



NEWS RELEASE

4 March 2009

Advantage West Midlands confirms £1.8 million for further investment in World Class Stratford

Advantage West Midlands, the regional development agency, has agreed to provide £1.8 million to support further investment in World Class Stratford projects in and around the Bancroft Gardens, Waterside and Southern Lane and the Recreation Ground.

Confirming the agency's decision to continue its vital financial backing for the regeneration of the town, Philip Roberts, AWM's Partnerships Director, said: "The business case for continuing to invest in Stratford remains strong and we are pleased to confirm our support for these important projects. They will help to considerably improve the town's tourism and visitor offer while complementing our major investment in the rebuilding of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre."

The £1.8 million was originally earmarked as AWM's contribution to the now-abandoned pedestrian bridge project, but since that decision was taken last year the money has been ring-fenced for other associated schemes. These will now include a number of new ideas, such as improvements to the Recreation Ground, lighting of the Tramway Bridge and Holy Trinity Church spire and refurbishment of the river ferry.

In more detail, the funding will be allocated to the following major projects:

- Improvements to the public realm and traffic management along Waterside and Southern Lane. Proposals for this are currently being finalised and will be brought forward in the near future
- Upgrading of the riverside promenade and the area surrounding the bandstand on the North Recreation Ground. This is a new scheme designed to make the recreation ground more attractive for public use and to stage events and festivals. It will also complement the quality and style of work in the Bancroft Gardens on the opposite side of the River Avon
- Lighting schemes for the Tramway Bridge and the Holy Trinity Church, to create a spectacular night-time feature of these two famous Stratford landmarks. Concepts have been prepared for both projects, which would require Listed Building consent prior to installation

- £195,000 has been allocated to cover anticipated additional costs associated with the re-landscaping of the Bancroft Gardens. These are likely to result from a combination of factors, including rectification of unplanned matters, for example, major repairs to the canal wall on the town side of the canal basin, and new elements added to the project, which along with adverse weather conditions over the winter, have contributed to over-running on the planned completion date. The gardens are being restored to a truly world class standard and will be re-opened as part of the Shakespeare Birthday Celebrations in late April
- Heritage reconstruction of the river ferry, based on original drawings from the 1930s, together with installation of new ramps to improve passenger accessibility

Welcoming the announcement, Councillor Les Topham, chairman of the World Class Stratford Strategy Group and leader of Stratford-on-Avon District Council, said:

“AWM assured us that the £1.8 million allocated for the bridge would be made available for other projects and this decision confirms that they have been true to their word. This is a huge boost to World Class Stratford, especially at a time when public funding is under great pressure. We are very grateful and appreciative for their continued belief in the project and financial support for its implementation.”

Councillor Chris Saint, economic development portfolio holder for Warwickshire County Council, said that the funding allowed exciting new elements to be added to the original Phase One programme.

“This revised programme will make AWM’s funding work very hard for Stratford and together with support from other partners will deliver some striking new features. The new lighting for the Tramway bridge and the Holy Trinity spire should create a superb evening atmosphere. The upgraded facilities in the Recreation Ground were envisaged in the original Waterfront Master Plan. The new schemes will be very timely, as plans are underway for more public events and festivals to be staged in the town in future. All of these improvements will add to Stratford’s appeal and ability to provide a superb experience that people will want to repeat time and again.”

Reverend Martin Gorick, vicar of Holy Trinity Church, said the decision was a perfect tonic as the church begins to plan for its 800th anniversary in 2010: “To have the church illuminated again in time for our 800th birthday celebrations is great news. Holy Trinity is Stratford’s oldest building and I’m sure that the new lighting will add an extra dimension to its already commanding presence and iconic status.”

Each of the projects will have its own timescale but work will be phased in over the next few months, with completion timed to coincide with the re-opening of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. Projects which impact on the main visitor season, such as work in the Recreation Ground, will be scheduled over the winter months.

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