



Haverhill Area Working Party 15 March 2012

Haverhill High Street Improvement Scheme: Consultation Results and Detailed Design Progress Report

1. Background to Consultation

1.1 Suffolk County Council's Highway Design Team has undertaken a detailed consultation on the Haverhill High Street Improvement Scheme proposals, as previously approved by the Working Party (18 October 2011: Minute 26 refers). The consultation was in two parts, although both were carried out in parallel to reduce the design programme. The first part was general public consultation on the scheme scope, design principles and overall appearance; and the second part was statutory consultation on the Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) required to deliver the overall scheme objectives.

1.2 The dates for the consultation were as follows:-

Stakeholder preview of the public exhibition: 18 January 2012;
Public Exhibition: 27 January to 10 February 2012; and
Public and Business Forum: 27 January 2012.

1.3 Statutory TRO Consultation: 2 February to 24 February 2012.

2. Public Consultation

2.1 The public consultation produced 101 questionnaire responses. Around a third were filled in on-line with the majority coming from attendees of the exhibition.

2.2 A full set of charts summarising the consultation feedback will be presented at the meeting.

2.3 The first set of questions aimed to find out how often people visited the town centre and for what purpose. A majority of respondents (62%) visit daily, and the most common purpose (39%) was for shopping. 64% of respondents agreed that improvements were required in the High Street.

2.4 On the issue of pedestrianisation, the data requires some interpretation. The numbers for and against pedestrianisation are very close, with a slight majority not supporting pedestrianisation. However, when the 'free text' responses are analysed the number supporting the pedestrianisation TRO as drafted, drops significantly to 33%. Several respondents answered that blue badge holders need to be allowed to park in the pedestrianised area, and several others said that

deliveries would still be required during the restricted times of the day. However, a few took the opposite view that the pedestrianisation should be 24/7 with no exceptions.

- 2.5 The question about providing more seating in the town produced a surprising result with 40% not wanting any additional seating; however, the majority did agree with providing more seating areas.
- 2.6 The question about providing measures in Crowland Road to facilitate this as a better traffic route drew an even split of responses. The largest response (56%) was for either 'do nothing' or 'don't know'. Amongst the positive responses, 'one way south west bound' was marginally (25% versus 19%) more popular than restricting parking.
- 2.7 82% of the responses were from Haverhill residents (CB9 postcode); however, the majority of the others (11%) did not fill this section in.

3. Interpreting the Results

- 3.1 The results show that there is a clear desire in the town to have improvements to the High Street. Of the respondents that indicated negatively, the cost of the scheme and prioritisation of this work in the current economic climate were cited. Therefore, it may be necessary to make the case for the project more widely in the public arena, and make it clear that the money is ring-fenced and cannot be spent on any other areas of public sector spending.
- 3.2 On the evidence available, the case for pedestrianisation has not been made. It is also clear that the details of the scheme have not been fully understood by some residents. The options for dealing with this key issue are covered later in the report.
- 3.3 Usually on town centre improvement schemes, increased numbers of attractive seating areas incorporating planting and cycle parking are far more popular with the public than our evidence shows. Our interpretation is that in some cases the existing seating areas are linked in the public's mind with undesirable or anti social behaviour. However, it is our expectation that as the number of areas is increased the number of areas where people can sit comfortably will also increase. In other similar projects, some seating areas have attracted pedestrians from certain age ranges, generally linked to the type of shop or facility in that section of the urban environment.
- 3.4 The evidence supports not making any changes to Crowland Road at this point, but having a couple of worked through solutions will be useful, in the event that problems do occur when the scheme is complete.

4. Business Survey

- 4.1 In parallel with the public consultation, we also requested information from business owners located in the High Street on their delivery patterns and loading requirements. The results of this survey will also be presented at the meeting.

5. Statutory TRO Consultation

5.1 The statutory consultation has also highlighted several issues with the proposed pedestrianisation orders (as at 20 February 2012). We have received 13 legal objections to the TRO, with some objectors raised multiple objections across a range of issues. The range of concerns is shown below:-

- (a) loss of disabled parking (36%);
- (b) restricted access for business loading (36%);
- (c) traffic impact on Crowland Road (9%);
- (d) loss of business (9%);
- (e) possible use of Quaker's Lane dangerous (5%); and
- (f) inconvenient to the public (5%).

5.2 The timetable for resolving these objections and their impact on the proposals is as follows:-

Statutory TRO Consultation: 2 February to 24 February 2012;
Suffolk County Council Rights of Way Committee: 19 June 2012; and
Public Inquiry: (4 month lead time) October/November 2012.

5.3 There is considerable project risk that the objections will not be overturned at the Rights of Way (RoW) Committee, as the Councillors involved will have to balance the overall benefits of the scheme against the considerable public concern raised. These SCC Councillors will have no prior knowledge of the scheme and will only make a decision based upon the quality of evidence presented on both sides.

5.4 If the RoW Committee does not recommend proceeding with the TRO as drafted, we will not be able to proceed to a Public Inquiry to finally resolve the objections. Obviously, there is further project risk that the Public Inquiry would find in favour of the objectors and the Access Restriction TRO would be thrown out. In either of these cases, the design team would have to re-draft a new TRO attempting to deliver the projected benefits of the scheme while seeking to avoid any further objections. Then the entire legal process would start again.

5.5 As with the results of the public consultation, options for resolving these project issues are included later in the report.

6. Scheme Detailed Design

6.1 The civil engineering design of the scheme has progressed well since the last presentation to the Working Party. The design chosen at the preliminary design stages was purposefully flexible to accommodate several TRO options, ranging from the status quo, through 'shared space' to full or part time pedestrianisation.

6.2 We have carried out a Ground Penetrating Radar survey to identify any hidden utilities equipment or underground structures which might be missing from the plans provided. We have tested the rigidity of the under laying material to ensure that our block paving will stand up to heavy use without rutting or opening up the joints, which are common problems with block paved surfaces.

- 6.3 However, we are now in a position to proceed with the construction planning and we require the acceptance of the current design for the Market Hill area from the Working Party. Some of the design features are on a long lead so the start date on site is likely to be at least 12 weeks from the issuing of the works order.
- 6.4 All of the peripheral areas of the scheme have been designed, including Swan Lane traffic signals, Crowland Road Traffic Management and a possible access route from the former Cleales car park to the Gurteen Factory site. However, as all of these additions to the scheme are linked to the Access Restriction TRO, there is no merit in progressing further until a decision on the TRO has been made. Without the Access Restriction none of these measures are required.

7. Options for Enhancing the Scheme to resolve Key Objections

- 7.1 Given the project risk that the proposed TRO will not navigate the legal stages ahead of it, the Design Team have undertaken some preliminary work on an alternative proposal, which it is hoped could deliver many of the key benefits of the current proposals while avoiding many of the objections raised. As work on the deliverability of this option is ongoing, the details will be explained in a presentation at the meeting.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 It is **RECOMMENDED** that:-

- (1) the content of Report C400 be noted; and
- (2) the current design for the Market Hill area, as outlined in paragraph 6.3 of Report C400, be approved.

For further information, please contact:-

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