

# **Western Avenue and River Anton Riverside Park, Andover**

Report of the Strategic Regeneration and Partnerships (North) Portfolio Holder

## **Recommended:**

- 1. That the progress of the Western Avenue and River Anton work be noted.**
- 2. That the Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development, in consultation with the Strategic Regeneration and Partnerships (North) Portfolio Holder, Finance and Resources Portfolio Holder and Head of Finance and Revenues, be authorised to progress all design and development work necessary to enable completion of detailed design, up to and including the submission of a planning application to include production of tender documents and pre-tender cost estimates for construction stages.**

### **SUMMARY:**

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the progress of the Western Avenue and River Anton riverside park project and recommends delegation of authority to the Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development, in consultation with others, to progress the Western Avenue and River Anton work to submission of planning application stage.

## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1** The Western Avenue and River Anton riverside park project is one of two priority projects being brought forward by the Council as part of the Andover Masterplan, the other being a new theatre for the town.
- 1.2** The projects are partly funded through an £18.3M award from the Levelling Up Fund (LUF). The Andover Masterplan was developed through intensive and innovative community engagement
- 1.3** A report to Council on 23rd February 2023 allocated £6.5M of funding towards the delivery of the project. A subsequent report to Full Council on 29<sup>th</sup> February 2024 allocated a further £3M to the project.
- 1.4** This report outlines the progress made on delivering the Western Avenue project and seeks delegated authority to further progress the scheme.

## 2 Background

- 2.1 The Andover Masterplan proposed several regeneration schemes which would improve the vibrancy of the town. Two key priorities identified to achieve this were to open-up the River Anton, which is largely hidden within the Western Avenue gyratory, and to bring more green space into the town.
- 2.2 The stretch of river between Town Mills and Andover College was identified during the consultation on the Masterplan as a priority for improvement, building on the improvements made around Town Mills. The Masterplan also recognised that existing pedestrian and cycle routes extend north to Anton Lakes and south to Rooksbury Mill Nature Reserve, but the town centre stretch north of Town Mills represents a significant break in connectivity.
- 2.3 The Masterplan identified an opportunity to address these issues and proposed the removal of part of the Western Avenue gyratory to create a new area of public space adjacent to the river Anton that would provide access to the river and space for informal recreation. A green 'trailway' was also proposed between Andover College and Town Mills that would promote awareness of the ecological value of the river.
- 2.4 The Masterplans illustrate ways in which the Masterplan Spatial Frameworks could be delivered. The Western Avenue/River Anton Area Masterplan is shown at Annex 1. The illustrative Masterplans are high-level concept schemes that require more detail work to be able to be implemented. As such detailed design feasibility work has been undertaken to consider how the schemes would work in practice.

### *Design Feasibility*

- 2.5 Since the Masterplan was adopted, the Council has undertaken feasibility work through the appointment of a consultancy team. This feasibility work identified and sought to address the following issues that were identified with the Masterplan concept scheme:
  - The Masterplan concept scheme indicated a bus-only exit lane through the northern section of the park. The inclusion of this bus lane created a break in pedestrian and cycle connectivity and would create conflict between pedestrians, cyclists and buses.
  - Currently, West Street accommodates one-way traffic. The Masterplan did not address how other traffic along West Street would exit onto Western Avenue, including Lidl, Andover Leisure Centre, Portland Grove, Chantry Lodge, deliveries to the Chantry Centre and traffic from the east of the town centre. This meant that the proposed bus-only exit lane would have to be used for all vehicular traffic unless changes were made to West Street to make it suitable for two-way vehicular traffic.
  - The quality and amenity of the park to be created and access to the river would be compromised by the space required for the bus lane as well as noise and emissions from vehicles using the northern exit only route.

- 2.6 To address these issues, officers explored whether all vehicular traffic could be re-directed through West Street by making changes to its road layout to accommodate two-way vehicular traffic. Doing so would allow for the exit only route through the northern section of the park to be removed, thereby creating a larger and improved area of public realm and green space that would allow better pedestrian and cycling connectivity through the town and remove any potential conflict between pedestrians and vehicular movements within the new park aligning more closely with the aspirations of the Masterplan and resulting in a significantly improved scheme.
- 2.7 The initial feasibility work involved close working with Hampshire County Council as Highways Authority and suggested that, in principle, two-way vehicular traffic on West Street would be possible within the adopted highway boundary and land owned by Test Valley Borough Council (TVBC).

#### *Highway Optioneering*

- 2.8 The report to Council on 23rd February 2023 considered the Council's position with regard the unsuccessful round 2 LUF bid and that progress should continue with the Western Avenue and River Anton riverside park. It set out the next steps in delivering the riverside park scheme following on from the conclusion of the feasibility work. These were to appoint designers to progress the feasibility design into a detailed design that would be taken through the planning process.
- 2.9 On 29 February 2024 Council approved the funding strategy for the wider regeneration programme, including the Western Avenue work. This strategy took into account the award of £18.3M from round 3 of LUF and increased the funding for the riverside park project to £9.5M. This was to address a significant budget increase for the highway elements of the project that would be required from the initial concept design to the optioneering. The Council report specified the additional costs required for a more sophisticated junction where Western Avenue meets West Street, additional changes to West Street to allow bus manoeuvrability, two-way running and greater uplifts for contingencies.

#### *Park Design*

- 2.10 In March 2024 the Council appointed Land Use Consultants (LUC) as lead landscape architects and Hampshire Engineering Services (HES) to undertake the next stage of design work. This involved undertaking an options appraisal of the potential changes to the road layout that would facilitate the creation of the park.
- 2.11 HES has now completed the optioneering study. This supports the earlier indications that there is space to change West Street to accommodate two-way vehicular traffic without the acquisition of third-party land. As such a preferred highway layout option has been identified to this effect. The optioneering report is also accompanied by a full road safety audit. This has demonstrated that there are no highway safety concerns with the proposed preferred highway option. As such HES are confident that two-way vehicular traffic can be accommodated along West Street without the need for a bus only exit lane through the northern section of the park.

- 2.12 The preferred highway scheme has been incorporated into the landscape design for the park that is being prepared by LUC. The emerging design for the scheme is shown at Annex 2.
- 2.13 In order to develop a scheme that is deliverable, it has been necessary to exercise the flexibility contemplated in the Masterplan in delivering the Spatial Framework whilst retaining the expressed objective of retaining access for both buses and vehicles in a traffic calmed environment. The scheme contemplated strongly aligns with the priorities of bringing more green space into the town and opening up access to the River Anton.

#### *Next Steps*

- 2.14 Recommendation 2 set out at the start of this report would take the scheme through the design and into the planning stages. It would also enable the completion of the detailed design work required to produce tender documents and a pre-tender cost estimate for the construction stages.
- 2.15 It is recommended that authority is delegated to the Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development in consultation with those listed at Recommendation 2 in order to progress this work efficiently and expeditiously.
- 2.16 It is expected that the Council will submit a planning application in December 2024 for the new park. This would enable the works to be underway prior to the LUF spend deadline of March 2026.

### **3 Corporate Objectives and Priorities**

- 3.1 A Place for Everyone – Supporting our Communities to Thrive is the Council's Corporate Plan (2023-2027). Based on the results of community engagement with residents from across the borough, this Corporate Plan outlines five strategic priorities that will provide the focus for the Council's activities over the next four years. These priorities are sustainability, connection, environment, inclusion and prosperity.
- 3.2 The Western Avenue and River Anton riverside park would create more green space in the town centre alongside ecological enhancement to the river Anton corridor thereby improving the natural environment and biodiversity within the Borough. The park would be inclusive to all and improve pedestrian and cycle connections through the town centre and encouraging more sustainable modes of travel. These are all considered to be positive enhancement to the town centre which will support investment into the town and improve its prosperity.

### **4 Consultations/Communications**

- 4.1 The Council has worked in close partnership with HCC on this project and Passenger Transport capacity. In order to strengthen this cooperation and ensure continuity, HES, the County Council's engineering design arm were employed to develop the design for the highways scheme. HCC are considering a Decision Day paper on the 24 October 2024 that seeks,

subject to the approval of this Cabinet recommendation, to support the Council's request to progress with the design work for preferred highway scheme, to work with the Borough Council to progress all necessary consents and to approve the allocation of £1.1M of s106 held by the County Council towards the scheme.

- 4.2 Engagement has been undertaken with Stagecoach, operator of the bus station whose egress would be altered by the proposed revised traffic scheme. To address some of Stagecoach's operational concerns, the work testing the proposed layout has resulted in alterations to the design of the highway and bus station that have demonstrated the scheme is workable.
- 4.3 Engagement has also been undertaken with Lidl, whose store also borders the scheme to explain the proposal and who would be affected by the proposed removal of part of the gyratory.
- 4.4 Those residents in Portland Grove and Chantry Lodge which are nearest to the scheme and would be affected by the introduction of two-way vehicular traffic on West Street were invited to an information sharing event held on 19 September 2024.

## **5 Options**

- 5.1 Option 1 - To approve the Recommendations set out in this report, Recommendation 2 of which will enable the design of the enhanced traffic work to be developed and the wider Riverside scheme progress to submission of a planning application and completion of pre-tender work.
- 5.2 Option 2 - Not to approve Recommendation 2.
- 5.3 Option 3 - To approve some other arrangement.

## **6 Option Appraisal**

### *Option 1*

- 6.1 Completion of the work envisaged under Recommendation 2 as described in the preceding paragraphs of this report would contribute to delivery of the priorities set out in the Andover Masterplan. These include significant creation of more green space in the town centre, opening up the river Anton and improving pedestrian and cycle connectivity through the town. This would enable works to the Western Avenue and River Anton riverside park to progress to the submission of planning application stage.

### *Option 2*

- 6.2 Moving to deliver the exact illustrative scheme set out in the Western Avenue/River Anton Masterplan and not exercising the contemplated flexibility to deliver the Spatial Framework in an improved or enhanced way would result in a carriageway through the northern half of the proposed park. Although the Masterplan indicatively showed this as being buses only, this would not be possible as it would also need to carry traffic emerging onto West Street from

Lidl, Portland Grove, Chantry Lodge, Chantry Street and Chantry Centre units backing onto West Street. This would create an unattractive and potentially unsafe environment in the northern half of the space, compromising the quality and amenity of the green space, and would not facilitate the strong north/south link through the town centre, which were stated priorities in the approved Andover Masterplan. For these reasons, this option is not recommended

### *Option 3*

- 6.3 The recommendations and in particular Recommendation 2 set out in this report are as a result of professional officers' assessment of the most effective way to deliver the Western Avenue/River Anton area Masterplan. It is difficult to see how resolving to adopt some alternative arrangement would result in effective progression towards delivery of the regeneration priorities for this scheme set out in the Andover Masterplan and supported by the funding strategy approved by Council in February 2024. There is a risk that funding from LUF could be recalled if not committed as required hence speedy and effective delivery is all the more important. For this reason, Option 3 is not recommended.

## **7 Risk Management**

- 7.1 Risks on this project are being managed through a comprehensive project risk register.
- 7.2 Recommendation 2 of this report would enable the necessary works to be progressed in an efficient and timely matter. If work does not proceed, as outlined in this report, the project would be significantly delayed. This would lead to significant additional costs in revising the design. It would also mean that the Council would not be able to meet the timetable agreed with Government for the spending of the LUF funding. There would be a risk that the Government would not release the remainder of the funding, placing a financial pressure on the Council.
- 7.3 The recommendation proposes delivery of work up to submission of a planning application. There may be standard risks that apply when submitting a planning application, such as third-party objections, which would be considered as part of the planning process.
- 7.4 The scheme represents a major highways and green space infrastructure project that has not yet been tendered. There is a risk that the project will not be able to be completed within the approved budget. Taking the recommended next steps will enable more certainty to be provided on the likely total project costs.

## **8 Resource Implications**

- 8.1 The budget for this project was approved by Full Council on 29th February 2024. £9.5M has been allocated to deliver the Highways improvements and creation of the park. No additional funding is required to complete the design stages of the project as set out in this report.

- 8.2 The project is being managed through existing resources. The highways design is being undertaken by HES and the landscape design is being undertaken by LUC, both sets of design consultants are reporting to the Council as the client.

## **9 Legal Implications and Statutory Authority**

- 9.1 Legal advice relating to planning, land registry and procurement matters has been procured from Sharpe Pritchard LLP and will support the Council as the scheme progresses.

## **10 Equality Issues**

- 10.1 The Andover Masterplan was produced having engaged with a wide range of the community and the proposals informed by the outcome of those conversations.
- 10.2 The Western Avenue and River Anton riverside park regeneration scheme is aimed at creating an accessible and inclusive new park within the town centre. This will include access to green space to promote health and wellbeing as well as improving the accessibility of pedestrian and cycling connectivity through the town for all groups. Wider connectivity from the proposed park would also seek to benefit all users. Both the Council and Hampshire County Council will continue to assess equality issues as part of the process.

## **11 Sustainability and Addressing a Changing Climate**

- 11.1 The completed riverside park will make a significant contribution to the quality of the environment in Andover Town Centre through habitat creation and promoting sustainable, non-car modes of travel.

## **12 Other Issues**

- 12.1 Community Safety – as part of the progression of the scheme community safety will be considered as part of the design process.
- 12.2 Environmental Health Issues – as part of the progression of the scheme any environmental health issues will be considered as part of the design process.
- 12.3 Property Issues – all land affected is within the ownership of the Council or Hampshire County Council. There will be a requirement for some land transfers between the Council and the County Council relating to the removal of the southbound arm of the gyratory and to extend some areas of adopted highway.
- 12.4 Environmental Services – there will be a requirement to take on the maintenance of the new park once the land is no longer adopted highway. This would place a revenue pressure on the Council.
- 12.5 Wards/Communities Affected – Andover St Mary's.

### 13 Conclusion and reasons for recommendation

- 13.1 The creation of the riverside park will support the delivery of the objectives of the Andover Masterplan. The recommendation set out at the start of this report will enable officers to proceed with the development of the design up to and including the submission of a planning application, the subsequent phases of detailed design and the preparation of tender documentation for the construction stages.

<u>Background Papers (Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D)</u> <a href="#">Andover Masterplan 2020</a>			
<u>Confidentiality</u> It is considered that this report does not contain exempt information within the meaning of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and can be made public.			
No of Annexes:	2	File Ref:	N/A
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