Digital Wayfinding

Huntingdon, St Neots, St Ives and Ramsey town centres

Digital wayfinding in Huntingdonshire

- In 2021, HDC, working with Connecting Cambridgeshire, secured £200,000 of funding to deliver a digital wayfinding project.

- The system was to be located in Huntingdon, Ramsey and St Ives town centres.

- The overall purpose of the Digital displays was to support wayfinding through technology, and to promote shopping, events and heritage attractions in these areas.

What were the wider project objectives?

Enhance the overall image of our market town centres as destinations, creating positive experiences for all users;

Increase the confidence to walk and explore by better connecting places keeping information simple;

Provide a digital wayfinding and information system that is beneficial to all town centre stakeholders and businesses;

Provide a flexible suite of signage products that can maintain movement and disclose information progressively;

Grow the number of visitors at key attractions, increasing spending, providing a boost to the local economy;

Improve urban realm, sense of community, pedestrian safety, health and environment.

Future proofed to incorporate interactive mapping solutions where appropriate

How did the system proposed for use, support wayfinding?

- Real time 3d mapping oriented in the users point of view
- Local business and activities highlighted
- Shortest route until destination and management of traffic flow
- Multi floor and multi building routes
- Connected information displayed on the visual display map
- Users would also receive route and information by QR code or SMS
- The system can include audience recognition technology, to deliver targeted advertising, promotion of local activities and personalised information

What were the broader benefits of this digital system?

- This is an information system that can be updated in real time with data tailored to local areas. The displays can include public transport schedules, local events, business information, maps and information for visitors.

- The screens could be used to promote local businesses and attractions through either paid for or free advertisement for the purpose of supporting the local economy.

- Local government authorities and agencies can use the displays to provide information about public services or, for example, to remind people to vote.

- The technology is adaptable and can be used to connect with people through their own phones and or social media. We can also make use of the smarter town's Lorowan network, currently being rolled out to display immediate data on a wide variety of information sources. This could include parking capacity, air quality or even public safety information from the Police, who are keen on partnering with HDC.

- Digital wayfinding could also help to underpin and support broader project delivery as part of the Market Town's programme through a more direct connection with local businesses and service providers. The system would be able to dovetail with other improvements such as the renewal of St Neots Market Square.

What happened to the project?

- During 2022, a decision was taken by members, not to take the scheme forward.

- This was primarily due to concerns and unanswered questions regarding how the system would be managed and maintained.

- As a result of this, HDC incurred abortive costs of £10,000 and the contract with the intended supplier was cancelled.

Digital wayfinding now. Why reconsider?

- The funds allocated to HDC were specific to delivering a Digital Information system. If we do not proceed, the funds are returned.

- CPCA have confirmed that the funds are still available for project delivery if HDC decides to reactivate the initiative, based on the original objectives and outputs.

- Recent discussions with local partners, has identified local interest in the project and a willingness to partner or lead on management and maintenance. This would address one of the most significant concerns regarding the project.

- Connecting Cambridgeshire have also confirmed that they would be willing to re-engage with HDC and help to support project delivery.

- Town centres continue to be affected by the impact of covid and the closure of businesses, not withstanding the long term trend to online shopping. This system provides an additional tool with which to support their recovery. It is a virtual signpost that will inform and direct town centre visitors to services or retail.

- Whilst the original programme did not include all of our major Market Town's, utilising unspent funds awarded from CPCA in a separate programme, we are able to extend the scheme benefits also to St Neots.

Scheme costs, management & maintenance

- Funding of £200,000 was previously allocated specifically to providing Digital Wayfinding system in Huntingdonshire.

- Subject to HDC deciding to progress this project, a further £50,000 is available to extend the scheme to St Neots. This part of the scheme would be delivered in tandem to the Market Square renewal scheme.

- Based on the previous preferred supplier's tender, 60% of the project budget is likely to be allocated to supply of the system, including management and updates for a period of three years. The remaining 40% was allocated for installation and civil engineering works. Whilst future tenders may differ in value, we would not expect this to change by a significant margin.

- Digital screens located in similar areas elsewhere, have been used to generate advertising and this may be an option to support operation by partners beyond the initial three year period.

What is the proposition?

- Discussions with other Local Authorities to understand the benefits of the system to the Community and their experience.

- If the project is re-initiated working with Connecting Cambridgeshire to develop an updated tender process to identify a project partner and supplier.

- HDC would seek to deliver displays systems in each of our major market towns as part of this process.

- Each display system would be managed and maintained locally by our partners. The Town Councils and Huntingdon BID have already expressed an interest in taking on this role.

- The project would **not** require ongoing revenue support from HDC and may in fact be used to generate funding from advertising to support operation by our local partners.

- The systems would be in place by the end of the current financial year. After which they will be regularly monitored for use and value generated to the local areas in which they are based.

Questions