

PLAN E - EPSOM HIGHWAY AND PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENTS

Report of the: Head of Place Development

Contact: Mark Berry

Urgent Decision?(yes/no)

If yes, reason urgent decision required:

Annexes/Appendices (attached): None Stated

Other available papers (not attached): None Stated

REPORT SUMMARY

This report seeks a decision on options for materials to be used in the Plan E Epsom Town Centre Highway and Public Realm Improvement Scheme, in light of the impact on the budget for completion of the scheme.

RECOMMENDATION (S)

That the Committee agree:

- (1) Whether or not to commit an additional contribution of up to a maximum of £185,000 from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) towards the cost of the Plan E Epsom Town Centre Highway and Public Realm Improvement Scheme,
- (2) As a consequence of the decision at (1), which material(s) shall be used for surfacing the paths in the various phases of the scheme, and for surfacing the market place and other locations.

Notes

1 Implications for the Council's Key Priorities, Service Plans and Sustainable Community Strategy

- 1.1 The delivery of the Plan E improvements is a corporate priority and agreement on the design and specification for the Market Place, in particular, is a specific target to be achieved by 31 October 2017. In practice the timing of this is more pressing for reasons described below.

- 1.2 Plan E is an Area Action Plan for the town centre and the highway and public realm improvements branded “Plan E” by the County Council are an important subset of the broader strategy adopted by the Borough Council in 2011. All of the important elements including two-way working on South Street, improvements to the Market Place and the Spread Eagle junction are envisaged in the plan.

2 Background

- 2.1 On 17 February 2015 Epsom & Ewell Borough Council agreed to increase its contributions to the Epsom Town Centre Highway and Public Realm Improvement Scheme. At that point the agreed funding was set out in the table below:

	Original £	Revised £
Total Project Cost	2,700,000	3,375,000
Funded by		
Local Growth Funding – 80% (LEP)	- 2,160,000	- 2,700,000
Economic Fund - SCC	- 252,000	- 252,000
Capital Reserves - EEBC	- 200,000	- 200,000
S106 - SCC	- 88,000	-146,991
S106 - EEBC	0	- 28,984
CIL	0	- 47,025
Total Funding	- 2,700,000	- 3,375,000

- 2.2 The table shows that the Borough Council agreed to contribute an additional £76k in order to help secure a substantive additional grant from the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) amounting, with SCCs additional contribution, to a total increase of £675k in the funding available.
- 2.3 It was anticipated that the uplift in funding could be used to enhance the specification for the Market Place and other areas of public realm.
- 2.4 For the record, there was also an additional £400k in the reckoning which comprised a separate grant of £200k from the LEP and match funding of £200k from the Borough Council. This too, it was anticipated could be used for public realm improvements but had been originally agreed on the basis of works to the Quadrant Junction and not for the current scheme. Subsequently, the Borough Council withdrew that bid on 10 May 2016 due to the fact that it was dedicated to the Quadrant and the scheme for that junction was not well developed and would have been far more costly than the original estimates. For the sake of

clarity, therefore, the extra £400k referred to in the February 2015 report (though not included in the table above) was never really available for this project although the Borough Council's CIL monies committed to that bid are still available to be used for other purposes.

- 2.5 Since that time, the initial budget has been refined and updated and the overall anticipated cost of the scheme has increased, based upon more detailed designs, specifications and construction costs. As a result the County Council carried out a "de-scoping" exercise on the highway elements and advised the Borough Council that the desired premium paving materials for the pavements and the Market Place that Borough Council officers had favoured were unaffordable within the budget. This set in motion a comparative assessment of various alternatives and that process has now reached an advanced stage where, for the first time, a clear choice can be set out for Members to consider.
- 2.6 Depending on the choice which is made, further funding may be required. The more expensive options originally considered were above the standard specification that Surrey County Council would use and, if the Borough Council wish to ensure a higher quality than the standard SCC specification, a further contribution will be required for the associated increase in costs above the budget.
- 2.7 In May 2017, the additional contribution was estimated to be between £350K-£850K depending on the choice made; a high quality, granite finish being the most costly of the options considered and a granite-like block being an intermediate one.
- 2.8 Granite and granite-like concrete blocks have associated drawbacks in addition to their premium price. It is evident that they would require the complete removal of the sub-base to the existing surface and its replacement with concrete. This would require total closure of the market place for an extended time and cause significant disruption. It would also extend the overall estimated construction programme by months.
- 2.9 The cost estimates for all options originally assessed by SCC assumed a period of total closure of the Market Place, meaning that the weekly markets would either need to be displaced to another location or closed for a term of many weeks. The closure would be much longer for the premium materials. The likely impact on local business and, in particular, the potential for significant disruption to the operation of the Market would be unacceptable as the protection and enhancement of the Market has been a key objective for the Borough in Plan E.
- 2.10 Consideration has turned in recent weeks to whether it might be possible to retain or reuse the existing Market Place blockwork in order to minimise cost and disruption. This is not favoured for the following reasons: a large proportion of the blocks are damaged; they are no longer manufactured and cannot, therefore, be matched; they would

need to be lifted and re-laid and the relative cost saving compared with new is negligible; the result would not be as long-lasting or as good visually.

- 2.11 Nonetheless, replacement with a similar interlocking product bedded in sand would be comparable in cost and potentially affordable within the budget. Therefore the options now under consideration include the replacement of the existing Market Place blockwork with a similar product and an alternative but more expensive concrete block.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 The decision relates to the selection of materials for the public realm elements of the scheme and their associated cost. It does not relate to the design and layout of the works themselves. It should be noted that the de-scoped scheme still includes significant public-realm enhancements as follows:

	£
Market Place Assets and power supplies	125,000
Landscaping (including 19 new tree pits)	110,000
Conservation Kerbing	20,000
Block Paving for South Street	92,000
Total Funding	347,000

- 3.2 This demonstrates that, although the £675k that it had been anticipated could be used to enhance the public realm is not now entirely available for that purpose, all the components of the improvements to the public realm envisaged in the scheme can still be secured albeit with a less expensive form of paving materials.
- 3.3 The decision now before us is to consider the options for blockwork bedded in sand equivalent to the existing Market Place surface together with a premium option for sand-based blockwork using a superior product.
- 3.4 Blockwork equivalent to the existing can be afforded across the entire scheme within the established budget whereas it is estimated that the premium product would cost an additional £185,000 if universally used. The breakdown of the extra cost by area would be; Market Place – £95,000; High Street (Northern side) – £40,000; South Street – £50,000 and Spread-eagle Junction approximately the same current estimate.
- 3.5 Officers are not convinced that the premium option is necessarily worth the additional expense. Weathering properties and maintenance costs could be inferior and, whilst the initial impact could be quite striking, the

case for dedicating additional resources to this product has not been made. Officers are hoping to find examples of comparable locations where the type of product has been extensively used and in-situ for a number of years in order to provide more informed advice.

- 3.6 The advantages of blockwork bedded in sand include the following: a large proportion of the market place could be kept open throughout the works, the associated dust would be substantially reduced as the blocks can be split rather than cut; a uniform quality can be achieved throughout the scheme; the programme time can be reduced and the manufacturers offer a free design service.
- 3.7 Samples of the material and a photographic presentation will be available on the night of the Committee to enable a proper comparison of the materials.

4 Financial and Manpower Implications

- 4.1 The Plan E scheme is already funded. Any up-lift in specification will attract additional cost to the Borough Council. Members are asked to consider whether the allocation of further Community Infrastructure Levy funds to this project can be justified.
- 4.2 ***Chief Finance Officer's comments:*** *The cost of the revised scheme for Plan E agreed by Council in February 2015 was £3,375,000 and included within this figure was £675,000 for public realm improvements. The project was agreed to be funded as set out in the table in 2.1.*
- 4.3 *The updated scheme identified in paragraph 3.1 of this report details the public realm improvements to be funded within the Plan E project totalling £347,000.*
- 4.4 *Unallocated CIL receipts as at the end of 2016/17 total in excess of £3 million, however these funds are likely to be required to part fund infrastructure projects as set out in the Council's Infrastructure Development Plan.*

5 Legal Implications (including implications for matters relating to equality)

- 5.1 ***Monitoring Officer's comments:*** *There are no legal implications arising from this report.*

6 Sustainability Policy and Community Safety Implications

- 6.1 There are no specific implications arising.

7 Partnerships

- 7.1 The Plan E Epsom Town Centre Highway and Public Realm Improvement Scheme, is principally a highway improvement scheme being implemented by Surrey County Council. It is being implemented

in partnership with Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, particularly as regards making wider improvements to the public realm at the same time as highway improvements are made. The scheme is funded by the two Councils and also by means of a grant from the Coast to Capital Local Enterprise Partnership.

8 Risk Assessment

- 8.1 Until decisions are made as to materials and the final elements to be included in the scheme, no contract can be finalised by Surrey County Council. As a result there is a risk that costs will further increase and exceed the available budget and further changes to the scheme will then be required.
- 8.2 There is a risk to the reputation of both Councils the longer the scheme is delayed, regardless of the reason(s) for the delays.
- 8.3 The disruption which the scheme will cause during construction could put at risk the operation of the market. Officers believe that if the market requires to be closed entirely at any point, its future existence will be jeopardised.
- 8.4 The disruption is likely to affect business rates income, and may also impact on the proposals and decisions to be taken in respect of the Business Improvement District, which is hoped to be put to ballot later this year.

9 Conclusion and Recommendations

- 9.1 A decision on materials needs to be made now to enable the project to proceed and to avoid further delays and cost.
- 9.2 The use of granite or a granite-like block in the Market Place is both unaffordable and too disruptive.
- 9.3 The use of block paving bedded in sand has advantages for the delivery of the Plan E highway and public realm scheme. There are options available that would enable a uniform standard of appearance across this part of the town centre and it would be equivalent in quality to when the market place was originally re-surfaced more than 25 years ago. A premium product also bedded in sand is of unproven worth and, unless its relative merits can be better understood, its use would be unjustified given the higher price.
- 9.4 It is recommended that Members determine whether they are happy to go with the basic block paving or whether the Council should fund a premium approach to some or all of the areas. This will carry an additional cost and Members are asked, if they are minded to consider a premium finish, whether the up-lift in cost should be funded from CIL.

WARD(S) AFFECTED: Town Ward;