

## LONDON BOROUGH OF WALTHAM FOREST

Meeting / Date	<b>Cabinet</b> <b>13 January 2022</b>	
Report Title	<b>Walthamstow Town Centre – Public Realm Improvements</b>	
Cabinet Portfolio	Councillor Simon Miller, Portfolio Lead Member for Economic Prosperity	
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Wards affected	High Street, Hoe Street, William Morris	
Public Access	OPEN .	
Appendices	Appendix 1: Public Realm Improvement Design Proposals  Appendix 2: EA Screening  Appendix 3: Sustainability Matrix	

### 1. SUMMARY

- 1.1. This Cabinet report seeks approval for a capital investment budget to undertake public realm improvements - including lighting, wayfinding and paving works in Walthamstow Town Centre, focused on investment around Walthamstow Central transport interchange, Rosebank Villas, Hoe Street, High Street, Hatherley Mews, Central Parade and Cairo Road.
- 1.2. The Council continues to drive significant investment in new homes, commercial, cultural and community spaces across Walthamstow, including with its own assets at Fellowship Square, Soho Theatre: Walthamstow, Juniper House, Central Parade, as well as in partnerships such as the development of The Mall. However, complementary investment is required to join this together with enhancements to key routes and spaces in the town centre's public realm, to assist economic and high street recovery from the pandemic.
- 1.3. There is a particular need to focus on enhancing the arrival points to the town centre – both in terms of the transport interchange and routes for

residents from local neighbourhoods - improving wayfinding and lighting in the evening that can address safety and anti-social behaviour concerns raised by residents and businesses.

- 1.4. This is important for boosting Walthamstow's role as the borough's principal town centre and economic hub, at the heart of the borough's 15-minute neighbourhood strategy, while also encouraging safe sustainable travel, particularly in the evening, positively addressing the Climate Emergency.
- 1.5. With the completion of Fellowship Square and refurbishment and forthcoming launch of Soho Theatre Walthamstow as a catalyst, these public realm improvements will help deliver the following benefits:
  - Encourage footfall and increase dwell time in the Town Centre, particularly in the evening, contributing to the growth of the evening economy and economic recovery from the pandemic.
  - Improve perceptions of safety in the Town Centre after dark.
  - Promote a thriving cultural quarter in Walthamstow Town Centre for the whole borough, with opportunities for celebration of creativity and unique identity within the Town Centre.
  - Support the launch of the new Soho Theatre in Walthamstow, and the wider benefits for residents and businesses.
  - Help to secure wider investment in the Town Centre and new commercial tenants in commercial assets, including those owned by the Council.
  - Improve accessibility and active travel in the Town Centre, therefore making Walthamstow a more inclusive place to live, work and enjoy leisure and culture.
  - Maximise the potential of existing public spaces for arts and cultural activities.
- 1.6. This paper sets out the proposed public realm improvements for five key locations in Walthamstow Town Centre and the estimated budget for delivery, as further detailed in Appendix 1.
- 1.7. The concept design has been presented to and endorsed by the Council's internal governance and investment boards. The overview is presented in Appendix 1.
- 1.8. With an agreed budget the scheme can progress through detailed design, procurement stages to enable phased delivery through 2022, aligning with wider plans for the town centre, including full opening of Soho Theatre: Walthamstow in early 2023.

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. Cabinet is recommended to:
  - 2.1.1. **Approve** a budget of £1.793m for capital investment in Walthamstow Town Centre's public realm, delegating authority to the Strategic Director of Economic Growth and Housing Delivery, in consultation with the Strategic Director of Finance and Governance, to finalise the sources of funding set out in this report.
  - 2.1.2. **Delegate** authority to the Strategic Director of Economic Growth and Housing Delivery to finalise the proposed procurement and delivery strategy.

## 3. PROPOSALS

### Background

- 3.1. The public realm proposals presented in this report have been developed to address both some of the challenges Walthamstow town centre faces – particularly the impact of the pandemic and perceptions and issues with public safety – as well as the opportunities to boost the town centre, enhance its profile as a cultural destination and accessibility via sustainable transport with associated socio-economic and environmental benefits.

### Boosting Walthamstow's Economic Recovery

- 3.2. Walthamstow, like all the borough's town centres, suffered significant reductions in footfall during the height of the pandemic lockdowns, with the knock-on impact for town centre businesses and the local economy.
- 3.3. Data recorded through town centre dashboards indicate that key measures including footfall, dwell-time, number of places visited, visit frequency remain lower than before the pandemic, albeit the Council's 'Choose Local' campaign has boosted local footfall.
- 3.4. Alongside this the town centre is predominantly visited by younger age groups – particularly between 20-40 years old – and there is a clear drop-off in visitor numbers after 6pm on most days, when much of the town centre closes for the evening.

### Creating a safe, welcoming and attractive town centre

- 3.5. The proposals build on the recommendations resulting from Walthamstow's designation as the Mayor of London's pilot for a Night-Time Enterprise Zone (NTEZ) in 2019.
- 3.6. The NTEZ, included engagement with visitors to the town centre, residents, and businesses, which highlighted concerns about the fear of crime, anti-social behaviour, poor signage causing difficulties in orientation and perceived poor levels of street lighting. 66% of survey respondents found the high street and wider town centre unappealing at night and 72% raising personal safety concerns.
- 3.7. This deters visits to the town centre in the evening, especially amongst younger people, older people and women. It also affects people who

work in the town centre during the evening or live in adjoining residential areas.

- 3.8. The transport interchange and Hoe Street area continues to be a focus for the Council's Neighbourhood Enforcement Teams, working with Community Safety and the Police.

### **Promoting Walthamstow as a Cultural Destination**

- 3.9. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, the Council continues to build on the momentum from Waltham Forest's status and year-long programme as the first London Borough of Culture in 2019, by enabling investment in inclusive cultural spaces and places across the borough.
- 3.10. In Walthamstow there is a significant opportunity to grow the town centre's evening economy, cementing it as an attractive, welcoming and safe destination both for residents and visitors from across London and beyond.
- 3.11. The Council has invested in Fellowship Square, the revitalised civic and cultural Town Hall campus, which launched in July 2021. Following its acquisition by the Council in 2019, restoration of the former EMD Cinema is progressing to create the 1,000-capacity cultural venue Soho Theatre: Walthamstow which will fully open in early 2023.
- 3.12. The business case for the theatre acquisition estimated that this will stimulate additional growth in Walthamstow's local economy of between £34m and £52m over the next ten years, providing a substantial boost to the local economic recovery. Business rates are forecast to grow £2m over the next ten years and the potential Gross Value Added (GVA) equates to £3.2m annually.
- 3.13. However, realising these socio-economic benefits and further developing Walthamstow as a cultural and creative destination is reliant not just on the success of the venue, but the overall town centre experience, with high-quality, safe, accessible public realm a key component.

### **Securing a return on investment for Council-owned assets**

- 3.14. Furthermore, the Council is a significant property owner and landlord in Walthamstow Town Centre with existing commercial assets at The Scene, Hatherley Mews, Central Parade, as well as its wider interests at Walthamstow Library. Moreover, it is the freeholder of several key regeneration sites, which are under construction or will come to fruition during 2022, including The Mall, Central House, Juniper House and Chestnuts House.
- 3.15. Investment in Walthamstow Town Centre's public realm will be important in realising the full financial and socio-economic benefits from these assets (as set out in the accompanying SAMP cabinet report), including continued and new commercial tenancies and inward investment in regeneration schemes.

### **Developing the public realm improvement proposals**

- 3.16. In early summer 2021, the Council commissioned leading design company Publica to develop the vision and concept designs for enhancing the public realm in Walthamstow town centre, particularly focused on the evening experience, lighting and wayfinding.
- 3.17. The catalyst for the commission was the success of the launch of Fellowship Square to the north of the town centre and the progress with refurbishing Soho Theatre Walthamstow (former EMD) ahead of a planned soft launch in Autumn 2022 and full opening in early 2023.
- 3.18. The proposals are focused on consistent use of high-quality materials, lighting and wayfinding to help ensure Walthamstow is viewed as a positive, safe and welcoming destination particularly as significantly more visitors will come into the town centre in the evening.
- 3.19. The focus for the proposals include:
- The gateway to the town centre for most visitors arriving at Walthamstow Central Transport Interchange, one of the highest footfall locations in the borough, with one of London's busiest underground stations outside Zones 1-2 and third busiest bus station.
  - Local routes, especially along Hoe Street which connects the transport interchange, high street, and key venues/destinations.
  - Soho Theatre Walthamstow's two public realm frontages on Hoe Street and Hatherley Mews.

### **Existing Lighting, Wayfinding and Safety Issues**

- 3.20. Improvements to lighting, wayfinding and areas of paving are required to create a sense of positive arrival and improved safety in Walthamstow Town Centre, particularly after dark. Most visitors to the regionally significant destination of Soho Theatre: Walthamstow will use Walthamstow Central transport interchange and walk via Rosebank Villas, the High Street and Hoe Street to access the venue.
- 3.21. At present, the experience involves walking through underlit areas with a lack of clear signage and wayfinding, impacting perceptions and raising concerns about safety in the town centre. Equally routes for residents to the town centre – including along Hoe Street – face similar challenges.
- 3.22. The proposed improvements would directly address concerns, highlighted through the NTEZ research, particularly the low quality of pedestrian-level illumination and poor signage. The improvements would encourage greater activation, contributing to a more consistent approach to the area's public realm and providing visual interest and excitement as the Council looks to promote Walthamstow as a major evening, visitor and cultural destination in London.

### **Lighting, Wayfinding and Paving Improvements**

- 3.23. The proposals in Walthamstow Town Centre include:

- Public realm enhancements along the primary routes between Walthamstow Central transport interchange and key destinations including Soho Theatre: Walthamstow and Fellowship Square.
  - Enhancements to the immediate vicinity of the Theatre, including the public realm in front of the Theatre, alongside the stage door in Council-owned Hatherley Mews (Tramworks) and local connections to Cairo Road.
- 3.24. The proposed works have been costed at £1.793m, including project management costs and allowance for contingency and inflation, which is described in more detail in Appendix 1.

### **Venue operation and visitor management**

- 3.25. The operating plans for the theatre are in development with Soho Theatre with a full access and crowd management strategy to be put in place to accommodate the venue's 1,000 capacity in the context of anticipated increase in evening footfall in this part of the town centre.
- 3.26. The public realm works in the immediate vicinity of the venue (including its Hoe Street frontage, the crossing over Hoe Street, Cairo Place on the other side of the road and Hatherley Mews) are developing to account for this increased footfall and crowd management. Hoe Street is a busy vehicle, bus, cycle and pedestrian route, and measures to ensure pedestrians and visitors to the venue can safely share the space are key, including widening the areas of existing paving where possible and prioritising pedestrians on the Hoe Street to Cairo Road zebra crossing.

### **Summary of works**

#### **Hatherley Mews**

- 3.27. **Lighting and wayfinding improvements:** New lighting along the underpass between Hoe Street and the Mews, introducing new artwork along the underpass wall, delivering a festoon canopy of lights across the mews' courtyard, installing a lighting projection onto the flank wall of the theatre, refurbishment of the heritage lanterns in the mews and a feature sign above the stage door entrance.
- 3.28. **Improved accessibility:** Introduction of a fully accessible route in new flag stone paving, partially incorporating the existing car parking, and the cutting, lifting, and re-laying of the higher quality cobbles from Hoe Street to the stage door on Hatherley Mews alongside the Soho Theatre frontage.
- 3.29. **Traffic calming:** To complement the wider Public Realm improvements, and increased footfall due to proximity to Soho Theatre, options for traffic management are included to create a better environment for the use of the Mews, and the potential for more creative future use, whilst balancing the need for deliveries, and servicing to the theatre and commercial units.

### **Cairo Place and Soho Theatre – Hoe Street Frontage**

- 3.30. Improvements are planned for the front of the theatre (in line with the S278 requirements), focused on creating an upgraded paving zone and enhancements to the existing zebra crossing.
- 3.31. **Crossing enhancements:** Enhancing this crossing will help to encourage active travel to connect to the cycle hub at Cairo Place, helping to reduce vehicular speeds along Hoe Street and encourage pedestrian priority, which will be an important part of the venue's visitor management plan.
- 3.32. **Lighting and paving enhancements:** New lighting and paving at the Cairo Road public space directly opposite the theatre and Hatherley Mews entrance. This would help create a visual connection to the theatre, allowing Cairo Place to act as an 'outdoor lobby' for the theatre and provide an active, well-lit location for cycle parking for the venue, as well as improving a key local route to the theatre and town centre.

### **Hoe Street & Central Parade**

- 3.33. **Hoe Street lighting and wayfinding improvements:** Illuminated wayfinding banners along Hoe Street, landmark tree by Soho Theatre: Walthamstow to have new integrated lighting and gobo projections along Hoe Street. The opportunity to introduce colourful crossings at the important junction with Hoe Street, High Street and Church Hill.
- 3.34. **Central Parade lighting improvements:** Up-lighting the canopy of Central Parade (Council-owned) to improve the lighting levels for existing businesses and further promote this as part of the Council's commercial estate in the town centre. The architectural detail of the Grade II listed building will be highlighted, with the clocktower lighting to be refurbished to include 'event' scenes.

### **The High Street & Scene**

- 3.35. **The High Street and The Scene lighting and wayfinding improvements:** Refurbished multi-head posts providing focused, warm ambient light to this part of the High Street. New lighting features to The Scene create more human scale lighting around existing planters and seating. Lighting and re-painting of selected retail shutters to provide a positive backdrop at night. Introduce clearer signage and associated lighting from the Transport Interchange along the route to the theatre via the High Street and Hoe Street. Potential for a new illuminated 'Walthamstow' sign to greet visitors approaching the Town Centre from Rosebank Villas.

### **Rosebank Villas**

- 3.36. **Rosebank Villas lighting and wayfinding improvements:** Refurbishment and upgrade of the skylar sails and spotlights above the pedestrian route. Introduction of wall lights highlights existing features and artworks. Opportunities for 'scene changes', where artworks, signage walls and sail colours are unified through light, colour and

graphics, helping to promote key destinations and programming in the town centre.

### **Programme of works**

- 3.37. Programming the work presents significant challenges in aligning with the construction programme for Soho Theatre and the full opening in Spring 2023. Reasons for this include:
- The work will need to be coordinated with the Soho Theatre: Walthamstow construction programme due to adjacencies of its frontages and Hatherley Mews sites and to minimise disruption to the newly opening theatre.
  - Current material and labour shortages mean that lead-in time for any significant works are extended.
- 3.38. The programme is being developed so that works are phased in order of priority, how they impact on the Theatre and wider construction projects and the vitality of the Town Centre.

### **Procurement Strategy**

- 3.39. It is proposed that the main public realm works will be procured and delivered through the Council's Highways maintenance contract. The term contractor delivers highway improvement schemes throughout the Borough and can be appointed within the terms of their agreed term maintenance contract.
- 3.40. A report will be presented to the Council's Strategic Commissioning Board to confirm and agree this procurement strategy. Any specialist consultant input required will be sub-consulted to the term maintenance contractor. Bespoke elements such as artwork and murals will be tendered separately following the Council's procurement guidelines.

### **Funding strategy**

- 3.41. The proposals draw together a range of interventions, including works to:
- Paving and surfacing
  - Lighting on the public highway and buildings
  - Signage and wayfinding
  - CCTV
  - Cycle parking
  - Planting
  - Public art
- 3.42. It is proposed that funding is sourced from a combination of developer contributions including Community Infrastructure Levy, section 106, Carbon Offset Funding where the criteria for allocation and spend can be met, supplemented by Council capital funding for enhancements to Council assets within the proposals.
- 3.43. With delivery required during 2022, a forward funding approach in lieu of upcoming developer contributions may be required.

- 3.44. With Cabinet approval, it is proposed that the decision on the final allocations of funding is agreed by the Strategic Director for Economic Growth and Housing Delivery, in consultation with the Strategic Director for Finance, through the Council's existing internal governance – including Developer Contributions Board and Capital Strategy & Asset Management Group.
- 3.45. Forecast spend for 2021/22 financial year is £140,000 with £1,653,000 for 2022/23 financial year.

### **Social Value**

- 3.46. The proposed programme of works will have direct and wider benefits for the Council's commercial assets in Walthamstow Town Centre, while also helping boost the town centre public realm's overall appearance, perception and safety, helping increase footfall, dwell-time and associated socio-economic benefits, enhancing high street regeneration.
- 3.47. The Council is freehold owner of Soho Theatre: Walthamstow, Hatherley Mews/Tramworks, commercial property at The Scene, Central Parade and – across the wider area – Walthamstow Library, The Mall & Town Square, Central House, Juniper House and Chestnuts House.

## **4. OPTIONS & ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

- 4.1. An alternative option would be to not deliver the proposed public realm enhancement programme. This would represent a lost opportunity to build on the momentum from London Borough of Culture, the Night Time Enterprise Zone and launch of Fellowship Square to further maximise the local economic impact of the launch of Soho Theatre Walthamstow and promote the town centre as a cultural visitor destination, with associated benefits, including employment and training opportunities. Importantly, for post-pandemic economic and jobs recovery this investment enhances local regeneration.
- 4.2. An alternative option would be to deliver smaller scale public realm interventions in fewer locations. This would reduce the impact and be a lost opportunity to celebrate the launch of Soho Theatre: Walthamstow and to promote the borough's cultural and evening economy assets as part of a wider approach to promoting the town centre as a destination.

## **5. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY PRIORITIES (AND OTHER NATIONAL OR LOCAL POLICIES OR STRATEGIES)**

- 5.1. The Council has set out ambitious plans for Walthamstow Town Centre in its Local Plan and plans for economic recovery of Walthamstow High Street in the High Street Action Plan and the Economic Recovery Strategy. The proposals for public realm improvements will support these Council policies, and the vision that Walthamstow Town Centre will be a vibrant social, economic and environmentally sustainable urban

town centre. This is supported by the policies in the Council's draft new Local Plan to ensure Walthamstow Town Centre will continue to thrive as a vibrant and active Major Town Centre with a thriving night-time economy.

- 5.2. Walthamstow was designated as the Mayor of London's pilot for a Night-Time Enterprise Zone (NTEZ) in 2019, and Waltham Forest was London's first Borough of Culture in 2019. The proposals are an opportunity to build on the opportunities from these two initiatives.
- 5.3. Furthermore, the proposals will contribute to delivering the objectives of the Council's new Public Service Strategy, particularly creation of 15-minute neighbourhoods and demonstrating confidence in the future of Walthamstow, especially post-pandemic.

## **6. CONSULTATION**

- 6.1. The proposals for Walthamstow public realm works have developed from several consultations, including through development of the Council's new Local Plan.
- 6.2. During the Mayor of London's Night-Time Enterprise Zone (NTEZ) pilot in Walthamstow in 2019, consultation took place with residents and local businesses, which have informed the current proposals.
- 6.3. Further consultation with key stakeholders will be undertaken as the design proposals are developed and delivered, including with local businesses through the Walthamstow Business Forum, Soho Theatre, TfL, police and safer neighbourhood teams.

## **7. RESET**

- 7.1. The Walthamstow public realm improvements will contribute to the Council's reset programme. The proposals will improve placemaking and enhance the public realm of the Town Centre to enable safe and well-designed public spaces for visitors and the local community.
- 7.2. The Walthamstow public realm improvements will support the development of a thriving 15-minute neighbourhood in Walthamstow and tackle the Climate Emergency by promoting public routes for walking and cycling, particularly improving the pedestrian experience at night, while calming traffic within Hatherley Mews and increasing the number and quality of cycle stands in Cairo Place.
- 7.3. Improvements to the public realm adjacent to key Council-owned assets will help encourage footfall to these buildings and the wider Town Centre. This will encourage economic activity in the Town Centre, helping to support the creation of local jobs and opportunities in Walthamstow.
- 7.4. The proposals address the Climate Emergency through promoting active travel and use of public transport and taking opportunities to

replace existing Town Centre lighting with energy-efficient LED lighting and using sustainable construction materials and methods.

## **8. IMPLICATIONS**

### **8.1. Finance, Value for Money and Risk**

8.1.1 Financing options are being explored to support the Walthamstow Public Realm Improvements. There are contributions from the Carbon Offset Fund, S106 developer contributions and the Community Infrastructure Levy subject to approval from the Developer Contributions Board and Cabinet.

8.1.2 Balance of the funding would be from Capital Receipts or borrowing. Based on the Capital Programme forecast at Period 7, there is sufficient headroom to accommodate this expenditure within the existing overall programme envelope. In the absence of the identification of other funding sources, the total required capital expenditure of £1.793m is to be funded from borrowing.

8.1.3 Each proposed element will need further development and review as the programme is confirmed, with phased delivery. Funding the complete package is envisaged to require a combination of funding:

- Developer contributions (potentially CIL, s106, COF) - focusing on elements within the public realm
- Council capital funding – primarily associated with enhancements to Council-owned assets
- Wider funding streams – including consideration of PSDS, Salix where the case can be demonstrated and opportunities to secure external funding e.g. through GLA NTEZ initiative, businesses and investors in the town centre.

8.1.4 Forecast spend for 2021/22 financial year is £140,000 with £1.653m in 2022/23.

### **8.2 Legal**

8.2.1 The Council as Highways Authority has a duty, under section 41 of the Highways Act 1980, to maintain certain – defined - highways within its boundaries. It also possesses wider powers under section 62 of the 1980 Act to execute works to improve the highways it has a duty to maintain, in addition to many other specific powers conferred by the 1980 Act including the power to provide lighting under section 97.

8.2.2 The Council also has the general power of competence under section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 and the powers under section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 to do anything calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of its functions.

### **8.3 Equalities and Diversity**

8.3.1 The Council must take into account its wider Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under s.149 of the Equality Act 2010 when making its decision.

Members are referred to the Equality Impact Assessment screening in Appendix 2.

- 8.3.2 An initial screening exercise of the equality impact of this decision was undertaken. It determined that there will be a positive impact on the Council's equality duty.

#### **8.4 Sustainability (including climate change, health, crime and disorder)**

- 8.4.1 The plans will contribute positively to the Council's efforts to address the Climate Emergency, most particularly by:

(a) Enhancing sustainable and accessible transport provision: The proposals will help encourage use of public transport by improving lighting and wayfinding around the Walthamstow Transport Interchange. Improving safety at night through improved lighting will help encourage people to use public transport. We will promote active travel through providing new and enhanced cycle stands on Cairo Road.

(b) Replacing existing lighting in Walthamstow Town Centre with more energy efficient LED lighting.

(c) Investing in the Town Centre public realm, contributing to the development of Walthamstow as an exemplar of the Council's priority to create 15-minute neighbourhoods. Improved public realm will encourage pedestrian movement around the Town Centre.

(e) Including sustainable materials and reclaimed or recycled materials wherever possible in the design proposals

(f) Introducing planting to Cairo Place will contribute towards increased biodiversity and reduced air pollution in the vicinity.

#### **8.5 Council Infrastructure**

- 8.5.1 If agreed, these proposals will deliver enhanced Council infrastructure through improvements to the public realm in Walthamstow Town Centre. These enhancements will bring economic benefits to the local area and help to increase the value of existing council assets.

- 8.5.2 At this stage, an allowance has been made to accommodate ongoing maintenance costs for the proposed public realm improvements.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION (as defined by Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985)**

None.