

Commercial Way, Woking Public Realm Improvements

Introduction and Background:

This project involves the upgrading and improvement of Commercial Way public realm and Wolsey Place Shopping Centre façade. The brief for the project asked for a detailed design for the remodelling of the Commercial Way public realm and the façade of Wolsey Place Shopping Centre.

The project team were instructed to:

- Illustrate how the high quality public realm treatment established in the Phase 1 work in Town Square, Gloucester walk and Mercia Walk might be extended into Commercial Way to create a vibrant and attractive street.
- Include architectural improvements to the building facades to Wolsey Place Shopping Centre fronting Commercial Way and Alexander House.
- Reconsider the existing tree planting.
- Produce a flexible layout capable of accommodating specialist markets and events.
- Undertake consultation with stakeholders on the proposals.

The proposal produced are shown in the attached document which was used during the public consultation and exhibition.

Project Aims and Objectives:

The scheme seeks to:

- Extend the high quality public realm treatment of Town Square and its surrounding areas established in phase 1 into Commercial Way.
- Improve the overall image and appearance of Woking Town Centre
- Improve the quality of the town centre shopping area.
- Create a high quality clutter free pedestrian street with a central activity zone, new street furniture, trees and lighting.

Phase 1:

The palette of high quality materials established in the phase 1 public realm works would be extended into Commercial Way with new smaller trees planted which are more suitable for this scale of street scene.

Consultation:

A full public consultation event on the proposals for Commercial Way was undertaken in February and March 2012 with the following objectives:

- Communicate to the public and key stakeholders the councils aspirations and proposals for Commercial Way
- Explain the importance of the scheme within the wider town centre improvements/retail scene
- Engage the public and key stakeholders early on in the design process and obtain their views and support in principle to the proposals.

The consultation included a 17 day public exhibition of the proposals in Wolsey Place Shopping Centre and a series of workshops with traders, specialist interest groups, statutory/transport consultees and residents associations.

There was significant support for improving Commercial Way from both stakeholders and the wider public. The importance of Commercial Way to the retails/commercial offer and the general impression of the town was recognised and people were supportive of the project's aims to lift the quality of the street using high quality materials.

Timetable:

To avoid disruption to Christmas trading, construction works are planned to commence in January 2013 with completion in October 2013.

Project Benefits:

- Upgrade of the public realm in Commercial Way creating a high quality clutter free pedestrian street with a central activity zone along its length. This zone would provide space for markets, events, street vendors and potential café seating areas adding activity and vibrancy to the street scene.
- Review of existing market traders in Commercial Way to ensure all activities enhanced the area and in turn attract quality retailers to the Commercial way retail units in Wolsey Place Shopping Centre.
- Upgrading the façade of Wolsey Place Shopping Centre fronting Commercial Way which will set a design standard for future shops to achieve a lively and good quality street frontage.
- Secure economic vitality of the town by improving retail offer in Commercial Way.
- Enable medium term uplift in rental income from Wolsey Place Shopping Centre.
- Enable long term improvement to the value of Wolsey Place Shopping Centre.
- The improvements to Commercial Way would make it easier for the Woking Gateway developer to attract suitable quality occupiers.
- If agreed, WBC will be able to exercise SCC's highway powers in the management and maintenance of Commercial Way going forward which will enable WBC to achieve and maintain the quality public realm it considers necessary to underpin the economic success of the town.