

IMPROVEMENT SCHEMES FOR KINGSBURY AND MARKET SQUARE, AYLESBURY

1 Purpose

- 1.1 This report sets out challenges facing Kingsbury and Market Square and outlines the plans to bring forward improvement schemes for both spaces and the associated costs.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members of the Scrutiny Committee are invited to review the report so that their comments can be considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 10 July.

3 Supporting information

- 4.1 The Aylesbury Town Centre Plan (www.aylesburytowncentreplan) was published in 2014 which set out:
- The challenges facing the town.
 - The regeneration achievements to date
 - A vision and unique selling point
 - Guiding principles for future regeneration of the town centre
 - A range of actions to improve the town centre generally as well as actions specific to the different area of the centre

The Town Centre Plan has now been reflected in the Draft Vale of Aylesbury Plan.

- 4.2 In respect of the challenges, the impact of internet shopping via multi-channels was already recognised and reflected in the Town's Vision

Aylesbury will:

...be a high profile, sub-regional centre for entertainment and the arts, which has added a distinctive edge to its market town heritage.

...be a distinctive, 'best in class', modern market town, which is attractive, safe, sustainable and accessible.

--- provide a quality day and evening environment in terms of leisure, retail and food and drink, which attracts and brings together people of all ages and communities from within its enviable catchment area.

- 4.3 There is no definitive view on how much impact the internet is having or will ultimately have on traditional retail, but it is abundantly clear that the demand for physical retail space is changing with 16 shops a day closing in 2017 and almost every operator including Marks & Spencer's and John Lewis

Partnerships are committed to undertaking portfolio reviews. Others such as House of Fraser, are already part way through that process and it is well known that the Aylesbury branch will close at some point.

- 4.4 Whilst some of this is offset by big box operators such as B&Q and Screwfix opening smaller, high street formats, users of town centres are undoubtedly looking to their towns (particularly those the size of Aylesbury), to provide a more social experience. National spend on casual dining and the increase in the number of restaurants and cafes has been phenomenal and whilst the dining out market has also seen a softening in recent months, spend generally in this area continues to grow, with shopping being only part of the reason to visit. Aylesbury is no exception to this trend and has since a number of new cafes and restaurants open in recent years, with more opening as part of The Exchange development.
- 4.5 A theme central to the entire Town Centre Plan, is the recognition that Aylesbury needed to improve the quality of its environment and public space to help create the experience people were looking for whether living, visiting or working. Whilst it is difficult to quantify a direct financial return on investment from public realm improvement, there is strong supporting evidence which shows that it can deliver the following intrinsic and non-economic benefits:
- Helps attract investment from the private sector as the town's reputation and profile rises. (AVDC can benefit from the business rate uplift this delivers).
 - Improves the wellbeing of existing residents and users of the town centre.
 - Increases footfall as the town becomes the preferred choice of place to visit. This helps generate spend in the local economy and enables existing businesses to thrive. Some of these in Aylesbury are AVDC owned or where the council has a vested interest in eg Aylesbury Waterside Theatre. Increased footfall helps enhance this investment).
 - Creates an environment where civic pride helps reduce anti-social behaviour.
 - Can support job growth
- 4.6 In Aylesbury good progress has been made on delivering a range of public space improvements identified in the Plan. These include:
- Creatively using the former water scheme in Kingsbury for colourful planters
 - Achieving a parking order for Kingsbury to enable enforcement of illegal parking on the central area
 - Using different spaces for events eg Aylesbury on Sea (an Aylesbury Town Council event), WhizzFizz, Christmas light switch-on etc
 - Developing the new Exchange public square alongside an improvement scheme for Long Lion
 - Launch of the first waterside festival in September 2018 using the public space by the theatre and canal for the festivities
 - New planters in the High Street (in part to help prevent unauthorised use by cars)

- An ever expanding street entertainment and events programme
- A fantastic Aylesbury in Bloom programme (led by Aylesbury Town Council)

4.7 However, whilst these small but incremental improvements are important, two of the town's largest public spaces – Kingsbury and Market Square, have operational and aesthetic challenges which need for significant schemes to come forward.

Kingsbury - background and context

4.8 Kingsbury is a distinct area of the town and a gateway to the historic Old Town. The land known as Kingsbury was given to the people of Aylesbury by Charles I and was originally called "Kings Borough" ie the land of the King. It was the secondary square of Aylesbury and originally used as a base for carters who were employed to deliver goods purchased at the market to outlying villages. As Aylesbury has developed and grown, use of Kingsbury has changed and whilst it still retains many fine buildings, it has struggled in recent times to attract the footfall of its former years and to find its own identity.

4.9 In 2004, a Government funded scheme to improve the public space was delivered to help Kingsbury attract private investment in the commercial units and make it more integral to the retail circuit. Whilst these improvements were welcome, they have not brought about the transformation hoped for. Instead, the on-going decline in footfall has led to new challenges and an increase in anti-social behaviour ranging from parking on the central area to public drinking outside the agreed areas. Much effort has also been made by AVDC, and its partners to address these issues, but the overall feedback is that more significant investment is needed to enable Kingsbury to thrive and become a greater asset to the town.

The Aylesbury Town Centre Action Plan and Kingsbury

4.10 The Action Plan for Kingsbury (taken from the Town Centre Plan is attached as Appendix 1). The mini vision for the area is to

"Create a more attractive environment for residents, visitors and businesses and improve it as the gateway to the old town."

4.11 A number of the actions listed have already been completed or are underway, but one of the key outstanding actions is to

"Form a stakeholder group to identify options for improving the physical environment, looking at seating, lighting, surfaces etc so that better use of the open space can be made all year round."

4.12 Some preliminary work has already been undertaken by the Town Centre Manager to gauge interest by the business community in a scheme being brought forward. This engagement has been on the basis that whilst AVDC (working potentially with BCC who own the highway around the central area which is failing in parts), may be able to deliver enhancements to the public space, the land and buildings also need to be considered to achieve the best outcome for this relatively small area. This means that the investment and commitment from landlord and tenants will be needed as well.

- 4.13 There are some 40 landlords and tenants in Kingsbury – some remote and with the primary objective of ensuring their unit is occupied regardless of the greater vision we are seeking to achieve for the area. However, some landlords and tenants are local to Aylesbury and are enthusiastic about being part of the plans. The potential to transform Kingsbury through a joint approach is significant and any stakeholder engagement will also extend to other key partners such as the Aylesbury Town Council, Thames Valley Police and the Aylesbury Old Town Residents' Association.
- 4.15 Some initial thought has been given as to what the future look and feel of Kingsbury could be taking into account the need to reduce the reliance on retail and how Kingsbury could complement other areas of the town centre. An initial concept based on bringing the Roald Dahl theme from the Museum in the adjacent area, to Kingsbury (both land and buildings) has been suggested and well received. However, as part of the development of the concept, significant more work would need to be undertaken with stakeholders to ensure that the vision was shared and jointly owned.

Aylesbury Market Square – background and context

- 4.16 The Market Square with its landmark clock is Aylesbury's most established public space. Originally the Square was much bigger but over time has reduced as development has taken place on the periphery. Over the centuries, the Market Square has been a central space for people to meet, socialise, and trade. Around the historic cobbled square there are many fine old buildings including the original Grade II County Hall (built in 1725), the Crown Court and the Corn Exchange (built in 1864).
- 4.17 The Market Square is still a very popular space and today is home to four markets a week – the Vintage & Craft Bazaar, general, Foodie Friday, special markets, concerts, Christmas light switch-on, the Christmas carol concert, WhizzFizz and more.
- 4.18 However, despite its popularity, the Square has constraint. The key ones can be summarised as:
- Accessibility. The cobbles are an essential part of the Squares heritage, giving it a distinctive look and feel. However, they are also very uneven and deter many people, particularly if they have a disability, from using the Market Square and enjoying the activities on offer. (A survey undertaken by the Market's Team identified that one of the reasons why people did not use the markets, was the concern about walking safely or easily across the cobbles. People who said this was ranged from women wearing shoes with heels, older people, people with pushchairs and people with a disability.
 - Poor infrastructure. As the town's main event/activity space, The Square has limited on-site infrastructure such as electricity supply points for generators etc, lighting and water. This has become a constraint for regular event such as Foodie Friday which is growing in popularity, but stalls can only be located on the sections of the Square where there is pop-up electricity supply. In winter months, the lack of lighting becomes a additional issue and is hard to address with health and safety regulations limiting how and where overhead cabling can be successfully rigged.

These two constraints collectively prevent all of the space from being used and for more a wider range of activities.

The Aylesbury Town Centre Plan – Market Square

- 4.19 The Action Plan for Market Square (taken from the Town Centre Plan is attached as Appendix 2). The mini vision for the area is to:

“Make more of the area’s presence as a key retail, catering and leisure hub”

- 4.20 As with Kingsbury, a number of the actions are already underway or complete. For example, significant investment has taken place to deliver the action about improving the markets. New stalls, and the development of the Vintage & Craft Bazaar, and the Foodie Friday markets, have all helped to revitalise the popularity of the town’s historic market tradition. But one of the key actions calls for a review of the public realm to

“Create a more attractive and usable environment for shopping, eating, drinking and leisure (including large scale events and socialising).”

The Action Plan also states that the review should include:

- *Better links between areas*
- *Vehicle, pedestrian and events use*
- *Public space (including layout, surfaces, street furniture, signage, lighting and electricity supply)*

- 4.21 Unlike Kingsbury, there is no plan at this stage to introduce a theme to Market Square unless the stakeholder engagement identifies one. The brief is in essence set out in paragraph 4.18 above but within the clear context of retaining the Square’s heritage look and feel..

5 Indicative costs of the improvements

- 5.1 Developing the concept to implementation of a scheme has a number of phases which will be applicable to both spaces. The key phases are:
- i) Inception, concept preparation and stakeholder engagement
 - ii) Design development to planning
 - iii) Tender and construction pack
 - iv) Delivery and project management
- 5.2 Each phase carries costs which includes the associated costs of specialist advice. Most are common to both spaces although with Kingsbury there will be an additional requirement to develop a Design Guide for the buildings.
- 5.3 Both spaces would be considered together. This will ensure a cohesive approach to the improvements and may also deliver some economies of scale in terms of commissioning the various elements of work.
- 5.4 The fee and capital costs of both schemes can only be indicative at this stage but for the purpose of this report, they have been identified as:

Collective fee costs for Kingsbury and Market Square: £180k

Capital costs of delivery – Kingsbury: £2m
Capital costs of delivery – Market Square: £2m
Contingency: £320k

Total: £4.5m

6. Sources of funding

6.1 Three funding sources have been identified:

- Existing Section 106 funding allocated to Aylesbury town centre but not to any specific scheme: £1m
- Heritage Lottery Funding Townscape Grants: £2m (potential funding source)
- New Homes Bonus: £1.5m

At this stage there can be no guarantee that the bid for Heritage Lottery Funding will be completely or partially successful. If there is any gap in funding from the Lottery, the proposal is that additional New Homes Bonus will be used.

7. Timescale

7.1 Phases i) to iii) are likely to take until late 2019 to complete enabling procurement for the delivery in early 2019 with construction starting on site in spring 2019. Depending on the nature of the finally approved schemes, it is probable that work will be phased rather than carried out at the same time.

8. Resource implications

8.1 The resource implications are set out in section 5. The overall programme will be managed by the Commercial Property & Regeneration Sector.

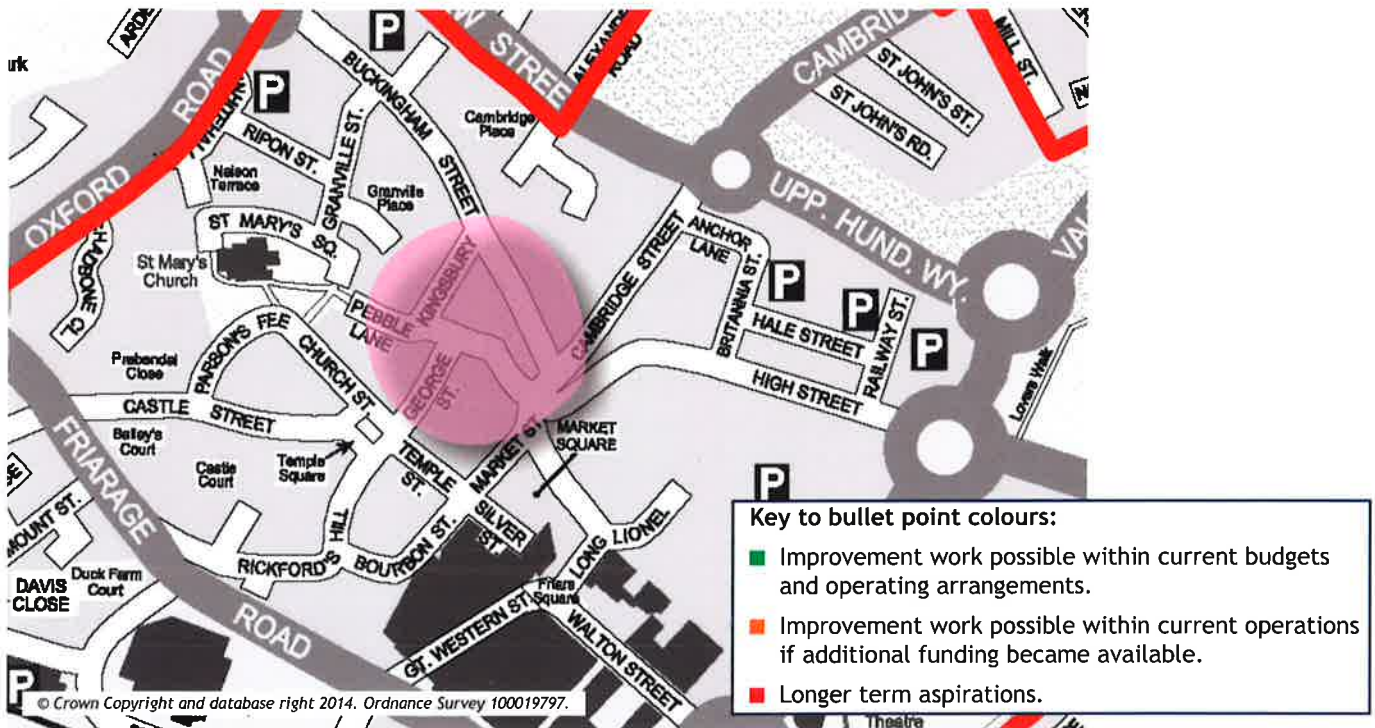
8.2 The council is currently holding in excess of £3.5m of unallocated New Homes Bonus from its allocation for 2018/19 and therefore there is sufficient funds available to fund this scheme if approved.

Contact Officer
Background Documents

Teresa Lane 01296 585006
Aylesbury Town Centre Improvement Plan
Heritage Lottery Funding: Townscape Grants Briefing Note

Action Plan

Kingsbury (including George Street & Pebble Lane)



Create a more attractive environment for residents, visitors and businesses and improve it as the gateway to the Old Town.

Actions:

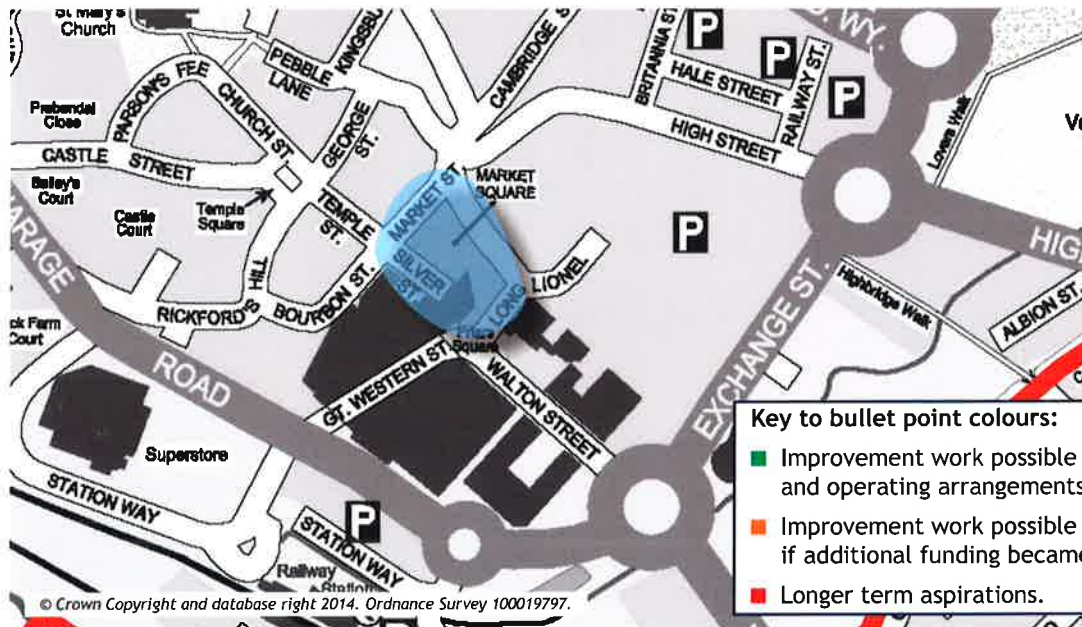
- Form a stakeholder group to identify options for improving the physical environment, looking at seating, lighting, surfaces etc so that better use of the open space can be made all year round.
- Deliver these improvements, in a phased way if necessary.
- Investigate if it's possible to enforce a 'saturation policy' for betting shops and off-licences.
- Support, however possible, plans by the Local Government Association to lobby government for new powers to prevent clusters of betting shops overwhelming town centres.
- Improve and promote Kingsbury as the gateway to the Old Town, eg through the signage strategy for the town.



These actions will be carried out in line with our strategic aims and work such as the Public Realm Study, Retail Study and Economic Development Strategy.

Action Plan

Market Square, Walton Street and Friars Square



Make more of the area's presence as a key retail, catering and leisure hub.

Actions:

- Create a more attractive and usable environment for shopping, eating, drinking and leisure (including large scale events and socialising), through a public realm review to include:
 - better links between areas.
 - vehicle, pedestrian and events use.
 - public space (including layout, surfaces, street furniture, signage, lighting and electricity supply).
- Improve the retail, food and beverage and leisure offer by:
 - improving the markets.
 - encouraging new retail operators in the Square.
 - holding more large scale events.
 - updating planning guidance to ensure it reflects the aim of making Market Square the hub of the town centre.
- Stop parking on the Market Square in the evenings and at other inappropriate times.
- Enable and support, where appropriate, improvement plans of landlords in this area of town to ensure a co-ordinated and complementary approach to future development.
- Review the treatment and use of Walton Street, to improve the environment and encourage better links between Walton Street and other town centre locations such as Waterside North, Friars Square and Market Square (see Waterside North action plan).
- Improve access to and visibility of the King's Head heritage site.

These actions will be carried out in line with our strategic aims and work such as the Public Realm Study, Retail Study and Economic Development Strategy.