

Item

## Environmental Improvement Programme



**To:**

North Area Committee

27 February 2020

**Report by:**

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**Wards affected:**

Arbury, East Chesterton, West Chesterton, Kings Hedges

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**Key Decision: No**

### 1. Executive Summary

1.1 This report outlines changes to the Council's Environmental Improvement Programme (EIP) during 2018/ 19, and reviews the latest round of applications received within North area.

### 2. Recommendations

The North Area Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the operating amendments to the programme agreed by the Executive Councillor for Streets and Open Spaces following Environment and Community Scrutiny on 21 March 2019
2. Note the allocation of funding to continue with a programme across all areas of Cambridge for the period 2019-21
3. Consider the allocation of £6,616 from local area EIP funds in 2019/ 20 towards the provision of 40 summer hanging baskets in Campkin Road, and along Chesterton High Street

4. Note those new North area project aspirations received in the latest 2019/ 20 round recommended to the Executive Councillor for Streets and Open Spaces for funding from the new central, city-wide, strategic EIP allocation
5. Consider those remaining new North area project aspirations received in the latest 2019/ 20 round for funding as part of the local North area programme for 2019/ 20
6. Support those projects selected for implementation, subject to them being viable, obtaining consents as necessary, positive consultation and final approval by the Council's Place Board, Ward and Executive Councillors, where required.

### **3. Background**

- 3.1. The Council's Environmental Improvement Programme (EIP) has been operating as a rolling programme since 2004. The programme budget, which has been £170,000 per annum for the most recent period up to 2018/19, has been devolved to Area Committees to allocate to outdoor public realm improvement schemes, identified through Ward Councillors. The creation of direct, lasting and noticeable improvements to the appearance of the public realm environment has been at the heart of the programme, since its introduction. The current EIP eligibility criteria are set out along with the programme application form in **Appendix B**.
- 3.2 The programme has been subject to periodic review to improve flexibility, ensure good value and help speed up project delivery. That said, there have been delivery difficulties where project aspirations have complexities, such as where they involve the public highway. Such difficulties have led to a disproportionate impact on staffing resource, with the associated projects often taking a significant amount of time and staffing to deliver.

3.3 Year 2018/ 19 was the last of the previous four-year programme funding commitment and so, it was appropriate to use the opportunity to consider the future focus and composition of any extended programme. EIP work remains much valued by councillors and communities alike, but warranted review and potential re-focus to ensure it continues to best meet strategic objectives and the needs of a rapidly expanding city.

#### **4. Programme Review and Funding**

4.1 Since 2011/ 12, approaching two hundred separate EIP projects were added to the programme by the four Area Committees city-wide. These varied in cost between a few hundred to tens of thousands of pounds. Of the prioritised projects, just over three quarters were completed by the end of the funding period to March 2019. The remainder are being progressed as resources allow, with most expected to be completed by end of 2019/ 20.

4.2 Over the years many submitted and approved EIP projects have focused on improvements to core highways and transport infrastructure, which is dependent on agreement with the County Council, as Highway Authority and, in certain cases, such as Traffic Regulation Orders, to statutory processes. In order not to further complicated programme development and delivery, such aspirations have more recently been directed towards the County's Local Highways Improvement (LHI) programme.

4.3 The end of the previous four-year EIP funding commitment provided an opportune point to review what has worked well, and not so well, and options for future investment. Engagement with the Council's SLT/ Executive suggested an appetite to retain a capital funded programme, but one more aligned with core corporate and service objectives, and operational needs.

4.4 EIP has been successfully used to support other public realm infrastructure investment; including s106 funded improvements secured through new growth in the city. As s106 and other such investment opportunities diminish in the years ahead, there is expected to be increased pressure for EIP to help 'bridge the gap' remaining.

- 4.5 During 2018/ 19, and with the support of SLT/ Executive, officers explored how a future programme might be re-shaped. Retaining a ward Councillor led approach was still favoured, but one further informed by other areas of Council work – including the day to day operational needs of the service.
- 4.6 It became apparent, too, that there were a number of common themes emerging from the area led application programmes where there may be merit in adopting a more strategic, city-wide approach. Examples include:
- Verge and grass landscape protection/ enhancement measures
  - Engineered tree pits and new street trees, to increase canopy
  - Enhanced seating, and lighting
  - Community orchards, and notice boards
  - Pictorial meadows
  - Public drinking water outlets/ fountains
  - Improved pedestrian way-marking signs
  - Rationalising signing and other street furniture
  - Enhancing materials in sensitive conservation areas
  - Improving private shop-front forecourts
  - Murals and related street art
- 4.7 Efficient delivery of the Environmental Improvement Programme across all areas in recent years has led to savings against many project allocations. Additionally, some projects have been abandoned, deferred or become delayed. The overall effect is that capital reserves built up in all areas. Following consideration by Scrutiny Committee on 11 February 2019, the Executive Councillor for Strategy and Resources approved the allocation of £170,000 re-phased from 2018/ 19 to continue with EIP in 2019/ 20, and a separate budget proposal (C4192) of £170,000 for the following year 2020/ 21 (subject to annual budget setting). A further review will be carried out before any commitment is made beyond 2020/ 21.
- 4.8 It was further agreed by the Executive Councillor for Streets and Open Spaces, following Environment and Community Scrutiny on 21 March 2019, that this new investment be split; retaining £100,000 per annum to allocate to local area voluntary and community sector/ Ward Councillor promoted projects across the four Area Committees (split

proportionately and with individual schemes subject to approval by Area Committees, as previously), and directing the remaining £70,000 towards a more strategic, city-wide programme led by officers and subject to approval by the appropriate Executive Councillor (as is currently the case for Minor Highways Improvements – the City Council contribution towards County Council LHIs).

- 4.9 Of those themes outlined in 4.6, officers have subsequently agreed with the Executive Councillor that the initial focus of this new, strategic, EIP allocation should be on initiatives to protect and make better amenity use of the city's grassed verges, enhancing tree canopy, encouraging biodiversity and providing further, free to use, public drinking water outlets.

## **5. Further Programme Applications**

- 5.1 Applications for potential new EIP projects were sought from ward councillors, and local community groups, across all areas during late Summer 2019. A copy of the application form is included at **Appendix B**. This has identified potential new projects to be funded from both the respective local area, and strategic city-wide, EIP funding allocations.
- 5.2 The apportionment of area EIP funds across the city has been updated to reflect population changes since 2015-19. South area in particular is now eligible for a larger share of the overall programme budget as a direct consequence of new growth around Trumpington. North area now receives 2.1% less, but there is still some £27,500 new funding available to consider area led requests in 2019/ 20.
- 5.3 Some 8 new viable project suggestions have been identified in North area during the latest application round, as set out in **Appendix A**. Each has had outline consideration by officers for eligibility and practicality; with an estimate of the likely costs involved in delivering those projects considered, at this stage, to be potentially feasible. An additional column has been included identifying where there may be delivery risks or other uncertainty, with supporting commentary.
- 5.4 Since 2011/ 12 Area Committees have supported the practice of re-charging the costs of providing seasonal hanging baskets in a number of local 'High Streets' to EIP. This has included Chesterton High Street,

and more recently Campkin Road, within North area - where the annual provision and upkeep of 40 baskets each Summer costs the Council some £6,616.

- 5.5 Efficient delivery of the Environmental Improvement Programme city-wide can lead to savings against individual project allocations. Whilst the exact budget available for allocation to new project applications across North area in 2019/ 20 is dependent of the final costs of schemes currently being delivered, latest estimates suggest there should be some additional funding available to 'top-up' new funding available over the 2019-21 period. Additionally, some aspirations are suited to funding from the new £70,000 strategic city-wide budget allocation.

## **6. Suggested Way Forward**

- 6.1 Two of the new project aspirations received for North area in the latest round (Appendix A suggestions N2 and N3) align with the initial focus of the new strategic, city-wide EIP allocation. They may therefore be considered for centralised funding (rather than area specific allocated funds). Whilst there may be insufficient strategic EIP funding to progress both, project N3 (Highworth Avenue) supports the Council's separate aspiration (subject to annual budget setting round) to enhance tree canopy across Cambridge. Whilst neither project may require local area funding in order to proceed in some form, officers feel it would be prudent to make provision for N3 should Area Committee consider it a priority.
- 6.2 Project reference N2 focuses on re-establishing a section of grass verge at the Milton Road end of Gilbert Road, close to the site of the former Primary School. A number of alternative approaches to verge management are in the process of being trialed across the city and this project, if viable, should helpfully contribute towards that work.
- 6.3 Aspiration N7; to create a new amenity space at Mitcham's Corner, requires further assessment work in order to identify what might be practicable. Area Committee will also be aware of the longer term Local Centres Improvement aspiration, linked to the developing SPD for this area. At this stage officers consider it might be worthwhile undertaking a feasibility study for the idea, in order to inform future consideration.

- 6.4 The Head of Environmental Services has suggested that officers explore with the Cambridgeshire County Council Highways team whether project aspiration N5 might be funded from their Local Highways Improvement programme. Given the annual application process, that is not expected to be possible before 2021/ 22. Given the relatively minor cost involved (c£2,500), Area Committee may wish to consider local area EIP funding in order that the work might proceed earlier.
- 6.5 Projects N1, N4, N5, N6, feasibility for N7, and N8 will need to be funded from area funds if they are to be prioritised in 2019/ 20. Further, N3 may require support if it is to proceed. The total estimated cost of these projects is some £23,000. Area Committee is therefore asked to consider, and determine, whether it wishes to support funding each of these aspirations, along with summer hanging baskets, from the remaining and new local area funding available in 2019/ 20.
- 6.6 Each of the four Area Committees will be considering new EIP project aspirations, and funding allocations, in the Winter/ Spring 2020 round. Those projects to be funded from the new central, strategic, city-wide allocation will be considered, and determined, by the Executive Councillor for Streets and Open Spaces (in consultation with area Ward Councillors as necessary).
- 6.7 Those projects unable to be prioritised from local area, and strategic, EIP allocations might be rolled forward and considered in any further round in 2020/ 21 (subject to annual budget setting), alongside any further applications received from future invitation rounds.

## **7. Implications**

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

The current EIP has an approved capital budget allocation of £170,000 per annum up to and including 2020/ 21 (funding re-phased for 2019/ 20 year; 2020/ 21 subject to annual budget setting). Those new projects identified as being viable at this time, provided they are developed carefully, are not anticipated to generate significant revenue implications for the City Council. Where projects are on the public highway or hard-surfaced definitive footpaths, ongoing management and maintenance is generally the responsibility of Cambridgeshire County Council.

## **(b) Staffing Implications**

Historically a small number of projects have proven difficult to develop and deliver for reasons as laid out in this report, and have had a disproportionate impact on staffing resource in comparison with other programme work. The programme needs to be managed and delivered within the existing funded staffing resource (2 FTE).

## **(c) Equality and Poverty Implications**

Environmental improvements have historically been prioritised across all areas proportionate to population and in accordance with locally identified need. 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 aims to preserve and improve the quality of the natural and built public realm environment across Cambridge, in a manner that does not contribute towards climate change and leaves a positive legacy for future generations. The overall impact of the programme on the environment within Cambridge is therefore rated as +M (positive; Medium).

## **(e) Procurement Implications**

The programme projects 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 may be delivered through competitive tender processes.

## **(f) Community Safety Implications**

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.

## **8. Consultation and communication considerations**

All the programme's projects 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 project. With the majority of the programme being small-scale projects, it is imperative that the proportionate principle continues to be followed.

## **9. Background papers**

Background papers used in the preparation of this report:

Environment and Community Scrutiny Committee meeting 21 March 2019 – paper and meeting minutes.

## **10. Appendices**

Appendix A – Summary of Potential EIP Schemes for 2019/ 20 – North Area

Appendix B – EIP Application Form and Eligibility Criteria 2019/ 20

## **11. Inspection of papers**

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

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