



Council

12th December 2013

Report of the Cabinet Member for Transport, Planning and Sustainability

Reinvigorate York, Kings Square Improvement Project: Petition

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to inform members of a petition with over 1,000 signatures submitted to the Council on the subject of the Kings Square improvement project, which is part of the Reinvigorate York initiative. The report describes the nature of Reinvigorate York and the Kings Square project. It then summarises the petition and provides some background to the petition as an informative

Reinvigorate York

2. The Reinvigorate York initiative is part of a wider programme of work being developed to create a world class, diverse and dynamic city centre. Reinvigorate York aims to improve the public open spaces and movement in the city centre with the following objectives in mind:
 - Reinvigorating the city centre economy.
 - Increasing footfall in the city centre.
 - Improving the overall quality of life for residents.
 - Increasing the sense of York as a special place.
 - Maintaining York as a top tourist destination.
3. The six city centre improvement projects are:-
 - Parliament Street (including Piccadilly/ Coppergate junction)
 - King's Square
 - Exhibition Square/ St. Leonard's Place/ Bootham Bar
 - Fossgate/ Pavement
 - Duncombe Place/ Blake Street
 - Micklegate
4. In addition to the project sites there are a number of wider city centre improvement programmes such as improved street furniture, lighting and wayfinding.

5. On 4 September 2012 Cabinet approved investing £3,300,000 in the Reinivorate York programme.

Kings Square Improvement Project

6. Kings Square is the first project site of the programme. Please refer to annex 1 for a proposed site plan. Phase 1 started on site in September 2013. Phase 1 included work to the main central area and the carriageway known as Kings Court. This is now complete and there is a break in construction to accommodate Christmas trading and winter. Phase 2 will complete the project by resurfacing the carriageway and refurbishing the raised area. It will commence in March 2014 and will be complete before the end of June before the Tour de France in July. Please refer to annex 2 for a proposed phasing plan.

The Petition

7. The petition is titled “Keep The Cobbles”
8. It has 2130 signatures
9. It states: “I the undersigned, wish for the cobbles & cart tracks (including post 1950 reconstructions of history) in York to be kept as a beautiful historic inspiration and experience of times gone by. Destroy the litigation culture not our heritage.”

Background to the Petition

10. The architect leading the project, met the petitioner on site on 23rd September 2013. The central concerns of the petitioner as understood by this officer are highlighted below and subsequent paragraphs explain the context to these issues:
 - The wish to keep the square as it was with a traditional look, although it was accepted by the petitioner that the current layout was neither historically authentic or old (having been laid down in the 1970s).
 - The wish not to have smooth surfaces.
 - The wish not to spend money.
 - The feeling that people were unheard and poorly informed about the proposals.
11. The layout and materials of Kings Square prior to the Reinivorate York project: Research in the photographic records show that the

square in the late 19th century was occupied by a church and surrounding the building were stone pavements and a carriageway in stone setts, without cart tracks. The church was demolished in around 1937 and since then the square has had a number of layouts including all tarmac roads in the 1960s. In around 1975 a repaving scheme laid granite features to look like “cart tracks” and stone setts in the carriageway known as Kings Court (next to what is now “York chocolate Story” building). Refer to annex 3 for a number of photographs.

12. The new layout and repaving materials: The proposed layout is quite similar to the one of the 1970s with Kings Court maintained as a carriageway feature (refer to annex 1), although the surface is continuous throughout the square with no step down off the kerb into a carriageway. Surface materials have changed slightly: Where stone setts and cart tracks in the southern end of Kings Court were missing and damaged they were reinstated. In the main section of Kings Court stone setts and the granite feature “cart tracks” were replaced with granite setts. All other materials in the square are either granite (setts, kerbs and guidance/blister/hazard warning paving) or new sawn yorkstone (setts and paving slabs)

13. Smooth Surfaces: The petition is titled “Keep the Cobbles”. For the purposes of definition, “cobble” are naturally shaped small rounded stones- normally either from river beds or glacial moraine deposits. They were traditionally used as a form of carriageway construction. No cobbles have been removed from Kings Square as a result of this project. The stone removed were stone setts (mostly hard sandstone) that were machine cut in the 1970s. They could possibly have been laid as “tumbled” which is to artificially introduce wear by tumbling in a machine. They have also been worn over the decades since being laid.
 This project has designed Kings Square to have a smoother surface for a number of reasons. The petition implies that it is to avoid litigation. This is a very incomplete impression. City of York Council commissioned an external consultant to audit the city centre and make recommendations to improve the accessibility for all users (*York City Centre Access and Mobility Audit September 2012*). A diverse range of groups that had mobility issues gave evidence of experiencing difficulties with damaged and uneven surfaces; most of these were people on foot. The audit strongly recommended to avoid building surfaces that were uneven and to rectify damaged surfaces. Both of these were aspirations of the Kings Square project. In addition to this, Kings Square has been relaid as a much stronger

surface which is aided by utilising uniform shaped stone incorporating small joint widths- something not practical with old uneven stones of varying quality.

14. Investment: The investment has been agreed by Cabinet for the whole programme on 4 September 2012. The final details of Kings Square design scheme were agreed by Cabinet on 2nd April 2012
15. Consultation: A significant programme of public consultation has been undergone for the Kings Square project. The main public consultation ran 04th -25th Feb 2013, but before then there were a number of public and stakeholder informative and feedback events. Public consultation made it clear that the square was going to be comprehensively repaved in new natural materials that removed uneven surfaces. The findings of the consultation were reported to Cabinet on 2nd April 2013. Please refer to annex 4 for details.

Options

16. This is primarily an information report, requiring no decision from Council.

Council Plan

17. The option outlined above accords with the following priorities from the Council Plan:
 - Create jobs and grow the economy
 - Get York moving
 - Build strong communities
 - Protect the environment

Implications

18. The following implications have been assessed.
 - **Financial** – *None*
 - **Human Resources (HR)** – *None*
 - **Equalities** – *The design work has been founded on the recommendations of a York city centre audit by Centre for Accessible Environments, titled “York City Centre Access and Mobility Audit September 2012”*
 - **Legal** – *None*

- **Crime and Disorder** - *None*
- **Information Technology (IT)** - *None*
- **Property** - *None*
- **Other – Health & Safety:** *A road scheme Safety Audit has been carried out at design stage*

Risk Management

19. In compliance with the Council's risk management strategy, the main risks of this project are:

- Reputational risk of a project not fulfilling the objectives of the project brief.
- Physical, Reputational & Financial risks arising from failure to comply with the laws and regulations relating to the design of public spaces.
- Financial risks associated with potential overspend.
- Reputational risks associated with disruption to local businesses during the construction period.

12. Measured in terms of impact and likelihood, together with mitigation, the risks associated with this report have been assessed as medium requiring monitoring.

Recommendations

13. This report is to inform members of the petitions over 1000 signatures on the subject of Kings Square and no recommendation is required.

Contact Details

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**Report
Approved**



Date 4/12/13

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

N/A

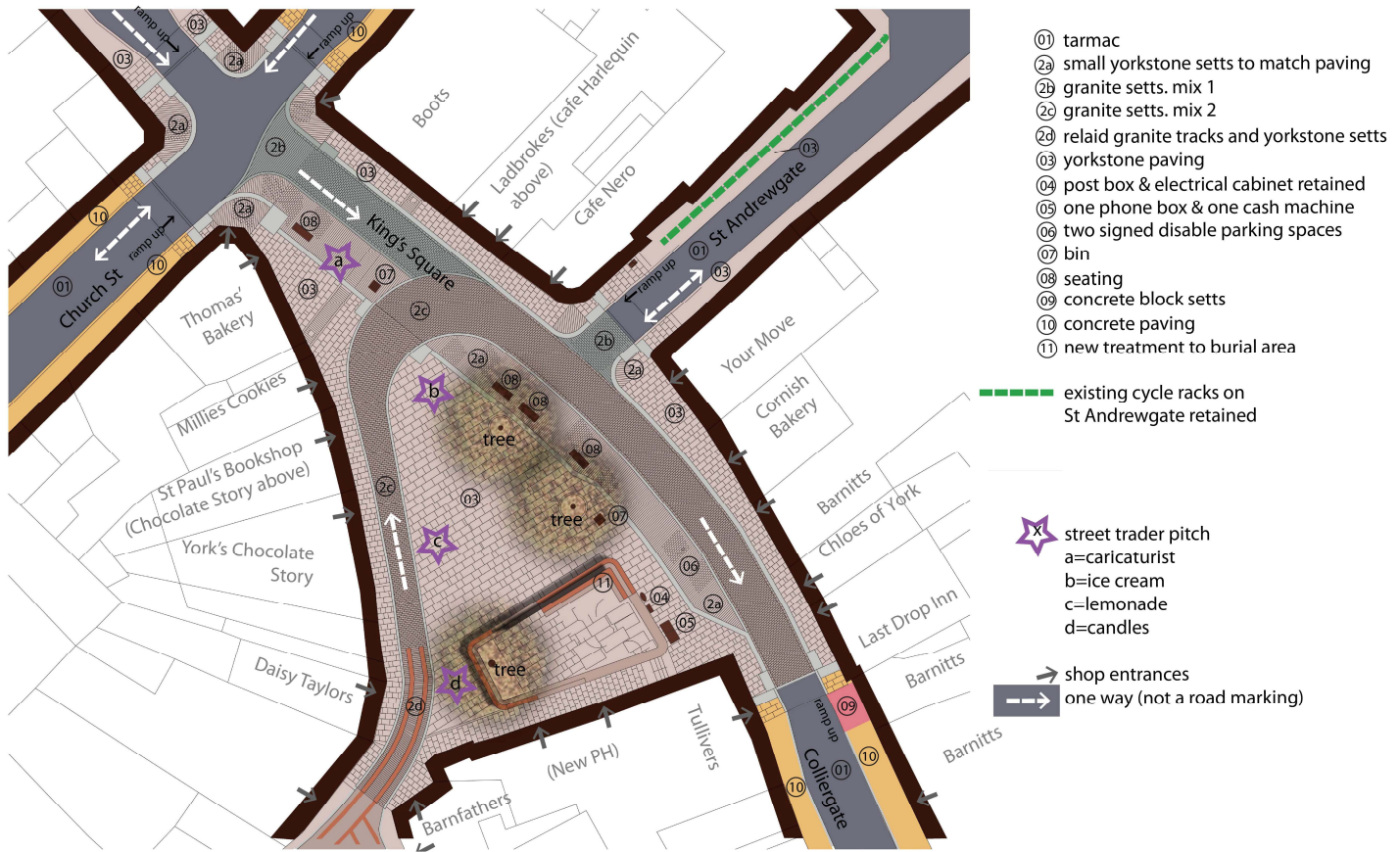
Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: None

Annexes 1-4

Annex 1: Final Scheme



Annex 2: Phasing Plan



Annex 3: Historic Photographs



1895 Newgate



1908 Kings Square



Kings Court circa 1960



Kings Court 2012

Annex 4: Public Consultation Plan (04-25 Feb 2013)

Business User Group was set up comprising adjacent businesses, stall license holders, performers and entertainers, and the following events were run:

- o Workshop 07/12/12 @ Bedern Hall to gather information on use of space, tensions and aspirations to inform the draft scheme
- o Presentation 01/02/13 @ Bedern Hall to present and explain the draft scheme, and options within it, in advance of the consultation

Press Release resulted in features in both internal (Colin/Buzz) and external media features, including:

- o 'Major revamp plan for popular city-centre square' The Press 31/01/13
- o 'Concerns raised over proposed King's Square revamp' The Press 01/02/13
- o 'How can we improve Kings Square' oneandother.com 07/02/13

Guildhall Ward Committee attended 28/11/12. The Neighbourhood Management team promoted the consultation online via Guildhall YourWard, Guildhall Ward webpage and Facebook channels.

CYC Website A new webpage www.york.gov.uk/reinvigorateyork hosted the exhibition boards and consultation leaflet and explained how people could get involved. Consultation finder hosted online questions www.york.gov.uk/consultation

Presentations Conservation Area Advisory Panel 05/02/13, met partially sighted representative onsite 21/02/13.

Reference copies were available at York Explore Library and Learning Centre and City of York Council receptions.

Summary leaflet presented the draft scheme, options, timescales, where to find out more, how to respond and what next (900 copies). These were made available online, via surrounding business outlets, Council receptions and York Explore Library and Learning Centre.

Exhibition boards were placed in York Explore Library and Learning Centre for the duration of the consultation, and the scheme architect was available 9am-4pm on 09/02/13 to discuss the scheme.

Electronic mailing was sent to stakeholders including Councillors, Ward Members, City of York Council Officers, Without Walls, inclusivity user groups, Visit York, City Team, Conservation Area Advisory Panel, York Civic Trust, York Environment Forum and English Heritage amongst others.