



Carlisle City Council

Report to Place Panel

Report details

Meeting Date:	19 January 2023
Portfolio:	Economy, Enterprise and Housing
Key Decision:	No
Policy and Budget Framework	No
Public / Private	Public
Title:	Future High Streets Fund: Reimagining Market Square Consultation
Report of:	Corporate Director of Economic Development
Report Number:	ED.04/23

Purpose / Summary:

This report provides an update on the Reimagining the Greenmarket / Market Square project ('the Project'), which forms part of the Council's Future High Streets Fund ('FHSF') programme. The report sets out the work undertaken so far on the Project, the concept designs that have been produced and analysis of responses from the two public consultations undertaken in July and November/December 2022.

Recommendations:

Members of the Place Panel are asked to:

1. Note the work undertaken to develop the scope and concept designs for the Project outlined in Section 2 of this report
2. Note the results of the recent consultation on the concept designs for the Project outlined in Section 3 of this report.
3. Provide feedback on the concept designs for the Project set out in Table 1 of this report to inform the next stage of development.
4. Note the risks to the delivery of the Project outlined in Section 4 of this report.

Tracking


Executive:	
Scrutiny:	
Council:	

1. Background

- 1.1. It is widely recognised that there has been a significant change in shopping behaviour, accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, with more people purchasing goods online. This trend has led to the collapse of several high-profile high street retail chains, such as Debenhams and the Arcadia Group (Topshop, Burton, Dorothy Perkins). Carlisle, like many towns and cities across the UK, has been affected by these closures with a number of prominent units within the City Centre now standing vacant.
- 1.2. This process has driven a fundamental change in the role and composition of town and city centres with much less focus and dependency on retail. The most successful and resilient are those that have evolved and diversified to include residential, business, culture, leisure, and education uses. This has largely occurred in the bigger cities where the process has been market-led and driven by the private sector.
- 1.3. This market-led diversification process has not taken place in Carlisle. There are a number of reasons for this, which, are to some extent interrelated: a low resident population in the city centre, a weak office market, over-dependency on retail, underperforming visitor and leisure offer, property development costs and commercial viability.
- 1.4. The broad aim of the Council's FHSF programme is to address this market failure through a suite of projects designed to catalyse the diversification process, improving the visitor and leisure offer in the city centre and make it more of an experience and destination for residents, businesses, and visitors.
- 1.5. The Greenmarket and Market Square project, that forms part of the programme, is focussed on the area around the Old Town Hall. The Council, supported by Cumbria County Council, have been developing the project that involves improving the public realm of the area to make it a more attractive space and provide enabling infrastructure (water, electricity, and drainage) so that it can host different kinds of events - such as an open-air cinema in the summer months or an ice rink in winter - with the objective of encouraging people to visit and stay longer.
- 1.6. The project has a £2.7million budget, with £2.38 funding from the Government's Future High Streets Fund and £390,000 from the City Council. The Project is part of a wider city centre strategy which includes investment in the Citadels, Caldew Riverside and Carlisle Railway Station.



2. Project development


- 2.1 An initial consultation on the project was undertaken in July 2022, which gathered feedback on the current issues with the Greenmarket and Market Square area, and the potential opportunities to improve it. The biggest priorities for the area were:
- Reducing the number of vacant properties and encouraging creative new uses
 - Improving pedestrian access by reducing vehicular movements and enhancing the paving and public realm
 - Increasing the amount of green space and more planting
 - More evening activity and better lighting to making the space feel safer at night
 - Better seating with more places to sit comfortably
 - Creating a greater performance space for events and performances
- 2.2 As a key element of the project is to provide enabling infrastructure to enable the hosting of events, the consultation also asked what types of uses and activities people would like to see held in the area. The most popular responses were:
- Seasonal events such as Christmas lights and summer fairs
 - Local, specialist and international markets
 - Live music and staged events
 - Street performances
 - Parades and important civic events
- 2.3 From this feedback a series of concept designs for both the Green Market and Market Square area were developed. These formed the basis of the second consultation that took place between November – December 2022. The concept designs are set out in Table 1 below

Green Market		
Concept 1 – Green the Greenmarket	<p>Maximise greening – new trees, plants and raised lawn</p> <p>Create quiet contemplative space focused around the War Memorial</p> <p>Large street planters to frame the Crown & Mitre frontage</p>	

<p>Concept 2 – Flexible and Fun</p>	<p>Sunken flexible events space</p> <p>Playful water jets are the focus of activity</p> <p>Jets can be switched off to accommodate temporary events</p> <p>Places to sit and space for spill out cafe seating</p> <p>Enhanced War Memorial setting</p>	
<p>Concept 3 – Destination Events Space</p>	<p>Define the Greenmarket as a place distinct from Market Square</p> <p>Multi-functional events space & bandstand/ pavilion</p> <p>Shelter from inclement weather & supporting facilities</p> <p>A new plug-and-play events destination</p>	

Market Square

<p>Concept 1 – Green Edges</p>	<p>More and better positioned mature trees</p> <p>Create a green edge to the Market Square with raised planters on the west side</p> <p>Integrate seating to provide sheltered and comfortable places to sit</p> <p>Enhance paving to the Market Cross</p>	
<p>Concept 2 – Playful and interactive</p>	<p>Large, sociable benches and moveable street furniture</p> <p>Integrate feature lighting to animate the evening environment</p>	

<p>Concept 3 – Simple and flexible</p>	<p>Feature art installation in the pavement</p> <p>Remove street clutter to open up views and usability</p> <p>Interesting seating arrangements to encourage interaction</p> <p>Mature trees to define the edge of the square</p> <p>Provide optimum space and infrastructure for events</p>	
<p>Table 1: Concept Designs</p>		

3 Consultation feedback

- 3.1 The consultation has largely been met with a positive response from the public, with recognition that the area could play an important role in diversifying the city centre offer – as both a focal point and encouraging more leisure, cultural and night-time uses. There was also consensus that in order to fulfil this role, the area needs to be improved and requires investment.
- 3.2 One of the most significant results from the consultation was that a large majority of respondents only used the Greenmarket and Market Square area as a throughfare to move across the pedestrianised area and did not stop or access any of the businesses within it. This highlights the underutilisation of the space, the opportunity for change and the rationale the project and the investment.
- 3.3 Those respondents who stated they did use the area, the majority used it for shopping and retail. However, when asked about specific activities the most frequent answers were for using the cafes and as a meeting place for friends and business. This suggests that the area is now seen more as a place for socialising rather than traditional retail with more emphasis on food and beverage uses.

Green Market

- 3.4 Overall, 96% of respondents felt that the proposals for improving the Greenmarket area would benefit the adjacent businesses by generating more footfall and spend. There was strong support for restricting vehicles from the using the space (94%) for servicing and deliveries. There was also support for emphasising the history of the Greenmarket (92%) though the use of information boards and other forms of interpretation. 86% of respondents stated they would like to see feature lighting and 56% a water feature.

- 3.5 In terms of the ideas for the area, Concept 2 gained the most support overall, with respondents commenting the flexibility of the space and the enhancement of the setting of the war memorial. However, both Concepts 1 and 3 were also supported with specific elements of these highlighted such as the planting / greenery and the covered performance area.

Market Square

- 3.6 From the consultation responses it was clear that the majority of respondents saw the Market Square as a location for larger scale markets and events in the City Centre. Many were concerned about change that may reduce the functionality of the space, with the terms 'future proofing' and 'flexibility' frequently referred cited. 90% of respondents stated they would like to see feature lighting in the area, with 42% citing a water feature.
- 3.7 In terms of the ideas for the area, Concept 1 gained the most support overall, with respondents commenting the increased greenery and seating breaks up the large space and creates a sense of place. However, Concept 3 was close behind with respondents citing that it would provide the maximum flexibility to accommodate different uses and events.

4. Next steps

- 4.1 The final designs for the project will be progressed in early 2023, with works commencing in spring 2023. The current timeline / milestones for the project are:
- Early 2023: Design development, Traffic Regulation process and public exhibition of preferred designs
 - Spring 2023: Tender and commencement of construction

5. Risks

- 5.1 The following risks have been identified in relation to the Reimagining the Greenmarket / Market Square project.

Risk	Consequences	Mitigation
Public and businesses do not support the final design for the area.	Delay to progressing the project through governance decision making processes. Project not perceived as a success by local community and businesses.	Consultation with partners, local businesses and public. Any issues raised can inform the final design.

Disruption to supply chain, material shortages and inflation causing increased costs.	Cost increases reduce the scope of works and delivery of outputs	Monitor availability and procurement of materials via the live projects. Develop a procurement strategy to avoid supply chain issues
Unforeseen ground conditions lead to increased costs and delays to programme	Cost increases reduce the scope of works and delivery of outputs	Intrusive surveys undertaken prior to construction to inform impact on cost and programme.
Traffic regulation orders (TRO) delayed due to LGR moratorium until 1 April 2023	The project requires amendments to existing traffic regulation orders and delays the project delivery.	Early engagement and informal consultation process with partners, local businesses and public will reduce the likelihood for TRO amendments.

6. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 6.1 There has been a shift in consumer buying behaviour with a rapid increase in on-line shopping, which has had a significant impact on the high street. Driven by this shift, the role and composition of town and city centres is fundamentally changing, with the most successful city centres now including residential, business, culture, leisure, and education uses in addition to retail.
- 6.2 Carlisle has been affected by these trends, with the loss of a number of high-profile chains and consequently, a number of prominent vacant buildings. However, unlike some of the larger cities, the market-led diversification process has not taken place.
- 6.3 The aim of the Council's FHSF programme is to address this market failure through a suite of projects designed to catalyse the diversification process. The objective of the Greenmarket / Market Square project is to improve the visitor and leisure offer in the city centre and make it more of an experience and destination for residents, businesses, and visitors.
- 6.4 Two stages of consultation have been undertaken on the development of the project: the first in July 2022 and the second in November/December 2022. From this feedback, a series of concept designs for both the Green Market and Market Square area have been developed.
- 6.5 On this basis Members of the Place Panel are asked to:
- Note the work undertaken to develop the scope and concept designs for the Project outlined in Section 2 of this report
 - Note the results of the recent consultation on the concept designs for the Project outlined in Section 3 of this report.

- Provide feedback on the concept designs for the Project set out in Table 1 of this report to inform the next stage of development.
- Note the risks to the delivery of the Project outlined in Section 4 of this report.

7. Contribution to the Carlisle Plan Priorities

- 7.1 The Greenmarket / Market Square project would be a transformational project for Carlisle and would support the delivery of the vision set out in the Carlisle Plan, which is to enable the city to grow and prosper as the capital of the Borderlands region. It would also contribute directly to the priority of delivering inclusive and sustainable economic growth, by making Carlisle a more attractive visitor destination and place for investment.

Contact details:

Contact Officer: Steven Robinson Ext: 7535

Appendices attached to report:

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Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government Act 1972 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers:

- None

Corporate Implications:

Legal	<p>Ensure that an Equality Impact Assessment is undertaken to consider and analyse how the Council will discharge its Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010.</p> <p>The subsidy Control Act 2022 came into full force on 4th January 2023 and its changes to the current subsidy control regime should be considered in relation to the delivery of this project and funding from the Council.</p>
Property Services	No property implications
Finance	<p>The confirmed allocation of Future High Street Funding (£9,124,607) has been added to the Council's capital programme which includes £2,381,768 for the Greenmarket and Market Square project. A further £390,000 contribution from the Council is also included giving a total project budget of £2,771,768 across the 2022/23 and 2023/24 financial years.</p>

	<p>The Memorandum of Understanding for the FHSF is for 2021/22 and 2022/23 only and therefore funding for 2023/24 is subject to the outcome of the Government's Spending Review and annual LA Funding Assessments.</p> <p>As the Council is acting as Accountable Body for the FHSF, it will need to ensure that it has suitable arrangements in place with third parties who will deliver some of the projects, e.g., Cumbria County Council etc, so that it can be certain that grant conditions will be followed and adhered to. There will likely be a requirement for funding agreements with these third-party bodies for this.</p> <p>The Council will need to consider any VAT implications associated with the delivery of the schemes as the significant expenditure that will be flowing through its accounts will increase the amount of VAT reclaimed.</p>
Equality	Consultation responses included catering for the needs of all ages.
Information Governance	Any consultation undertaken which involves the collection of personal data must be supported by the required data protection documentation. Any publishing of survey results requires a governance check to ensure personal data is not inadvertently disclosed.