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**Agenda Item:** Public Realm: Request to relocate the Buttercross Needle

**Meeting Date:** Monday, 27<sup>th</sup> January 2025

**Contact Officer:** Town Clerk/CEO – Sharon Groth

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The purpose of this report is to seek views on the relocation of the ‘Buttercross Needle’ currently located in Marriotts Walk opposite the Cinema, to Town Council owned land.

### Background

The Buttercross Needle is a public contemporary art installation created by sculptor Michael Fairfax which was unveiled on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2009.



Source: <https://batch.artuk.org/discover/artworks/buttercross-needle-308003>

It is a narrow pyramidal obelisk mounted on a geometric steel base, made of stainless steel, glass and fibre optic lights; its unique characteristic is that at night internal fibre optic lights illuminate thin glass strips.

The sculpture intentionally references local landmarks, specifically the spire of St Mary’s Church and the roof of the Buttercross, and whilst modern it maintains the connection to Witney’s architectural heritage.

## **Current Situation**

The District Council is undertaking public realm improvements at Marriotts Walk. As part of these improvements, it has identified the need to relocate the Buttercross Needle, currently situated within the shopping centre. While alternative locations in the vicinity are being considered, this report seeks the committee's agreement in principle to accommodate the Needle at Unterhaching Park.

Unterhaching Park has a circular plinth that was originally designed to accommodate a German maypole. More recently, the plinth was earmarked for a Jubilee Legacy Project commemorating Queen Elizabeth II. However, due to technical issues encountered during the installation of a sundial, the plinth currently remains vacant and available for use.

The relocation of the Buttercross Needle to Unterhaching Park represents an opportunity to enhance the park's amenities by making use of an existing, unused feature. The committee's decision is now required to proceed with discussions and planning.

## **Impact Assessments**

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) Equality – the Council will need to ensure that the park remains accessible to all and would seek to get the District Council to add tactile information panels to make the monument's cultural significance accessible to visually impaired visitors. The historical referent to St Mary's Church and Buttercross helps maintain cultural heritage education for all community members.
- b) Biodiversity – given that a plinth is already in situ this would lead to minimal disruption to the area. The plan was to provide landscaping within a previous project – this could still be considered to help with the biodiversity of the area.
- c) Crime & Disorder – the illuminated feature and visibility from surrounding areas may deter antisocial behaviour – although it could also provide an area for congregating youths.
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency – the fibre optic lighting should be energy-efficient compared to traditional lighting systems. The re-utilisation of the plinth would minimise wastage and the disposal of rubble/building materials would therefore be minimal.

## **Risk**

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

Both Council's will need to ensure the plinth's structural integrity to support the obelisk's weight with it being anchored down sufficiently; and that the seals around electrical/fibre optic components are adequate and safe. A clear maintenance schedule would be needed for both the structure and lighting elements; and a safety assessment of any sharp edges or climbing potential given its location in a children's park. It is currently free standing in Marriotts Walk and not a fenced attraction.

## **Social Value**

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates.

Accommodating the Buttercross Needle would create a unique day/night feature in a children's space, encouraging imagination and interest in local heritage. There would be an educational opportunity to connect children with local architectural history through a contemporary lens. It would add cultural value to a recreational space, creating a multi-purpose destination for all to use and enjoy.

## **Financial implications**

The District Council has confirmed that all costs associated with the relocation of the Buttercross Needle, including transportation and installation, will be fully covered by them.

However, it is important to note that the Needle is illuminated and requires an electrical supply. This means the ongoing running costs associated with its lighting will need to be borne by the Town Council. Officers will seek a detailed assessment of these costs if the proposal is agreed in principle.

## **Recommendations**

The Committee is asked to note the report and

1. Consider the request to accommodate the Buttercross Needle at Unterhaching Park;
2. Agree in principle to accept the relocation, subject to further discussions on ongoing costs and any additional considerations.