

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Overview and Scrutiny Committee **DATE:** 16th April 2009

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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 nearing completion in Slough High Street and outstanding work as requested under call-in procedures.

2. Recommendation

That the Committee note progress achieved to date and its completion during Spring 2009, including expenditure.

3. Community Strategy Priorities

Celebrating Diversity, Enabling Inclusion

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.

Being Safe, Feeling Safe

Good design plays a key role for improving places where people visit, work and live. This street enhancement scheme has been designed to create an interesting and attractive public realm. It also incorporate many innovative methods for designing out crime along the entire length of the High St. There is a continuing role for managing street activity and streetcare maintenance with our strategic partners.

A Cleaner, Greener Place to Live, Work and Play.

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

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 seeking a step change improvement in its streetcare and street activity management in the High Street. This should realise the added value to be gained from this scheme upon its completion.

Prosperity for All

Slough town centre is a major centre for employment, leisure and retailing activities. Its attractiveness is a key element for the future economic success of Slough. The scheme will help maintain the local economy now and in the future.

Involvement of retailers and local businesses have been sought throughout the Design, development and the construction stages of the scheme. These have helped improve the design and mitigate any impact during the construction process. Information is also being given through newsletters, the Council website, information banners and retailer forum meetings. A borough-wide publicity campaign is planned to encourage greater use of the town centre..

Adding years to Life and Life to Years

There has been an active programme during the project lifetime of involving people of different ages through voluntary organisations, schools and other youth organisations. Improving the public realm helps promote healthy choices for exercise such as walking and cycling.

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. It is anticipated that final spending will be within the approved budget. However there are some outstanding claims still to resolve.

(b) Risk Management

This report gives an update about the scheme's progress. Throughout the design, procurement and construction stages, methods of risk management have been in operation.

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

Human rights issues have been met through a 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.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

An equalities impact screening statement has been completed. The scheme has incorporated relevant government requirements currently in force.

5. Supporting Information

Background

- 5.1 In April 2004, the Council announced its plans to start design work to physically improve Slough High Street. This was considered important to maintain the town centre in its sub-regional shopping role and help support its shopping and leisure offer. This is in the face of increasing competition from nearby towns. General support was given by retailers and shoppers to the need for a major street enhancement in view of its then drab and worn out look. Arts Council England, South-East and South-East Economic Development Agency gave some financial assistance to support the Art at the Centre and Artplus initiatives. The capital scheme was then estimated for completion by April 2009. The detailed design stage was subject to public consultation in 2006 and the traffic management scheme during 2007/2008 which raised no objections to the scheme.
- 5.2 Enterprise plc, the appointed engineering contractors, commenced construction in December 2007. Since then, they have been undertaking phased work in four main sections. The approved detailed design is largely unchanged from the scheme originally tendered for. The period of the contract was set at 54 weeks which meant it fell across two Christmas periods when it was necessary to limit construction work whilst the important Christmas retail trading took place. Christmas light up events took place in both years and drew good crowds. The pedestrianised area of the High Street was clear of barriers throughout these two periods. Once certain sections of work had taken place, blue badge parking was temporarily reintroduced and the taxi rank moved to their new locations. Temporary road closures have since been instigated when further carriageway works were required. There are temporary diversions for buses in operation and temporary provision for alternative blue badge parking whilst these works take place.
- 5.3 In September 2008 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee received an update on the work about progress and lead-up to the Christmas period. Members also received reports in response to concerns raised. During the past three months, it has been necessary to construct the road sections for parts of the east and west end of the High Street. Reopening for restricted vehicular traffic is due to take place in May 2009. Extensive pavement reconstruction and tree planting has been taking place.
- 5.4 In March 2009, the initial Inspection report by the Audit Commission on Sustainability recognised the Art at the Centre project was substantially improving the town centre through improved facilities for pedestrians, priority for public transport and traffic management and choice of high quality public art which helps to celebrate the cultural diversity of Slough. The Art at the Centre project was also commended for the use of sustainable procurement practices such as minimising excavations, using recyclable materials and installing energy efficient lighting and better value for money obtained from these measures.
- 5.5 Council engineers and their design consultants oversee the works programme and on-site resources. Significant areas are nearing completion. There has unfortunately been some programme slippage. Strenuous efforts continue to be made to complete the bulk of the work during the Spring. New CCTV equipment will be installed as a separate contract to take place out of daytime working hours. Two

new mechanical street washers/sweepers are now undertaking limited cleaning operations to areas now largely free of construction.

- 5.6 It remains paramount that the public are kept safe while construction is taking place. This involves the widespread use of temporary barriers, albeit with access to retailers' entrances kept clear, and areas paved being reopened when work commences on neighbouring sites. When pavement areas close to shops are under construction, then the roadway has been used to ease pedestrian congestion. In the area of the High Street close to Alpha Street North, temporary road closures are in place. Ramps have been constructed for pedestrians to safely cross with displayed street notices. Black granite road surface and white kerb and paving have been laid in this vicinity. Kerb heights across the whole scheme do conform to Department of Transport requirements. It has been necessary to reinstate some temporary barriers until permanent road markings are laid prior to the reopening of the road for vehicular traffic due to trip hazards. Any claims are passed to Enterprise whilst the High Street is still in their possession.
- 5.7 The majority of the remaining work is planned for completion by the end of April 2009, including installation of sculptural artwork features, tree planting and remaining street furniture. New promotional work will take place in the forthcoming months. Any necessary contract maintenance provisions are in place once practical completion and final completion have been obtained. A High Street Streetcare Maintenance and Street Activity Management Manual is also being prepared to set the quality standards and guide those Council departments responsible for services in the town centre.

6. Conclusion

The completion of this scheme will largely be achieved during the next month. This major scheme represents an important contribution towards revitalising the town centre. Efforts will continue through management of street activity and street maintenance to keep up its good appearance. Other regeneration schemes are still in the pipeline within the town centre and their implementation can also make important contributions towards strengthening the town centre.

7. Background Papers

- a) 2004 Project Plan
- b) Stage One and Two Consultation Reports
- c) July 2005 Cabinet Report on Selection of Concept Designer
- d) 2006 Booklet on Outline Design
- e) 2007 Final Scheme Design
- f) Your New High Street Newsletter 1-5 and Art at the Centre Booklet