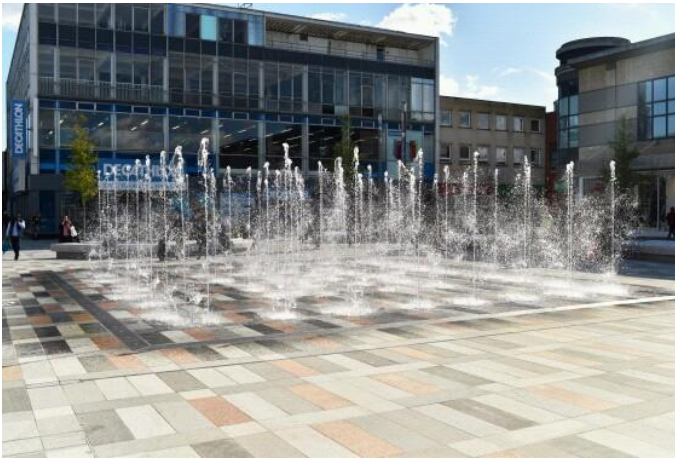


QUEENS SQUARE REGENERATION SCHEME

PROJECT EVALUATION

NOVEMBER 2019



INTRODUCTION

In October 2017, the £3.2m Queens Square regeneration scheme opened to the public. Funded and delivered in partnership by Crawley Borough Council, West Sussex County Council and the Coast to Capital Local Enterprise Partnership, the project represented the first phase of Crawley's Town Centre Regeneration Programme and the Crawley Growth Programme (CGP).

BACKGROUND

Queens Square lies at the heart of Crawley town centre and was originally opened in 1958 by Queen Elizabeth II. The Square comprises a large plaza surrounded on all sides by shops, linked to the High Street via The Broadwalk and to the bus and railway stations via The Martlets.

In the 1970s, the area was fully pedestrianised and in 2005, The Pavilion was constructed within the square to introduce modern retail accommodation and create a more sheltered space.

Between 2008 and 2014, a number of retailers in the Square either closed down due to the economic downturn or relocated to the recently refurbished County Mall indoor shopping centre. Several units were either empty or occupied on short term leases which exacerbated the decline and worsening image of the area. In addition, the Square is an area of fragmented ownership and had suffered from a lack of inward investment from freeholders.

Commercial advice suggested that whilst Crawley town centre is an excellent location for business investment in terms of demographics, accessibility and affluence, its public realm was tired, outdated and in need of an upgrade. Any rejuvenation of the public realm should properly connect the area to the rest of the town centre and have the ability and flexibility to support both retail *and* leisure uses within the Square.

In 2013, Crawley Borough Council commissioned architects Burns + Nice to develop concept designs for a new square, based on extensive public and stakeholder consultation.

PROJECT AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The overall aim was to create an adaptable and multi-functional space, which will transform the area into a high quality, distinctive and enjoyable public space.

The following *scheme objectives* were identified:

- to deliver physical improvements to the Square, developed in consultation with residents, local businesses, councillors and officers from CBC and WSCC and other key stakeholders that will help create a vibrant, attractive and accessible space;
- to help create an inviting, vibrant, attractive and comfortable space that becomes a destination in its own right, encouraging more people to visit, stay and make use of the space and drawing new retailers, social and other commercial activities in to the town centre.
- to ensure the space is accessible to all users including children, older people, workers, residents and visitors that will be using the space at different times of the day and night;
- to ensure seamless connections to other parts of the town centre including routes along The Broadwalk, The Martlets and Queensway. The design must also respond appropriately to its surroundings taking account of new town architecture and building uses, both existing and potential;
- to ensure that the area feels safe and is designed to limit opportunities for anti-social behaviour, taking into account the limited evening and night time use of the area and the potential impact of a more active evening economy;
- to add greenery to the space with a variety of planting in order to soften the appearance of the square and promote bio-diversity;

- to minimise disruption to pedestrians and existing businesses for example through phasing, timing, consultation and a considerate approach to construction.

The following *design objectives* were identified:

- create a step change in the townscape quality of the square in the form of an attractive, vibrant, green, comfortable and welcoming area which encourages new investment and employment and acts as a catalyst for wider regeneration.
- the square will be used predominantly by people on foot. Street furniture, planting material and structures should be designed to encourage positive social interaction. The potential for creating a well-ordered approach to café-related outdoor seating should be explored;
- provide a usable open space with flexibility for performance and community events;
- improving the perception of Queens Square and enhance and promote the visitor experience considering a range of users including residents and those in the wider geographical area;
- whilst the scheme should take account of Crawley (architecture/history/new town) there is a desire to soften the appearance of the square with planting to make a much greener space and to use ‘warm’ colours as part of the hard landscaping;
- Sustainable Urban Drainage - explore the potential for sustainable drainage or water recycling to maintain trees and plants;
- Play & Recreation - evaluate the potential of the area to be used for play and recreation;
- Connectivity & Wayfaring - establish ease of navigation through the square and strengthen pedestrian linkages between the square, Broadway and High Street;

The following outputs were anticipated:

- 300 jobs created / protected as a consequence of the Queens Square regeneration scheme.
- 5,668 square metres of retail / commercial space regenerated / brought back into use
- Create the conditions that will generate a multiplier effect for over 7,000 square metres of retail / commercial space across the town centre to be brought back into use.
- 262 residential units created
- 3,500 square metres of public realm space regenerated

FUNDNG REQUIREMENTS

The total cost for the delivery of the Queens Square regeneration scheme was confirmed as being £3.2 million. This was broken down according to the following budgetary headlines:

Construction	£2,002,000
Other project costs (service diversions, planning fees, public art relocation, arboricultural survey, ground investigation works, bandstand relocation)	£121,000
Project Design & Management	£388,500
Contingencies	£688,500
TOTAL SCHEME COST	£3,200,000

These costs were met by a £1.7 million contribution from West Sussex County Council (*approved November 2013*) and a £1.5 million contribution from the Coast to Capital LEP’s Local Growth Fund programme (*approved March 2016*).

Crawley Borough Council was the lead authority in terms of project management and delivery; from initial feasibility to project completion.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

A comprehensive programme of consultation and stakeholder engagement with local people on the future of Queens Square was completed in two stages: the first asked what people would like to see in Queens Square. The second invited feedback on concept designs. Consultation was delivered using a variety of methods including exhibitions, on-line surveys, local and social media and targeted meetings with key stakeholders. Analysis of the findings positively influenced the final designs and showed that people were generally supportive of the proposed changes to the square.

Throughout the 12 month construction period, the council worked closely with the contractor and local businesses to ensure that disruption was kept to a minimum. This included informational signage and regular face to face contact with businesses. Any issues arising were dealt with swiftly and feedback was generally positive. Regular updates were posted on the Council's dedicated Inward Investment website, social media and around the site itself.

SUSTAINABILITY

A new irrigation system was installed within the planters to recycle water and reduce usage. Former halogen lighting in the square was replaced with LED which has significantly reduced the power requirements for street lighting. The majority of construction materials were reused, recycled and sourced from local suppliers in order to reduce delivery mileage to the site. Site operatives were employed locally (in accordance with the Crawley Developer & Partner Charter) so that travelling distances were reduced.

Crawley Borough Council took steps to ensure the quality of the public realm will be maintained and upheld by investing in a programme of maintenance and cleaning, ring fencing a £15,000 revenue budget per annum to focus specifically on the upkeep of the transformed Queens Square public realm. The project was also able to provide a commuted sum towards the future maintenance programme.

PROJECT OUTPUTS AND BENEFITS REALISATION

Since the new Square opened in October 2017, it has been used to host a number of public events including:

2017

7 October	Queens Square Opening
mid Nov - January	Seasonal Ice Rink (attracting 11,000 visitors)
25 November	The Big Seven-0 (celebrating 70 years of Crawley new town)

2018

30 March	Good Friday Churches Together
22 April	St George's Day Scouts open air service
30 June	Crawley Festival - Community Day
14 & 15 September	Outdoor cinema events
23 September	Ratha Yatra festival of chariots
27 October	Halloween entertainment & cinema: Coco (Pixar), The Addams family
24 November	Children's parade "Chime" & Christmas tree lighting
15 December	Christmas Carols by St John's choir
15 December	Christmas in Queens Square – Community Event
20 December	Christmas Carols by St John's choir

2019

19 April	Good Friday Churches Together
28 June	Crawley festival, children's day

31 August & 1 September	Outdoor cinema events
7 September	Ratha Yatra festival of chariots
17 – 20 October	Continental street market
23 November	Christmas Tree light switch-on
30 November	THRIVE Arts & Culture Community event
25 November – 22 December	Crawley Mistletoe Fair

Whilst we have no specific data to support an increase in visitor spend, we know that footfall has increased from 200,000 to around 220,000 per week.

A Town Centre Operator Survey¹ carried out in February 2019 showed an 8% increase on trading performance figures since 2017 with average transaction rates staying the same. Most operators plan to stay in Crawley, presenting a positive and stable outlook for the town centre. Satisfaction levels with the town centre are good and the Queens Square project was singled out by many respondents and recognised as providing a positive benefit to them and their customers.

100% of the commercial units surrounding the square are now occupied and we have seen around £30m private sector investment in those properties, realised through a combination of refurbishments, fit-outs and freehold/leasehold purchases.

In September 2015 (pre-scheme), Sussex police received 37 reports of incidents in Queens Square, mostly relating to anti-social behaviour and thefts (reported by staff and the public). In September 2019 (2 years post-scheme completion) the police received 20 calls relating to incidents in Queens Square; and fewer calls received from the public. This is the right direction of travel and demonstrates that effective design can help to reduce crime in public spaces.

The project also delivered:

- 4,512sqm of retail / commercial space refurbished in/around Queens Square
- 1,331sqm of retail / commercial space refurbished in surrounding areas.
- Creation of 91 new jobs
- 274 new residential units built in the immediate area (mainly above retail space)
- 3,500 square metres of public realm regenerated

Summary

The award-winning² regeneration of Queens Square has seen a tired, inflexible and deteriorating public area transformed into a high quality, inviting, distinctive and enjoyable public space in the heart of the town centre – on time, within budget and comprehensively in accordance with the original design specification.

The improvements include high quality paving, new and improved lighting, new seating, new street furniture, new planting and a fountain and have encouraged new businesses to open and for existing retailers and property owners to improve the appearance of their buildings.

The future of the town centre is extremely positive and the project has already led to further public realm improvements along Queensway and The Pavement. The project symbolises the changing and emerging Crawley as a place to live, work, visit and invest in and demonstrates that investment in re-vitalising the public realm can stimulate regeneration yet remain embedded with and supported by the local community.

¹ 155 responses from town centre businesses

² BALI Award 2018 Hard Landscaping Construction over £1.5m category and CIHT 2019 Creating Better Places Award (commended)

