

## **SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** Overview and Scrutiny Committee      **DATE:** 11<sup>th</sup> September 2008

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**WARD(S):** All

### **PART I** **FOR CONSIDERATION AND COMMENT**

#### **ART AT THE CENTRE - UPDATE**

1. **Purpose of Report**

To inform the Overview and Scrutiny Committee about progress of the Art at the Centre Scheme now under construction in High Street, Slough and future working until completion.

2. **Recommendation(s)**

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the progress achieved to date and its completion by the end of the financial year 2008/9 including expenditure.

3. **Key Priorities – Taking Pride in Slough and Making a Difference to Communities and our Environment**

**Priority 1 – Creating safe, environmentally friendly and sustainable neighbourhoods.**

The scheme will lead to a more attractive town centre and improve the public image of Slough

**Priority 2 – Improving lives for those in need and creating thriving communities.**

The scheme will help maintain the thriving economy now and in the future.

A significant amount of community engagement has taken place on the chosen design. During the design development and implementation stages, there have been many inclusive opportunities which assist in building stronger communities and the scheme has drawn upon and reflects the cultural diversity here in Slough.

**Priority 3 – Improving life chance for children and young people**

There has been an active programme during the project lifetime for involving many young people in schools and other youth organisations who share interests about art and design.

#### **Priority 4 – Ensuring excellence in customer services**

It is necessary to provide customer service to respond to any issues raised by High Street businesses and members of the public visiting the High Street. This is being done through bi-monthly newsletters, Council website, information banners and retailer forum meetings. There is a continuing borough-wide publicity campaign to inform residents about new attractive elements coming to Slough town centre. A series of consultation exercises about the overall scheme design have been completed during the design development stages.

#### **Priority 5 – Maintaining excellent governance within the council to ensure it is efficient, effective and economic in everything it does.**

The project management and procurement practices used during its life mean that this capital scheme can meet its projected completion date of March 2009 and achieve the quality standards being sought in the 2004 Project Plan and be within the current budget .

A scheme of this kind is complex and has required considerable co-ordination to meet requirements of other Council departments and outside companies. Design choices have been made to introduce new high quality materials. Slough Borough Council is now seeking a step change improvement in its street care and street activity management. This should realise the added value to be gained from this scheme upon its completion.

#### **4. Other Implications**

##### **(a) Financial**

Funding is mainly coming from the Council's Transport and Highways Capital Programme. Other funding has been received from Arts Council England-South-East and South-East Economic Development Agency and some developer contributions.

Of the main £4.75m contract and other artists' contracts, actual spending of £2.55m has been made. It is anticipated that final spending will be within the approved budget.

##### **(b) Human Rights Act and other Legal Implications**

Human rights issues have been met through the planned public consultation exercise. The Council has various obligations around financial and public indemnity matters. Use of collected data is required to comply with the Data Protection Act.

##### **(c) Workforce**

There are workforce implications from work commitments on this scheme by existing members of staff funded by capital and revenue budgets.

## **5. Supporting Information**

### **5.1 Background**

- 5.1.1 In April 2004, Slough Borough Council announced its planned programme for designing and implementing physical improvements to Slough High Street. This was considered important to maintain the town centre in its sub-regional shopping role and help widen its shopping and leisure offer. This is in the face of increasing competition from nearby towns. The High Street had become drab and outworn and needed a major street enhancement. General support was given by retailers and shoppers to this. Arts Council England, South-East and South-East Economic Development Agency have also given some assistance through their Art at the Centre and Artplus initiatives. Slough Borough Council's Art Development Unit already had a good record for bringing new public art to Slough. The capital scheme was then estimated for completion by March 2009.
- 5.1.2 The design development stage was undertaken after a major competition for designers, engineers and artists took place. A variety of innovative methods of public consultation took place to interest and engage the general public and retailers during these stages. The three shortlisted designers publicly exhibited their concept designs in April/May 2005 and the public were asked to express a preference. In July 2005, the Cabinet selected the designer who was also the most popular public choice. Artists were also selected through a similar process. Work followed on the Outline Design which also contained new contemporary artwork in different locations in the High Street.
- 5.1.3 The Outline Design developed ideas from the original submitted Concept Design. The scheme contained many new attractive elements of interest and street enhancements such as:
- 1) Deliver a hierarchy of principal public spaces, gateway entrances including unique artworks set within a contemporary floorscape scene
  - 2) Maintain and improve access to High Street for public transport users, disabled persons, taxis, cyclists and pedestrians. Maintain access for essential users such as emergency services and permit holders
  - 3) Improve the High Street Environment for all. This would provide more pedestrian –friendly areas containing a new shared surface, floorscapes with complementary style, materials and street furniture
  - 4) Reduce unauthorised traffic currently passing through traffic restricted areas and reduce traffic related clutter. Improve traffic safety through introduction of 20mph zones for town centre roads
  - 5) Increase measures to improve community safety and street cleansing
- 5.1.4. The Outline Design was reported to a Cabinet Commissioners and Chief Officers meeting in June 2006 prior to its public exhibition in July 2006. This became the Detailed Design with a revision to the shared surface. Councillors were also invited to view the proposed black and white patterned paving on display at Wexham Nursery. Work on revised Traffic Regulations Order got under way between August

2007 and February 2008 and confirmed in July 2008. An Equalities Impact Screening document was put in place.

## 5.2 Implementation of the Scheme

5.2.1 The contract commenced on 15 October 2007 with a 54 week programme. During 2007 Christmas trading period, construction work was limited to help retailers during the busy Christmas period. There is a second minor contract for new CCTV works for the designated area which is planned to immediately follow on after completion of the main scheme.

5.2.2 Many key elements of the scheme have been put in place since the contract start. These comprise:

- 1) New street lighting with built-in sophisticated equipment to improve public safety and be energy saving
- 2) New 20 mph speed zones throughout the Enhancement Area including works in Herschel Street and Alpha Street North and new High Street junction with Windsor Road
- 3) Large areas of new patterned paving has been laid out in the High Street Piazza and Town Square
- 4) Three major artwork floorpieces are currently being installed.
- 5) New road configuration and paving in part for the western and eastern sections during the first phase of construction.
- 6) New footway and carriageway kerblines have been constructed on the northern side in the section between Mackenzie Square and Church St to create the new shared surface. Further road surfacing and narrowing of the carriageway will soon be undertaken. The single bay taxi rank has been relocated into Church Street and the new rank will now accommodate six taxis. It will then adjoin the boundary of the shared surface once constructed. It is approximately 25m from Marks and Spencers.

5.2.3 Part of this large package of works are designed to help curb the many unauthorised vehicles that have been entering the High Street in past years. These are using High Street banks ATMs, dropping off or picking up or taking a short cut. The new works help provide better access for permitted traffic such as public transport, taxis, blue badge holders and cycles.

5.2.4 This revised road alignment can both discourage the unauthorised traffic and help improve enforcement, either by the Council's own parking enforcement powers against unauthorised parking and by the Thames Valley Police for enforcing against unauthorised entry. New statutory powers are available this year for joint arrangements between the Police and the Council to cover enforcement of moving traffic offences. It is intended to take up these powers to optimise better transport safety and this can be achieved in the High Street without any further physical changes necessary.

- 5.2.5 Only after contract start and the taxi rank was required by the construction work to resite from the existing single space taxi rank in the High Street to a new six bay taxi rank in Church Street, did one of the two hackney carriage drivers' organisations raise an objection. Several meetings have since taken place with Council officers and some modifications designed for the new rank. Despite some early indication about this Hackney Carriage Association accepting these modifications, this Association has however now confirmed its objection. A petition has recently been lodged at the time of a demonstration by taxi drivers. Also the recent demolition of Church Street properties for the approved Buckingham Gate development has meant a retrospective planning application being submitted for change of use of a first floor in premises directly above the new rank. This is due for decision at 23<sup>rd</sup> September Planning Committee. The Art at the Centre Design Team and Local Police have raised objections. The shared surface is considered very important new element in the High Street and should be retained.
- 5.2.6 The Art @ the Centre contract is currently running a little behind the original contract programme. These were primarily paving works caused by delays early in the scheme works programme mainly due to unforeseen or undetectable underground services such as gas, electricity, water and telecoms. Each High Street premises can have all of these utilities running into their premises and these need to continue as well as keeping access open to the premises during trading hours. To keep running these services, it has been necessary to use those private utilities companies when some diversion might prove necessary and led to some delays in certain locations. Many have been resolved or well on the way to resolution with the companies where these have been encountered and any lost time recovered where feasible.

It is not envisaged that any negative impact on Christmas 2008 activities or trade from this scheme in the central area will occur. It will however be necessary for work to continue outside of this area albeit with efforts to minimise any disruption (mainly from The Grove to Yew Tree Road).

- 5.2.7 This current programme anticipates that all infrastructure works will be complete by the end of March 2009. There will continue to be updated progress information given through the newsletters and retailers forums.
- 5.2.8 Extensive lengths of kerbs have already been replaced. Many new dropped kerbs have been installed to improve mobility. The new sections of granite paving, where complete, provide a more level surface for those who are less mobile or require shopmobility vehicles. However there are locations where dropped kerbs have temporarily been lost awaiting the new road construction. Where the latest repaving abuts the old paving and around areas under reconstruction, then these are barriered off to ensure public safety,

Seats will eventually be available along the length of the High Street for those requiring them but some temporary reduction of seating has occurred whilst the paving phases roll forward.

### 5.3 **Sequence of Works**

- 5.3.1 Members have recently raised concerns about inconvenience to shoppers and businesses and effect on those with low mobility affected by the works under way.

These also reflect some concerns of retailers about loss of footfall whilst works under way outside their premises and arrangements for keeping the area clear during the important Christmas 2008 trading period.

- 5.3.2 The original construction programme envisaged that three work areas would be active at any one time.
- 5.3.3 A further two areas have been progressed "out of sequence". These were required for the crucial and critical integration of the artwork within this project. Some of that art work must be installed in certain weather conditions and temperatures (i.e. Anne Smyth's terrazzo). Others rely on very skilled workers that are only available at certain times of the year. Prior groundwork preparation and co-ordinating such a complex set of operations, unfortunately and inevitably, will lead to some parts of the project looking as though they are "on hold" or stopped/started for no apparent reason. Steps have been taken to display information about the recent artwork planned in August and September.
- 5.3.4 Reference has already been made in the previous section about locations affected by necessary changes to private utilities and their insistence to complete these themselves. It has been necessary to await the completion of works by them before the section can be finished off. Where other areas are quality checked by Council engineers, then any necessary remediation work needs completing and some reprogramming of work is necessary.
- 5.3.5 Temporary closures of the blue badge parking bays did take place whilst construction work was undertaken. This did help provide continued access for taxis and buses during this period. Some provision has now been reinstated although final reconstruction of the road sections will be necessary to complete the road sections with the final blue badge parking bays in place. Other blue badge bays now exist in Herschel Street.

#### 5.4. **Street Cleaning**

- 5.4.1. Trials of new cleansing machines are underway. For areas that have become available, it has been found necessary to use a combination of waterjetting and scrubbing, particularly when starting immediately after construction works have moved along. This is an improved method of street cleansing over our existing method and one capable of achieving higher quality on this type of new surface with its sealed joints. This new method will be deployed to an agreed schedule during this interim period (when only limited results can be achieved because of ongoing construction work) and once all the areas are made available when this higher standard can be achieved.

#### 5.5 **Health and Safety**

- 5.5.1 Health and Safety considerations are always important and all parties are responsible to keep workers and shoppers alike safe. Regular inspections and audits are undertaken to maintain that safe environment.

## 5.6. **Future Risks**

- 5.6.1 The majority of risks on this project have now been dealt with. However two areas still need attention. Underground services still remain a risk until all formation/foundation works are complete. Mitigation is in place by way of surveys, enquiries, trial holes and close liaison with the statutory undertakers. Most of the delivery of the artwork contains little risk at the moment. Alec Peever, Anne Smyth and Bhajan Hunjan's floorscape are all in hand. As are Simon Watkinson's telescope lighting and Fred Baier's seating. The two areas where some risks are retained are Bhajan's lightbox (although this is a relatively small scale piece and could be installed at a later date without significant implications). Orders for Simon Watkinson's radar, lamplight and mini gateways have been placed and installation dates are likely to be early 2009.

## 6. **Conclusion**

Council staff are working extremely hard in partnership with our chosen contractor, Enterprise, to complete this project in as timely a fashion as is possible within the above constraints, whilst still providing a workable high street.

## 7. **Background Papers**

1. 2004 Project Plan
2. Slough Borough Council Transport and Highways Capital Programme 2004/5 onwards
3. 2004 Stage One Consultation Report
4. 2005 Artplus Submission Document
5. 2005 Stage 2 Consultation Document
6. July 2005 Cabinet Report-Selection of Concept Designer
7. July 2006 Public Exhibition and leaflet and summary of public responses about Outline Design
8. 2007-2008 Traffic Regulation Order Stakeholder and Statutory Consultation Process/ Copy of confirmed Order
9. Nos 1-4 Your High Street Newsletters
10. Art at the Centre presentation booklet
11. Equalities Impact Screening Document
12. Agendas and Notes of Meetings of Art at the Centre Project Board and Steering Group.