

PUBLIC REALM UPDATE – CLLR RODDY HOGARTH, COMMISSIONER OF THE PUBLIC REALM

People & Places Advisory Committee – 20 June 2023

Report of: Chief Officer People & Places

Status: For Information

Also considered by:

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary: Cllr Roddy Hogarth will be updating Members on the work of the Commissioner for the Public Realm.

This report supports the Key Aim of: Community & Corporate Plan

Portfolio Holder:

Contact Officer(s): Kelly Webb, Ext. 7474

Recommendation to People & Places Advisory Committee

To note the report

Introduction and Background

Introduction and Background

- 1 In early 2020, the Council appointed a Public Realm Commissioner, who will oversee the delivery of a public realm programme for the district. The Public Realm Commission sits within the People and Places portfolio.
- 2 The commission is not decision-making body, but will provide support in an advisory capacity. The commission's role is to:
 - Understand current public spaces across the district and what purpose or uses they serve.
 - Identify what new developments are planned and has the public realm been considered, designed or planned.
 - Understand what makes good public space.
 - Facilitate funding and other philanthropic contributions to enable the delivery of an annual public realm programme.
 - Ensure public art celebrates the particular story of a place and engages with the community in its making.
 - Submit an annual report describing the activities of the previous year.

3. There will be an advert going out for new volunteers who help to deliver the aims identified, supports the Commissioner. Volunteers assist the Commissioner in the work towards the creation and retention of good quality public space in the district.

Commissioner for the Public Realm

4. End of Term Report

My thanks to Sarah Robson, Kelly Webb and Yulia La-Kruz and the entire Communities Team for their support during my first term as the Public Realm Commissioner.

A Public Realm Panel was also appointed, comprised of 10 volunteers. I am indebted to each one of them for their advice, input and practical support. A new panel will be appointed in the near future.

Originally conceived as the Commissioner for Public Art in 2019, the role evolved into a broader remit for the Public Realm which was then adopted by Council in 2020, just at the start of the pandemic.

The pandemic affected the rollout of the Commission as other matters took priority. Nevertheless, by June 2022 several projects had been initiated/completed:

- Photos of locations around the District highlighting the best and worst elements of the Public Realm
- The first of an annual school video challenge at Knole Academy later expanded to Milestone Academy and Grange Park.
- Repairs and maintenance to the artwork in the Shambles and the preparation of a long-term plan for the preservation of the artwork.
- The use of s.106 funds for a sculpture at M&S.
- The replacement of the skateboard park in Swanley.
- Re-establishment of the In Bloom competition and awards.
- A bee/pollinator project at Milestone Academy

Lessons learned:

- 1) It is difficult (but not impossible) to be a Commissioner without any budget with which to commission work.
- 2) The Planning Application process, governed by NPPF and NPPG, is not amenable to such a role. Planning Officers have their own methods of evaluating the Public Realm. Pre-app discussions preclude the involvement of the Commissioner. The result is that major impacts on the Public Realm occur without any influence from the Commission. That means there have been lost opportunities.

- 3) The District is blessed with many people willing to volunteer, bringing with them enthusiasm and skill sets. The Commissioner will do more to encourage volunteers.

In conclusion:

What was intended to be a 4-year project was limited by circumstance to about 18 months. However, the pandemic highlighted the immense importance of the District's public realm to the wellbeing of residents and visitors alike.

The next 4-year term must be used to identify and deliver enhancements. We must create unexpected opportunities.

Key Implications

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

There is no financial implication to the Council, projects are either through S.106 money or funding is sought.

Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Net Zero Implications

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the council's ambition to be Net Zero by 2030. There is no perceived impact regarding either an increase or decrease in carbon emissions in the district, or supporting the resilience of the natural environment

Wellbeing

This update supports wellbeing.

Conclusions

For the Committee to note the report.

Appendices - None

Sarah Robson

Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer – People & Places