

To: Cabinet
Date: 15 June 2022
Report of: Executive Director (Development)
Title of Report: Proposal for public realm improvements on Council owned land in the City Centre

| Summary and recommendations | |
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| Purpose of report: | To seek approval of this public realm improvement scheme on Council owned land in the city centre including approval of planned works and required property and legal procedures to deliver the scheme (see Confidential Appendix 1 for more details) |
| Key decision: | Yes |
| Cabinet Member: | Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) - Finance and Asset Management |
| Corporate Priority: | Inclusive Economy |
| Policy Framework: | Oxford Local Plan 2036 |
| Recommendations: That Cabinet resolves to: | |
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| 1. | Approve this public realm improvement scheme on Council owned land in the city centre including approval of planned works and required property and legal procedures to deliver the scheme (see Confidential Appendix 1 for more details); |
| 2. | Recommend to Council to approve a capital budget of £297K for delivery of this public realm improvement scheme (see Confidential Appendix 1 for more details); and |
| 3. | Delegate authority to the Executive Director (Development) in consultation with the Council's Section 151 Officer, the Head of Law and Governance and the Deputy Leader (Statutory) - Finance and Asset Management to agree the final works details, budget changes, and submission of any planning application for this public realm improvement scheme on council owned land in the city centre (see Confidential Appendix 1 for more details). |

| Appendices | |
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| Appendix 1 | Confidential – Officer Report |
| Appendix 2 | Confidential - Risk Register |

Introduction and background

1. The Council has a responsibility to effectively manage assets it holds in order to advance Council priorities, maximise future income returns for the Council, and bring about wider public benefits.

Public realm enhancement opportunity

2. Analysis of the urban design context of the site has been undertaken by external design consultants. Retail and community analysis has been undertaken through conversations with relevant Council departments including Property and Community Safety.
3. On balance, it is felt that overall the existing situation is now limiting the longer term future development and enhancement of this site and wider area. It is now felt that benefits arising from key improvements to the visual appearance and character of the site, in the short and long term, will far outweigh any short term financial losses from not renewing a number of leases. Due to commercial sensitivity, more information on the public realm scheme is contained within Confidential Appendix 1 – Officer Report.

Other options considered

4. Other options have been considered but would only result in a limited and short term improvement in visual amenity. Due to commercial sensitivity, more information on other options are summarised within Confidential Appendix 1 – Officer Report.

Milestones and Programme

5. In order to best secure the Council's interests for the site, minimise risks; and maximise the wider benefits of an improved public realm quickly, including increased rents in the area, this scheme needs progressing urgently.
6. It is expected that detailed technical design and tendering will happen in the autumn with works then on site between April and July 2023. This programme is subject to further work with the design consultants, and as such is indicative at this stage.

Financial implications

7. Estimated maximum costs of the project are £327K and include officer time, external consultants, and capital works costs.
8. An estimated maximum cost for the capital works has been included at this stage, but it is hoped the costs will be lower. Works costs may change as a result of more detailed assessments of site conditions in due course, but any increases required will be within the delegated authority limits of the Executive Director of Development. This delegation is necessary to allow the Council to

achieve the benefits of these public realm improvements in a timely fashion, and to minimise risks, for reasons explored further in Confidential Appendix 1 - Officer Report.

9. The budget allocation will be staged, and reviewed by the Council's officer level Development Board at key gateways. The costs include public realm consultants, internal project management, property and legal resource, and contingency.
10. A budget of £45K from the officer delegated feasibility pot was allocated to this project in January 2022 for the feasibility stage costs of officer time and architects fees. £15K has been spent to date so there is £30K which can go towards costs of the detailed and technical design stage.
11. Cabinet is therefore now asked to recommend that Council approve a £297K ceiling budget of funding for this project right for the technical design and through to the delivery phase.

Legal issues

12. The Council's legal team has advised on this report. See Confidential Appendix 1 – Officer Report.

Level of risk

13. Please refer to the attached Confidential Appendix 2 – Risk Register.

Equalities impact

14. This project will allow a greater range of people to use, and enjoy spending more time in the space. There will be improved visibility and access to adjacent land uses and destinations through this scheme. New public realm features will be designed to be accessible for different groups of people.

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Background Papers: None

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