



To: Executive Councillor for City Centre and Public Places (and Deputy Leader): Councillor Carina O'Reilly

Report by: Alistair Wilson - Streets and Open Space Development Manager

Relevant scrutiny committee: Community Services Scrutiny 8/10/2015

Wards affected: All - Abbey, Arbury, Castle, Cherry Hinton, Coleridge, East Chesterton, King's Hedges, Market, Newnham, Petersfield, Queen Edith's, Romsey, Trumpington, West Chesterton

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME Non-Key Decision

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 This report considers changes and modifications to operating protocols for the Environmental Improvement Programme (EIP).
- 1.2 The programme creates direct, lasting and noticeable improvements to the appearance of the public realm and is accessible to all residents of Cambridge through local Ward Councillors and Area Committees.
- 1.3 The number of EIP projects being considered at any one time, and often with their complexity, has historically made the management and delivery of the programme challenging at times, with project delays frequent.
- 1.4 This report considers options and makes recommendations on changes to the frequency of allocations, the selection process, setting funding caps and the number of allocations per ward, with the aim to improve project delivery timescales.

2. Recommendations

The Executive Councillor is asked to agree that:-

- a) Area Committees may consider EIP allocations up to twice per year, should they wish;

- b) Area Committees are set a cap of £5,000 per project, which can be over-ruled by a majority vote of the area committee;
- c) A maximum of two projects is included per round (maximum three projects per year), per ward; and
- d) Projects are considered through a selection process before Area Committee approvals.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Environmental Improvement Programme (EIP) has historically been allocated to Area Committees and allows local people and organisations, through their local Ward Councillors, to put forward ideas to improve their neighbourhood. A report on progress with developing and implementing schemes, and for extending the current programme, was considered by Community Services Scrutiny Committee on 16th October 2014.
- 3.2 Since the commencement of this programme in its current form in 2004, ~150 Environmental Improvement projects have been delivered across the four area committees with a further ~40 currently in development, the majority of which will be complete by the end of this financial year.
- 3.3 During the budget setting round in early 2015, Council approved further Capital funding for EIPs of £170,000 per annum for the three years from 2016-17 to 2018-19. This is allocated across the four areas of the city as follows:
- North £50,320 per annum;
 - South £35,530 per annum;
 - West/Central £36,380 per annum; and
 - East £47,770 per annum.
- 3.4 Council has further allocated an annual budget of £30,000 for the four years from 2015-19 for Minor Highways Improvements, to jointly fund Cambridgeshire County Council's Local Highways Improvements (LHI) programme within Cambridge. The County Council is allocating some £81,565 to this programme this year, providing a combined budget of some £111,565. This programme focuses on community lead improvements to core Highway Authority functions, and is being delivered entirely separately to EIPs.

4. Issues and Officer Comments

- 4.1 Local schemes have been at the heart of the EIP, creating direct, lasting and noticeable improvements to the appearance of the public

realm and have been accessible to all residents of Cambridge. Both small, and large, scale schemes have been considered if there is local support and if the proposal is likely to constitute a significant and long-term improvement to the street or place.

- 4.2 However, the EIP budget is not large and some Area Committees have received bids for projects valued at more than four times the available budget. The number of projects has made management of the programme challenging at times, particularly time consuming larger scale projects which have no staff time budget allocated.
- 4.3 Officers cannot currently include their time working on EIP projects in the same way that they can for S106, for example. This means that bigger, often more complicated projects or ones that need significant consultation should not be dealt with through EIP, if avoidable.
- 4.4 Many EIP bids and adopted projects have focused on improvements to core highways and transport infrastructure, which is dependent on agreement with the County Council as Highway Authority for local roads and, in certain cases (such as Traffic Orders), to statutory processes. This has further complicated development and delivery. In future, all such bids will be considered under the County Council's LHI programme. Whilst EIP can still be applicable to highways; the programme will focus on adding environmental value to the public realm, rather than core highways functions and responsibilities.
- 4.5 Officers have considered options to change and modify the next round of the Environmental Improvements Programme, due to start on 1 April 2016. Officers recommend that EIP projects in general should be small, easy to deliver, not require widespread consultation, and with the cost of ongoing maintenance either negligible or small enough to be incorporated within existing revenue budgets.
- 4.6 Officers consider there to be considerable merit in examining proposed projects before they come to area committees for consideration in order to flag up those that should not be shortlisted because they are expensive, complex, or will require major consultation.
- 4.7 An officer's outline of the recommended process for projects to follow to be considered for EIP funding is included at the end of this document.

5. Frequency of allocations

5.1 Currently the lead-in for inviting new bids for EIPs, to assessment, adoption by Area Committees, consultation and project development is such that it can take between one and two years from inception for projects to be realised on the ground. This has caused frustrations within communities, and alternative options have therefore been scoped.

5.2 The following options have been considered:

- a) All Area Committees to consider EIP bids once a year (unchanged). This approach has one notable disadvantage in that it could take a long time from the inception of an idea through to its ultimate delivery, although this will be improved with the focus on simple, non-controversial schemes.
- b) Area Committees consider EIP allocations twice per year. This has the advantage that small schemes could be delivered more quickly, but administration time, and associated costs (bid invitation, assessment, and consideration and adoption by Area Committees) would be higher. With a fixed annual budget, the total project value that Area Committees would have available to allocate each round would be lower.
- c) Area Committees have the choice of whether to allocate funds once, or twice, per year. This increases flexibility; however it does create some extra complexity for officers, though this is not considered insurmountable to overcome.

5.3 The recommended option is c); that Area Committees are given the choice of how frequently they would want to consider allocations.

6. Funding Caps

6.1 Setting a ceiling on individual EIP allocations would enable a reasonable programme and spread of projects to be developed and delivered in a more manageable way. A cap on City Council contributions towards schemes might also encourage other opportunities to 'top-up' budgets and permit more extensive projects to be taken forward.

6.2 The following options have been considered:

- a) Area Committees are set a rigid cap of, perhaps, £3,000, or £5,000, on each project. This maximises the number of projects that can be

considered within annual budget allocations, however it is rigid and inflexible and may restrict some projects whilst being suited to others.

- b) Area Committees have no cap on individual projects (unchanged). This approach allows the greatest flexibility. The risk that some areas might end up with just one or two large projects which may be better suited to other sources of funding, and/or that some wards might get nothing at all, remains. However this would be a decision for Area Committees to determine.
- c) Area Committees are set a cap of £5,000 per project, but this can be over-ruled at committee by a majority vote. This provides the greatest flexibility and potentially value for money, whilst guiding the committee towards small, easily deliverable projects.

6.3 The recommendation is for option c); that Area Committees are set a cap of £5,000 per project, but this can be over-ruled at committee by a majority vote.

7. Cap on Ward allocations

7.1 Introducing a cap on the number of projects possible to be included within any assessment round would be another means of speeding up development and delivery, but may reduce flexibility.

7.2 The following options have been considered:

- a) There is currently no maximum number of projects a ward can bring forward, or an Area Committee choose to allocate. This is very flexible, but can cause bottle necks in delivery timescales as officers have to initially assess, then prepare and consult, on a wide range and number of projects. Allocating funds more often than once per year would compound this pressure.
- b) Area Committees could set a maximum number of projects per ward, per round (perhaps two), and up to a maximum of 3 each year - ensuring that all Wards are given consideration. This would mean that a maximum of 42 new projects could be adopted city-wide in any one year. However, it does prevent flexibility should an Area Committee prefers to put its money in to lots of small projects (which may be something to be encouraged) although it puts significant pressure on delivery resources. In 2015-16 for example, West/Central Area Committee decided to support almost all bids put before it, adjusting the financial allocations to suit the overall budget available, with 15 new committed projects across 3 wards.

c) A maximum of £15,000 may be allocated per ward. This allows for flexibility within projects.

d) A maximum of £15,000 may be allocated per ward unless there is a majority vote to overturn it. However, the disadvantages are that this approach might not encourage smaller, and simpler, schemes.

7.3 The recommendation is for option b); that a maximum of two projects is included per round (maximum three projects per year), per ward.

8. EIP project selection process

8.1 It is recommended that the process for inviting and considering bids will be updated as follows:

- Officers invite Ward Councillors to submit projects for EIP funding (either once, or twice, per year) by specified deadline (likely 4-6 weeks) using a simple template (see **Appendices A and B**). This will include clear guidance on the relationship between EIP and the County Council's LHI programme.
- EIP guidance notes will be circulated with the project submission template, based on whichever of the above options are approved by The Executive Councillor. The guidance notes will include a list of typical or possible projects/ supporting evidence of need. It is suggested that a 1 month application window is sufficient, up to two times per annum.
- Officers then assess project submissions against agreed EIP criteria (based on the approved recommendations) including important considerations such as the scale of community need met (applicants would be requested to evidence this), anticipated ease of consultation, deliverability, estimated cost and value for money (against available budget), and any ongoing revenue implications.
- Officers will then use the assessment results to produce a ranked project shortlist with supporting explanation for each assessment outcome. Projects that are considered too expensive, complex or require major consultation would not be included on shortlist, and referred to the Capital Plan Programme.
- The assessment results will be presented in report format to Area Committees for consideration, including appendices

containing those projects not on the shortlist and the individual actual project submission proformas.

- Area Committees will consider the assessment report, including the recommended shortlist and approve allocation of project funding in accordance with approved funding caps and ward allocations (from options above).
- Changes will be considered to the Constitution in order to reflect the proposals and recommendations (if agreed). This would not have to be considered through Civic Affairs Committee since decisions regarding operational protocols for EIP rest with the Executive Councillor.

9. Implications

(a) Financial Implications

Capital budget of £170,000 per year for 3 years from 2016 to 2019 for environmental improvements to the public realm. Provision to be made within individual scheme allocations to mitigate increased ongoing operational costs.

(b) Staffing Implications

The changes to operating protocols recommended should ensure that the continued programme can be delivered within existing staffing resource.

(c) Equality and Poverty Implications

The impact of all programme schemes on Equality Act 'protected groups' is assessed at the design/ planning stage. All hard infrastructure schemes are designed to national standards to accommodate the needs of those with physical impairments, including mobility, sight and hearing. The overall impact of the programme is considered positive.

(d) Environmental Implications

The programme is delegated to Area Committees to approve schemes which deliver local environmental improvements. As a result, the overall impact of the programme on the environment for Cambridge is rated as +M.

(e) Procurement

The programme schemes are either delivered in-house utilising existing resources within the Streets & Open Spaces service, or via existing framework contract arrangements. To ensure value for

money, the larger programme schemes are often delivered through competitive tender processes.

(f) **Consultation and communication**

All the programme's schemes are consulted on at the planning/ design stage, with the level/ type of consultation determined by and proportionate to the nature, scale and scope of the proposed scheme. With the majority of the programme schemes being small- scale, it is imperative that the proportionate principle continues to be followed in any future extension of the programme.

(g) **Community Safety**

The programme is designed to deliver local public realm environmental improvements and foster increased pride of place and community cohesion. As a result, the programme is considered to have a positive impact on community safety.

10. Background papers

- Section 11 of the Constitution relating to Area Committees and EIPs
- Community Services Scrutiny Committee meeting 16/10/2014 – paper and meeting minutes

11. Appendices

Appendix A – EIP Project Proposal Template
Appendix B – Programme eligibility criteria

12. Inspection of papers

To inspect the background papers, or if you have a query on the report, then please contact:

Author's Name: Alistair Wilson
Author's Phone Number: 01223 - 458514
Author's Email: alistair.wilson@cambridge.gov.uk

Appendix A – EIP Project Proposal Template



environmental-improvement-programme-suggestion-form.pdf

Environmental Improvement Programme (EIP)



Print Form

Email to Cambridge City Council

Date:

First Name:

Surname:

Address:

Post Code:

Telephone:

Email address:

Location:

Ward Councillor Aware

Suggested Improvement:

Benefits to the Local Area:

Appendix B: Programme eligibility criteria

The following criteria were agreed by the Executive Councillor (Environment) on the 18th March 2003 with amendments agreed 22 March 2005.

Essential Criteria:

- Schemes should have a direct, lasting and noticeable improvement to the appearance of a street or area.
- Schemes should be publicly visible and accessible.
- Should the scheme be on private land, the owners' permission must be granted – unless there are exceptional circumstances by which the Area Committee may wish to act unilaterally, with full knowledge and responsibility for the implication of such action.
- Schemes must account for future maintenance costs.

Desirable criteria:

- Active involvement of local people.
- The project will benefit a large number of people.
- 'Partnership' funding.
- The potential for inclusion of employment training opportunities.
- Ease and simplicity of implementation.
- Potential for meeting key policy objectives (e.g. improving community safety or contributing to equal opportunities).

Ineligible for funding:

- Where a readily available alternative source of funding is available.
- Revenue projects.
- Schemes that have already received Council funding (unless it can be clearly demonstrated that this would not be 'top up' funding).
- Works that the City or County Council are under an immediate obligation to carry out (e.g. repair of dangerous footways)
- Play areas (S106 funding should pay for this resource)

Other Information:

The following categories of work were agreed as being eligible for funding by the Area Committees:

- Works in areas of predominately council owned housing
- Works to construct lay-bys where a comprehensive scheme can be carried out which not only relieves parking problems but achieves environmental improvements.