

**Report to: Cabinet, 11<sup>th</sup> June 2013**

**Report of: Cabinet Member for Economic Prosperity**

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**Subject: USE OF NEW HOMES BONUS FOR HIGH ST RE-PAVING WORKS – KEY DECISION**

**1. Decision required**

1.1 This report asks the Cabinet to agree to the expenditure of £174,000 from the New Homes Bonus allocation to contribute to the project for the re-paving of the High Street from Pump Street to the Elgar Statue and to note the use of up to £150,000 of New Homes Bonus funding towards a Skills Co-ordination post for a 3 year period.

**2. Background**

2.1 The Council at its meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> February, agreed the release of the remaining 2012/13 and the 2013/14 New Homes Bonus (NHB) funding. This included 348,000 towards High Street improvements.

2.2 The High Street improvement project has been a shared priority between the City Council and the County Council working together on the City Centre priority projects.

2.3 The aim of the project is to provide an improved and more coherent appearance to the south end of the High Street, to match the work that has already taken place at the northern end of the High Street. The objective is to improve the operational conditions for businesses and the shopping and leisure experience for residents and visitors. This will be the first phase in the programme to regenerate Cathedral Square which is a Corporate Plan priority and will be followed by more detailed work on how Cathedral Square can be improved in line with the aspirations in the city centre Masterplan.

2.4 The costs have been split equally with the County Council on the grounds that this work was not in their work programme for the city centre and by agreeing this we can bring the work forward. Originally this was forecast to be very expensive as subsurface works were thought to be needed to prepare base course (possible cellar filling too). However further investigations have shown this was not required and the final cost has reduced to £315,788, with the City Council contribution being £157,894.

2.5 The proposal was discussed and met with the approval of the New Homes Bonus Cabinet Infrastructure Task Group which met on May 7<sup>th</sup>.

**3. Project details**

3.1 Attached at Appendix 1 is a plan, showing the details of the scheme.

3.2 The scheme incorporates resurfacing in the same Mastertint<sup>TM</sup> material as used in the northern end of the High St, and demountable street furniture.

3.3 Details of the project programme and timeline will be finalised by the County Council should the Cabinet approve our contribution.

It is expected that work on the contract will start at the end of August or beginning of September and take up to 10 weeks to complete. The details to be finalised and communicated with stakeholders include hours of working and access arrangements.

#### **4. Additional projects to support the improvements**

- 4.1 **Improved Lighting:** The City Council has already committed £22,000 from the Priority Projects budget to provide four new lighting columns for this part of the High Street. These will be put in before the main works start.
- 4.2 **New Power Points:** Following discussions with partners including Worcester BID and Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce, we propose to install three hydraulic (opening) floor boxes to be placed between the lighting columns. These will provide sufficient electric power to serve the Christmas Fayre, and provide greater flexibility for other events to be staged in the area. The Council would own the boxes, manage a contract for maintenance and re-charge for the use of electricity. The estimated cost for these is £16,000. These will be installed at the same time as the main works.

#### **5. Skills Co-ordination**

- 5.1 At a meeting of the New Homes Bonus Task Group for Skills Employment and Retail on May 8<sup>th</sup>, members of the Task Group were informed of work that had already been progressed in February this year to increase capacity in the Regeneration and Business Engagement team. Discussions had taken place with the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (WLEP) regarding the delivery of their business plan priority for Employment and Skills. WLEP has established a Skills Board which will oversee skills strategy and coordination across the county. The appointment of a Skills Coordinator for Worcester through WLEP will provide the capacity in Worcester to coordinate and oversee the delivery of a Worcester skills programme and provide value for money through the ability of WLEP to match this funding with LEP funding. An exchange of correspondence between the Managing Director of Worcester City Council and the WLEP took place on February 26<sup>th</sup> 2013 to confirm the arrangement and discussions are at an early stage to progress this work.

#### **6. Summary**

- 6.1 £22,000 has already been committed from Priority Projects for lighting columns.
- 6.2 A total of £174,000 (£158,000 for the main works and £16,000 for the floor boxes) is proposed to be funded from New Homes Bonus.
- 6.3 Up to £150,000 over a 3 year period has been committed to provide the capacity for the Regeneration and Business Engagement Service to develop and oversee delivery of a skills programme for the city.

#### **7. Policy, Legal, Financial, Equalities and Risk Management Implications**

- 7.1 **Human Resources** – the infrastructure project will be delivered by the County Council. The City Council will be represented on the working groups for the project; and manage the engagement with local stakeholders and communication. This will be led through the Regeneration and Business Engagement Service. The Skills Coordination post will be appointed by the WLEP and based in the City Council.

- 7.2 **Policy Implications** – The re-paving of this end of the High Street is the first phase in the delivery of improvements to Cathedral Square, one of the priority projects identified in the City Centre Masterplan. The new post for Skills will facilitate the coordination and delivery of the Economic Prosperity Strategy.
- 7.3 **Legal** – Council funding will contribute to a County Council led and managed main project. We will need to develop contract arrangements for the maintenance and re-charging of the electric points. A formal agreement will be drawn up between the WLEP and the City Council regarding the arrangements for the Skills Coordination post.
- 7.4 **Financial** – The costs set out above for the main project and the separate fitting of electric boxes and the proposed skills coordination post are within the NHB funding approved for infrastructure and economic development .
- 7.5 **Equalities** – the infrastructure project will bring about significant changes to the physical layout of the City Centre, and offers the opportunity to enhance accessibility for all. Any contractors we directly engage will be required to evidence that they are fully compliant with the Equalities Act 2010. The Skills coordination post will have due regard for ensuring that negative equality impacts of unemployment in the city are addressed.
- 7.6 **Risk Management** – The project risk register is within the ownership, of the County Council but through membership of a working group, we will ensure they are effectively managed.

## **8. Comments of Regeneration and Business Engagement Service Manager**

- 8.1 Re-paving of the High Street is a key first step in the delivery of the Cathedral Square priority area.
- 8.2 The inclusion of the floor-boxes for the provision of electricity will greatly enhance the way in which the space can be used for events, and their location has been designed to provide flexibility in use.
- 8.3 The quality of communication will be critical to the success of the scheme and in ensuring stakeholders are kept fully informed.
- 8.4 The Skills coordination post will provide much needed capacity into the Regeneration and Business Engagement Service.

## **9. THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ECONOMIC PROSPERITY, COUNCILLOR GEOFF WILLIAMS, RECOMMENDS:**

1. **That Cabinet approve the expenditure of £174,000 from the New Homes Bonus for High Street Improvements as set out in this report.**
2. **That this is confirmed immediately with the County Council, so the final details of the scheme can be drawn up and communicated to stakeholders.**
3. **That Cabinet note the allocation of up to £150,000 of New Homes Bonus funding towards a Skills Coordination post via the WLEP.**

**Ward(s):** Cathedral/ all  
**Contact Officer:** Anne Bonsor, Head of Service, Regeneration and Business Engagement Tel: 01905 721150  
**Background Papers:** None