

ADEPT President's Awards 2023

Entry form

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Award category Shaping Places for People

Project Title Dunstable High Street

Local authority entrant Central Bedfordshire Council

Partner/s if applicable Jacobs

Headline summary (150 characters max.)

The Dunstable High Street improvements have enhanced community feeling and overall quality of life.

Video - please paste links to any video evidence here. (Leave blank if not relevant.)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AF_ENFU1Wc8

Shaping places for people: How was this project an innovative response to a significant concern? (150 words max.)

The Dunstable High Street improvements are pivotal to the regeneration of Dunstable. Residents and businesses wanted their High Street to be more attractive and a safer experience, reducing the sense of vehicles dominating the road. They wanted a café culture with more greenery and wider pavements making the town safer for pedestrians. Through the opportunity presented by the detrunked A5, we designed solutions that addressed these aspects, but also delivered other innovative improvements that enhanced cultural heritage aspects, reduced flooding risk and reduced carbon emissions. This has enabled the town to enhance the urban environment, creating a better sense of place, supporting civic pride, enhancing community feeling and overall quality of life.

Shaping places for people: Please give evidence of the quality of outcomes obtained from the project (for example improved/more efficient services, increased inclusivity for residents, futureproofing the service). (150 words max.)

The project improved road layouts and safety, including High Street median planting and cycling facilities, encouraging modal shift from cars to cycling and walking. It enhanced the cultural heritage in the historic Middle Row, developing arch and gateway totems on the High Street. It also reduced flood risk through sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDS) and mitigated potential further damage to homes, businesses and the medieval vaults of Priory House, which is on the Historic England at risk list and is an important part of Dunstable's cultural legacy. Landscape planting enhanced the environment, improving community spaces and personal amenity. LED lighting reduced energy use and carbon emissions, as well as reducing the perception of crime. The scheme won a Royal Horticultural Society Community Awards Green Solutions Achievement Award and was supported by Anglian Water, who saw this as an exemplar approach to flood and water management in a high street location.

Shaping places for people: Please give evidence of the level of collaboration between place and people services (both within the council and with external partners/providers). (150 words)

max.)

These works compliment the local government and private sector investments in leisure and recreation, heritage and place shaping and form an integral part of the wider regeneration strategy for Dunstable Town Centre. Further benefits from implementing these plans include incremental consumer expenditure, additional employment and associated income and reduced retail property vacancy. The public realm works enhance the urban environment and heritage which are important enablers of town centre regeneration. They enable a better sense of place supporting civic pride, enhanced community feeling, and “can do” attitudes. These as well as tangible environmental improvements have improved the quality of life to those using the High Street.

Shaping places for people: Please give evidence of the level of buy-in to the project or its goals from members of the local community, health and social care and external organisations. (150 words max.)

We managed liaison with key stakeholders, Central Bedfordshire Council, Councillors, funding organisations, adjacent development teams, and local businesses. We also managed the public consultation phase, creating public relations materials. We undertook Interactive Planning Workshops for each design phase where stakeholders were invited to review the scheme proposals and provide feedback. There was also public consultation and an exhibition at the feasibility stage and further consultation through the Traffic Regulation Order changes process. We presented the public realm works in a way that appealed to civic pride by demonstrating how the town centre would become more attractive to both residents and visitors, improving business opportunities and ultimately improve quality of life. This led to further support from residents, who were able to see the benefits, such as additional employment and reduced retail property vacancy as a result of our clear messaging and consistent appeals to their community interests.

Shaping places for people: Please give evidence of the use or consideration of new sources of investment to fund projects. (150 words max.)

For the project to be financially viable, funding from different sources was obtained through the project’s environmental, societal and safety benefits. Environmental Designated Funds of circa £3 million were obtained from National Highways, circa £2.5 million was obtained from South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP) Local Growth Funding, circa £0.5 million from the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) as well as match funding from Anglian Water and the Council. This income has directly benefitted the community by aligning to themes outlined in each of the respective funds, such as improving safety (HE), enhancing places (SEMLEP) and local infrastructure. The SuDS and other landscape planting has been supported by match funding from Anglian Water, who see this as being an exemplar approach to flood and water management in a high street location. This funding enabled the project to benefit from significant design enhancements.