

Report title	Public Consultation for Guildford Street, Chertsey, improvements
Report author	Azra Mukadam Town Centre & Events Manager]
Department	Economic Development
Exempt?	No
Exemption type	Not applicable
Reasons for exemption	Not applicable

Purpose of report:

- To resolve

Synopsis of report:

This report seeks authority to go to public consultation with concept plans for the improvements to Guildford Street. The plans proposed have been drawn up following early engagement with stakeholders (including surveys), the completion of a Public Realm and Building Frontage Improvements Report and the completion of a Guildford Street Heritage Assessment.

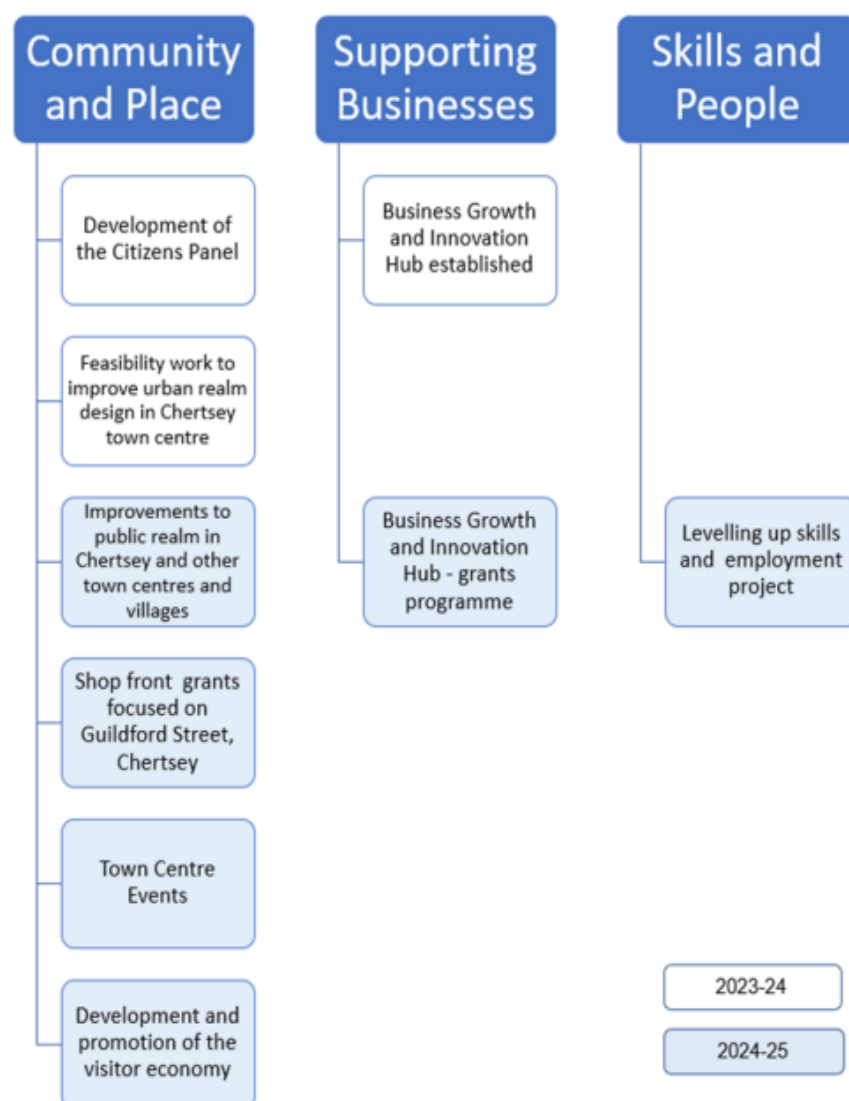
Recommendation(s):

Corporate Management Committee is asked to APPROVE public consultation between 29th February and 24th March 2024 on the Guildford Street Improvement Plans described in this report.

1. Context and background of report

- 1.1 In July 2022, Corporate Management Committee (CMC) agreed the indicative projects and budgets that would form the basis of the Council's Investment Plan submission to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) and unlock the Council's £1 million allocation.
- 1.2 CMC agreed at this meeting to delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee to refine the SPF programme before submitting to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

- 1.3 The SPF is the key Government funding stream which supports levelling up. The primary goal of the SPF is to build pride in place and increase life chances across the UK. There are three UKSPF investment priorities:
- Communities and place
 - Supporting local business
 - People and skills
- 1.4 In [September 2023](#), a further report was taken to committee CMC to provide an update on the development of the Runnymede SPF Investment Plan.
- 1.5 The following chart provides a summary of the objectives and schedule of activity over the next two years for each of the three SPF priorities in the Runnymede Investment Plan.



- 1.6 Separate to the SPF process, in 2021, the Council appointed Lambert Smith Hampton and New Masterplanning (as subcontractor) to refresh its Retail and Town Centre Study to underpin its planning policy activities and also refresh the Chertsey Masterplan; the previous version of which was published in 2013. An update of the masterplan was considered timely given the change in the retail environment associated with the COVID-19 pandemic which had impacted on high streets across the country. In response to this, the Government made it their priority to support high street businesses through the Welcome Back Funding (WBF). This fund allowed local authorities in England to put in place additional measures to create and promote a safe environment for local trade and tourism, particularly in high streets as their economies reopened.
- 1.7 Following the impacts of COVID-19, the WBF aided the creation of town teams for each of the Borough's towns of Egham, Chertsey & Addlestone. These provide more formalised stakeholder partnership arrangements with local businesses, groups and stakeholders .. The aim of the town teams is to hear the voices of the key players in the town centres. The town teams work collectively to support events, activities and talk about the needs of the high street with the aim to make them an attractive, vibrant place for visitors and the wider community.
- 1.8 The meetings with each town team are held four times a year and businesses and stakeholder are beginning to see the value that these meetings hold. Chertsey Town Team for example are participating in conversations with officers on matters that most impact their high street like the lack of footfall and the look and feel of certain streets. Engagement with this groups has highlighted several challenges for the town.
- 1.9 Engagement carried out in 2022 during the Chertsey Masterplan refresh commission also highlighted the following key issues (see Appendix 2 for a more detailed summary of the engagement carried out with local stakeholders to date):
- Issues related to the environmental appearance of Guildford Street, including shopfronts and roller shutters. Improving the appearance with baskets, displays, pleasant seating areas and bunting has been suggested;
 - The most important qualities of the town centre were considered to be its historic character and specialist/independent businesses;
 - Carlo's Deli and the Church were near the top of the list when people were asked to name their favourite places in Chertsey. Just Relish and the Revive Café were other locations on Guildford Street that were mentioned;
 - After 'better choice of shops' the main improvement visitors wanted to see was to the physical environment and appearance of the town centre. The percentage of visitors wanting to see environmental

improvements was three times that in surveys carried out at the same time in Egham and Addlestone;

- The vast majority of respondents visit the town centre for one hour or less, which highlights the opportunity to increase dwell time;
- Broad support for markets in the town;
- An increased number of secure bike racks and increased free parking have both been suggested as ways to increase dwell time;
- The town would benefit from initiatives which would encourage visitors to explore either the town itself or the wider area.

2. Report and, where applicable, options considered and recommended

- 2.1 In November 2023, New Masterplanning was appointed by the Council to build on the high-level findings from the Chertsey Masterplan refresh 2022, and develop a concept for how Guildford Street could be enhanced using SPF monies. In particular, New Masterplanning having been considering ways to increase dwell time within the street and enhance the public realm.
- 2.2 The focus on Guildford Street is due to the findings from the Chertsey Masterplan refresh 2022 work and supporting engagement carried out with local people and businesses at this time, which highlighted that Guildford Street was the main area for shopping and visitor activities.
- 2.3 New Masterplanning has been considering the responses from previous engagements, and further engaging with businesses, stakeholders and town team members during their current commission to feed into the development of their proposals.
- 2.4 Their report highlights the challenges that Guildford Street faces to attract more footfall (refer to Appendix 1). It notes that the street feels longer than it actually is due to the lack of distinct areas of interest. The report also highlights the opportunity to increase dwell time in the area through targeted interventions.
- 2.5 The report identifies a lack of seating which prevents visitors the chance to sit and enjoy their environment and identifies that introducing more seating in key locations within the street could encourage visitors to increase their dwell time.
- 2.6 In response to the above findings, the consultation material will be developed around the following principles:
 - Improve gateways and points of arrival for pedestrians to create a more welcoming environment and improve footfall,

- Improve the historic character of the street and individual buildings,
 - Improve areas which can stimulate interest in vacant premises,
 - Create focal points of interest along the street,
 - Increase opportunities for socialising, with more seating and attractive places to spend time,
 - Increase greenery in the street.
- 2.7 Members will note that as well as public realm improvements being proposed along the street, there are two larger areas of focus for particular investment; the first being the alleyway to the north of the Post Office Depot which links Guildford Street and Sainsbury's (and which is in the ownership of the Council), and the large area adjacent to the SSNR club at the southern end of Guildford Street. In both these areas there is considered to be the opportunity to install planting and seating to create attractive spaces which would improve pedestrian arrival from the Sainsburys car park and Heriot Road respectively. The concept for the area adjacent to the SSNR club is for a 'parklet' style space containing space for market stalls and street food operators, bringing life to this empty part of the street.
- 2.8 To supplement this work and to encourage visitors to increase their dwell time in Guildford Street, the Council's Town Centre and Events Manager has also been working alongside Chertsey Museum to develop ideas for interactive trails which could cover both Guildford Street and the wider town centre. It is proposed that QR codes could be introduced at key locations to provide information to visitors on the history of Chertsey and historic local figures. Headsets, for example, could be hired at Chertsey Museum and content could be amended as required. Trails can be versatile and be changed as needed, for example in the schools holidays, trails could be developed which are aimed at children, to encourage families to visit the town, or trails could be developed at other times to appeal to the interests of other including bespoke-themed events.
- 2.9 The Council's retained heritage consultants; Essex Place Services have also visited Guildford Street and have carried out a heritage assessment to help underpin future public realm improvements which could be made along Guildford Street to respond to the concerns raised by stakeholders, whilst also building on the local distinctiveness of the Street which is both within a Conservation Area, and contains a number of nationally and locally listed buildings. This assessment can be viewed in Appendix 3.
- 2.10 Officers are engaging with Surrey County Council (SCC) to ensure a partnership approach continues to be developed to aid with the timely delivery of the project. This is vital as most aspects of the improvements are dependent on SCC approval given that most elements of the works will be carried out on land which is under the control of the Highway Authority.
- 2.11 Engagement to date with SCC has highlighted that the delivery of improvements to Guildford Street will need to take account of the future development of improvements to active travel infrastructure in Chertsey

identified in the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan LCWIP. Initial feedback provided by officers at SCC is that the draft town centre improvement plans do satisfactorily respond to the LCWIP proposals. For more information about the LCWIP can be viewed on Surrey County Council's [website](#).

- 2.12 One additional concept which has been explored but which does not appear in the consultation material is the possible introduction of parklets in replacement for some of the existing parking spaces along Guildford Street. This would allow for additional seating to be placed along Guildford Street, presenting further opportunities for visitors to dwell. Surrey County Council has not dismissed the proposed concept of parklets, but it has been suggested that further work and investigation will need to be carried out before it can be determined if such parklets are a viable proposition from a regulatory perspective. It has also been recommended that parking surveys are carried out along Guildford Street, and the results considered before it is decided whether to process this idea any further. Such parklets are likely to be a longer-term option and are considered to be unlikely to be deliverable in the timeframes of the SPF, hence why they are not proposed to be the subject of public consultation at this time.
- 2.13 Officers are continuing to work with SCC highways to ensure that the suite of environmental upgrades and improvements proposed (including the decluttering of the public realm) can be delivered in the timeframe required by the SPF.
- 2.14 The time frame and processes for delivery of this project are subject to ongoing discussions with SCC highways. Officers will keep committee members informed through the SPF investment plan updates that the Lead Officer carries out.
- 2.15 As set out in the Recommendations section, officers are now seeking the approval of the Committee to carry out a period of public consultation on the draft proposals for Guildford Street. This consultation will run for a period of just over 3 weeks between 29th February and 24th March. During this period of consultation, an exhibition will be developed which will include information on:
- The concepts for the 2 larger areas proposed for enhancement adjacent to the SSNR club and Post Office Depot
 - Public realm improvements which could be made along the street
 - Information about types of heritage trails which could be delivered in the town
 - Environmental upgrades by increasing greenery along the street
- 2.16 The exhibition material will also contain some limited information on ideas for how short-term improvements could be made to vacant premises, the upcoming business frontage improvement grants to help elevate the heritage assets of the street (with businesses being given the opportunity to formally sign up to receive more information), and the ongoing work of the Council to introduce markets in the town. For more information on the latter point, the

Committee may wish to refer to the [Environment and Sustainability report dated 11th January 2024 on the Chertsey Town Centre Street Licencing.](#)

- 2.17 The display boards will be available to view in two venues across the town centre. A further opportunity to hold pop-ups in key places in the town centre will also be offered. Suggested places are the library, the local gym or the museum, but these are to be confirmed.
- 2.18 A breakdown of the activities that will support the consultation is in the table below:

Guildford Street exhibition	Date	Possible venues
Two exhibitions available for general viewing.	1-16 March	Revive Café & Chertsey Library
Launch Event for invited stakeholders and businesses to view the exhibition material with an informal presentation from team	29 th Feb (6-8pm)	Revive Café
Drop in Exhibition	1 st March, 10-12am 2-4pm, 6-7pm	Chertsey Library
Optional second drop in Exhibition	7 th March, 10-12am 2-4pm	Chertsey Museum

- 2.19 A launch event will be organised on 29th February at the Revive Cafe, for the stakeholders and businesses that were engaged in early consultations, to provide them with a chance to see the proposed concepts. This will demonstrate that the consultants and the Council have been sensitive to their feedback in coming up with a number of proposals that seek to build on the town's heritage qualities, deliver local aspirations, and help address the town's shortcomings.
- 2.20 A digital engagement campaign will be run with interested parties being directed to the council's website to view the consultation proposals, allowing a wider group of residents to view and comment on the concepts.
- 2.21 Officers will work with the Communications team as well as local businesses and stakeholders to ensure that the consultation is advertised as comprehensively as possible, to maximise the response rate. Posters with QR codes will be delivered to businesses on Guildford Street to engage with passersby.

- 2.22 Officers will also engage with the Runnymede Access Liaison Group (RALG) to get a representative view of disabled residents on the proposals.
- 2.23 Posters will also be advertised in other town centres across the borough to capture a wider response from people who regularly visit Chertsey but may not live in the area.

3 Policy framework implications

- 3.1 The SPF is designed to help deliver the Government's Levelling Up agenda. The aim of the funding is that 'By 2030, pride in place, such as people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between the top-performing and other areas closing.'
- 3.2 The SPF prospectus sets out 31 interventions which are recommended to deliver the priorities for Communities and Place, Supporting Business and People and Skills.
- 3.3 The tables in Section 1 (Point 1.5) of the Runnymede Investment Plan identify the interventions which are sought to be addressed in the Borough.
- 3.4 The Runnymede Economic Development Strategy for 2022 to 2026 identifies the Council's key priorities, objectives, and activities for support economic growth. The SPF Investment Plan supports the recommendations set out in this corporate strategy to support town centres, improve business growth and improve skills and employment.

4 Resource implications/Value for Money

- 4.1 Approximately £500,000 will be allocated for the Guildford Street Improvements projects. This includes environmental improvements, Public Realm upgrades, Business Improvements Grants and upgrades to seating areas.
- 4.2 From this allocation, £165,000 will be supporting Business Frontage improvement grants to Guildford Street businesses, between £5-£20,000 per building. A 15% contribution will be required from businesses.
- 4.3 Currently the consultation proposals presented in this report have not been fully costed. Following the outcomes from the consultation, a priority intervention audit will be developed and members will be consulted with.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 The delivery of the various projects in respect of which funding has been secured may require the exercise of legal powers by the Council or the creation of legal relationships. The details associated with each project will be dealt with when each project is implemented.
- 5.2 Consultation is a tool used by public bodies to gauge the opinion of interested parties on a particular proposal. The responses to a consultation are used as part of the matrix when making a decision on a particular matter. In certain instances there maybe a statutory requirement that a consultation is undertaken e.g. Section 169 of the Enterprise Act 2002. In some instances, there may not a be a statutory requirement to consult but a public body may conclude that a consultation exercise

will assist it in arriving at a decision on a matter. In the present case there is no statutory requirement to consult.

5.3 There are certain guiding principles that must be followed if consultation is to be fair. The formulation most commonly adopted is set out in *R v London Borough of Brent, ex p Gunning* [1985] LGR 168 and frequently referred to as "the Gunning principles":

- The consultation must be at a time when proposals are still at a formative stage.
- The proposer must give sufficient reasons for any proposal to permit of intelligent consideration and response.
- Adequate time must be given for consideration and response.
- The product of consultation must be conscientiously taken into account in finalising any proposals.

5.4 It should be noted that a decision making body is not obliged to follow the responses to a consultation i.e. if 300 responses are received of which 200 favour one option and 100 favour another, the decision maker is not required to select the option favoured by the majority. The decision must take account of the responses but may have a valid reason for selecting the option favoured by the minority of people responding.

6. Equality implications

- 6.1 The Council has a Public Sector Duty under the Equality Act 2010 (as amended) to have due regard to the need to:
- a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation;
 - b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a Protected Characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - c) Foster good relations between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share those characteristics; in relation to the 9 'Protected Characteristics' stated within the Act.
- 6.2 An EQIA screening (refer to Appendix 4) has been carried out in support of this consultation. This has concluded that the consultation will be widely promoted and delivered in a range of formats that allow for those identified who share protected characteristics, will have every opportunity to engage in feedback on the proposed improvements.

7. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications

- 7.1 Following the conclusion of the public consultation, it will need to be decided which interventions are taken forward. The responses to the public consultation will be considered in prioritising interventions. In addition, the implications of the various interventions will need to be considered in terms of their environment, sustainability and biodiversity implications before final decisions are made.

8. Risk Implications

- 8.1 There are a few risks that could impact on the Council's ability to deliver the interventions along Guildford Street in the timescales prescribed by the SPF. Firstly, there is a risk that SCC in their capacity as the Highways Authority may not be fully supportive of the street improvements, meaning they cannot be delivered. This could result in the community and stakeholders becoming disengaged with any future funding opportunities.

- 8.2 There is a risk that the cost of materials and infrastructure works go beyond the funding allocated for the work which could result in not all of the work being completed in the timeframes of the SPF criteria.
- 8.3 There is a risk that at the point of the physical work being implemented, SCC Highways are not able to guarantee the delivery times within the SPF timeframes.

9. Other implications

- 9.1 N/A

10. Timetable for Implementation

- 10.1 The SPF funding stipulates that all projects and developments must be completed by March 2025.

Consultation and reporting	End of March 2024
Planning permission for the development and replacement of public realm & street furnishing	To be discussed with SCC highways
Business Improvement Grants	April 2024 – March 2025

- 10.2 SPF reports are fed back to CMC in a quarterly report by the Council's Senior Economic Development Officer. All key milestones relating to the Guildford Street Improvements project will be reported through the SPF reporting mechanism.

11. Conclusions

- 11.1 The Council assigned consultants, NEW masterplanning, to investigate with Guildford Street businesses and town stakeholders opportunities for improvements. The opportunity to develop such a plan has arisen from the SPF focus on community and place. This identified areas within the area that are in need of improvement and investment for the positive economic benefits of the area.
- 11.2 NEW Masterplanning have previously worked on the 'refreshed Chertsey Master plan 2022 and much of their investigation and engagement provided a solid foundation for the next phase of work.
- 11.3 Approximately £500,000 has been allocated to improvements to the public realm and local environment (including new or replaced street furniture where appropriate) and business grants to improve the frontage of businesses.
- 11.4 This report seeks authority to take the Guildford Street improvements concepts to public consultation. This will allow for engagement with businesses, stakeholders and the wider community on the short-term improvements proposed to the northern end of Guildford Street, which has been identified as the main hub of activities in the town. These improvements are intended to coincide with the designation of Guildford Street as a licensed street, which will allow for regular street markets and cultural events to increase footfall and dwell time, something that has been a consistent need for Chertsey.

12. Background papers

- [Environment and Sustainability report dated 11th January 2024 on the Chertsey Town Centre Street Licencing](#)
- [Shared Prosperity Funding update report September 2023](#)

13. Appendices

Appendix 1: New Masterplanning Report - Guildford Street, Public Realm & Building frontage Improvements Report 2024
Appendix 2: The Journey so far... document
Appendix 3: Guildford Street Heritage Assessment 2024
Appendix 4: Equalities Screening Assessment Form