

# Gloucester City Council

<b>Meeting:</b>	Cabinet	Date:	10 March 2021
	Cabinet		
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>High Street Heritage Action Zone (Cathedral Quarter) Update</b>		
<b>Report Of:</b>	<b>Leader of the Council</b>		
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	<b>Westgate</b>		
<b>Key Decision:</b>	No	<b>Budget/Policy Framework:</b>	No
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<b>Appendices:</b>	<b>None</b>		

## FOR GENERAL RELEASE

### 1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update Cabinet on the progress of the Historic England funded High Street Heritage Action Zone scheme in Gloucester's Westgate known as Cathedral Quarter.

### 2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to **RESOLVE** it be noted that:

- (1) the scheme is making excellent progress despite the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic
- (2) the scheme will make a significant contribution to the post Covid-19 recovery of the city centre economy
- (3) due to the strong performance of the Cathedral Quarter programme, Gloucester has an opportunity to increase the level of funding from Historic England.

### 3.0 Background

- 3.1 Launched in the autumn of 2018 as part of the Future High Street Fund, Historic England's High Street Heritage Action Zone programme is a place-based scheme designed to secure lasting improvements to our historic high streets and the communities who use them.
- 3.2 The nationwide £95 million government-funded programme, aims to 'unlock the potential of high streets across England, fuelling economic, social and cultural recovery and breathing new life into it for future generations.' £40 million was provided by the Department for Digital, Culture Media and Sport's Heritage High Street Fund and £52 million from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's Future High Street Fund to support the scheme. A further £3 million has been provided by the National Lottery Heritage Fund to support a specific cultural programme.

- 3.3 With the changing role of city centres, the programme aims to change the perceptions of the importance of heritage in the future of high streets, inspiring more interest and care for our older buildings and providing a more ‘experiential’ based approach. The scheme provides funding for:
- Physical works to buildings; repair, reinstatement of lost features and conversion to new uses including residential
  - Improving the appearance of shared spaces and the public realm
  - Creating cultural opportunities through learning about the history of the high street and its importance to local communities
- 3.4 In September 2019, Gloucester submitted a bid to the programme which centred on an initiative running from April 2020 – April 2024 delivered in partnership with a range of stakeholders. Following a period of consultation, the bid team chose to focus on Westgate Street due to the prevalence of high quality heritage assets, including the Grade 1 listed former Fleece Hotel, as well as the impact that could be achieved during the 4 year programme. Match funding of 50% was identified from the City Council and it's partners.
- 3.5 Finally, the scheme was branded as ‘Cathedral Quarter’ to reflect the area’s proximity to this iconic, world class building and it’s role as the spiritual centre of our City.
- 3.6 In April 2020, Cathedral Quarter was announced as one of 68 successful bids and awarded £1.9m of grant.
- 4.0 Progress to Date**
- Governance
- 4.1 The project is led by a Steering Group chaired by the Leader of the Council and containing representatives from a number of stakeholders including: the County Council, Business Improvement District, GFirst LEP, Cathedral, Heritage Forum, Culture Trust and Civic Trust. Cllr Dawn Melvin attends these meetings as Cabinet Member for Economic Recovery and Growth.
- 4.2 As a City committed to Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) the HSHAZ is an opportunity to further apply community-led place-making to deliver regeneration within a heritage context. Through community engagement, we will identify local knowledge, skills and strengths as well as the challenges and needs of residents, visitors and businesses. We will use this insight to co-produce an awareness-raising, activity and intervention programme that delivers regeneration, whilst drawing out measures of success to create a sustainable legacy.
- 4.3 A high quality brand toolkit has also been developed to provide a consistent theme for all communications activity.



### Grants

4.3 Schemes currently being progressed include:

- 39 & 41 Westgate Street – major repairs and conversion of upper floors to flats to support the introduction of more homes to the city centre.
- Dick Whittington Inn – improvement works to the façade and conversion of first floor rooms to function space.
- Meeks Shoes – sensitive repairs to the building and conversion of two upper floors to a one and two bedroom flat.

### Public Realm

4.4 As high streets become more about the experience and less about simply buying and selling, the quality of the environment and its contribution to that experience becomes more important.

4.5 Plans are progressing to improve the surfacing along Westgate Street as well as introducing discrete areas for events and activities. Significant upgrades to street furniture (seating, planting, lighting) will also be undertaken with the intention of engaging the wider community in its design,

### Cultural Programme

4.6 Cultural events and activities are considered as being integral to the success of the scheme, helping to re-purpose the High Street as a place where people enjoy spending time.

4.7 A pilot for the Cultural Programme was delivered in September 2020 as part of the History Festival. It involved installing 3D artworks on the street surface, showing ‘holes’ in the ground depicting what we know from archaeology was once on that spot. The artwork (see image below) was created by renowned artist Joe Hill and were considered to be a huge success. The event also included an exhibition and consultation in no 21 Westgate Street, and a survey was completed giving us some baseline information about people’s perception of the area.



- 4.8 It is worth noting that Historic England has cited this event as a national exemplar.
- 4.9 To secure additional funding, a bid for £120,000 of the national Cultural Programme was submitted in December 2020 under the auspices of Consortia comprising the Culture Trust, Strike a Light Theatre Co, the City Council Culture, Museum and Heritage teams, History Festival, the Heritage Archive Hub, Civic Trust and Cathedral.

#### Other activities

- 4.10 The Cathedral Quarter initiative also includes historical research, a reminiscence project collecting local people's memories of Westgate Street which launches at the end of February 2021 and a number of management initiatives. These include a conservation area appraisal which may result in the introduction of clearer guidance and stricter controls over signage, shop front design and street furniture. There will also be guidance for property owners and workshops in aspects around care of older properties.
- 4.11 An attractive brand has also been developed alongside a number of marketing materials. A web site will be launched at the end of February 2021 as a focus for the reminiscence work and progress.

### **5.0 Social Value Considerations**

- 5.1 The programme will contribute directly to the delivery of the Council's Social Value aims across all three of the priority drivers of social, economic and environmental improvement. Bringing vacant property back into use will contribute towards meeting Gloucester's housing need as residential schemes for the upper floors is the most appropriate use for many of the properties taking up grant funding. The ground floor areas are likely to remain as commercial use where the tenant businesses provide services to the local community. Active uses will contribute to the vitality and viability of the City Centre and bring empty residential properties back into use.
- 5.2 The improvements to the street scene and the Cultural Programme aim to make the High Street a more attractive place to visit and spend time, providing opportunities to engage with a variety of activities. This will assist with well-being and local pride. High streets are one of the few places where all people are able congregate and mix and that makes them important, not just for local economies, but also for local social cohesion and well-being.
- 5.3 The programme also presents a mechanism to engage people in the construction industry through direct job creation as well as by enhancing traditional building skills.

### **6.0 Environmental Implications**

- 6.1 The historic environment is a non-renewable resource. Its fragile and finite nature is a particularly important consideration in planning. There is much embodied energy in older buildings, and vacant upper floors are an underused resource. Conservation of historic buildings for future generations therefore accords with the principles of sustainable development. Bringing vacant property back into residential use ensures the future of the property and adds to the sustainability of the City Centre as a residential area.

### **7.0 Alternative Options Considered**

- 7.1 This report is a project update, so no alternative options are considered or proposed here.

## **8.0 Reasons for Recommendations**

8.1 Members are asked to note progress and to ensure that the scheme is supported, promoted and endorsed by Cabinet.

## **9.0 Future Work and Conclusions**

9.1 Work coming forward as part of the scheme that Cabinet are asked to note are;

- The development of the Westgate buildings that form part of the Fleece complex is included in the Cathedral Quarter programme and provides considerable match funding for this priority project
- A conservation area appraisal will be undertaken in 2021/2 which is likely to propose additional management arrangements for the City Centre Conservation Area
- Works to the public realm / street scene require support from the County Council Highways team

9.2 The scheme is progressing well and anticipates the first grant offer for works to 14 Westgate Street (Meeks Shoes) by March 2021.

9.3 The project should be seen as a significant part of the Council's work to rejuvenate the High Street post COVID.

## **10.0 Financial Implications**

10.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this Report.

(Financial Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report)

## **11.0 Legal Implications**

11.1 There are no legal implications arising directly from this Report.

(One Legal has been consulted in the preparation of this report)

## **12.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications**

12.1 There are no risks or opportunity management implications arising directly from this Report.

12.2 As the scheme progresses, there may be a risk that not all of the property owners will be in a position to take up the grant at this time, given the poor trading conditions arising from the pandemic. Officers are discussing this situation with Historic England and examining risk mitigation measures.

12.3 In addition, an element of the match funding identified by the County Council may be at risk should there be further constraints on public funds arising from the pandemic and this would affect the planned improvement works to the public realm.

12.4 Finally, the frontage of the Fleece hotel is a key project for the programme and was one of the main strengths of the bid. The improvement to this historic asset would significantly enhance the street scene and act as a catalyst for other regeneration, it would bring a major redundant property back into productive usage, and it would lever in much needed match funding. It is therefore important that the redevelopment of the Fleece be progressed.

## **13.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA) and Safeguarding:**

13.1 The PIA Screening Stage was completed and did not identify any potential or actual negative impact, therefore a full PIA was not required.

## **14.0 Community Safety Implications**

- 14.1 Vacant property in poor condition can attract vandalism and squatting. Vacant properties often result in increased complaints from neighbours about statutory nuisance e.g. causing deterioration to adjoining properties. By ensuring properties are brought into use these issues are taken away. This can also help to restore economic confidence in an area especially as these buildings are within the Primary Retail Area of the City Centre.

## **15.0 Staffing & Trade Union Implications**

- 15.1 None.

**Background Documents:** None