



To: Executive Councillor for Environment & Waste
Draft Report by: Simon Payne, Director of Environment
Relevant scrutiny committee: Environment - 15 March 2016
Wards affected: Newnham, Market

IMPROVEMENT OF SILVER STREET PUBLIC CONVENIENCES – OUTCOMES OF OPTIONS SCOPING

Non - Key Decision

1. Executive summary

1.1 This report details the outcome of outline scoping work on options to improve the existing City Council provided public toilets located beneath the Silver Street river bridge approach.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Executive Councillor is asked to consider the results of the scoping exercise on the various options identified, and support further development work (including detailed design and public consultation) on potential variations around Option 2 (street level on existing site).

3. Background

3.1 On 12 January 2016 Environment Scrutiny Committee, and the Executive Councillor for Environment, Waste and Public Health, considered a report outlining a number of potential concept options for the improvement of the existing public toilets situated in Silver Street.

3.2 The report outlined the difficulties and challenges faced in maintaining and operating the existing facilities, and the poor level of service they offer to users. It also identified a number of constraints, and potential opportunities, associated with various options for their improvement.

3.3 Investigation and scoping work has now been undertaken on a number of options as outlined in the report. This has involved the production of architectural concept drawings and a technical appraisal of the opportunities and constraints associated with each option, an

indication of the likely costs involved in taking each forward and the views of key stakeholders including planning, conservation and heritage interests.

- 3.4 Whilst the work was incomplete at the time of the Committee meeting in January, Councillors were able to consider typical conceptual architectural drawings for some of the options under consideration. This provided useful feedback in informing the ongoing work.
- 3.5 Whilst welcoming the work and the range of options being explored, the Committee felt that the possibility of locating new purpose built facilities on public open space such as Queens Green was not supported and should therefore not be explored further. This view was supported by the Executive Councillor.

4. Outcomes from Options Scoping

- 4.1 The criteria for the technical options scoping work were outlined in the 12 January report to this Committee, and the principal findings are set out in **Appendix A**. A summary of the main points, for each of the options considered, is laid out below. Artistic illustrations showing how each of the options could appear are included as **Appendix B**.

Minimal refurbishment of the existing facilities (Option 1)

- 4.2 There are potentially two different variations for this option based upon retaining the existing below ground facilities, from a largely cosmetic 'facelift' with minor improvements to the access stairwell area to reduce water ingress, to additionally maximising toilet and/or kiosk provision beneath the canopy of the current small street-level building. Both options would minimise change to the existing street-scene and the necessary consents needed to secure scheme approval.
- 4.3 Whilst each variation could likely be provided quicker and at more modest costs than other more comprehensive options, they would have limited capacity, not overcome many of the inherent difficulties of the existing facilities (including a poor equalities offer), and limit opportunities to raise additional income to offset operational costs. The costs for providing such improved facilities would be in the lower to medium range; typically in the region of £220,000 (Ex VAT). However, value for money would be comparatively poor.

New above ground provision on existing site (Option 2)

- 4.4 A new lightweight structure to complement or replace the existing street level building could be provided, with the existing below ground facilities retained for alternative use or abandoned altogether. This option would have the most impact upon the existing street-scene, so form would likely be equally important as function and the building would need to feature a high quality exterior finish. Either a modular form or bespoke architectural design building could be considered.
- 4.5 The new provision would be subject to planning and possibly listed building approval, and require street level adjustments including the possibility of service diversions. Capacity would depend on building size with consequent impact on the street-scene, but the equalities offer and opportunities to generate income and include kiosk/public information facilities would be good. The costs for providing such new facilities would be likely to be in the medium to high range compared with other options under consideration, in the region of £450,000 (Ex VAT) for an architectural version, and £370,000 (Ex VAT) for a modular version. Depending on the extent of the building, an allowance might also have to be made of £50,000 (Ex VAT) for a sewer diversion.

New partly below street provision on existing site (Option 3)

- 4.6 This option would raise the existing floor level and overcome the operational restrictions of the existing facilities, whilst minimising the visual impact at street-level. It would be bespoke and high quality, with the potential to include significant enhancement to the street-scene and public realm (possibly at a raised level). The equality offer would be good with easy access from a new orientation of the steps and new ramp, it would maximise capacity, opportunities to raise income and could incorporate kiosk/public information facilities.
- 4.7 It would, however, require significant structural and street level adjustments including the possibility of service diversions, planning and likely listed building consents. The cost of providing such new facilities would be higher; currently estimated to be in the region of £440,000 (Ex VAT). This could be more given the risks inherent in undertaking structural alterations. Depending on the extent of the building, an allowance might also have to be made of £50,000 (Ex VAT) for a sewer diversion.

New remote provision within short walking distance (Option 4)

- 4.8 The Supplementary Planning Document for the redevelopment of the Old Press / Mill Lane site neither specifically requires, nor excludes,

the possibility of incorporating toilet facilities available for use by the general public within the new build.

It is currently anticipated to be several years before redevelopment of the site would be likely to be completed.

- 4.9 The provision of new purpose built facilities on open green space such as the corner of Queens Green would minimise the requirement on the existing Silver Street site and offer greater opportunity for potential re-use of the space here. It could also incorporate kiosk/public information facilities.
- 4.10 New service connections would be required but these are not expected to be complicated, with no significant diversion. The potential costs involved are also likely to be lower than for some of the other options considered; in the region of £240,000 (Ex VAT).

5. Views of key stakeholders

- 5.1 In addition to seeking the views of local councillors, further dialogue has been undertaken with other key stakeholders, including the Council's own planning and conservation teams, and Historic England, to identify the likely suitability, and acceptability, of each of the options considered. Work has also been ongoing to establish precise ownership extents, and responsibilities. The latter was yet to be concluded at the time this report was prepared.
- 5.2 The Council's urban design and conservation teams favour minimising the visual impact on the sensitive local environment and, in this context, favour the provision of suitable and appropriate facilities on the existing Silver Street site above potential open green space alternatives. Historic England's interest is primarily focused on the existing site where they are similarly keen to minimise adverse impacts.
- 5.3 An Anglian Water sewer runs beneath Silver Street between the existing below and above ground toilet provision. New build either above or adjacent to this is subject to their consent and this would inevitably impact upon options to improve facilities on the existing site. There may be some flexibility, although this will likely impact on costs, and depending on the options favoured for further investigation, discussions will commence with Anglian Water around the detail.
- 5.4 Cambridgeshire County Council is understood to own the structure of the existing Silver Street river bridge, retaining walls and balustrade details and inspection and maintenance is undertaken by its highways service. Irrespective of ownership, the authority's consent is likely to

be needed for any significant amendment to the existing provision, and particularly those requiring amendment to the structure.

6. Next steps

- 6.1 Environment Scrutiny Committee, and the Executive Councillor for Environment, Waste and Public Health, are asked to consider the outcome of the recent work and determine suitable options for further more detailed investigation, to include consultation with the public.
- 6.2 If this work is able to commence following the meeting in March it is anticipated that a public consultation might be undertaken from late spring / summer 2016 with one or two more detailed designs. It will be important to capture the views of users of the existing facilities along with those of local residents and other stakeholders, and with visitors to Cambridge peaking during the summer months this would seem to be the ideal time to consult.
- 6.3 The results of this exercise would then be reported back to this Committee, and Executive Councillor, for consideration. It is anticipated this could enable a 'preferred' option to be identified (and potential planning and listed buildings applications submitted) from late summer / autumn 2016.
- 6.4 Depending on the feedback received and the ease in identifying a preferred option to be taken forward to detail design stage, subject to obtaining the necessary support and consents, it is currently anticipated that the improvement work could potentially be undertaken during the winter to spring 2017 period, with the new facilities being available for use by the public from summer 2017 onwards.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 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.
- 7.2 The options investigated would all deliver improvements but to differing degrees and at differing costs. Their likely acceptability within the locale also varies.
- 7.3 On the basis of the investigation work undertaken thus far, the option (including variations thereof) to provide new street-level facilities on

the existing site adjacent to Silver Street bridge would appear to present the best balance between the principal determinants of opportunity and usability, practicability and cost, and environmental considerations including local acceptability, and sensitivity towards heritage and visual impact. However, significant care will be needed to ensure the new building is in keeping with the local environment and able to secure the necessary approvals.

- 7.4 Environment Scrutiny Committee and the Executive Councillor are consequently asked to consider the results of the scoping exercise and determine a suitable option, or variations thereof, for further detailed investigation and to include consultation with the public.

8. Implications

(a) Financial Implications

£20,000 has been secured through the Capital programme feasibility fund to meet the costs of officer time, and professional advice, in developing a suitable solution to Full Business Case stage. Up to £437,000 is potentially likely to be available to deliver the project (subject to approval), funded from the Public Conveniences Programme (now UD016).

(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 initial Equality Impact Assessment accompanies this report (**Appendix C**). This will be updated as necessary through the lifeline of the project. 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:

Item 16/48/ENV Options Regarding Silver Street Public Toilets – Environment Scrutiny Committee, 12 January 2016

8. Appendices

Appendix A: Findings of options scoping appraisal
Appendix B: Visuals for Silver Street toilets options
Appendix C: 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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