

Report of the Corporate Director of Economy and Place

## **Removal of Parliament Street Fountain and Saint Sampson Square Toilets**

### **Summary**

1. York is one of the most visited places in the UK with over 7 million visitors and each year hosts a number of events and festivals. Parliament Street is a key part of the city centre; it is not just a focus for retail but hosts many of the events and festivals that make York such a vibrant thriving city.
2. However, Parliament Street has a number of items of redundant, life expired public realm infrastructure that blight the space. The fountain at the centre of Parliament Street has not worked for a number of years and the toilet block at Saint Sampson Square is no longer used.
3. The fountain is a landmark and key focal and meeting point for the city. Therefore it is appropriate to consider how to replace the fountain with more than just paving. This is a more significant decision for the city and it is proposed to establish a task and finish group including York Businesses Improvement District; Make it York and the Civic Trust to establish permanent replacement proposals.
4. This report recommends the removal of both the Fountain and the Toilet Block with a temporary feature installed at the former fountain site. The BID have commissioned design proposals for a floral display and additional seating to coincide with this years floral celebrations. The removal of the toilet block is subject to planning permission.

### **Recommendation**

5. It is recommended:
  - Option 3 - To remove the toilet block and fountain replacing the Fountain with a intermediate floral display and establish a task and finish group to bring forward proposals for the use of the space

created by the removal of the fountain. These proposals will be brought back to the Executive Member. This is the recommended option as it will improve the public realm of Parliament Street and encourage meaningful engagement on the future uses of the Fountain Site.

Reason: To improve the public realm of Parliament Street and support the economic growth of the city.

## **Background**

6. The toilet block at Saint Sampson Square was has not been used since 2010, it offers no value to the public it merely houses some electrical and mechanical plant that can be removed/relocated.
7. However, below is a list of the public toilets within this city:
  - Coppergate Shopping Centre
  - Nunnery Lane
  - Silver Street
  - St Georges Fields
  - St Leonard's Place
  - Tanner Row
  - Union Terrace
8. All of the above toilets offer disabled access. This in addition to the many toilet facilities contained within the businesses; restaurants and cafe's of the city
9. This year will see the Council invest £70,000 to refurbish the public toilets in the Coppergate Centre and on Silver Street.
10. The toilet block does not complement the historic setting of Saint Sampson Square.
11. Its removal will enable the square to be better used offering increased space for the temporary cultural, recreational and retail events that happen in the city. The water and drain connections will remain to allow toilet facilities to be provided for such events if needed.

12. The building is greater than 50 cubic metres and therefore planning permission will be required for its demolition.
13. The fountain was installed back in the 1990s. Key issues about the fountain are:
  - The fountain has not worked for a number of years due to failure of the associated plant
  - It is not certain whether the fountain could be restored but, if it were possible, the final capital cost would need to be established following excavations and in light of a full scheme design. It has however been estimated the cost is circa £13k.
  - It should also be noted that fountains carry significant running / maintenance costs for which no budget currently exists. This cost has been estimated at £10k per year.
14. The design of the fountain is a problem for a number of reasons some of which attract anti-social behaviour.
15. Due to the way it re-circulates water from a tank under the fountain it can be filled with washing up liquid, this used to happen up to four times a week. The resulting foam would then spread through the city once reaching down to Boots on Coney Street. The fountain was also contaminated with food and clothes dye.
16. The base of the fountain became an impromptu paddling pool used by children and dogs but was not designed as such and the structure was also used to hide drug paraphernalia. Sadly it was not only the dogs that urinated in the fountain.
17. The fountain when in operation caused its own complaints as the wind would blow water onto passers by.
18. When the fountain was operational it was a drain on operational resources in addition to the persistent anti social behaviour there was the need to test the water and treat it on a weekly basis for such things as legionnaires disease. It also required a required a monthly deep clean to stop algal growth. The budget for the operation of the fountain no longer exists.
19. Fountains are a success in other cities and indeed within York, but are a different design so as not to lend themselves to the same levels of antisocial behaviour or ongoing maintenance and revenue funding requirements.

20. The fountain is a valued landmark and meeting point for the people of the city, as such it is not considered appropriate to just remove the fountain without identifying a replacement. Planning Permission is not required for the demolition of the fountain.
21. A permanent replacement will need to be considered by key stakeholders including the Civic Trust, York Business Improvement District, Make it York and will need to be sufficiently iconic that it may well require planning permission.
22. The current toilet block does not hinder the use of Saint Sampson Square significantly. However, any replacement feature for the fountain could be more flexible to increase the event space within the city for the cultural events and festivals; this is also an income generation opportunity for the city.

### **Consultation**

23. York BID and Make it York have both been consulted and support the proposal.
24. The Civic Trust Planning Committee have been briefed about the proposal to remove the redundant public realm facilities. They support the principle of removal of the fountain and Saint Sampson toilet block. The Committee did observe that the reinstatement (of the ground surfaces) or replacement (with other street furniture) would have to be correct and in keeping with the historic character of the area.
25. Public interest in the fountain is significant. In 2015 we received two petitions with a combined total of over 600 signatures calling for the fountain to be restored to life.
26. The Joseph Rowntree Society have shown interest in the site as a possible location for an artwork to the Rowntree family's work, see Annex A
27. A letter has also been received in support of a band stand – see Annex B

### **Options for Consideration**

28. Option 1 – To only remove the Toilet Block, and refurbish the existing fountain. The cost of refurbishment is only an estimate based on investigations so far. Ongoing revenue funding would be required.

Capital: 65K

Annual Revenue cost: 10k

29. Option 2 – To demolish the toilets but to wait on the demolition of the Fountain until a permanent replacement has been identified, this is not the recommended option as a temporary replacement will enable discussion about the future use of the space and the opportunity for income generation from Parliament Street is reduced

Capital: 52K

Revenue: None

30. Option 3 – To remove the toilet block and fountain replacing the fountain with a temporary use and establish a task and finish group to bring forward proposals for the use of the space created by the removal of the fountain. These proposals will be brought back to the Executive Member. This is the recommended option as it will improve the public realm of Parliament Street and encourage meaningful engagement on the future uses of the Fountain Site.

Capital: 87K

Revenue: None

### **Council Plan**

31. The above proposal contributes to the Council Plan of:
- A prosperous city for all,
  - A council that listens to residents

### **Implications**

32. This report has the following implications:

**Financial** – The cost estimates are as follows

- removal of the Fountain (£35k)
- removal of the Toilet Block (£52k)
- repair of the current fountain is an estimate and subject to further investigation and commissioning (circa 13K)

- The ongoing revenue cost will need a budget allocation (10K per annum)

York Businesses Improvement District have agreed to 50% funding up to a maximum of £50K for the removal of both the Fountain and the Toilet Block as well as the installation of a temporary feature at the fountain. See Annex C

The council contribution will be funded from the Built Environment Fund allocation

**Human Resources** – None

**Equalities** – None.

**Legal** – None

**Crime and Disorder** – None

**Information Technology** - None

**Land** – None

**Other** – None

**Risk Management**

## **Contact Details**

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### **Date:**

4 April 2018

### **Specialist Implications Officer(s)**

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**For further information please contact the author of the report.**

**Background Papers:**

**Annexes:**

Annex A Joseph Rowntree Society Letter

Annex B Letter of Support regarding a band stand

Annex C Letter of funding support from York BiD