

3. LATIMER SQUARE ENHANCEMENT

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PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

The purpose of this report is to update the Council on progress with the enhancement of Latimer Square and to seek approval for the distribution of a public consultation document.

CONTEXT

In 1995 the Latimer Neighbourhood Improvement Plan was finalised and from that budgets set to upgrade Latimer Square. Around \$588,000 for enhancement of Latimer Square over the next two financial years is available within the annual plan. The budget line items occur as follows:

2002/03

Parks & Waterways	\$150,000
City Streets	\$421,100 for major amenity improvements, Latimer Square West (Gloucester to Hereford Streets)

2003/04

Parks & Waterways	nil
City Streets	\$167,122 major amenity improvements along Worcester through the square.

A cross-unit project team, headed by John de Zwart from City Solutions, has been set up integrating staff from the Parks and Waterways, City Streets, Heritage, City Plan and Central City Revitalisation teams. The proposed planning for enhancing Latimer Square and the streets around it fits well within the Mayor's vision to revitalise the eastern side of the central city.

The project team is now ready for further consultation in a wider forum by way of a consultation document and wishes to gain approval from the Hagley/Ferrymead Community Board and then from the relevant standing committees (Parks, Gardens and Waterways, Arts, Culture and Heritage and Sustainable Transport and Utilities) to distribute the document.

Background

Latimer Square is an important open space area which, in around the 1890's, used to be the centre of many lively activities such as bicycle races and fetes. Its more recent history is less positive with issues about safety causing the park to be under-utilised. In reality it should be a prime civic space of similar importance to that of Cathedral Square and Victoria Square and needs to be considered as part of the open space network within the central city. Enhancement of Latimer Square will be a definite step to revitalising the eastern part of the central city.

The Latimer Neighbourhood Improvement Plan makes a number of references to Latimer Square including:

- Historic references identifying where it has come from.
- Reference to the public consultation used to help produce the plan, the public considered the park of importance in defining their area.
- Through consultation main improvements for the area identified by the plan were seating and the beautification of Latimer Square together with encouraging multiple uses.
- Under the heading of Main Opportunities some guidelines were given, contingent on the Square's re-design.

It is prudent to note, however, that the current Latimer NIP is due to be revised and re-published. As part of the Latimer Square Enhancement process the Council's Urban Design Team has requested to be kept informed on any developing issues that may impact on the team's planning processes.

The Central City Revitalisation team has also been informed of the project's progress and will be given further opportunities to comment. John de Zwart updated the Mayoral Forum at a seminar on 26 July 2002.

Public Consultation

More recent public consultation comprises two public meetings to advance common themes and to determine the brief for Latimer Square. These were as follows:

- September 2001 - Public meeting to determine aspirations, issues, opportunities and constraints. Some action points believed to be urgent were identified.
- March 2002 – Follow-up meeting to update participants on immediate action taken and to tease out further agreed themes on which to base the design brief for Latimer Square. Members of the public volunteered to work with staff on the proposed lighting scheme.
- Themes that arose from the public meetings were:
 - Need to change the image of the square as currently perceived as an undesirable space – improved safety was of high concern.
 - Keep the simplicity of the park – don't clutter it with objects or shrub borders.
 - Recognise heritage aspects.
 - Reduce the impact of traffic around the square.
 - Need for more activity by way of festivals, events, jazz concerts.
 - Maintenance needed to be improved to change the appearance of the square.

The consultation to date has mainly involved business owners and residents living and/or working close to Latimer Square but the space has a wider significance and consultation with the wider public is also necessary to determine how it will exist in the 21st Century.

THE PROPOSAL

Lighting/Safety

Because one of the key concerns from the meetings was safety it was decided that lighting improvements should be worked on as a priority, even before the overall design plans for Latimer Square have been determined. Subsequently, four residents/business owners volunteered their time to work with staff on a lighting option and this was supported by the wider group. Several meetings were held including one on-site mock-up of a lighting proposal. Consensus between the Council and Community has now been reached on a lighting solution. The proposal is to place 5 (Manhattan) lights equidistant along the western side of each of the squares between the trees, ie 10 lights in total.

Due to the presence of large specimen trees and the heritage status of the square resource consent is required to implement the lighting proposal. Because council heritage staff and arborists have been consulted regarding the proposed lighting, it has been advised that the resource consent will be non-notified. It is therefore expected that the new lights will be installed by the end of September this year.

The proposed lighting scheme is only intended to provide the first stage to a potentially more complete lighting plan but it has support from the community and will immediately address safety concerns as well as creating a new ambience for Latimer Square.

Maintenance has been increased which should contribute to improving the general impression of the square.

Draft Consultation Document

From the Latimer NIP three options for the road through Latimer Square are apparent. These are; close off the road completely, slow the road through narrowing and status quo. The Project Team, through its more recent community consultation has confirmed the validity of the three options and developed a draft consultation document to present to the wider community and other interested parties.

It is believed that options promoting closure or narrowing of Worcester Street will reduce the impact of traffic around the park spaces and facilitate a change to Latimer Square which will enable it to become the lively civic space that it used to be. At the same time its role will be considered in relation to other central city spaces, in particular Cathedral Square, the Avon River Precinct and the new park to be developed on the former Turners & Growers site.

The Project Team's intention is to release the consultation document at the end of August 2002 asking for comments back by the end of October 2002. The consultation document, once completed and returned is intended to give the Council a better understanding of the public's preferences with regards the three options, as well as notifying the public of the lighting progress.

It is intended that the document will provide information on heritage aspects, state of the existing trees, possibilities for new activities/events, as well as ideas for streets around the square.

CONCLUSION

The cross-unit project team is working well with a 'Total Solutions' approach to the enhancement of Latimer Square and already has engaged neighbouring business owners and residents in identifying common threads for this important civic space. Wider consultation is now needed to generate feedback on proposals for the configuration of the spaces. In the meantime maintenance has been improved and new lighting is proposed to increase safety in the area.

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- Recommendation:**
1. That the information be received.
 2. That the public consultation document be released.