

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no Human Rights issues arising from this report.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

All requirements have been reported in the approved Equality Impact Screening Opinion.

(e) Workforce

None

5. Supporting Information

Introduction

- 5.1 In June 2009, High Street, Slough was relaunched following the street enhancement work undertaken along this street. Construction work had begun in December 2007. It was the first of the major public regeneration schemes to be completed in the town centre. Yew Tree Gardens was reopened in September 2009.
- 5.2 In April 2004, Slough Borough Council announced that design work would begin on this scheme and scheduled its completion for 2009. This scheme would accompany the previously launched Heart of Slough Regeneration scheme. The commercial operators of the Queensmere Shopping Centre had carried out some refurbishment work on the Queensmere Shopping Centre and their buildings around Town Square a few years before.
- 5.3 Widespread improvements were sought to the main shopping areas and other areas to: encourage better pedestrian circulation; improve streetscene environment; the active promotion of the Town Square as a new entertainment and restaurant area; introduce new pavement cafes; improve traffic measures and new public spaces designed to benefit residents in new town centre housing, shoppers and office workers. It would retain flexibility to take up future retail opportunities.
- 5.4 All these town centre schemes reflect the priorities for the town centre set out in Slough BC's Local Development Framework accepting the need for action. This scheme did not make any direct changes to the Queensmere Shopping Centre buildings but can accommodate the most likely changes. Members are aware of the context that many

similar High Streets in the United Kingdom are experiencing the adverse impact of structural changes in retailing, whether it be for low cost clothing, unit sizes, the internet, out of town retail parks, parking fees and more recently the impact of a severe economic downturn on retailing. Central government will shortly give its response to the recommendations of its own commissioned Portas Report on Retail health.

- 5.5 In Slough, results from the 2004 shoppers survey strongly endorsed the idea of a new scheme. The respondents were also wanting retailers to strengthen their retailing roles as a way of facing the challenges for such centres like Slough. On matters of detail, they supported the provision of street trees, more seating, community safety measures and new public art. Public interest in the scheme and the town centre was maintained through occasional promotional efforts and one day events like Arts Alive in the Town Square during the design development stage. In the construction period, newsletters, street banners and press articles kept the public and businesses informed.
- 5.6 The new scheme would address longstanding pavement subsidence, uneven paving levels and removal of redundant or broken street furniture. New level paving would better suit wheelchair users or those less mobile. New seating was to be introduced at regular intervals along the entire length of High Street to assist. It would also expand CCTV coverage to improve community safety.
- 5.7 The previous traffic restrictions in parts of the High Street required these to be kept free of daytime traffic except blue-badge holders, buses, delivery vehicles and taxis. In reality, the then unauthorised incursions were largely unenforced by the Police and the street operated as a through route to the detriment of those vehicles permitted in the daytime. By applying new Government provisions on traffic management, decriminalisation of parking and community safety measures soon after they became available, this new scheme could deliver arrangements for blue badge parking, buses and taxis within the newly created shared surface street best suited to Slough.
- 5.8 Initial funding for project development came from S106 funding with the Council's Highway and Transport's capital programme coming available once the scheme design was ready. Other grants from Arts Council England and South East Economic Development Agency were used for initial development work and other project grants paid for some individual artworks. This was undertaken with limited availability of inhouse staff resources, some shared with the Heart of Slough scheme.
- 5.9 Most High Street retailers and businesses front onto the road where improvements were planned. It was imperative to minimise any effect upon the underground utilities whilst construction was underway and ensure continuity of supply for businesses to continue trading with minimum disruption. Inevitably the enhancement scheme was sometimes

delayed because utility companies were required to attend and move or upgrade substandard equipment . Work could not recommence in this vicinity until repaired and took precedent when reinstatement arose. Precautions put in place did allow visiting pedestrians to safely use the High Street and temporary emergency routes were maintained whilst works were underway. It was necessary for the public to exercise caution and comply with instructions on temporary signs. Regular newsletters were distributed to all High Street premises including positive interviews by retailers. The newsletters did give businesses advance notice of current and planned work in the forthcoming month and details of planned Christmas arrangements to allay any who had concerns about this. Regular press releases were issued to inform the public as well as answering individual public queries received.

5.10 After completion of both schemes, there are fresh opportunities for new investment into the new infrastructure. Every encouragement continues to be given to businesses choosing the town centre as their base, whether nationally known retailers, independents or businesses and customers and visitors to stay longer. The March 2012 publication of the Government's National Planning Policy Framework reconfirms support for town centres.

How the scheme was undertaken

5.11 The High Street was comprehensively designed, bringing new lighting, natural stone paving, seating, trees and artworks as well as new traffic arrangements that came into operation.

5.12 The work was managed by a SBC Project Team with a Project Sponsor. A Project Team was made up of representatives from Transport and Planning and Arts officers from Community and Wellbeing. This team worked in conjunction with the Town Centre Action Group and the Town Centre Manager whilst they were operating. Arts development consultants liaised with the other consultants and artists. Any design drawing work would largely be done outside in offices of the appointed engineering and landscape design consultants who were responsible for the outline, detailed and construction design drawings, material specifications and contract documents based upon the concept design accepted at the time of their selection. A programme, project aims, and Risks Assessment had all been set out in a 2004 Project Plan up to Outline Design stage together with Project briefing material. This also included briefing material prepared by an adhoc artists advisory group with time given to inform the shortlisted consultants. The Project Plan set out requirements to regularly review the work at monthly Project Team meetings and take any necessary co-ordination. An Equality Impact Screening Opinion was fully compliant with adopted Council procedures and practises. The implementation of the engineering contract and artists work was directly supervised by SBC engineers, the latter being undertaken in conjunction with the Lead Arts officers.

- 5.13 In July 2005, engineering consultants were engaged to design this major scheme following selection by Cabinet from three shortlisted concept design submissions. The OJEU procurement and public consultation requirements were fully met. The selected concept design proposed many contemporary features along with new traffic measures for keeping blue badge parking bays and taxi parking close to the main shopping area. This choice was endorsed by the results of a major 2005 opinion survey about the three shortlisted schemes. Paving materials were on display at the public exhibition. Members and Chief Officers were later invited to inspect larger sections of sample paving modules built at Wexham Nursery.
- 5.14 The consultant designers worked with artists to devise ways that art ideas could integrate to create new interest for those visiting the town centre. This initial work was done over three Design Days between December 2005 and March 2006. The locations were incorporated into the Outline Design. The whole Outline Design was displayed at Central Library in July 2006. Artists produced detailed designs for their new work by October 2006. Some design changes were deemed necessary to define locations and artworks foundations.
- 5.15 It was necessary for consultant structural engineers to design and check the artworks. Artists did identify contractors for the fabrication design and manufacture of these works. SBC engineers did complete risk assessments during the early design stages. The design and manufacture proved relatively straightforward for artworks using materials in common use, it was however found to be more complex for others using less common materials, some with lighting features.
- 5.16 The appropriate consultation took place about materials, new physical features or future street maintenance with various council sections during this period. Some responses did not meet their set critical times by some margin, or coverage proved incomplete, for a variety of reasons. Promotional and public information were jointly produced by Communication, Planning and Art officers. Supervision work on the detailed designs and construction was carried out by SBC engineers running the engineering contract.
- 5.17 Other design changes would incorporate minor traffic changes in Herschel Street, alterations to road layouts at the junction of Windsor Road and High Street and others associated with the confirmed Traffic Regulation Order. The detailed design and tender documents were then completed.

The nature of the scheme

- 5.18 In 2004, new design ideas were emerging from the Heart of Slough scheme to bring a modern and positive identity to the centre. A step change was required in terms of environmental quality and new architectural forms. Elsewhere in the UK and abroad, a large number of street enhancement schemes were developing similar approaches within existing shopping areas, representing a distinct departure from past heritage approaches. The High Street scheme would complement the existing shopping and business activities. The two regeneration schemes enjoy a common boundary in Mackenzie Square.
- 5.19 Many High Street properties in Slough were built during the twentieth century. The planning brief set a contemporary design approach for the street environment. It would need to marry with likely design details for the Heart of Slough scheme which would not be forthcoming until much later. It was acknowledged that parts of the shopping premises could well be regenerated during this period or afterwards and the new scheme would need to accommodate these. A heritage approach was not pursued for these reasons.
- 5.20 The appointed engineering designers had to be knowledgeable about materials, costings, reliability of suppliers, new sources of natural stone and street furniture as well as normal traffic and highways requirements. There were some new schemes of this type in the pipeline but few on the ground at the time. Our inhouse staff and the consultants had to work closely as a team and share knowledge about all these matters.
- 5.21 Slough High Street is a linear shopping street. It has two shopping centres with indoor malls, all of which has recessed entrances onto the High Street. Its shopping pattern has been changing and non-shopping uses are still expanding (but still complement the shopping). The new street design unifies the street environment encouraging a more pedestrian-friendly environment, improve areas close to the shopping centre entrances and introduce new features including seating along the entire length of the High Street. All of the new design features have to properly integrate so the scheme works in its entirety, for example the lighting columns along the highway, the catenary lights in the pedestrian zone and light columns in the Town Square and Mackenzie Square; the selected black and white stone paving pattern in the pedestrian areas and shared surface streets, new number-plate recognition CCTV cameras and new street trees, granite seating around art floorscapes and the major floorscape in the new Town Square.
- 5.22 An important set of measures was used to relocate the bus stands to the west of Mackenzie Square, introduce new physical traffic measures to allow only permitted traffic to enter and by relocating the new taxi stand to the top of Church Street, both Mackenzie Square became a more

significant and welcoming place in its own right with new seating and lighting and the opportunity taken to designate a shared street for the area between the Square and the central pedestrian zone which helps improve pedestrian permeability. A more limited shared surface was introduced to the east end of the pedestrian zone up to The Grove. The changes that went out to consultation about the Traffic Regulations Order, once confirmed, allowed the scheme to commence.

- 5.23 It was necessary for this scheme to integrate many different work streams, each requiring different expertise and requiring completion within prescribed times critical for the project's completion. It took considerable coordination to complete the layout design. It was necessary to closely supervise the designers work to ensure coverage and practicality of proposals. This took time because of the amount of detail requiring checking, particularly when one set of changes is accepted might necessitate some further remodelling of the whole; when new information becomes available about precise locations of underground services and more evidence being sought to justify the consultants' proposal. Not all traffic regulations were in place at the outset and could only be incorporated once the new government regulations became operational. The final layout has been in use over the past few years with no significant difficulties raised by the business community and a marked reduction in the vacancy rate . This compares favourably with many other UK towns who are showing an increase in vacancy rate elsewhere in many UK towns. It has the ability to accommodate new business opportunities with the take up of new opportunities showing signs of promise in a difficult trading climate.
- 5.24 Most street furniture products were selected by the designers for their appearance, materials choice, suitability and cost. It was found that few European quality standards are in existence for street furniture and which the Council might reasonably require from manufacturers before purchase. The alternative of individual product testing is costly without special funding. Despite the normal checks being made, a few products did unfortunately fall short of expectations. In future, the Council may want to set out agreed standards or possibly undertake individual product testing itself.

Construction of the Scheme

- 5.25 The main contractors were appointed in September 2007 following the completion of the OJEU procurement period. It was necessary to obtain financial clearance for this appointment in the light of new owners of the original bidding contractor.
- 5.26 This major contract requires the handing over of control of the street to the contractors during the contract period. After mobilisation and Council leasing of Lascelles Depot for their use, enabling and paving works began at the Windsor Road end. It soon became clear that contractual obligations over the paving team had not been met and the Council

required this to be urgently addressed. New paving subcontractors soon started on site but it was not able to catch up time from the original programme for this and other reasons set out elsewhere.

5.27 Council agreement was given for each new phase to be commenced and reopening for public use after that phase of work was completed. This permitted sufficient area to remain available for the public use. It was also necessary to fully comply with all safety specifications such as temporary ramps to shop premises. Street notices were on display. The roll forward of construction work meant that the bluebadge parking bays opposite Mackenzie Square and later the blue badge parking bays at the east end of the High St were temporarily closed with narrowing of the vehicle routes. These allowed these two phases of the work to be safely completed. It was necessary to give priority to maintain the bus routes, often from temporary stands. This could only be achieved by blue badge holders using the nearby surface carpark in Buckingham Gardens and alternative locations at the east end of the High Street and for alternative drop off/pickup points to be used. Some members of the public were not appreciative of these temporary displacements but this was a necessity to keep the public safe and complete these works. At the time when the rolling construction work required the resiting of the taxi rank to its new position, the hackney carriage drivers sought its return to its original position despite the Associations not participating in the informal and formal consultations on the Traffic Regulations Order. Some minor reconfiguration of the new taxi rank site and new measures introduced to enforce new traffic arrangements took account of the taxis' operations. The taxi rank remains in its new position. Its resiting was necessary to deliver the shared street link between Mackenzie Square and the main pedestrian zone with the buses flowing unimpaired.

5.28 The main contractor was responsible for the procurement of materials. Agreements for monthly payment were based upon the monthly returns and measurements of quantities on the ground. Lighting, tree and landscaping work was undertaken by sub-contractors controlled by the main contractor. On the procurement of paving materials, Slough BC engineers approved a single large purchase as a way to maintain control over supply and costs.

5.29 Where there were planned locations for new seating, tree pits or art features, it was necessary for the main contractor to build the foundations and continue working until safe for installation to take place. Safety fencing would often be necessary during this intervening period. Where utility companies were required to divert utilities, this did result in some areas remaining open longer. Banners were placed at certain locations illustrating the new street feature to inform the public following their concerns about areas being left open.

5.30 Similarly, temporary arrangements were needed whilst works to the roadways were necessary and only fully resolved for some once the road markings were in place.

- 5.31 There were two Christmas periods during the contract. The phasing of works took account of any planned street festivities during this period. All the necessary arrangements were in place to permit these events to take place and be safe and clean during these periods.
- 5.32 The major repaving of the Town Square has a large central floor mosaic along with new seating and lighting provided. Apart from the day to day activities taking place, it would be capable of better entertainment events because of new equipment. More cafes and restaurants and outside pavement seating are now in the Town Square where longterm vacancies had existed. Elsewhere the new Mackenzie Square has new seating and lighting and has now linked to the High Street pedestrian area. New cafes with new pavement cafes can be found along the pedestrian area. The granite seating is grouped close to new floorworks in the pedestrian areas which people can enjoy whilst resting.
- 5.33 Slough BC staff undertook daily inspections to ensure that the scheme progressed and council assistance immediately available to resolve matters. Works were undertaken during weekdays. The temporary safety barriers put in position could be disturbed overnight requiring reinstated early the following morning. There was emergency cover during the weekends and bank holidays when more disturbance was likely. There were recurrent problems regarding failure to remove discarded wooden packing material by the contractors from the site on Fridays. There was sometimes unsightly litter build ups in the working areas requiring extra attention in the construction period.
- 5.34 In early 2009, it was necessary for Slough BC to strongly press for completion of the works and the remedial work soon after its completion date. A fresh assessment of costs was made by Slough BC based upon final measurements of quantities and a final settlement was made after a period of negotiation.
- 5.35 Certain remedial works have been undertaken by Slough BC since the final settlement.

Provision of Artist Designed Street Features and Public Art

- 5.36 A scheme of the scale and type did identify key locations and sections of street where new street features can create interest. The day-to-day activities remain unimpeded and the routes of the underground utilities protected. Five artists were part funded by the Arts Council England, South East and the South East Economic Development Agency for the design work and certain projects.

5.37 Feature locations were identified:

- 1) entry/leaving points at each end of the High Street
- 2) mini-gateways at both ends of the main pedestrian zone
- 3) town square
- 4) locations of three main granite seating in High Street
- 5) Mackenzie Square
- 6) Yew Tree Gardens

5.38 It was beneficial to group seats, feature lighting, new floorscapes, public art in different permutations at different High Street locations. By applying this 'multiplier effect' for each location, these strengthen their value. Throughout the High Street, there are examples of world poetry in eleven languages in most common use by people living in Slough. This approach helps endorse the Council objective of promoting cultural diversity.

5.39 The new street features in the Town Square, Mackenzie Square, the eastern mini-gateway, Yew Tree Gardens and the engraved poems in stone continue to perform well. The catenary lighting is operating well with its energy saving technology as are the tree uplighters(proposed by the designers).

5.40 The floor droplets, made of stone and terrazzo, are located near to Clarks Shoes and WH Smiths and create the interesting focus for shoppers resting at the seating although some underfloor lighting is still receiving attention.

5.41 It was however necessary to remove the resin blocks in the Lamplight(at the west end of the pedestrian zone) and Radar(at the Windsor Road end of the High Street) because of the structural failure of this material. The introduction of cast resin during the implementation stage was in fact a substituted material for the previous choice of acrylic. For the Lamplight, a replacement metal design is being developed to install into the present structure which retains its attractive appearance. There are current funds to cover this. No clear evidence has become available about why the original material failed but emphasises the risks about using 'new' materials and the need for review risk assessments in changing circumstances and avoid accepting risks on parts of structures proposed by third parties. There is no current artwork planned for the 'Radar'.

Community safety

5.42 The coverage of the area by the CCTV cameras has been greatly improved and enables better co-ordination across the whole area. Additional camera equipment has brought about better overviews of the area as well as its active use to assist the traffic control measures in the sections of new shared streets and support for the entry control system into the pedestrian zone. It has led to a significant reduction of vehicles seeking unauthorised entry. This facility can also greatly assist the police for example involving the arrest of one serious offender on one occasion. The control of vehicles permitted entry into the central pedestrian area has enabled us to identify vehicles which cause

physical damage but leave the scene of the accident without reporting the accident. Cameras are in active use to combat shoplifting , anti-social behaviour, cycle theft and assistance about lost children.

Links with Schools and Promotional Materials

- 5.43 A significant number of schools and voluntary groups took part in the scheme during its development stages. A large number of schools were actively involved in project work through inschool visits by artists and exhibitions of the students work displayed at Slough Museum. Town Square banners were displayed in the town square in 2004 and 2005. Postcards were also available. There were link ups with events at the West Wing and exhibitions about the best of Slough's architecture scheduled during the nationally promoted annual Architecture Week. A booklet was published to coincide with the launch of the construction work. Little or no post implementation promotion since its completion has been possible for cost saving reasons .

Financial Aspects

- 5.44 The cost of this major capital contracts amounted to approximately £7.00m. including costs of engineering supervision. Funding from S106, Arts Council England-SouthEast and South-East Economic Development Agency has offset expenditure dealing with project setup and concept design development, publicity and public consultation, costs associated with the final settlement and set up of aftercare management system totalling approximately £1.8m over the scheme period of 6 years.

Streetscene Management

- 5.45 The High Street is a 'living street' requiring regular attention when affected by nearby development. A Maintenance manual is being developed to deal with the different circumstances that arise. It contains an important products library of those involved with sourcing these.

6. Comments of Other Committees

None

7. Conclusion

Recent national and our own surveys of Slough High Street premises show that its vacancy rate is 6% compared to the national average of 14%. Furthermore our trend remains downward compared with the national figure which is still rising. It offers evidence that High Street retailing is showing signs of improvement. The new scheme creates opportunities for new take-up, extension and retention of the wide range of activities best served by premises in the town centre.

8. **Appendices Attached**

None

9. **Background Papers**

1. 2004 Project Plan-
2. July 2005 Cabinet Report
3. Equality Impact Screening Opinion
4. Art at the Centre booklet 2007
5. Various evaluation reports submitted to Arts Council England.