

Lever St Improvements

Decision:

The Hotel Action Group asks for consideration of the following funding ideas, to be delivered by the Town Council and financed by the Welcome Back Fund:

1. Provision of wall-top seating on the car park wall adjacent to the canal towpath.
2. Installation of a tree in the existing raised bed at the end of Union St South (to replace one that was removed)

Background

Todmorden's Neighbourhood Plan (draft) is supportive of proposals to improve the canal and views along it, and local community feedback identifies that the public would like to prioritise canal improvements for walking, cycling and recreation. The car park provides significant and attractive views of the natural landscape features, like Stoodley Pike, and the Neighbourhood Plan seeks to protect and enhance these canal views.

Todmorden Town Deal published a proposal in January 2021 to build visitor accommodation on the Lever Street Car Park site, as part of the Town Investment Plan submitted to the UK Government.

Todmorden Hotel Action Group was formed to campaign for the best location for any visitor accommodation and ensure that Lever Street Car Park was protected from building development. We believed the canalside at Lever St should instead be enhanced for recreation and to improve canal access, but the current car park environment is poor.

The Action Group received considerable feedback about the site and its value to residents and visitors during the campaign, particularly for accessing and enjoying the canal, and relaxing on the canalside.

In November 2021, Todmorden Town Deal withdrew the hotel project from their revised Town Investment Plan. Following this, the action group decided to consult about what improvements the public wanted to see at Lever Street and at the adjacent canalside – this evidence was presented to the Todmorden Town Deal and then passed to Calderdale Council.

Consultation

We asked the question, 'Can the canalside be improved?' on local social media and over 1500 people read the post, with over 100 comments and suggestions for improvements at the Lever Street canalside, whilst retaining the car park. There is a strong public desire to create some open green space by the canal with seating, amongst other issues.



Public Realm Improvements

We have produced a comprehensive assessment of the car park and its relationship with the canal, recommending opportunities where public realm improvements would improve the resident and visitor experience of the town, enhancing Todmorden's distinctiveness. This report will be published after mid-February 2022, including longer-term opportunities that will need development in a detailed design proposal, dependent on available funding.

In the short-term, the Welcome Back Fund (WBF) provides a good opportunity to deliver immediate visible improvements, and will provide some of the improvements highlighted in the report. We have recently met with Calderdale Council to discuss what improvement ideas could be funded. Calderdale Council are considering a proposal for car park signage simplification and relocation, as they are the asset owner. As a partner of Calderdale for delivering the WBF, we thought that the Town Council would like to consider additional appropriate ideas.

Welcome Back Fund

The Welcome Back Fund (WBF) is a European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) available until 31st March 2022 for relevant expenditure actually incurred and paid, with Calderdale receiving a total allocation of £372,198. It can be used by local authorities to boost the look and feel of high streets and areas adjacent to them, including improving green spaces, and installing additional seating areas. Additions or adaptations to the public realm, like seating, must be temporary and capable of being removed.

Funding Ideas

1. Provision of wall-top seating on the car park wall

We have observed usage of the car park wall for relaxation and we believe that provision of two seats on the car park wall would be sufficient, at the locations below. Each of these should be capable of seating two persons comfortably:



The design of the seating should be simple and allow people to sit comfortably in either direction, probably in dark natural wood. We have looked at what removable products are available and there appears to be a wide range – this contains a number of examples:

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/610589661963777123/>

2. Installation of a tree in existing raised bed

The landscaping at the end of Union St South was installed in 2015 as part of the flood prevention works to the canal towpath. Originally, there was a crab apple tree installed in the main raised bed but this was unsuitable and was removed:



A suitable replacement tree would help to reduce the dominance of the car park, and provide a focal point at the end of Union St South and also enhance the setting of Lock 18 (Shop Lock) – enhancing the views of Todmorden when walking along the canal to the town centre.

The replacement tree shouldn't become too dominant when mature and be suitable for planting in a raised bed - the tree should be carefully selected for its location. The previous flowering cherry trees along the canalside, whilst beautiful, became too dominant and tall restricting views, and the petals littered the towpath and car park during the short flowering season:



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