



To: Executive Councillor for Environment & Waste  
Draft Report by: Simon Payne, Director of Environment  
Relevant scrutiny committee: Environment - 12 January 2016  
Wards affected: Newnham, Market

## **IMPROVEMENT OF SILVER STREET PUBLIC CONVENIENCES – OPTIONS SCOPING**

### **Non - Key Decision**

#### **1. Executive summary**

1.1 This report details investigation work undertaken to date on improving the existing City Council provided public toilets located beneath the Silver Street river bridge approach. It proposes that further work be undertaken on four options in order to inform further consideration, and discussions with planning, conservation and heritage interests.

#### **2. Recommendations**

2.1 The Executive Councillor is asked to support further investigation of the options for improving the existing toilets as laid out in this report.

#### **3. Background**

3.1 The existing public toilet facilities provided and operated by Cambridge City Council in Silver Street date from 1985. Separate segregated facilities for males and females are located underground within the river bridge approach (accessed via stairs), with one separate mobility impaired cubicle provided at street level (timber clad design, beneath a pitched and tiled roof).

3.2 These facilities are located close to the drop off point for coach borne visitors to Cambridge on Queens Road, and are heavily used by tens of thousands of people each year. They are comparatively poor by current standards and are the source of regular complaints; particularly during the summer months, and give a poor first impression of what Cambridge has to offer visitors. The frequency and pattern of visitor arrivals is such that the facilities struggle to cope with demand at peak times, leading to lengthy queues and inconvenience to users.

- 3.3 The Council has supported the improvement of the existing facilities in Silver Street following the successful refurbishment in 2014 of similar conveniences located within the Lion Yard complex in the city centre. Up to £437,000 is potentially available towards their improvement, funded from the Public Conveniences Programme, UD016.
- 3.4 Being largely located beneath the street at river level the existing facilities suffer from poor, and congested, access and the ingress of water both from above, and below as ground and river levels increase. Such events are becoming increasingly regular and result in the temporary closure of the toilets. Maintaining, and operating, the current facilities cost the City Council in excess of £70,000 per annum.

#### **4. Investigation work undertaken**

- 4.1 In 2013 the Council undertook a scoping exercise into the improvement of the toilets and recommended that the existing disabled toilet, which forms a part of the Silver Street provision, be removed and the underground facilities made redundant - with a new lightweight toilet provision constructed at ground level on the same site, and collecting a 20p charge for individual usage. An alternative of providing a lift to the below ground facilities was considered, but discounted on the basis of impracticality.
- 4.2 A more detailed structural, mechanical and electrical feasibility study conducted by consultants Faithful & Gould in 2013 further recommended the building of a new toilet above ground due to surcharge flooding from the foul water sewer system, poor access provisions, and no guarantee that the existing waterproof membrane would continue retain its integrity; leading to increased management costs.
- 4.3 The bridge, designed by the renowned national architect Edward Lutjens in 1932 and built in 1958-59 after his death, is a reinforced concrete structure clad in Portland stone, and became Grade II listed in 2013. Any alteration to the form or fabric of the bridge structure, and its associated infrastructure, is expected to require planning approval and Listed Building Consent. The western pavement approach where the current facilities are accessed does not fall within the curtilage of the listing.
- 4.4 A Heritage Impact Assessment, also undertaken in 2013, concluded that the construction of a standalone unit would not have an automatically detrimental impact on the environment, subject to successful and compatible design being formulated - stating that there

should be no reason why conceptual proposals should not be prepared, and further reviewed, to determine their suitability.

- 4.5 Both the bridge itself, and retaining walls with balustrade details, forms part of the structure owned and maintained by Cambridgeshire County Council and is located within the area of dedicated public highway. However, the area under the disabled toilet on the surface, and the area occupied by the steps down to the additional facilities, appears to have been adopted as highway in error.
- 4.6 The Council's legal team are presently applying to get the toilets registered in city ownership with the Land Registry in order to correct the highway register. Advice has also been sought from the Council's Planning and Conservation teams, and from Historic England – whom would need to determine any listed building application since the Local Planning Authority cannot grant itself permission on its own buildings or structures.

## **5. Opportunities**

- 5.1 These discussions, whilst acknowledging the difficulties being experienced with the existing facilities and their limited potential for improvement below ground, suggested that any very obvious change to the street-scene around the bridge and its aspect to/from the river, is likely to be extremely sensitive.
- 5.2 The second phase of the Cambridge Core traffic scheme removed much of the through traffic from Silver Street and has delivered a significant improvement to the public realm in the area. This, along with the historic and tourism offer of this area of the city and river Cam (including the Mill Pond and Mathematical Bridge), and thriving local businesses, provides a significant 'draw' to many of Cambridge's millions of annual visitors.
- 5.3 This background context provides both challenges, and opportunities. Such a prime location has huge potential to enhance the 'offer' to city visitors, and bring in additional financial revenue - both in respect of public convenience provision, and the potential for incorporating some small kiosk or retail outlet. However, the constraints of the site and its locale and setting significantly limit what might be practicable.
- 5.4 In view of this, and in considering potential options for further investigation, it would seem prudent not to limit the scope to the existing site specifically but include other potential locations within the vicinity that might maximise the potential benefits further. Any solution would need to be within relative close proximity to the western side of

the city centre, the river, backs and coach drop-off point along Queens Road.

- 5.5 The Council's planning service are working with Cambridge University on the redevelopment of their Mill Lane site, and this in the longer term could include potential to incorporate additional public toilet facilities. It is also suggested that the potential to provide further facilities within existing public open space close by (possibly on Queens Green) be investigated, since the additional space available here could enable a significantly more creative and high quality solution than the existing Silver Street location.

## 6. Next steps

- 6.1 The existing public toilets in Silver Street are well used but significantly outdated, costly to maintain and operate, regularly out of service and the source of regular complaints. They are in need of significant improvement to bring them up to current standards befitting a city with a tourism offer such as Cambridge.
- 6.2 In order to move the work forward, a nationally reputed firm of local architects with experience of this type of commission in a heritage urban setting, both within Cambridge and elsewhere, have been commissioned to undertake an options appraisal for several differing potential approaches. These are laid out briefly below:

Option	Description
1	Do minimum refurbishment of the existing facilities ('Facelift' below ground with minor improvements to access stairwell area to reduce water ingress)
2	New above ground provision on existing site (Lightweight structure to complement/replace the existing street level provision, with existing below ground facilities retained, re-used, or abandoned)
3	New partly sunk into the street provision on existing site (Extensive engineering work to minimise environmental intrusion whilst maintaining accessibility – subject to detailed technical and cost appraisal)
4	New remote provision within short walking distance (Possibly on open green space either above or partly below ground - subject to detailed environmental appraisal)

- 6.3 The work will include further consideration of the heritage context (a weighting of 30%), alongside other important factors such as functionality, equality and sustainability, with output 'deliverables' of plans, elevations and artistic impressions, to inform further consideration by the Council and the various stakeholders likely to have an interest.
- 6.4 The precise work being undertaken is set out in **Appendix A**. It commenced in December 2015, is being managed by the Council's Streets and Open Spaces service, and is due to report during early 2016.

## **7. Programme**

- 7.1 The results of this scoping exercise, along with the views of stakeholders, are expected to be reported to the 15 March 2016 meeting of Environment Scrutiny Committee for consideration. It is anticipated that the Committee, and Executive Councillor, will be requested to support up to two options to form the basis of consultation with the public; with further consideration of the outcome of this exercise at a future meeting of the Committee.
- 7.2 Depending on the feedback received and the ease in identifying a preferred option to be taken forward to detail design stage, it is currently anticipated that it will take between 12 and 18 months to deliver a significant improvement to the existing toilet facilities in Silver Street.

## **8. Implications**

### **(a) Financial Implications**

Developing the project to Full Business Case stage is anticipated to cost up to £25,000 in officer time and professional advice, for which an application to the Capital programme feasibility fund is currently under preparation.

### **(b) Staffing Implications**

Staffing resource, and expertise, to manage the development and ultimately delivery of the project is available within the Streets and Open Spaces service and will be supplemented with specialist professional advice as the need arises.

(c) **Equality and Poverty Implications**

An Equality Impact Assessment accompanies this report (**Appendix B**). All public realm infrastructure improvements are designed in accordance with the 2010 Equalities Act, and national standards, to accommodate the needs of those with specific needs. The overall impact of the project is anticipated to be positive.

(d) **Environmental Implications**

Any improvement of the existing facilities will need to accord with current environmental and sustainability requirements. It is anticipated that this project, overall, will have a +L (low positive) impact on climate change.

(e) **Procurement**

The improvement project will be delivered in accordance with the Council's contract procedure rules. Wherever possible the work will be undertaken using in-house resource, or via existing framework arrangements. To ensure value for money the larger elements of work may need to be procured via competitive tender processes.

(f) **Consultation and communication**

Consultation and communication for the project will be proportionate to the nature, scale and scope of the proposed improvement. It is anticipated that there will be widespread engagement, and consultation, with stakeholders and the public prior to a final decision being reached. The project is likely to be a sensitive one and throughout its development appropriate opportunities will be taken to publicise progress.

(g) **Community Safety**

The improvement is expected to enhance pride of place, and community cohesion, and should therefore have a positive impact on community safety.

## **7. Background papers**

These background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

City Council Silver Street Toilet Refurbishment Preliminary Design Report, March 2013.

Faithful & Gould, Public Toilet Refurbishment Report, September 2013.

## **8. Appendices**

Appendix A: Freeland Rees Roberts Architects options appraisal criteria

Appendix B: Equalities Impact Assessment

## **9. Inspection of papers**

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

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