

High Street, Leatherhead Options for Phase 2 Water Feature

**Mole Valley Local Committee
11 December 2002**

KEY ISSUE:

This report outlines options for decision on whether to continue with the works in association with the water feature that forms part of phase 2 of Leatherhead Town Centre Refurbishment.

SUMMARY:

Construction of Phase 2 of Leatherhead Town Centre Refurbishment started on site in April 2002 with expected completion in late September 2002. However, there have been many constructional difficulties attached to the water feature element of these works, and a number of requests not to proceed with the original scheme. The works have reached a stage where it is reasonable and appropriate that this report, which presents information on number of options, be brought before committee. Accordingly, to minimise further delay and additional costs it is recommended that the Local Committee make the decision to continue with the ramps and not the water element of the original scheme.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Committee is asked to agree:

- 1. That the ramp and associated works are pursued, with the exception of the water element**
- 2. That the revised layout of the ramp and associated works be delegated to the Local Transport Manager, Local Committee Chairmen and Local Members.**

Report by

Roger Archer-Reeves
Local Transportation Manager

Surrey Atlas Ref:

(O.S.)Pg95,B5

Mole Valley District Wards

Leatherhead North and South

County Electoral Division(s)

Leatherhead and Fetcham East

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Civic Trust Regeneration Unit (CTRU) produced a report in 1997 entitled 'Leatherhead Town Centre – Regeneration Strategy and Action Plan' which laid down a vision for the future of the town. This vision included revamping the High Street, creating new focal points for the town and improving access for pedestrians, particularly those with disabilities.
- 1.2 The CTRU report identified the cross roads of High Street, Church Street, Bridge Street and North Street as the logical focal point for the town centre. It also recommended that a piece of public art be erected in this space.
- 1.3 Mole Valley Partnership Area Transportation Sub-committee agreed the design of Phase 2 of the Town centre refurbishment in February 2000. This followed completion of the construction of Phase 1 of the Town Centre refurbishment in 1999.
- 1.4 Phase 2 works include the construction of a water feature incorporated into a series of ramps. The ramps were designed to allow ease of access from Bridge Street to the High Street for people with pushchairs and other mobility problems.
- 1.5 The contract for construction of phase 2 of Leatherhead Town Centre refurbishment was awarded to Blakedown Landscapes (South East) Ltd. in February of 2002. The contract start date was in March and completion was expected in late September.
- 1.6 Professor Whitelegg from the University of York was commissioned in May 2002 to advise on the way forward for Leatherhead Town Centre, following some vocal opposition to the water feature. He recommended that the water feature should proceed as planned because it had been through all the processes of democratic decision making; cancellation would incur financial penalties; and it was only a small part of a much bigger issue. He concluded that the water feature was not an obstacle to Leatherhead's renaissance.
- 1.7 Unfortunately there have subsequently been delays to the contract for a number of valid engineering reasons, including:
 - Public utilities' underground services being located in areas where they were not expected, and the companies taking over six weeks to relocate them
 - Change in design details of the water feature to ease construction following the discovery of underground services that were unknown prior to commencement of the works
 - Concerns over the buildability of the water feature, given the changes now required
 - Permission being withheld by property owners for street lights to be attached to buildings
 - Rate of progress of the contractor.

- 1.8 As a consequence of the delays to the contract, options have now become available that would not have previously been financially prudent.

2. ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY

2.1 The delay in construction and the cessation of work over the Christmas period have created an opportunity to review some aspects of the contract. This opportunity only extends to the work in hand, and not to any other issues such as reopening the crossroads to all vehicles and providing access to the High Street for traffic. In 2000 the Mole Valley Partnership Area Transportation Sub-Committee reconsidered the issue of allowing traffic to use the High Street etc. In January 2002 the committee took the decision to publish orders and in October 2002 to confirm. The decision was: approval be given to make a permanent traffic order to allow access to all vehicular traffic after 4:30 pm and before 10:00 am on Monday to Saturday, in part of Church Street and the High Street Leatherhead as described in Para 2.2 of the report.

2.2 There are a number of issues to consider when deciding whether or not to vary the construction of the access ramps and water feature:

- The change in levels between Bridge Street and High Street are quite severe, thereby making this area difficult for the elderly and those with mobility problems;
- The water feature has not proved popular with some members of the public and traders in the town;
- There are concerns that the water feature will become a target for vandalism and be difficult to maintain to a high standard once the works are complete;
- There is a concern that the complex internal networks of pipes will prove difficult to maintain;
- The estimated completion date for the works;
- There are liable to be significant cost overruns associated with any further delays to the project;
- Extensive further delays would occur if any completely new proposals were to be put forward.

2.3 Without generating significant further delays, there are two possible alternatives to the current plan that could be considered for progressing Leatherhead Town Centre Refurbishment Phase 2.

(i) The works continue as planned

The town would gain a unique focal point as recommended by the CTRU. The whole of the town centre would be accessible for the elderly and those with mobility problems.

If the works continue as planned the contractor will be on site significantly longer than planned. There would also be cost overruns to the project. Once

the water feature is complete there may be maintenance problems. There is likely to be a lack of ownership of the completed structure by a significant proportion of the public and traders.

- (ii) Construction of the water feature is abandoned and the area is paved over

There would continue to be accessibility problems for the elderly and those with mobility problems.

However, the works would be completed in less time and may cost less. With no water feature there would be fewer maintenance liabilities and wider acceptance of the project by the local community.

- (iii) Construction of the zig zag ramps without the associated water features and retaining walls

The whole of the town centre would be accessible for the elderly, infirm, disabled and those with pushchairs. The works would be completed in less time and at less cost. With no water feature there would be fewer maintenance problems and there would be wider acceptance of the project by the local community.

3. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

If the decision is taken not to construct either of the two options involving ramps, then this may discourage walking within Leatherhead town centre, especially for those with mobility difficulties.

4. ECONOMIC & ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Leatherhead Town centre has been identified as in need of regeneration by the CTRU. The paving works and water feature in the High Street are an attempt by Surrey County Council and Mole Valley District Council to invest in the town by targeting resources effectively creating maximum impact.
- 4.2 However, the prolonging of the phase 2 works is widely felt to be having a detrimental effect on shops and businesses in the town.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There may be a claim by the contractor if the contract is varied. However the recommended option will minimise any financial overrun. A detailed report will be brought to this committee next year regarding these issues.

6. WIDER CONSULTATION

Professor Whitelegg judged that past consultations over the water feature had been properly carried out. For the future he recommended that the two Councils should "...carry out a thorough review of all recommendations for regenerating the town centre, and either implement them on an accelerated time scale or reject them with a reasoned explanation". This recommendation is being actioned by a joint officer working group of the two Councils, which is currently developing a proposal to engage the public on the wider regeneration issues contained in the 2001 Leatherhead Town Centre Action Plan.

CONCLUSIONS

The project is running over time and budget for a number of valid engineering reasons. There are objections to the water feature element by some members of the local community. The elderly and those with mobility problems find it difficult to cope with the change in levels between Bridge Street and North Street.

The Local Committee is asked to make the decision to construct the ramps without the water feature element.

Report by: Roger Archer-Reeves, Local Transport Manager, Sustainable Development

LEAD/CONTACT OFFICER: Roger Archer-Reeves

TELEPHONE NUMBER: 01372 832620

BACKGROUND PAPERS: Previous Local Committee Papers; 2001 Leatherhead Town Centre Action Plan ; 'The Way Forward for Leatherhead Town Centre' by Professor John Whitelegg, June 2002
