

Cabinet – 12 April 2006

Conservation- led regeneration – approval to submit an application for Townscape Heritage Initiative Funding

Portfolio: Councillor Adrian Andrew, Regeneration

Service Area: Regeneration

Wards: All

Forward Plan: Yes

Summary of report

This report seeks Cabinet's Authority to prepare and submit a Stage 1 Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) funding application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for Willenhall Town Centre for submission in May 2006.

The Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) is a HLF grant programme under which schemes are developed to regenerate the historic environment in towns and cities across the United Kingdom.

The THI promotes conservation as an essential part of urban regeneration and HLF support between 17 and 25 new THI schemes nationally each year. HLF's priorities for support under the THI schemes are based around historic areas which are, or about to become, Conservation Areas which are suffering from decline, extensive disrepair, which can demonstrate deprivation and where it is considered the scheme will contribute to a wider strategy for regeneration of the area in order to benefit the wider community.

Applications for THI Schemes are judged against criteria that are based upon these broad aims.

Following the assessment of these criteria, Willenhall District Centre has been identified as demonstrating the most robust case for investment from a THI initiative.

Recommendations

That Cabinet authorise officers to prepare and submit a Stage 1 Townscape Heritage Initiative funding application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for Willenhall Town Centre for submission in May 2006.

Resource and legal considerations

Under a THI scheme a “common fund” of pooled resources is made up of various sources of funding, including a contribution from HLF. These funds are used by the managing partnership to make grant awards to support a series of individual projects and activities that together make up the THI scheme.

The common fund can include contributions that will only support certain types of project or work within the overall THI scheme. The common fund does not include contributions from property owners to the cost of work to their properties.

The highest priorities for THI grant aid are:

- a) structural and external repair of historic buildings which are still being used,
- b) repair and conversion for new uses of empty historic buildings

HLF will contribute between £250,000 and £2 million to the common fund of each THI on the proviso that their contribution does not represent more than 50% of the total value of the common fund. Although, under exceptional circumstances, HLF may consider contributing up to a maximum of 75% of the common fund.

THI applications are made in two stages. Stage 1 is for outline applications for funding which provides broad justification for the proposed THI scheme. If this is successful, a 75% development grant up to £25,000 is made available to support the development of a detailed delivery plan, which is submitted as the final Stage 2 submission. The deadline for the submission of Stage 1 applications is 8th May 2006.

The outcome of the Stage 1 applications will be known by 17 October 2006. Stage 2 applications will need to be submitted by 17 October 2007.

Decisions on Stage 2 applications would be expected February 2008 and funding would commence in April 2008.

If approved, the THI scheme would run for a total of five years with the common fund being offered to eligible properties within the first three years and all work being completed and claims paid within five years.

On the assumption that the Stage 1 application is successful, as part of the Stage 2 application it will be necessary to identify the “match funding” to support the delivery of the THI programme. Efforts will be made to draw together a range of options for funding, including the Council’s mainstream Capital Programme, Advantage West Midlands and “Walsall Helping Future Generations” (VAT Shelter) Company and Cabinet’s approval for the final Stage 2 submission will be sought prior to its submission, which will set the detailed financial implications at that time.

Citizen impact

The preservation and enhancement of a conservation area creates an asset that is available for all members of the community to learn from and enjoy. Walsall has a strong track record in the successful delivery of similar conservation-led regeneration schemes e.g. Bloxwich District Centre, Bradford Street in Walsall Town Centre, etc. These schemes have made a significant contribution towards the community regeneration of Walsall by helping to create a sense of place and by promoting new economic uses for historically important buildings.

Community safety

Any future improvements brought forward through a THI programme will be designed to comply with “secured by design” principles.

Environmental impact

The Borough's built heritage is an important resource that should be preserved and enhanced for the benefit of future generations. Investment in established town centres can remove the need for out-of-centre development and can reduce the need to travel, especially by car.

The following items are eligible for THI funding:

- authentic restoration of architectural features to historic buildings and their settings (as long as the building is, or will be, repaired to a high standard);
- appropriate new buildings for gap sites (sites where buildings have been demolished) where they are critical to restoring the character of the historic area and as long as this would not harm the use of historic buildings in the area;
- repair and authentic restoration of features lost from public spaces when they make a contribution to the character of the historic area;
- professional fees, planning fees, non-recoverable VAT and costs associated with compliance with national planning policy guidance on archaeology;
- activities that involve people who have not been involved with the heritage before, or are designed to widen knowledge, understanding and awareness of the heritage;
- training in conservation skills as part of the THI scheme;
- extra costs of running a THI scheme, including employing project officers or consultants,
- and other running costs directly arising from the THI such as marketing;
- any other research, evaluation and strategic planning work needed to safeguard the long-term approach to conservation

Following an assessment of the THI criteria it is felt that Willenhall district centre is the priority for consideration of the establishment of a THI. This is on the basis that:-

- Willenhall has the greatest concentration of historic buildings of any of the borough's centres.

- the threat to Willenhall's special character is cause and a symptom of wider economic and social problems and is an area where public funding is needed to tackle this decline.
- A previous conservation-led regeneration scheme was successfully completed in Market Place during 2000-2003 but greater investment in the historic building stock is required in order to act as a catalyst for the regeneration of the District Centre and the wider Willenhall area.

Performance and risk management issues

(i) Performance Management Issues

The sustainable regeneration of the borough's District Centres is a priority for the Council and specifically the Regeneration Directorate.

(ii) Risk Management Issues:-

Risk 1 – *Failure to obtain support for the initiative*

This is considered to be a low risk in view of the level of community support for the Regeneration of Willenhall.

Risk 2 – *Failure to attract sufficient resources to fund priorities*

This risk is considered to be low. Regeneration for the District Centres is a priority for the approved Strategic Regeneration Framework and is a key theme within the Local Area Agreement. Subject to the approval of Stage 1 development funding, Cabinet's approval will be sought prior to the submission of the Stage 2 Delivery Plan, which will set the detailed financial implications for the Council.

Equality implications

HLF funding via THI programmes are to be targeted at "disadvantaged communities", based on an assessment of deprivation indicators. These areas must be able to demonstrate that they have heritage assets, which can benefit from conservation-led economic regeneration initiatives.

HLF recognise the essential relationship between the economic vitality and prosperity of an area and the condition of its building fabric. All property owners within the defined THI areas will be able to apply for grant assistance under the terms of the scheme.

Consultation

Consultation on the Stage 1 submission will be undertaken with the Local Neighbourhood Partnership. Subject to approval, the Stage 2 submission will be developed with the engagement of the LNP.

Vision 2008

Regeneration of the Borough's district centres is seen as contributing towards the Vision priorities of "helping to make people proud of Walsall" and "ensuring a clean & green borough".

Background papers

All published

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Signed:



Executive Director:
T Johnson

Date: 30.03.06

Signed:



Portfolio Holder:
Councillor A Andrew

Date: 31.03.06