



Oldham
Council

Report to CABINET - Part A

Cultural Quarter Public Realm

Portfolio Holder:

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Reason for Decision

The existing community garden located outside Oldham Library and Gallery Oldham will be subject to damage and changing levels as part of the refurbishment works to the Old Library and Old Post Office buildings, as the Council delivers projects to bring both heritage buildings back into public use. This also applies to the footways and carriageway as construction vehicles access the area on a more regular basis, and part of the area is used as a compound for important materials needed in close proximity to the buildings.

This decision report seeks to outline proposals to reinstate the community garden and improve access routes to the cultural facilities in this area to ensure the green space is enhanced and valuable outdoor space is created, some of which can be used for events and performances.

Purpose of Report

This report seeks approval to fund the replacement / reinstatement of the community garden area, to create a new public green space and reflection area, to create a new open air event space, and to improve the pedestrian and vehicular access routes in the Cultural Quarter of the town centre (i.e. the immediate areas by Oldham Library, Gallery Oldham, the Old Library building and the Old Post Office Building, located off Union Street).

The report also seeks to obtain approval for the submission of a planning application and a highway stopping up order in respect of the proposals.

Executive Summary

Culture and heritage are critical elements members of the public asked the Council to enhance and protect during the Big Oldham Town Centre Conversation a couple of years ago. This feedback influenced and shaped the ***Creating a Better Place Programme*** of works, which includes were possible brining the borough's beautiful heritage buildings back into public use for future generations to enjoy.

In July 2022, Cabinet approved the Phase 2 refurbishment of the Old Library building, and in February 2023, Cabinet formally approved the progression of a new theatre within the Old Post Office building, (84 Union St), the former museum and the former Friends' Meeting House on Union Street/Greaves Street.

These two exciting venues will, along with Gallery Oldham, be the focus of Oldham's new Cultural Quarter; however the community garden area and access routes are anticipated to be subjected to damage as part of the construction programme. In order to reinstate the areas on completion of the works, and to enhance the community facilities, it is proposed to amalgamate budgets from highways maintenance, Levelling Up funds and Council capital to create an attractive public realm that will be at the heart of this new Cultural Quarter.

Given the complexity of implementing three major projects within a relatively small footprint, it will be important that the public realm works are phased. As such, it is proposed that works to the new flexible space, along with those at the northern end of Southgate St. (Phase 1), are delivered as part of the Old Library Phase 2 works, with the remaining public realm works along Ashworth St. and Greaves St and immediately adjacent to the new Oldham Theatre (Phase 2), completed as the Oldham Theatre works come to a conclusion.

Recommendations-

That Cabinet approves the recommendations as set out in Part B of the report.

Cultural Quarter Public Realm

1 Background & Strategic Context

Creating a Better Place Programme

- 1.1 The Creating a Better Place strategic programme was approved by Cabinet in January 2020. This programme focuses on building more homes for residents, creating new jobs through town centre regeneration, and ensuring Oldham is a great place to visit with lots of family friendly and accessible places to go.
- 1.2 The programme recognizes that quality of place is paramount to thriving communities and it, therefore, seeks to make Oldham a place where people feel they belong, as well as an exciting place where they can live, work and spend time by:
- building quality homes
 - providing opportunities to learn & gain new skills
 - providing opportunities to grow local businesses and create jobs
 - ensuring Oldham is the greenest borough
 - by embedding sustainability, energy efficiency & low (zero) carbon
 - by improving life-chances and the health / well-being of our residents and local communities
- 1.3 Quality design and attention to the public realm will be critical to the programme's success.

Creative Improvement District Plan

- 1.4 The proposed Creative Improvement District Plan (CIDP) proposes to reinvigorate and bring to life an area in and around the town centre. Importantly, it seeks to complement Oldham's wider green network and, in particular, its two major green spaces at Alexandra Park to the south and Oldham Edge to the north. It also references proposed schemes such as the Linear Park which will bring much needed green space to the town centre. It is envisaged that within the new CIDP there will be a series of urban green networks which will create a seamless green infrastructure network across the town, creating a softer and more pleasant townscape.
- 1.5 The CIDP encapsulates a number of historic and culturally significant buildings (including the Old Library and the former post office, the former museum and former Friends Meeting House). Creating a safe and welcoming public realm is a key component of the CIDP as it seeks to accommodate existing and new industries. The intention is that the benefits of the new district will spread outwards into the community, improving place making, sense of community and job opportunities for creative innovation through community involvement. Importantly, the CIDP includes the establishment of an improved Cultural Garden (i.e., the proposed flexible space) next to the Old Library, which will act as a meeting and performance space for surrounding creative industries. It envisages this space providing a spill out space

for those enjoying a post theatre drink at Oldham Theatre or for people enjoying events at the Old Library and Gallery Oldham.

Big Conversation

- 1.6 The Council's Big Conversation focused on the future of Oldham Town Centre and provided a very clear indication from local residents of the significance of place and heritage, as well as the importance of maintaining and bringing back into use some of the town's beautiful heritage buildings.
- 1.7 Resident feedback, however, also emphasized the need for more community space within the Cultural Quarter. The new public realm will, therefore, not only provide a physical connection between the adjacent facilities, it will also, in its own right, form an attractive destination for local residents and visitors alike.
- 1.8 Please note, the emerging Prevent duties may require a risk assessment to be undertaken where there are gatherings of more than 100 people. These duties may require as yet unidentified additional works to the proposed public realm.

2 Public Realm Proposals

2.1 On 3rd January 2023, delegated approval was given to appoint a design team to design a public realm in and around the Old Library. Since then, the team, comprising of architects, engineers, lighting specialists, access specialists and security consultants, has been developing plans to RIBA Stage 3 for this important space. The public realm will, therefore, comprise of the following:

2.2 An open flexible space

- The removal of the current steps that provide access from Union St and their replacement with a fully accessible/DDA compliant ramped path and accompanying railed steps.
- The removal of excess soil to lower and level out the ground levels
- The installation of rainwater attenuation tanks
- Newly planted clear stemmed trees (to replace those that need to be removed)
- Hard landscaping
- External lighting and seating areas
- Temporary hoarding providing an attractive barrier which would serve to block off the Performance Space construction works

2.3 Southgate St (North)

- The installation of drop bollards at the western and eastern ends of Ashworth Street (this will require a highway stopping up order – see paragraph 4.2 below)
- A high-quality surface on the northern section of Southgate St (next to Union St)
- Planting of appropriately sized trees
- Rain garden planting

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- Wooden benches
 - Drop bollards to restrict vehicular access (including bollards to deter terrorist attacks that use vehicles)

2.4 Ashworth St and rear of the Performance Space

- A high quality surface
- Drop bollards at either end of the road to restrict vehicular access (i.e., restrict access to authorized vehicles such as delivery vehicles)
- Standard trees

2.5 Greaves St

- Suitable new surfacing (likely tarmac)

3 Phasing

3.1 The new Cultural Quarter is a confined location on the edge of the town centre. It is constrained on its northern side by Union St and the TFGM trams that run along it. On its western side it has Greaves St that provides access for the adjacent Positive Steps building. On its southern side is Ashworth St, which provides access to Gallery Oldham and can be a busy pedestrian thoroughfare. Finally, on its eastern side is Southgate Street and Southgate Street.

3.2 It is important, therefore, that given these constraints, the proposed public realm works are phased to keep disruption to a minimum and provide the Old Library with sufficient public realm space (in the current Garden area) until such time that all the works are completed.

3.3 Given this, it is proposed that Phase 1 is delivered as part of the Old Library Phase 2 works, with Phase 2 delivered as the new Oldham Theatre works conclude. As the exact delivery mechanism/agent for the Phase 2 works has yet to be finalised, it is also proposed, that the final decision on this matter is delegated to the Executive Director for Place and Economic Growth, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Reform and Regeneration.

3.4 An indicative phasing plan for the proposed works. However, as stated above, the delivery mechanism for Phase 2 has yet to be finalised. Notwithstanding this, it is envisaged that it will be delivered following the completion of the new Oldham Theatre.

4. Transport Assessment

4.1 The new Cultural Quarter, despite being served by good public transport links in the form of the trams and buses that run along Union St., will inevitably generate extra vehicle movements. Therefore, a transport assessment will be drawn up that will address a number of key transport issues impacting on the whole Cultural Quarter including coach drop arrangements, HGV parking at the new theatre Get-in on Greaves St, deliveries to all three key buildings within the Cultural Quarter, refuse collection, both disabled and general parking, the Mayor's drop off point at the northern end of Southgate St. and, importantly, pedestrian access.

4.2 As indicated in paragraph 2.3 above, it will be necessary to implement a highway stopping up order that will cover both Ashworth St and the northern end of Southgate St. The stopping up order will effectively restrict vehicle access to these areas (e.g., only vehicles such as refuse, and delivery vehicles will have access). It should be noted, however, that vehicular access is already restricted on Ashworth St by way of a prohibition of driving order.

4.3 The stopping up order will mean that these sections of highway will become the responsibility of the Corporate Landlord. As such, Corporate Landlord will become responsible for their maintenance, along with the rest of the new public realm.

5 Stakeholder Engagement

5.1 A key element of the development of the Public Realm designs has been stakeholder engagement. The consultant team has, therefore, held design workshops with key stakeholders including staff from Gallery Oldham and library and the Council's Highways section. Further engagement will take place as the transport strategy is developed (particularly with tram authority, Transport for Greater Manchester, and local disability groups). Formal consultation with statutory undertakers and the wider public will be undertaken during the planning application process.

6 Costs

6.1 Financial implications are covered in Part B of the report.

7 Business Case Status

7.1 The business case status is covered in Part B of the report.

8 Risk

8.1 As set out in Part B of the report .

9 Financial Implications

9.1 Financial implications are covered in Part B of the report.

10 Legal Services Comments

10.1 Legal implications are covered in Part B of the report.

11 Co-operative Agenda

11.1 As set out in Part B of the report.

12 Human Resources Comments

12.1 As set out in Part B of the report.

13 Risk Assessments

13.1 As set out in Part B of the report.

14 IT Implications

14.1 As set out in Part B of the report.

15 Property Implications

15.1 As set out in Part B of the report.

16 Procurement Implications

16.1 As set out in Part B of the report.

17 Environmental and Health & Safety Implications

17.1 As set out in Part B of the report 18.

18 Environmental Services

18.1 As set out in Part B of the report

19 Equality, community cohesion and crime implications

19.1 There has been a detailed stage one Equality Impact Assessment completed for the Creating a Better Place programme. Colleagues in Policy have reviewed this document and have given feedback and some suggested additions and elements to explore.

20 Equality Impact Assessment Completed?

20.1 As set out in Part B of the report

21 Key Decision

21.1 Yes

22 Key Decision Reference

22.1 ESR-24-23

23 Background Papers

23.1 As set out in Part B of the report

24 Appendices

24.1 As set out in Part B of the report
