

<b>PLANNING &amp; ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION COMMITTEE</b>	AGENDA ITEM No. 6
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Contact Officer(s):	Simon Machen, Executive Director of Growth and Regeneration Jim Daley, Principal Built Environment Officer	Tel: 453475 Tel: 453522
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## **PARTNERSHIP SCHEME IN CONSERVATION AREAS (PSiCA) (COWGATE)**

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S	
<b>FROM: Principal Built Environment Officer</b>	<b>Deadline date: N/A</b>
That Committee notes the review of the Partnership Scheme in Conservation Areas (PSiCA) in the Cowgate area of the City Centre Conservation area.	

### **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to review the achievements of the Partnership Scheme in Conservation Areas (PSiCA) grant scheme (2011/12-2014/15) that supported the repair, restoration and reinstatement of building fabric in Cowgate, an important part of the City Centre Conservation Area. The report will explain how successful the scheme has been and the benefits achieved.

### **2. SUMMARY**

- 2.1 The PSiCA scheme has played a major role in contributing to the regeneration and enhancement of heritage assets in the Cowgate area of the City Centre Conservation Area. Many buildings have been repaired, restored and much of the areas heritage architecture has been secured. Vacant upper floors have been brought into optimum use.
- 2.2 The PSiCA project has shown that a way to help secure the future of an area is to get owners and tenants to invest in an area and stimulate self-sustaining regeneration. Public realm works have complemented the PSiCA scheme by combined area based enhancement. Together they have arrested tell-tale signs indicating a downward spiral of under-investment in the fabric of on area, revitalise the street and strengthened the local economy.
- 2.3 The PSiCA scheme and public realm works have shown that heritage assets play a positive role in achieving successful regeneration. High quality improvements have helped to generate business confidence to engender pride in Peterborough and its heritage. The fabric of the city centre has changed for the better and the City Centre Conservation Area is no longer on Historic England's 'at risk' register.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 In 2010 the City Centre Conservation Area was identified 'at risk' by Historic England. This was due to concerns with the condition of the public realm, under occupancy of buildings and the condition of individual heritage buildings, including listed buildings that appeared to be suffering from lack of regular repair and maintenance. Of the 35 ground floor retail units 7 were vacant and others had under use of upper floors.
- 3.2 To help arrest this situation Historic England invited an application from Peterborough City Council to join with Historic England in progressing a Partnership Scheme in Conservation

Areas (PSiCA) grant scheme to improve the Cowgate area of the City Centre Conservation Area.

- 3.3 The detailed bid included a three year phased programme of work, and a schedule of targeted buildings and anticipated costs. The Delivery Plan gave priority to the repair and restoration of those buildings with the most architectural and historical importance, particularly listed buildings, those in poor state of repair, and poor quality shop fronts and signage. It was anticipated that up to 25 buildings would be enhanced / repaired over the three year period of the scheme. The bid and delivery plan were successful and the scheme was launched in April 2011.

#### **4. PARTNERSHIP SCHEME IN CONSERVATION AREA (PSiCA)**

- 4.1 Partnership Schemes in Conservation Areas are grant schemes designed to promote conservation-led regeneration. The PSiCA scheme by Historic England targeted regionally important heritage towns in need of enhancement of the built environment. A high quality environment is acknowledged as an important factor in attracting businesses and in helping to foster a sense of well-being in those who live and work in a place.
- 4.2 The grant scheme concentrated on the Cowgate area, including properties to St Johns Square. This part of the city centre is not only the most evident to visitors, shoppers and business users, it being one of the two pedestrian routes from the rail station to the city centre, but also contains many interesting Victorian buildings of the city centre conservation area. The PSiCA scheme would complement other Council initiatives in the public realm and its commitment to regenerate the city centre.
- 4.3 The objective of the scheme was to contribute towards the regeneration of the city centre conservation area through the repair and restoration of the historic buildings of the Cowgate area.
- 4.4 The aims were three fold –
- To encourage high quality external building repair in appropriate materials;
  - To promote the authentic reinstatement of damaged and missing architectural features; and
  - To promote improvements in the design and appearance of shop fronts and signage.
- 4.5 Under the PSiCA scheme Historic England and the City Council each allocated £35,000 a year for three years (2011/2012 - 2014/2015) (£210,000 total) for grants towards the authentic restoration and repair of eligible historic buildings. The Cowgate Traders Association enthusiastically supported the scheme from the outset and in year 2 of the scheme contributed £20,000 to fund further work and this was matched by Historic England. Total expenditure has been £250,000 and with owner and tenant contributions the total amount of expenditure was in excess of £375,000. A location map of target buildings is shown at Appendix A and a list of buildings that have benefited from grant aid is shown at Appendix B.
- 4.6 The grant scheme provided assistance to building owners and tenants to restore and repair their buildings. Grants were offered at 50% of the total cost of eligible work, and in special cases up to 75%. The balance of the cost of work was provided by building owners and tenants. Grant recipients were required to implement the work within 6 months from the date of the grant offer.
- 4.7 Eligible works covered the restoration of traditional shopfronts and the replacement of non-original shop fronts with authentic replacements with concealed cornice lighting, signage, the reinstatement of missing architectural features such timber sash windows, pilasters, corbel brackets, cast iron rainwater goods, terra cotta ornaments and dentil course, the repair of original external joinery, re-roofing, repair of brickwork, lead-work and re-pointing and redecoration of painted elevations in complementary colour. Priority was given to

those buildings with the most architectural and historical importance; in poorest condition; poor quality shop fronts and repairs to listed buildings.

4.8 The day to day promotion, publicity and implementation of the scheme was the responsibility of the Councils Conservation Officer, assisted by a Heritage Regeneration Officer (a three year post jointly funded by Opportunity Peterborough, Peterborough City Council and Historic England). Building owners were approached directly with grants offered for eligible works. Each scheme of work was developed and agreed between the officer and the building owner / tenant. This ensured that the council monitored grant recipients on the work, ensuring that it was carried out to a high quality, appropriate design, and using traditional materials and methods.

4.9 Wherever possible restoration was based on photographic, documentary or archaeological evidence. For example new dormer windows at 50 Cowgate reproduce the scale of the street as it was when the building was constructed. The scale of the details was verified by reference to historic photographs and illustrations.

## **5. THE COWGATE AREA**

5.1 Cowgate is a key street in the city centre leading west from Cathedral Square, and is a gateway to the city centre. It is a medieval street located in the City Centre Conservation Area and a strong pedestrian route to the bus and rail stations. A remnant of King Street remains to the north side of Cowgate. This once was one of the city's principal streets but became a dead-end with the development of the Queensgate Centre. At its western end Cowgate is terminated by Bourges Boulevard / Crescent Bridge roundabout.

5.2 A terraced street of some 36 buildings, (6 listed grade II and 9 locally listed) where the principle functions are retail, commercial with several independent businesses and mostly office use to upper floors. The south side is lined with many pleasant Victorian buildings. Unfortunately, many of the original shop fronts had been replaced with unsympathetic aluminium fronts in the 1970's and early 80's of inappropriate design, unsympathetic fascia signs and illumination. Many of the buildings, although altered at ground floor, retained much original fabric to the upper floors. Some building frontages to the north have been replaced over the years reflecting the architectural style of the time though the original scale of the street remains.

5.3 Nearby St Johns Square to the east was created by the demolition of Norwich Union Office block in 2010. With St John Church forming the centre piece to the east the buildings to the square include 8 listed buildings and 2 locally listed buildings at Church Street and Queen Street.

## **6. PROGRESS**

5.4 The first year began successfully with contacts being made with owners of key target buildings within the PSiCA area. Publicity took the form of letters, press coverage and radio interviews. The scheme was also promoted by the Councils Cabinet Member for City Centre Management, Culture and Tourism.

5.5 The take up of grants and implementation in the first year was low, and this was not unexpected given economic conditions, tenancies and some hesitancy from building owners. Experience from a similar scheme at Spalding by South Holland District Council was that once a building or shop front was improved the visible improvements helped to promote the scheme and the Council would get requests for grants, and this proved to be the case. After this initial slow built up there was strong support for the regeneration work, to the extent that by the end of the scheme demand exceeded available grant. The programme is now complete (summer 2015). All of the available funds of £250,000 have been spent.

## **7. ACHIEVEMENTS**

- 7.1 Almost all the target outputs set for the PSiCA scheme have been met. Two in three buildings have been repaired and restored and much of the area's heritage has been secured. The majority of the other buildings are in good order. The heritage investment by the PSiCA scheme is a success and has delivered the following benefits:
- Secured the restoration (and re-use) of key city centre heritage buildings;
  - Stimulated the regeneration of the building fabric of Cowgate;
  - Led to the introduction of city centre living via flats-over-shops; and
  - A visually distinctive place with greater business confidence and public pride.
- 7.2 Of the 32 target properties some 22 properties received grant for building repair and enhancement work. (69% of total properties). A list of the buildings to benefit from grant is shown at Appendix B. (18 in Cowgate, 2 in Queen Street and 2 in Church Street). Before and after photographs and a summary of key building works carried out are shown in Appendix C.
- 7.3 The commercial attractiveness of Cowgate for retail use had traditionally been limited by a high concentration of estate agents, and perhaps a part explanation for 7 vacant units at the start of the PSiCA scheme. Economic downturn, stagnation of the housing market and the rationalisation of estate agents has always left the area vulnerable to shop vacancy through being over reliant on one use.
- 7.4 The combined PSiCA and public realm works appear to have brought about a sense of positive change for owners and tenants. Public sector investment of £230,000 and £165,000 by the private sector in grant contributions has created confidence and helped to promote other investment and improvement. The regeneration work has helped to act as a catalyst to further investment by owners and tenants, including the fitting out of vacant buildings.
- 7.5 Only limited information is available to assess the impact of the works on the economic vitality of Cowgate in the short time period since the completion of both schemes. However, indications are that Cowgate has fared better than the rest of the city centre since 2011. There is no data on employment, but the street has seen business growth, with a net increase in trading shops and a widening of the commercial offer. Since 2011 the number of occupied shop premises in Cowgate has increased (7 vacancies reduced to 1). Over the same period shop vacancy rate in the rest of the city centre has remained broadly static. It is understood from conversations between the conservation officer and local property agents that rents have remained steady.
- 7.6 There has been a diversification of the offer of the street. A new small SPAR convenience store, a jewelers and antiques shop, restaurant, hairdressers, and recruitment agencies have opened. This is complemented by a public house, the post office, and three other restaurants. Interestingly a specialist independent pie shop that opened two years ago in a small unit has moved to larger premises in Bridge Street and it is understood that a sandwich shop is to take the vacant unit.
- 7.7 The schemes have strengthened the character and appearance of Cowgate by providing a better quality environment which brings a 'buzz'. Cowgate has become a visually distinctive place. The wider footways to the east end allow tables and chairs on forecourts and new retractable traditional shop awnings add interest and attention to the street.
- 7.8 Two of the upper floors above shops that had been vacant for many years (12 and 50 Cowgate) have been brought into residential use. The owners of other buildings with under-utilised floors have been in discussions with planning services on development opportunities.
- 7.9 Last month the second city outlet of an authentic Italian Gelato cafe opened in Britannic House, a large ground floor unit at the corner of King Street that had been empty for a number of years and which had a negative impact on the appearance of the conservation

area. Tables and chairs in the warmer months in King Street will add to a cafe culture seen elsewhere in the street. (The Pizza House and Topo Gigios).

## **8. OTHER ENHANCEMENT WORK**

- 8.1 The PSiCA scheme ran in parallel with several other projects and policy work by the City Council to help enhance and rejuvenate the City Centre Conservation Area.
- 8.2 In 2013 extensive public realm work was carried out in Cowgate as part of the implementation of the City Councils Public Realm Strategy that commenced in Cathedral Square in 2010. Work included narrowed carriageway and widened footways to improve pedestrian safety and enjoyment, removal of street posts, new street furniture and lighting to buildings. The work has seen a shift in street character toward pedestrians and an improved 'gateway' to Cowgate. The area can be better promoted and enlivened by outdoor activities and events in King Street by businesses, the Cowgate Traders Association and the City Council.
- 8.3 The street works have complemented the PSiCA scheme by achieving combined area based enhancement to transform the appearance of the area and emphasise the historic character of Cowgate (before and after photographs Appendix D and E).
- 8.4 In 2012 new Shopfront Design Guidance was adopted to improve the standard of shop fronts and signage.

## **9. FUTURE HERITAGE LED REGENERATION WORK IN THE CITY CENTRE CONSERVATION AREA**

- 9.1 The PSiCA scheme has demonstrated the benefits of relatively modest public sector investment to support the regeneration of an historic area and the preservation and enhancement of heritage assets in the City Centre Conservation Area.
- 9.2 A business case is being made for funding for three years to continue to support heritage based regeneration by targeting grants at other historic buildings in the City Centre Conservation Area which have been affected by inappropriate replacement shop fronts, oversized fascia and signage. (particularly 2, 4 and 6 Westgate and 1 Broadway).

## **10. CONCLUSIONS**

- 10.1 A high quality environment is acknowledged as an important factor in attracting businesses and helping to foster a sense of well-being for people who live and work in an area. In 2010 there were concerns at signs indicating a downward spiral of under-investment in the physical fabric of heritage buildings, retail and the public realm of the city centre.
- 10.2 The PSiCA scheme has brought about heritage led regeneration of the Cowgate area providing repairs to key historic buildings and enhancing this part of the City Centre Conservation Area. Many buildings have been restored and upper floors brought into optimum use. Much of the areas heritage architecture has been secured. The fabric of the City Centre has changed for the better and the City Centre Conservation Area was removed from the 'at risk' register (2014).
- 10.3 The achievements of the PSiCA scheme have been widely acknowledged by local civic and commercial groups. The work was positively supported from the outset by the Cowgate Traders Association who made a £20,000 contribution in year 2 and matched by Historic England.
- 10.4 The PSiCA project has shown that a way to help secure the future of an area is to get owners and tenants to invest in an area, and stimulate self-sustaining regeneration. The PSiCA and public realm works have helped build confidence. This is seen in vacant upper floors at two properties brought back into use and encouraged new tenancies in vacant units.

- 10.5 Further investment over the past year since the end of the PSiCA by new tenants and discussions with Planning Services for development opportunities at upper floors would indicate that the process of regeneration in Cowgate has continued. There would appear to be a virtuous spiral of regeneration. The regeneration work of both the PSiCA and the public realm work has raised the profile of Cowgate as a place that is vibrant and appear to have strengthened the area's economic role in the city centre judging from the wider range of offer in the street.
- 10.6 There is a need to keep a focus on Cowgate to ensure that what has been achieved is not eroded. There is sufficient confidence that if property values increase it can be reasonably expected that buildings will be repaired and renovated without the need for future grant aid.
- 10.7 The PSiCA and public realms work have shown that heritage assets play a positive role in achieving successful regeneration. High quality improvements have helped to generate business confidence to engender pride in Peterborough and its heritage.
- 10.8 The City Council is looking to continue heritage led regeneration in a grant scheme to improve other historic buildings at key focal points in the City Centre Conservation Area.

## **11. APPENDICES**

- Appendix A: Location plan PSiCA phased area
- Appendix B: Grant aided properties
- Appendix C: Photographs of building restoration and enhancement works
- Appendix D: Photographs of Cowgate public realm enhancement scheme 2013/2014
- Appendix E: Plan of Cowgate and King Street Public Realm Enhancement Scheme 2012/2013