



## PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION NOTICE

### INDIVIDUAL DECISION BY THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR ECONOMY AND ESTATES

#### TOPIC - CASSON BLOCK ENHANCEMENTS SCHEME

#### PROCEDURAL INFORMATION

The Access to Information Procedure Rules – Part 4, Section 22 of the Council's Constitution provides for a decision to be made by an individual member of Cabinet.

In accordance with the Procedure Rules, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, the Chief Executive and the Head of Finance are consulted together with Chairman and Vice Chairman of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee and any other relevant overview and scrutiny committee. In addition, all Members are notified.

If five or more Members from those informed so request, the Leader may require the matter to be referred to Cabinet for determination.

#### Contact Officers:

**Case Officer:** Kate Cloud, Head of Economy and Arts, 01962 848 563, [kcloud@winchester.gov.uk](mailto:kcloud@winchester.gov.uk)

**Democratic Services Officer:** Nancy Graham – 01962 848235  
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#### SUMMARY

- Further to CAB2712 in September 2015, work has taken place to plan the Casson Block enhancement works. The design phase is now complete and tendering for the works to take place has begun. Drawings of the proposed scheme are available at <http://www.winchester.gov.uk/business/casson-block/>
- Following a consultation period in December and January based on preliminary designs, a detailed design has been put forward. The consultation process elicited the views of the business tenants of the Casson Block, the City of Winchester Trust and other respondents. The conclusions of that consultation have been published at <http://www.winchester.gov.uk/business/casson-block/>
- Features include;

- Extended 'terrace' area outside of the premises, which may allow for outdoor seating subject to licensing policies;
- Renewed lighting ensuring the area is safe and inviting;
- The addition of planters including innovative 'green wall' systems around the building columns and between the terrace and St George's Street.
- The removal of the planter to the east of the Casson Block, reinstating the existing ground work, and consideration of a public art scheme in this area.
- Cleaning of the windows and fascias after the works;
- In addition, officers across the Council have been involved in developing the scheme.
  - The Head of Community Safety and Neighbourhood Services has been consulted to ensure the plans do not inadvertently create areas which might encourage anti-social behaviour.
  - The Head of Environmental Health and Licensing has raised concerns about a seating area in an air quality monitoring zone, and exposing members of the public to poor air quality. This is mitigated by the placement of green 'walls' to shield the public on the new terraces from the road; clear information concerning air quality monitoring zones to businesses in the Casson Block; wider plans to improve the air quality on St George's Street. A report from Lancaster University states "judicious placement of grass, climbing ivy and other plants in urban canyons can reduce the concentration at street level of NO2 by as much as 40 percent and PM by 60 percent".
  - The Conservation Officer has been involved in ensuring the Casson Block design is preserved and enhanced where appropriate.
  - The Landscape Architect has been highly influential in offering advice on surface treatments, planting and other aesthetic and technical elements of the scheme.

## **DECISION**

That authority be granted under Financial Procedure Rule 6.4 to incur the capital expenditure for the scheme of up to £150,000.

## **REASON FOR THE DECISION AND OTHER ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

The release of the capital expenditure will allow a contract for the works to be let, and the works then carried out, securing a refreshed area of the city, welcoming

more visitors to the businesses in the area, and discouraging forms of anti social behaviour.

**RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:**

£150,000, financed from the Property Reserve, has been allocated in the 2016/17 Capital Programme.

The estimated costs are as follows:

- Engineering and maintenance works £75,000
- Landscaping £20,000
- Lighting £20,000
- Artwork £10,000
- Other including street furniture £10,000
- Contingency of £15,000
- Total £150,000

The scheme has been subject to a competitive tendering exercise and a contractor will be appointed shortly.

- Hilliers have agreed to waive the cost of the plants and their climbing system, reducing the planting to only the cost of the planters themselves. This partnership approach will enable Hilliers to test out their system in an urban environment, whilst keeping costs down for this project.
- The artwork is identified for the space to the east of the Casson Block itself where there is an existing planter. This artwork has not yet been commissioned, and a specification will be publicised shortly. The timing of this will allow for the successful artist(s) to respond to the scheme as the existing planter is removed, and a 'blank canvass' can be seen.
- In addition to the planter, in the space to the East of the Casson Block, there is a public telephone box, the air quality monitoring unit and a waste bin.
- Officers have approached BT to seek to remove the public telephone box, but BT are unwilling to do so. It is possible to re-site the unit slightly, but this would be at a cost of over £12,000 to Winchester City Council. The existing budget does not allow for this to happen.
- The Head of Environmental Health and Licensing is currently tendering for a new air quality monitoring unit. It is anticipated that to remove the unit from its

current location, and replace elsewhere on St George's Street, will cost an additional £5,000. The benefits would be to remove the unsightly unit from the area, creating a cleaner design, and opening up the area further. This cost is included in the budget for this project.

- Lastly, a public litter bin is in the same area abutting the rear of the Hampshire Chronicle building. This could also be removed to clear the area as there are two alternative public litter bins outside of the Casson Block businesses. These would be replaced as part of the project. The cost of this would be a further £1,000, budgeted for as part of this project.

### **CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN ON THE DECISION**

Consultation to establish the current position has involved ward Member, business tenants of the Casson Block, Winchester BID, City of Winchester trust and other interested parties via a public consultation process.

### **FURTHER ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED FOLLOWING PUBLICATION OF THE DRAFT PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION NOTICE**

#### *1. Delay the scheme until city centre air quality issues have been resolved.*

Some Members have commented that the scheme creates too much of a conflict between the low air quality on St George's Street, and potential customers eating and drinking on the new terraced area. The project team has thoroughly considered this element, and has tried to mitigate this with a high level of planting to absorb some of the pollutants. It may be that the new terraced areas are not used as seating for the eateries in the area in any case – that remains a decision for the businesses themselves to take, alongside seeking licenses for outdoor tables and chairs. Indeed, Tom's Deli already has outdoor seating in this area which is well used by the public. The increased terraced area does help to create a feeling of openness and a more inviting environment. The wider air quality issues are outside the scope of this project, and are being tackled by other teams working in conjunction with Hampshire County Council to consider city centre traffic management. The measures proposed will provide much needed improvements which can be delivered before the autumn. The wider air quality issues will take significant time and resources to address and ultimately may need Government intervention. The measures proposed have been designed so that they can be integrated with wider measures as and when identified and implemented in future years.

#### *2. Cease the scheme*

Some Members have questioned whether the source of funding for this scheme is the correct one. This was discussed during the consideration of CAB2712 in September 2015 at both Cabinet and Overview & Scrutiny Committee. The decision was made to continue to use this funding in this way. Ceasing the scheme would mean the area would degrade over time without the level of investment proposed,

and would likely cause reputational damage to the Council. Therefore, it is recommended that the Casson Block enhancement scheme should proceed without delay.

**DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY THE DECISION MAKER OR A MEMBER OR OFFICER CONSULTED**

None.

**DISPENSATION GRANTED BY THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

n/a

**Approved by: (signature)**

**Date of Decision: 27.06.16**

**Councillor Steve Miller – Portfolio Holder for Economy & Estates**

**APPENDICES: None**