



Report to: Place and Economic Development Committee, 13th March 2023

Report of: Deputy Director - Economic Development

Subject: TOWNS FUND HERITAGE AND RIVERSIDE PROJECT UPDATE

1. Recommendation

1.1 That the committee note the contents of the report and the progress currently being made with this project.

2. Background

Towns Funds £19.6m investment in Worcester and includes a range of projects that were included in our Town Investment plan, including Shrub Hill, Active Travel, Community Skills, Health and Well Being Centre and Heritage and Riverside. This report is to provide an update on progress to date on the latter of these projects, which combines two of the original priority projects in the Worcester TIP: Heritage Tourism and Riverside as a Destination

- 2.1 Investment along the Riverside complements existing City Council activity to develop the Riverside Park as a visitor destination. It focusses on improving public realm and enhancing public access to the Cathedral and St Andrew's gardens
- 2.2 Towns funding will support the initial phase of a wider landscaping masterplan for the Cathedral grounds. Phase 1 will intuitively link the crossing from Cathedral Square to the North door (main entrance) of the Cathedral and on to the entrance to the riverside gardens
- 2.3 The heritage aspect of the project will aim to drive footfall, dwell time and visitor spend in Worcester, focussed through the Museum and Art Gallery and the Commandery. The project will see the Worcestershire Soldier gallery move from the current space within the Art Gallery and Museum, to the Commandery. Alongside the move, renovation of The Commandery's reception will deliver a new reception area will enable the conversion of the gallery space within the museum to a new art and exhibition area.

3. Information

- 3.1 **Riverside**-The project has established a project board and have appointed a design team, with the Cathedral's landscape consultant developing a full project plan with costings, and with ongoing advice from Historic England.
- 3.2 The project has a budget of £140,000 from Towns Fund which is matched by £179,000 from the Kildare Trust, to cover Phase 1 of the Cathedral plans.

£118k is still to be secured for the extended scheme, with two funding organisations inviting applications directly (these bids have now been submitted). The Cathedral is confident funding will be in place for the whole project by June this year

- 3.3 **St Andrew's**- £200,000 project. An archaeological brief was prepared for a written scheme of investigation to secure specialist services, with Worcester Archaeology appointed in January. Wider consultation has taken place with WCC's Tree officer to identify any constraints that may affect existing trees, alongside consultation with the County Ecologist to clarify any impacts or constraints in relation to ecology.
- 3.4 Archaeological investigations including a GPR survey were carried out and a report received, identifying that there are likely to be vaults/crypts and burials at the north of the site 0.7m below present ground level, but they do not appear to conflict with the area of proposed access enhancements. There are possible graves in the southern portion of the site at 0.4m below present ground level and a structure at the new entrance at 0.3m below present ground level – these are within the line of the proposed path. No evidence for cellars associated with the previous housing have been identified. The GPR survey report will now be considered within a wider desk-based assessment to help determine the next steps in terms of minimising archaeological impact and/or evaluation.
- 3.5 **Heritage**-A positive working management group has been established with external stakeholders to oversee and guide delivery. The project was unable to secure the services of a heritage consultant at first call, with consultants suggesting that the brief was too large for just one individual. The brief will now be broken down into smaller, manageable parts. The design for the shop and reception fit out has been placed, with work due to begin in January 2024.
- 3.6 The Mercian Museums Trust will be submitting an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund in May to secure further funding to support an enhanced Commandery display. Unfortunately, the project was unsuccessful in its application to the Wolfson Trust for match funding for the Museum, however there is confirmed match funding of £200,000 from UKSPF. The Towns Fund allocation stands at £280,000, with all current costings still within budget.

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Background Papers: None