



Report of the Chief Planning Officer

PLANS PANEL CITY CENTRE

Date: 19th August 2010

Subject: APPLICATION 10/01601/FU – ALTERATIONS TO PUBLIC OPEN SPACE AT VICTORIA GARDENS, THE HEADROW.

APPLICANT	DATE VALID	TARGET DATE
Groundwork Leeds – M Topping	8/4/10	3/6/10

Electoral Wards Affected:

City and Hunslet

No

Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

RECOMMENDATION: APPROVE subject to the conditions to cover the following:

1. Standard 3 year time limit for commencement.
2. Landscaping condition(s) requiring:
 - The replacement of any failed trees in the next available optimum planting season of November-February, replacement to be at an identical size.
 - Provision of details of illustrated staged management of London Plane trees, with dimensions over a period of 20 years, including any support structures.
 - York stone to match existing in stone colour texture and dimensions, samples to be provided.
 - Full details of crown pruning of retained oak trees to improve spacing between the crowns, with no height reduction.
 - Details at a reduced scale of stone carved lettering to be provided on the road frontage of the planters.
 - Full details of the benches, bins.
 - Samples of resin bound gravel.
 - Details of tree surrounds to the retained trees by the chess boards and details of passive irrigation of these by manipulation of finished levels, cross falls and surface water infiltration channels, flush grille covered.

- Details of the tree up-lighting and any associated control boxes.
3. Full details of surface water drainage.
 4. No increase in the height of the planting beds to ensure appropriate pedestrian visibility is retained.
 5. The lockable drop down bollard system onto Cookridge Street must be retained.
 6. The hard surfaced areas should be laid before use and should not contain loose material. All gradients must be no more than 1:20.
 7. Details of off site tree planting adjacent to the Civic Hall.

Reasons for approval: The application is considered to comply with policies GP5, T2, T5, T6, A4, N12, N19, CC5, CC9, CC11, BC7, N25, LD1 of the UDP Review, as well as guidance contained within the City Centre Urban Design Strategy September 2000 and PPS1, 'General Policies and Guidance', and, having regard to all other material considerations.

1.0 INTRODUCTION:

- 1.1 This application is brought to Plans Panel as it relates to the refurbishment of a significant public open space within the city centre and because there is a letter of objection from the Civic Trust.

2.0 PROPOSAL:

- 2.1 The refurbishment of Victoria Gardens is proposed. The scheme of refurbishment includes the following:
 - The removal of the 16 existing trees in the stone planters and replacement with 26 London Plane trees.
 - Damaged Yorkstone surfacing will be repaired or replaced.
 - The steps to the art gallery will be repaired and cleaned.
 - New stainless steel bins, stainless steel and oak seating, integral information panels and 'Victoria Gardens' signage etched into the existing stone planters.
 - Replacement marble and granite chess boards will be introduced and smaller chess boards will be carved into the coping stones of the existing planters.
 - The existing planter in the north-west corner adjacent to Calverley Street and the library will be reduced in size to assist pedestrian movement into the site.
 - The existing brick setts on the raised area in front of the library will be replaced by a resin bound surfacing that would be more complimentary to the Yorkstone elsewhere in Victoria Gardens.
 - Cycle racks will be relocated adjacent to the chess boards.
 - The existing step up from the Headrow pavement into Victoria Gardens will be removed and the levels re-graded to provide level access.
 - 58 uplighters will be installed in the planters to illuminate the proposed trees.
 - The planters will be turfed and bulbs planted (1,384 of both snow drop and crocus, 2,768 in total).
- 2.2 The Italian Alder in between the art gallery and Henry Moore Institute, the Joseph Beuys Oak adjacent to the war memorial and the two Oaks in front of the library will all be retained. There will be some crown pruning to the Oak trees in front of the Library.
- 2.3 The new London Plane trees will be planted in the existing 6 stone planters with a clear stem of a minimum of 2.4m with 2m x 2m boxed crown above. This crown will

be allowed to grow out to 3m width x 4m height that will result in an almost continuous crown throughout each planter and therefore along the majority of the boundary of Victoria Gardens to define the space.

- 2.4 The Victoria Cross and Leeds PALS memorials are to be retained.
- 2.5 The project of refurbishment is wholly sponsored by Marks and Spencer. It is intended to start works as soon as possible in order to have the works completed and the site vacated in time for the various upcoming public events that utilise this space.

3.0 SITE AND SURROUNDINGS:

- 3.1 The site relates to the public open space known as Victoria Gardens. The site is bounded by the Headrow to the south, Calverley Street to the west, Cookridge Street to the east and the civic buildings of the Library, Art Gallery and Henry Moore Institute to the north. The Library is grade II* listed and the Art Gallery and Henry Moore Institute grade II. The site is within the Central Area Conservation Area.
- 3.2 Victoria Gardens was formed following the demolition of a cluster of Victorian buildings on the site in the 1930s, it was originally intended to construct a new building on the site as part of the Blomfield redevelopment of the Headrow.
- 3.3 There are 6 stone planters on the Headrow and Calverley Street boundaries. These planters contain shrubs and a total of 16 trees (1 Silver Birch, 3 Lime, 10 Crab Apple, 2 Cherry). The trees have an average height of around 5-10m.
- 3.3 The majority of Victoria Gardens is surfaced with Yorkstone with the exception of an area in front of the Library that is surfaced with brick setts. This area also contains two large chess boards. There is the monument at the eastern end of Victoria Garden and the war memorials within the eastern planter. There is seating located adjacent to some of the planters and a variety of signs within the site.

4.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY:

- 4.1 09/04249/LA and 09/04250/LA: A package of wall mounted and free-standing signs on and around the Art Gallery and Library were approved on 11/1/10 following a panel resolution and referral to the Secretary of State. This proposal included free-standing banner signs adjacent to the planters and signs attached to the planters.

5.0 HISTORY OF NEGOTIATIONS:

- 5.1 The applicant, Groundwork, carried out local public consultation on behalf of Marks and Spencer, this included face to face consultations at Victoria Gardens and a postcard questionnaire being distributed in the Library, Art Gallery, Tiled Hall Café and central Marks and Spencer. Leeds City Council Parks and Countryside have been fully involved in the formulation of the proposals at pre-application stage.

6.0 PUBLIC/LOCAL RESPONSE:

- 6.1 Site notices were erected around the site on 21/4/10 and an advert was placed in the Leeds Weekly News on 29/4/10.
- 6.2 Leeds Civic Trust have commented on the scheme as originally submitted in April. The Civic Trust state that Victoria Gardens is long overdue for an overhaul and

commends the investment from Marks and Spencer. However, the Trust strongly objects to the removal of the existing shrubs and trees that blossom every spring and replacement with shaped London Plane trees and turf within the planters. The Trust request 'colour and imagination'. The Civic Trust also objects to the suggestion in the material submitted with the application that they were involved in the pre-application process. *Response: The objection to the removal of the trees is addressed in the appraisal section. It is understood that the applicant has since made contact with the Civic Trust to discuss the proposals.*

7.0 CONSULTATIONS RESPONSES:

7.1 Non-statutory:

7.2 Access: The amount of seating should not be reduced and the benches should accord with the latest design guidance and British Standard (BS). Further information should be provided regarding the new seating on top of the Library steps and the bollards should be designed in accordance with the latest BS. The resin bound gravel will be significantly different to the Yorkstone and may make some ambulant disabled people trip due to the friction of the surface. Evidence should be provided to ensure the material does not pose a trip hazard. The entrances from the Headrow should be re-graded to provide level access. *Response: The amount of seating is increased and significantly improved. All fixtures will be designed in accordance with the latest BS. The bench on top of part of the steps adjacent to the Library/terrace bar were introduced at the request of the Chess Society and LCC Events Team that have had concerns with regard to people watching the chess boards and other events and falling backwards down the steps. The steps are lightly used in this location and the bench is not considered to create a significant hazard to those climbing the steps but will significantly improve safety around the chess boards. The resin bound gravel will be agreed by condition to ensure there is no trip hazard. The entrances from the Headrow will be re-graded.*

7.3 Public Rights of Way: No known claimed public rights of way are affected.

7.4 Mains Drainage: Surface water discharges should be minimised.

7.5 Highways: No objections subject to conditions

8.0 PLANNING POLICIES:

8.1 Development Plan Policies

8.2 Unitary Development Plan (Review 2006) (UDPR): The site is designated as an 'existing pedestrian corridor/public space' and is located within the Civic Quarter, Central Area Conservation Area with a number of listed buildings in close proximity. Relevant policies include:
Policy GP5: Proposals should resolve detailed planning considerations.
T2: Development proposals should not create new, or exacerbate existing, highway problems.
T5: Satisfactory provision for pedestrians and cyclists.
T6: Satisfactory disabled access.
A4: Development and refurbishment proposals should be designed to secure a safe and secure environment, including proper consideration of access arrangements.

CC5: All development in the CA must preserve or enhance the character of the area. New buildings in the CA should respect the surrounding buildings by normally being within one storey in height.

CC9/CC11: Enhancement of pedestrian spaces and routes.

BC7: Use of local materials in Conservation Areas

N12: Fundamental priorities for urban form.

N19: Development within or adjoining Conservation Areas should preserve/enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

N25: Boundaries should be appropriate to the character of the area.

LD1: Proposals should allow sufficient space around buildings to retain existing trees in healthy condition & allow new trees to grow to maturity.

8.3 **Relevant Supplementary Planning Guidance.**

8.4 **City Centre Urban Design Strategy (CCUDS) September (2000):** Seeks to reinforce the positive qualities of character areas, re-establish urban grain, provide enclosure to streets, create visual interest, encourage excellent design, improve pedestrian connections, develop a mixture of land uses, promote active frontages and promote sustainable development. CCUDS identifies Victoria Gardens as an important 'City-wide Space' and highlights how the trees and flowers provide shade and colour outside the Art Gallery.

8.5 **National Planning Guidance**

8.6 PPS1 General Policies and Principles

9.0 **MAIN ISSUES**

- General refurbishment and upgrade of hard surfacing, seating and other features.
- Pruning and removal and replacement of the trees.

10.0 **APPRAISAL**

10.1 **General refurbishment and upgrade of hard surfacing, seating and other features.**

10.2 Victoria Gardens has not had any major improvement works for a number of years and the space is looking tired. The proposed refurbishment includes the replacement of damaged Yorkstone paving that will remove the unevenness of the current surface in addition to the visual improvement. The popular large chess boards will be replaced with two new granite and marble chess boards with further smaller chess boards etched into the stone planters to provide further opportunity for day to day activity in the area. New bins and seating will significantly enhance the area whilst the seat introduced on top of the steps in front of the Library will improve safety for those watching or participating in chess and the other events held within Victoria Gardens.

10.3 Part of the existing planter in the northwest corner is removed to permit an easier access into the site from Calverley Street and new surfacing will be introduced into the area currently laid with brick setts. The brick setts are not complimentary to the Yorkstone or the setting of the listed buildings therefore a new resin bound gravel, to be agreed by condition, will be able to provide a more appropriate surface. The budget available from Marks and Spencer would not permit this area to be surfaced with Yorkstone to match that elsewhere in Victoria Gardens.

10.4 Another significant benefit of the scheme will be the provision of level access from the Headrow into Victoria Gardens at the four access points in between the planters. At present there is a step up into Victoria Gardens of approximately 50-60mm that makes it awkward for the visually impaired and those in wheelchairs. The proposed scheme will re-grade the paving in this area to ensure level access from the Headrow.

10.5 Pruning and removal and replacement of the trees.

10.6 Leeds City Council Parks and Countryside Forestry Section were commissioned to undertake an Arboricultural survey and hazard assessment of the existing trees at the site. The majority of those trees along the Calverley Street and Headrow Frontages were considered to be of poor vigour with removal being the recommended course of action.

10.7 The two Oak trees in front of the Library were considered to be of reasonable vigour and provide sun shading for those playing chess in the summer. These trees are retained but with some remedial pruning (5%) and removal of deadwood to improve the visual connection with the civic building behind.

10.8 The Joseph Beuys Oak adjacent to the war memorial was rated as having poor vigour but with reasonable form. Due to the prominence of this tree and its relationship to the war memorial this tree is to be retained.

10.9 Despite being rather close to the Art Gallery, the Italian Alder is considered to give this building an appropriate setting and neatly fill the space between the gallery and Henry Moore Institute therefore it is retained.

10.10 As stated above the 16 trees within the planters were primarily of poor vigour and all were recommended for felling in the tree survey despite not causing any significant threat to public safety. The existing trees are of a mixed variety and are not considered to give a uniform setting to the civic buildings.

10.11 The 16 trees will be replaced with 26 London Plane trees, a tree commonly found in city centres partly due to its tolerance of urban conditions. The new trees will be planted at regular intervals within the retained planters to form a continuous line of trees bounding Victoria Gardens. The trees will be planted with a minimum 2.4m clear stem with 2m x 2m cubed headed/boxed crown. This crown will be permitted to grow out to 3m in width and 4m in height and then maintained at this dimension to give a formal appearance to all the trees and the space. The clear stem will permit views into the space from street level whilst the regular crown will result in framed views of the civic buildings in between the planters.

10.12 After understanding the history of the space and historic and future aspirations, the regular form and appearance of the proposed replacement trees are considered to accord with these aspirations and general urban design principles, I outline some of the history and aspirations below.

10.13 The space of Victoria Gardens was created following the demolition of a cluster of Victorian buildings in the 1930s. The space is a remnant of two grand schemes, the 1920's Blomfield/Headrow scheme that sought to introduce a building to mirror what is now 'The Light' into the space and the 1930's civic schemes for spaces in front of the library/museum/art gallery and new courts building all respecting an axis through the centre line of the Town Hall. However, the spatial clarity was not achieved

following the collapse of the 1930s proposal. The southern elevation of the art gallery and library is actually the side elevation and were never intended to be exposed or considered as the fronts of the buildings. In the 1996 Millennium Bid there was a strategic objective of creating three linked spaces at Millennium Square, Victoria Gardens and City Square.

- 10.14 The great strength of the current proposal is to create a formal continuity of the 19th century composition of the Municipal Buildings and thereby create a scheme for "a space within a space" with Cookridge Street, The Headrow and Calverley Street being the outer space. These spaces contain two axes, the Art Gallery Door axis (Part of the 1930s Civic proposals) and the War Memorial and Joseph Beuys oak axis. The outer space will be seen below the proposed 'boxed' trees and is considered to be a very elegant device to achieve this.
- 10.15 The space beneath the trees within the planter will be turfed to enable further areas to be used for seating and to ease maintenance whilst the up-lighting will further enhance the visual setting of the trees, space and buildings at night. Bulbs will be planted under the turf to give some colour and interest.
- 10.16 To further mitigate the impact of the proposals on the existing trees, officers are exploring the possibility of introducing blossoming trees adjacent to the western façade of the Civic Hall as a replacement for those existing blossoming trees that are to be removed from Victoria Gardens. A condition will require this off-site planting.

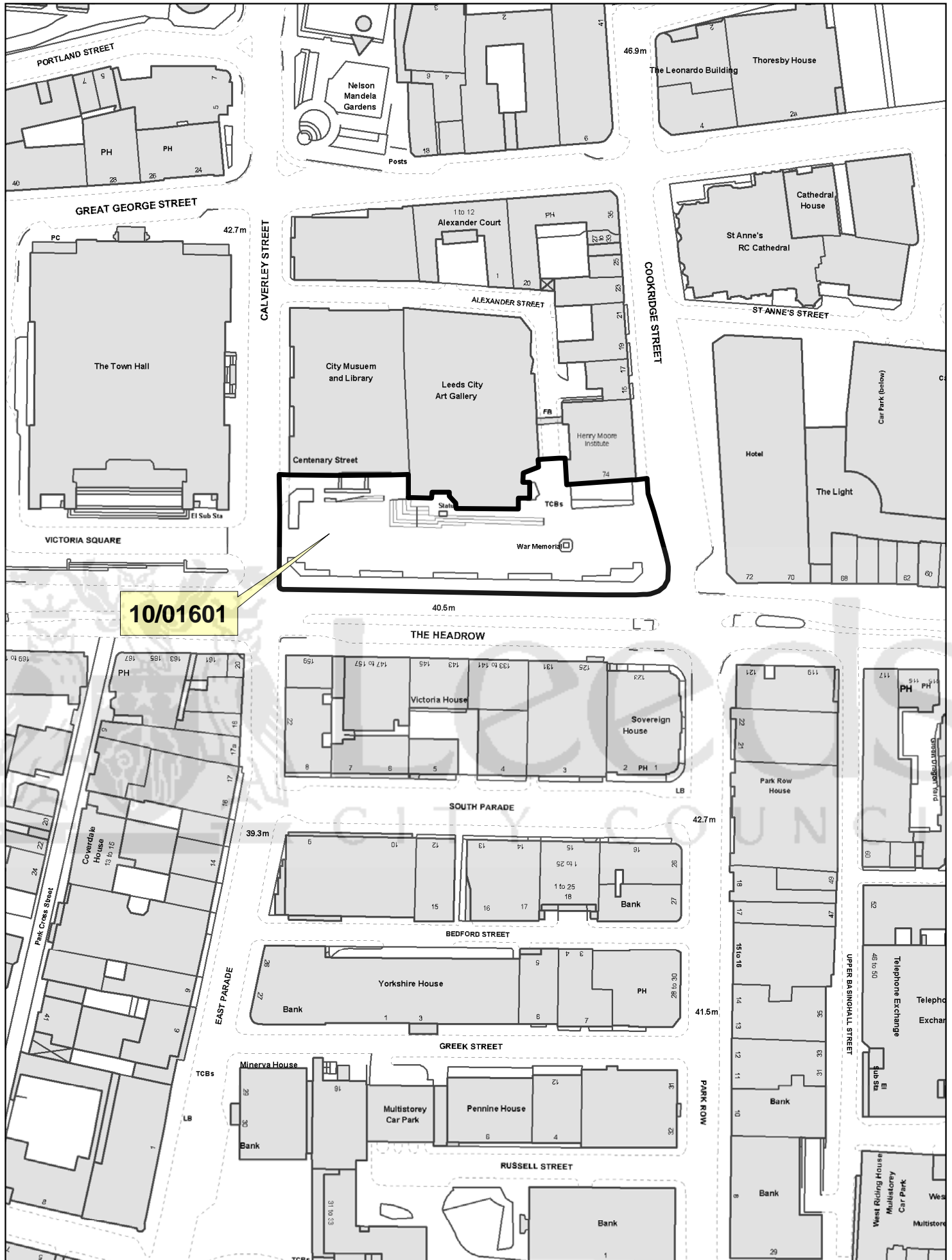
11.0 CONCLUSION

- 11.1 The proposed refurbishment of this important, but tired, Civic space will significantly enhance the surfacing and other fixtures and features within Victoria Gardens to provide an area that can be enjoyed and accessed by all. The removal of the mixed variety of trees will permit the introduction of more trees of a common species and formal appearance and layout to clearly define the space. The proposed refurbishment has a limited time as to when it can be introduced therefore Members are requested to approve the scheme and permit works to be completed prior to the planned events within the space later this year.

Background Papers:

Application file 10/01601/FU.

Notice has been served on Leeds City Council



10/01601

CITY CENTRE PANEL

