



## Report of the Chief Planning Officer

### CITY PLANS PANEL

Date: Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> April 2018

Subject: Clay Pit Lane Public Realm Improvements

#### Electoral Wards Affected:

City & Hunslet

yes

Ward Members consulted  
(referred to in report)

#### Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

**RECOMMENDATION: This report is brought to Plans Panel for information.**

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION:

- 1.1 Re-form landscape architecture Limited have been commissioned by Leeds City Council to prepare detailed design drawings for public realm improvements to the junction between Clay Pit Lane and Woodhouse Lane, to the north of Merrion House.
- 1.2 The Council's Breakthrough Project 'World-class events and a vibrant city centre that all can benefit from' recognises that city centres are evolving as critical centres for people to interact, exchange knowledge and drive commerce. Consultation undertaken as part of the Breakthrough Project prioritised improving the quality of our public realm, re-thinking our approach to street design and reducing the impact of traffic, to improve the pedestrian experience while creating enhanced settings for our cultural and heritage assets and key gateways.
- 1.3 In July 2015, The Council's Executive Board endorsed the principle of the Council developing a strategic plan for public realm improvements in the City Centre. Clay Pit Lane was identified as one of the top 20 projects prioritised for improvement based on a number of criteria. The primary driver of these schemes was to reduce the impact of traffic and improving the pedestrian environment through highway interventions. As all of these proposals contain public highway, a holistic approach is required to the design and implementation of a combined public realm and highways programme in the city centre.

- 1.4 On 15<sup>th</sup> February 2018, City Plans Panel considered proposals for public realm improvements to the former subway area adjacent to the stalled development site at the junction of Woodhouse Lane and Cookridge Street and requested that a report be brought to Plans Panel on the details of the wider junction improvement works that were being undertaken by Leeds City Council.
- 1.5 The Council has the benefit of permitted development rights to carry out the public realm works pursuant to Class A(a), Part 12, Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015. The proposals are therefore brought to City Plans Panel for information and comment only.

## **2.0 SITE AND SURROUNDINGS:**

- 2.1 The site is located on the junction of Clay Pit Lane and Woodhouse Lane, Leeds and is currently a vehicular dominated space. Existing infrastructure in the site includes the junction of two dual carriageways and a single lane slip road, linking Clay Pit Lane with Woodhouse Lane. Previously a pedestrian subway ran underneath the space, this has since been filled bringing the sunken areas back to the same level as the adjacent ground plane.
- 2.2 The proposed works will provide a major uplift to this important gateway junction into Leeds. Currently, this location is an unattractive and traffic-focussed location which acts as a barrier to pedestrians on their way to the city centre.
- 2.3 Clay Pit Lane / Woodhouse Lane is a key city centre junction with very high footfall and traffic flow. The proposed improvements to convert this key junction into a new area of city centre public realm sit within the wider highway improvement works required under the planning conditions attached to the permission for the Merrion House development which included;
- Filling the remaining subway sections with recycled crushed stone.
  - Junction realignment work to Clay Pit Lane and Woodhouse Lane.
  - Relocation of the left turn onto Clay Pit Lane to facilitate a new Public Realm area.
  - Improvements to the controlled crossing facilities.
  - Footway widening on Clay Pit Lane.
  - Additional cycle facilities.
- 2.4 The proposals have also been developed in the context of emerging plans to infill the former subway area and provide enhanced public realm adjacent to the stalled development site at the junction of Woodhouse Lane and Cookridge Street, which were presented to City Plans Panel on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

## **3.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY:**

- 3.1 Planning permission was granted for the Merrion House office refurbishment, extension and adjacent highway improvement works detailed in paragraph 2.3 above on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2014 (Application reference 14/01825/FU)
- 3.2 Planning permission for amendments to the approved hotel scheme at the junction of Woodhouse Lane and Cookridge Street was approved on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2012 (Application reference 12/01191/FU). Development of this scheme by GB Building Solutions commenced towards the end of 2013 and stopped in March 2015 when the building contractor and its parent company went into administration.

3.3 Vita Leeds 2 (a student housing provider) has subsequently acquired the stalled development site and presented emerging proposals to City Plans Panel for the completion of the approved building with two additional storeys and a change to student use on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2017. The scheme involves provision of enhanced public realm to the adjacent infilled subway area details of which were presented to City Plans Panel on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2018 (PREAPP/17/00489).

#### **4.0 HISTORY OF CONSULTATION:**

4.1 The Executive Member for Regeneration, Transport and Planning has been consulted and is supportive of the proposals.

4.2 Ward members were consulted via email on the wider highways proposals including the early concept designs for the public realm on 10 December 2014 and 4 May 2017. No issues were identified.

4.3 The proposals for the in-filling of the subways and light well have progressed in conjunction with the Structures Section within Highways & Transportation. Consultations were carried out with a number of internal LCC departments to assess the feasibility of the junction improvement scheme as the design evolved in 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017.

4.4 Occupiers / frontages adjacent to the works were consulted via hand-delivered letter on 10 May 2017. Recipients included Yorkshire Bank, developers of the former Cobourg pub, Leeds City College Technology Campus and Town Centre Securities. No negative responses were received.

4.5 LCC Conservation Team fully support the public realm scheme commenting that the landscaping works will be perceived as an extension of the greensward that washes up to the listed buildings and enhances their settings.

4.6 The Leeds Civic Trust Planning Committee considered the proposals and welcomes plans for the new green space and hopes that more such facilities can be developed around the city as a whole. The Trust welcomes the simplification of the traffic routes in this busy area and the creation of a new green space which will greatly enhance the setting of the surrounding buildings and improve the walk from Woodhouse Lane Car Park to The Arena.

4.7 With regard to the detail within the scheme, the Committee suggested the following elements should be given further consideration:

- given the heavy pedestrian flows along Woodhouse Lane in this area, (notwithstanding the wider road crossing) the area for those waiting to cross Claypit Lane should be larger and accept this might mean losing some of the proposed grass area if the layby is removed the area for crossing Clay Pit Lane will be larger.
- the surface of layby should be more similar to the main footway so that it is not 'attractive' to vehicles, if the layby gets used regularly (eg by taxis or private hire vehicles) it will create a pinch-point for pedestrians.

4.8 It should be noted that, in response to comments received from the Council's Transport Development Services, a decision was made to remove the layby from the scheme, before the above comments were received.

## 5.0 PROPOSAL:

- 5.1 The design has been conceived to accommodate the high volume of pedestrian traffic and desire lines, whilst achieving a significant green space at this busy highway intersection. The existing under-utilised green space to the back of Queen Square is encompassed by the design proposals and acts as a backdrop to the new central lawn. The proposed space is designed as a green 'pause' along this key route into the city, providing pedestrians with a reprieve from the busy road environment.
- 5.2 A central lawn is proposed, framed by bench seating, clipped hedges and tree planting. A 'prunus subhirtella'/ autumn cherry feature tree sits within the lawn acting as a sculptural focal point and providing year-round seasonal interest.
- 5.3. The existing cherry trees to the north of the site will be retained, resulting in a space that will feel well established from the completion of the construction works. The retained trees will not only provide a sense of maturity to the design, but they will also help to create a buffer, reducing the noise and visual impact of the traffic to the surrounding properties.
- 5.4 A birch tree grove is proposed to the north-west corner of the site that will sit within a metal grille. This feature will create a sense of enclosure and shelter whilst generating an interesting sculptural piece for people to interact with. The retained cherry trees are enhanced by the addition of a feature cherry tree within the lawn, and by the proposed birch grove and street tree planting. Stepping off the main pedestrian thoroughfares onto the narrower path around the southern side of the lawn provides access to seating and a space to rest or pause.
- 5.5 High quality concrete paving is proposed to the primary pedestrian routes that edge the proposed lawn.
- 5.6 Access to the benches that sit to the southern edge of the lawn is provided via a resin bound gravel pathway. This path has a more informal and relaxed character and is of a deliberately different quality from the main pedestrian thoroughfares.
- 5.7 High quality granite kerbs and metal edging are proposed, and a feature metal grille (beneath the grove of birch trees) anchors the northern corner of the space.
- 5.8 Cast stone benches with timber tops, back-rests and arm-rests frame the central space and provide ample opportunity for resting at this busy junction.
- 5.9 Three forms of lighting are proposed – column lighting provides the primary light source, whilst under-bench strip lights and tree uplighters provide accent features, creating a more dynamic environment after dark.
- 5.10 The two primary desire lines (along Woodhouse Lane – to and from the city centre, and east-west towards Merrion Way and the Arena) are accommodated, with 3m wide footpaths providing space for those in wheelchairs and those with pushchairs.
- 5.11 The site is fully accessible with all gradients shallower than 1:21, and with primary paths at a suitable width to allow wheelchair access (3m).
- 5.12 Non-slip paving materials are specified, with a contrast provided between surfaces and kerbs. Benches are fitted with back and arm rests and are located at sensible

distances to allow places for resting. These alterations are designed to accommodate the needs of all users.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 The successful delivery of this scheme as detailed above will see this key gateway transformed into a new area of public realm in the city centre, the first new public realm scheme to be delivered as part of the Breakthrough Project 'World-class events and a vibrant city centre that all can benefit from'. It will help to enhance and support the emerging developments adjacent to this road junction and provide a much improved pedestrian experience through this part of the city centre.
- 6.2 Improvements to the junction and the public realm uplift are also consistent with the Best Council Plan 2015-2020 in terms of improving road safety and enhancing the quality of our public realm and green spaces.

### **Background Papers:**

Report to the Executive Board dated 21<sup>st</sup> June 2017 Claypit / Woodhouse Lane Junction improvement Associated with the Merrion House Extension.

Report to the Executive Board dated 21<sup>st</sup> October 2015: An Approach to Street Design and the Public Realm in Leeds City Centre

# 03 Proposals

## Illustrative Plan

Existing cherry trees retained

Seating provided along primary pedestrian thoroughfare

Proposed birch tree grove with uprighters

Planting beds within lawn provide seasonal interest

Hedge and tree planting encloses the lawn and creates a sense of protection from the road

Bench accessible from both sides

Proposed feature tree within lawn

