

FRONTAGE IMPROVEMENT SCHEME ALLOCATION

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Cllr Kit Taylor / Cllr Del Booth
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Director	John Staniland
Wards Affected	St Johns
Ward Councillor Consulted	Yes
Non-Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 On the 4th August 2010 Cabinet resolved *‘that in order to support the existing Town Centre Frontage Improvement Scheme, a virement of £50,000 be approved to enable funding to be allocated to the scheme and that the income already received from VAT refunds during 2010/2011 be utilised to meet the costs associated with the scheme’.*
- 1.2 The following report requests that the limit of £4000 per application which was part of the original scheme be removed, and larger financial awards allowed for specific properties where the requirement for work is greater.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Cabinet resolve the removal of the £4000 limit for applications and delegate to the Executive Director of Regeneration, Regulatory, and Housing Services in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holders, the determination of the appropriate level of frontage improvement scheme awarded to successful applicants.

3. KEY ISSUES

Financial Implications

- 3.1 The existing overall budget for the Frontage Improvement scheme will remain as agreed, the only change is the possible amount to be awarded on individual applications.

Legal Implications

- 3.3 The Council has a statutory duty under s71 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to prepare proposals for the preservation and enhancement of Conservation Areas.

Service / Operational Implications

- 3.4 The frontage improvement scheme was approved in May 2010 and launched shortly afterwards, an initial budget of £20,000 was allocated which was raised by a further £50,000 in August of 2010. The scheme was originally launched with a leaflet posted to all the eligible property owners and handed to all eligible tenants. The scheme was further publicised via a press release and on the Council's website. During the Town Centre AAP consultation which took place on the high street in February 2011 further publicity for the scheme was undertaken.
- 3.5 Currently applications have been approved for 4 properties totalling £15,460 although as yet not all of these have been claimed. Three of the applications have been for the maximum £4000 with the other one being for £3460. This money has been approved for minor window and brickwork improvements, and some limited external decoration on historic properties.
- 3.6 A number of inquiries have been received from other landowners and tenants requesting assistance under the frontage improvement scheme for work which would cost more than the currently allowed £4000 one in particular is for the reinstatement of a historically-accurate, nineteenth century shopfront together with traditional, hand-painted fascia. For this to be achieved the assistance available under the Frontage Improvement Scheme is not sufficient. At present there is a grant rate of 80% of the cost of works to a maximum of £4,000 per building. In order to carry out more substantial works such as reinstating a historic shopfront, - a measure in keeping with the architecture of the rest of the building - it would be necessary to remove this £4,000 limit. It is felt that whilst the current limit of £4000 is making a modest improvement to the character of the High Street, it is also preventing other opportunities coming forward which would have a more substantial impact.
- 3.7 There are opportunities in the Town Centre to set an example of good shopfront design based on historic precedent as a benchmark for the Townscape Heritage Initiative scheme currently under development. Works would be carried out in accordance with best practice in the enhancement of historic buildings and to a quality appropriate for an assistance scheme of importance to the national heritage. The reinstatement of a historic shopfronts on the High Street supported by the Council would go a very long way in persuading the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) that our second-round bid is an exceptionally positive one. The welcome publicity that such projects would bring is sure to provide a positive message in the run-up to submission of the Stage 2 HLF bid.

Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 3.8 The Frontage Improvement Scheme is not means tested and applications are welcomed from any owner or tenant within the target area. When asked at a public consultation in Bromsgrove which actions would make the town centre a nicer environment to visit 65% of people thought that it would help if more of the shopfronts and signage were more in keeping with the historic architecture.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 4.1 The Frontage Improvement Scheme supports CO1 Regeneration and CO1 Priority to improve the Town Centre. The additional funding per property would allow for more substantial work to take place creating a larger overall impact as part of the town centre regeneration.
- 4.2 The successful allocation of funding to support key frontages within the Town Centre will help to further demonstrate the Councils commitment to improving properties within the Town Centre and help support the bid for £1.25 million National Lottery Townscape Heritage initiative funding which is currently being prepared.

5. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Frontage Improvement Scheme Leaflet

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

AUTHOR OF REPORT

Name: Mike Dunphy
E Mail: m.dunphy@bromsgrove.gov.uk
Tel: 01527 881325