

Report: Town Centre Wayfinding and Gateway Archway Project – Approval of Specification, Installation and Future Ownership

Report Author

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Purpose of Report

To seek approval from Witney Town Council for:

1. The proposed approach to the installation of two town centre gateway archways.
2. The proposed wayfinding and signage specification.
3. The installation of an archway at Langdale Gate on Town Council land.
4. The principle of Witney Town Council accepting ownership of the completed archway and wayfinding assets and responsibility for their future maintenance following installation.

Background

West Oxfordshire District Council has been progressing a programme of town centre improvements aimed at strengthening Witney's identity, improving the visitor experience, and supporting navigation throughout the town centre. This work has been developed in collaboration with officers from Witney Town Council and representatives of the Witney Chamber of Commerce, helping to ensure that the proposals reflect local priorities and aspirations for the town centre.

Two key elements of this work are:

- The fabrication and installation of two town centre archways.
- The installation of a refreshed wayfinding and signage network.

These interventions form part of a wider approach to creating a more attractive, legible and welcoming town centre environment for residents, visitors and businesses, while reinforcing Witney's identity and supporting the vitality of the town centre.

Working alongside the Oxfordshire County Council-led High Street improvement programme, we are already collaborating closely with the project team and contractors to ensure a coordinated, complementary and well-integrated approach. This partnership is helping to maximise the impact of investment in the town centre and ensure that individual projects contribute to a wider vision for Witney.

Once completed, this project has the potential to provide a fitting final element to the wider programme of improvements, helping to enhance the public realm and create a distinctive focal point for the town. It would build upon the significant work already undertaken and deliver a strong visual statement that reflects Witney's character and ambition.

The completed scheme would offer lasting benefits for residents, businesses and visitors alike, strengthening the attractiveness of the town centre, encouraging footfall and civic pride, and creating a memorable feature that people can enjoy for years to come. In doing so, it would serve as a showcase addition that helps to complete and celebrate the wider investment being made in Witney.

Proposed Archway Installations

As part of the wider town centre improvement programme, it is proposed to install two new gateway archways at key arrival points into Witney town centre:

- Corn Street
- Langdale Gate entrance adjacent to Market Square

The archways are intended to act as landmark features that strengthen Witney's identity, improve the sense of arrival into the town centre, and create distinctive gateways that celebrate the town's character and heritage. They will serve as highly visible placemaking features, helping to reinforce a sense of destination and complement wider efforts to improve the attractiveness, legibility and vibrancy of the town centre.

The proposed approach is to commission a suitably qualified local architect to lead the project through concept development, stakeholder engagement, planning and technical design. The architect will undertake the necessary site investigations, utility searches, liaison with planning, conservation and highways authorities, and coordination of structural engineering requirements. They will also prepare the planning applications, develop the technical design package and provide support through fabrication, installation and handover. This approach will ensure appropriate due diligence is undertaken throughout the project and that key considerations such as planning requirements, heritage impacts, land ownership, utility constraints, structural integrity, clearances and future maintenance requirements are addressed at an early stage.

Subject to the necessary approvals and consents being secured, a separate procurement exercise will then be undertaken to commission the fabrication and installation of both archways.

As one archway is proposed to be located at Langdale Gate, on land owned by Witney Town Council, approval is sought in principle for its installation in this location. The proposed Corn Street archway will require the appropriate permissions and licences from Oxfordshire County Council as Highway Authority, together with any other statutory approvals identified through the design process.

The proposed archways are intended to:

- Create distinctive gateway features at key entrances to the town centre.
- Strengthen Witney's identity and sense of place.
- Improve the visitor experience and sense of arrival.
- Support town centre vitality, tourism and place marketing activity.
- Complement the wider wayfinding and signage programme.
- Create lasting civic assets that contribute positively to the character of the town centre for many years to come.

Proposed Wayfinding and Signage Specification

A draft wayfinding and signage specification has been prepared to guide the procurement and delivery of a comprehensive town centre wayfinding scheme.

The purpose of the scheme is to create a coherent and accessible network of signs and information points that help residents and visitors navigate the town with confidence, while encouraging exploration of Witney's retail, cultural, heritage and leisure offer.

The objectives of the signage scheme are to:

- Improve navigation throughout the town centre.
- Assist visitors in locating key destinations and amenities.
- Encourage exploration and increased dwell time.
- Promote cultural, heritage, leisure and visitor attractions.
- Improve the overall legibility of the town centre.
- Create a consistent, recognisable and high-quality wayfinding system.
- Complement and reinforce Witney's identity and character.

The specification establishes requirements relating to:

- Design quality and visual identity.
- Accessibility and inclusivity.
- Materials, durability and longevity.
- Mapping and directional information.
- Maintenance and lifecycle considerations.
- Future adaptability and expansion.

A copy of the draft specification is attached at Appendix 1.

Ownership and Maintenance

The archways and wayfinding assets are being developed through a project led by West Oxfordshire District Council. However, as permanent features within the town centre, it is proposed that ownership of the completed assets transfers to Witney Town Council following installation and completion of the works.

Approval is therefore sought in principle for Witney Town Council to accept ownership of the completed archways and wayfinding assets and assume responsibility for their future management and maintenance.

This approach recognises the Town Council's ongoing stewardship of Witney's public realm and ensures that responsibility for the assets rests with an organisation with a long-term interest in the town centre's appearance, functionality and visitor experience.

Durability, longevity and ease of maintenance will be key considerations during the detailed design and procurement stages in order to minimise future maintenance requirements and whole-life costs.

Potential Future Maintenance Provision

The Section 106 team have given us an indication that it may be possible for a proportion of the Section 106 funding to contribute towards a budget for the ongoing maintenance of the wayfinding signage.

If supported, such a provision would help ensure that the signage network remains well-maintained, safe and effective over the longer term, protecting the investment made and maximising the benefits to residents, visitors and local businesses. Whilst the signage has been designed with longevity and durability in mind, and ongoing maintenance requirements are not anticipated to be significant, any provision would provide additional reassurance that the network can be maintained to a high standard over a longer time.

Financial Implications

The design, manufacture and installation of the proposed archways and wayfinding assets are intended to be funded through a combination of UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Section 106 contributions. Funding is time-limited and subject to expenditure deadlines.

Whilst the completed assets will become the responsibility of Witney Town Council following installation, the ongoing maintenance costs cannot be quantified at this stage as they will depend on the final designs, materials and installation methods adopted through the procurement process.

Durability, longevity and ease of maintenance will be key considerations during the design and procurement process, with the intention of procuring assets that have relatively low whole-life costs.

Environmental Implications

The proposals seek to enhance the attractiveness, legibility and accessibility of Witney town centre, encouraging walking, exploration and engagement with local businesses, attractions and public spaces.

Environmental considerations, including material selection, longevity and maintenance requirements, will be considered during the procurement process.

Risk Management

- The successful delivery of the project will be dependent upon securing the necessary permissions, approvals and consents from the relevant landowners and statutory bodies, including Oxfordshire County Council in its role as Highway Authority.
- Failure to secure agreement in principle regarding the installation, ownership and maintenance of the proposed assets could delay or prevent the delivery of the wider town centre improvement programme.

- The project is reliant upon time-limited UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Section 106 funding. Delays in obtaining approvals or progressing design and procurement activities may affect the ability to utilise the available funding within the required timescales, potentially resulting in the loss of investment that would otherwise be available for improvements to Witney town centre.
- Whilst the completed assets will require ongoing maintenance, durability, longevity and ease of maintenance are key considerations within the design and procurement process. The appointment of a suitably qualified architect will also help ensure that planning, conservation, structural, highways and maintenance considerations are identified and addressed at an early stage, reducing delivery and operational risks.
- With changes to local government arrangements approaching, there is a valuable opportunity to progress this project now, capitalising on the strong partnerships, shared priorities and momentum that are already in place.

Recommendations:

Witney Town Council is therefore asked to:

- Approve the proposed approach to the design, procurement and installation of the two gateway archways.
- Grant approval in principle for the installation of an archway at Langdale Gate on Town Council land.
- Consider the draft wayfinding and signage specification for the physical signs.
- Agree in principle to accept ownership of the completed archway and wayfinding assets and their associated maintenance responsibilities following installation.
- Continue to work in partnership with West Oxfordshire District Council, Witney Chamber of Commerce, accessibility groups and other local stakeholders to deliver a high-quality project that complements ongoing town centre improvements and contributes to a vibrant, welcoming and accessible Witney for residents, businesses and visitors alike.