

Report to Cabinet and Council

25th March 2021

By the Cabinet Member for Planning and Development

DECISION REQUIRED



**Horsham
District
Council**

Not Exempt

Horsham Town Public Realm Strategy and Design Guide

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to seek approval that the Council adopts the Horsham Town Public Realm Strategy and Design Guide which sets out the future approach to the streets and spaces of Horsham town centre.

Recommendations

That the Cabinet is recommended:

- i) To agree to recommend to Council that it adopts the Horsham Town Centre Public Realm Strategy and Design Guide.
- ii) To note the summary of stakeholders' consultations.
- iii) To delegate authority for any minor amendments to the Cabinet Member for Planning and Development.

Reasons for Recommendations

- i) This Public Realm Strategy and Design Guide for Horsham Town Centre seeks to achieve the overarching aspiration to; enhance the existing heritage of the town centre; futureproof the town centre by identifying and maximising key spaces that could provide flexibility in how they can function, and improve access and connectivity throughout; sustain and further promote Horsham as a key destination to live, socialise and shop. A coherent public realm strategy is a fundamental factor in order to achieve this aspiration.
- ii) The Stakeholder engagement summary is an important background document in setting out the proposed response to the comments received;
- iii) To allow minor changes only. Any substantive change would need to be agreed by all Members.

Background Papers

- National Planning Policy Framework
- Horsham District Planning Framework
- Horsham Town Design Statement 2008
- The Future Prosperity of Horsham 2011
- The Horsham Town Local List 2011
- Horsham Town Plan SPD 2012
- Green Space Strategy 2013
- Horsham District Planning Framework-2015
- West Sussex Walking & Cycling Strategy 2016-2026
- Horsham Town Centre Vision Statement 2017
- Horsham Town Retail & Leisure Study 2017
- Good by Design - Horsham Society 2018
- Horsham Society Vision Primary Themes
- National Planning Policy Framework 2019
- Coronavirus COVID-19 Safer Public Places
- Cycle infrastructure Design Local Transport Note 1/20 2020
- Horsham Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan November 2020

- i) Appendix 1: Stakeholder engagement summary and commentary.
- ii) Appendix 2: Public Realm Strategy and Design Guide
- iii) Appendix 3: Forum Sketch

Wards affected: Denne, Forest, Holbrook East, Holbrook West, Roffey North, Roffey South, and Trafalgar.

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Background Information

1 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The Council adopted the [Town Centre Vision Statement](#) in 2017 to promote an aspirational, all-inclusive and deliverable medium term (10-15 years) vision for Horsham Town Centre.
- 1.2 The purpose of this Public Realm Strategy (the Strategy) is to help achieve this vision by putting forward a strategy and design guidance manual that will:
 - Inform the design and assessment process for future development and maintenance.
 - Ensure consistency in quality and aesthetics.
 - Demonstrate a commitment to best practice.
 - Provide a consistent approach to planning and design for individual developments and projects over time across the town centre.
- 1.3 The public realm is more than just the physical environment, it is about place-making, identity, community and management. When these components are present and balanced within the public realm, it becomes a place people want to spend their time. A good quality, well considered public realm plays a major role in a positive user experience that will encourage return visits, just as poor public realm might discourage visitors.
- 1.4 The public realm provides the context for highlighting the built heritage. Well maintained and presented buildings are an important component of the public realm. Horsham town centre has a strong heritage, with key historical buildings. These contribute greatly to the strong sense of character that Horsham has today.

2 Relevant Council policy

- 2.1 Corporate Plan 2019-2023: A great place to live - Both our built and natural environments are highly valued and will be well managed to keep our District an attractive place to live.
- 2.2 A thriving economy - Towns and villages are lively and welcoming - Implement the 2017 Town Centre Vision for Horsham.

3 Details

- 3.1 The Strategy document sets out in detail, design principles specific to the requirements of the town centre, as identified within the Town Vision statement. These include: the preservation and enhancement of the town centre's rich historical and architectural context, key spaces and gateways, connectivity and movement between spaces, materials and furniture palette, planting, signage and wayfinding, lighting, public art and maintenance.
- 3.2 The Strategy sets out its key guiding principles as follows:

- Put People First. Design Spaces for People.
- Simplify the streetscape and improve legibility.
- Ensure consistency in design.
- Create memorable and identifiable spaces where people want to be.
- Design spaces to be flexible and suitable for multiple uses.
- Protect Horsham's historical character and architectural heritage.
- Support pedestrian users of the town.
- Create a green and sustainable town centre.
- Promote vibrant and active streets.
- Ensure that all public realm projects support the proper functioning of the town centre

3.3 The Strategy is set out over four chapters:

1. Introduction and Objectives
2. Strategic Guidance
3. Design Guidance
4. Worked Examples

3.4 Chapter 1 includes an understanding of the existing, influencing factors; feedback received through initial engagement with stakeholders and defining the objectives. These guidelines are developed, in Chapter 2, addressing and setting out Strategic Guidance with respect to the various components that make up the public realm. Chapter 3 presents detailed design guidance which are together applied and demonstrated, in Chapter 4, through seven specific 'Worked Examples' within the town centre comprising: Carfax, Causeway, Albion Way, Bishopric, Blackhorse Way, Forum and Queen Street.

3.5 The town has managed to maintain its unique historical character and environment whilst also managing to grow both economically and as an attractive place to live, work and visit. This was reflected in the positive consultation statements received: A walkable compact town; strong heritage; historic buildings throughout within a large conservation area; close proximity to Horsham Park and the wider District landscape and the successful weekly and annual events programme.

3.5 However, in the past few years, some localised projects have been delivered throughout the town centre of Horsham, bringing a restored public realm to its visitors in some areas, such as Piries Place and the adjacent car park. Nonetheless, the absence of a general strategy over the years has led to a series of spaces that do not read in a coherent manner, both visually and functionally. This in turn has resulted in spaces and streetscapes that lack legibility and connectivity which do not put pedestrians at the forefront.

3.6 Some of these issues are reflected in the feedback we received: Too much street clutter; too many A board signs; lack of uniformity in street furniture and paving; too much vehicular movement through the centre; not cycle friendly enough; paving trip hazards; unsightly Blackhorse Way with poor pedestrian connections and with Albion Way hindering connectivity between the town centre and Horsham Park.

3.7 Arising from this initial individual and stakeholder workshops' feedback a coherent set of objectives emerged:

- A. **Links & Connectivity:** Improvement of accessibility and legibility of all pedestrian links, including major links/gateways into the town centre from the wider area, right down to the historical passages throughout the town.
- B. **Traffic:** Retain the existing bus route through the Carfax, however, look to reduce access through timed restrictions for all other general traffic.
- C. **Heritage:** The public realm design needs to respond and compliment the architecture in a neutral way.
- D. **Materials:** An appropriate palette of high quality material shall be used throughout the town centre. Where appropriate bespoke elements can be included to add interest, and respond to the surrounding context.
- E. **Planting:** Maximise permanent greening in the town centre where possible, and introduce planting that supports biodiversity and water management.
- F. **Legibility & Wayfinding:** A clear and legible public realm will be provided through the simplification and coordination of street components and the de-cluttering of unnecessary streetscape elements e.g. Bollards, street furniture, structure and signage etc. Encourage streets that are more responsive by supporting a renewed approach to signage and shop front design.
- G. **Cycling & Sustainable Transport:** Support and encourage carbon neutral transportation by; reducing the emphasis on the use of cars in the town centre and promoting public transport; creating safe pedestrian and cycle routes and providing attractive cycle parking.
- H. **Use of Space:** Future proofing the town centre by creating flexible spaces that will allow activities and events both on a day-to day basis and annual occasions across the year.
- I. **Lighting:** Improve and enhance public lighting throughout the town centre. Open up views and create clear sight lines by removing unnecessary components and structures to increase visibility.
- J. **Maintenance:** Future design should consider realistic and achievable maintenance goals.

- 3.8 Following the identification of the objectives a series of Strategic Guidance is developed in Chapter 2 with respect to key public space components ranging from the 'Street Hierarchy', the 'Town Centre Core' to 'Activities and Events'. Each section provides a set of design principles to be borne in mind when developing schemes.
- 3.9 Chapter 3 goes on to provide 'Design Guidance' in the form of detailed guidelines which should be observed throughout the implementation of all projects or other improvement works. The guidance covers the following components: Paving, Street Furniture, Planting, Lighting, Signage & Wayfinding, Electrical & Water Connections, Public Art and Maintenance.
- 3.10 To demonstrate the guiding principles of the design guide and vision, a number of key intervention areas have been identified and illustrated in Chapter 4. In each of the worked examples, a series of design considerations has been established which are specific to each of the sites and in line with the aspirations of the design guide. These include items such as accessibility and pedestrian movement that are in accordance with best practice.
- 3.11 It should be noted that the 'Worked Examples' are not set in stone and while they have garnered general support through the stakeholder engagement process and

are welcomed in addressing key issues, such as the connectivity between the town centre and Horsham Park, there are differences over details. Once the Strategy is adopted we will seek to prioritise and develop detailed design solutions for further consultation and engagement.

- 3.12 The District Council will work in partnership with the Local Enterprise Partnership, the Highway Authority, West Sussex County Council and central government, to secure funding which will enable the future detailed design and delivery of public realm improvement schemes in the short, medium and long term.

4 Next Steps

- 4.1 To secure funding to complete detailed design stages and delivery of prioritised public realm improvements. The Public Realm Strategy will provide the essential framework to guide detailed project design and set standards for other improvements.

5 Views of the Policy Development Advisory Group and Outcome of Consultations

- 5.1 The Planning and Development PDAG considered the latest iteration of the Public Realm Strategy and Design Guide on 8 March and supports its overall aims and approach.

Consultation and Engagement Programme

- 5.2 The emerging Strategy was developed following extensive engagement and consultation with PDAG Members and stakeholders as follows:

Date	Who	Purpose
28 August 2019	Horsham Town PDAG	Presentation review of the Horsham Town Centre Vision 2017 including future key projects: Public Realm Strategy and LCWIP.
October/November 2019 Workshops	HDC Officers; WSCC Officers; Horsham Town Ward Members; Neighbourhood Councils & Horsham Blueprint; Horsham Society & Cycling Forum	Establish first impressions, key positive and negative issues, initial analysis and discussion.
13 November 2019	Horsham Town PDAG	BDP Issues analysis and presentation.
November/December 2019 consultation	Horsham Town PDAG and Ward Members; Neighbourhood Councils; Horsham Society, Cycling Forum, BID Steering Group and HDC/WSCC Officers	First impressions; what makes a good public realm; key topic areas
6 February 2020	Horsham Town PDAG	BDP Emerging themes, vision, Objectives and proposals presentation.
April 2020 Consultation	Horsham Town PDAG and Ward Members; Neighbourhood Councils; Horsham Society, Cycling Forum, BID Steering Group and HDC/WSCC Officers	Initial concerns and issues; Findings – main topics and proposed objectives; Proposed Strategy and Public Realm Action Plan
19 May 2020	Horsham Town PDAG	BDP Design principles for the town centre and key areas presentation.
June/July 2020 Consultation	Horsham Town PDAG and Ward Members; Neighbourhood	Draft Strategy: Strategic guidance and design development of key intervention

	Councils; Horsham Society, Cycling Forum, BID Steering Group and HDC/WSCC Officers	areas
16 September	Horsham Town PDAG	BDP presented the draft Public Realm Strategy, Design Guide, Intervention areas to the group.
September/October 2020 Consultation	Horsham Town PDAG and Ward Members; Neighbourhood Councils; Horsham Society, Cycling Forum, BID Steering Group and HDC/WSCC Officers	Draft Public Realm Strategy, Design Guide and Intervention areas
18 November 2020	Horsham Town PDAG	Amended draft Public Realm Strategy, Design Guide and Intervention areas
8 March 2021	Planning and Development PDAG	Final draft Public Realm Strategy, Design Guide and Intervention areas

5.3 The Councils Monitoring Officer and Director of Resources have been consulted and their comments incorporated in this document.

6 Other Courses of Action Considered but Rejected

6.1 Not adopting the Public Realm Strategy would fail to realise the Council's long term aspirations as evidenced in the Town Centre Vision Statement. By adopting the Strategy it will:

- Inform the design and assessment process for future development and maintenance.
- Ensure consistency in quality and aesthetics.
- Demonstrate a commitment to best practice.
- Provide a consistent approach to planning and design for individual developments and projects over time across the town centre.

7 Resource Consequence

7.1 The Strategy's proposed seven intervention areas are currently not costed and unfunded. External funding contributions such as Government grants and other local funding, or directly from CIL, or Section 106 contributions will be bid for to develop detailed designs that can be used to secure delivery funding in due course.

8 Legal Considerations and Implications

8.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report, however, there are statutory and legal processes to consult on any future proposed highway infrastructure improvements as and when they are identified, and finances become available.

8.2 The strategy is consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework and the Horsham District Planning Framework.

9 Risk Assessment

9.1 There may be reputational and practical risks with the development and delivery of specific public realm schemes and these will need to be managed through relevant risk management and project management processes. There may also be legal

processes such as Traffic Regulation Orders that will need to be undertaken, depending on specific measures progressed. These will be subject to separate assessment and consideration as specific scheme proposals are developed.

10 Procurement implications

- 10.1 The initial design principles for each of the seven identified intervention areas as set out in Section 4 of the strategy are currently unfunded improvements. Future procurement of design and construction services will be in compliance with the prevailing legal procurement framework at the time.
- 10.2 It is envisaged that funding for these schemes will come from external funding contributions such as Government grants and other local funding, or directly from CIL, or Section 106 contributions.

11 Equalities and Human Rights implications / Public Sector Equality Duty

- 11.1 There are no direct equalities implications arising from the adoption of the Strategy. The detailed guidance with respect to future schemes to improve the public realm environment will create spaces where increased number of people will wish to spend time during the day and into the evening. This increase will include families with young children, those with visual and mobility impairment, visitors and local residents as the spaces will be somewhere that they will wish to come and spend leisure time.
- 11.2 Future improvements to street lighting will help to improve safety and the perceptions of safety. Further, such increases in footfall and activity should help to reduce incidences of and the impact of anti-social behaviour. This improvement to the space and safety will lead to an increase in those wishing to invest in the city centre thereby helping to promote the wider city.
- 11.4 The implementation of decluttering – removing unnecessary signage, bollards and A boards wherever possible – will provide a more accessible and navigable town centre for all and in particular those who may have a visual or mobility impairment.

12 Environmental Implications

- 12.1 There are no direct environmental consequences arising from this report. Section 3.2 of the strategy sets out design guidance with respect to public realm features such as trees, shrubs, perennials and grass together with the advocacy of 'rain gardens' (or SuDS - sustainable drainage systems) as part of a sustainable approach to reduce carbon emissions.

13 Other Considerations

- 13.1 There are no direct crime and disorder consequences arising from the content of this report. Future public space improvements will take into consideration the need to design out crime and improve community safety and accessibility for all.

13.2 The Head of Public Safety and the Community Safety Team were consulted and comments incorporated in the development of the Strategy.

APPENDIX 1: Stakeholder consultation summary – see separate document.