



OFFICER REPORT TO LOCAL COMMITTEE (MOLE VALLEY)

LEATHERHEAD HIGH STREET

07 DECEMBER 2010

KEY ISSUE

Members involvement is sought in a joint project between Surrey County Council, Mole Valley District Council and key stakeholders representing local groups, in how best to make improvements to Leatherhead High Street, Church Street and the immediate surrounding area, ensuring that developer contributions which have been collected by the Council can be spent to provide best value for money.

SUMMARY

Following reports to Surrey County Council's Local Committee and Mole Valley District Council's Executive in the summer of 2010, officers consulted with key stakeholders to produce a questionnaire to canvass opinion about the High Street and surrounding area. The period for consultation has now closed. In addition officers sought input from business on the High Street and Church Street. This report provides a summary of the responses to those consultations and seeks confirmation to the proposed next steps as laid out in the recommendations below.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS

The Local Committee (Mole Valley) is asked to agree that:

- (i) The results of the public consultation should be fed back to the community and be made available on the District Council's web site and at the Help Shop in Leatherhead;

- (ii) That a public exhibition should be held to summarise the results of the consultation and consult further on the next steps suggested by the consultation;
- (iii) When considering these next steps, officers of both councils should investigate the following:
 - The arrangements for access to High Street/Church Street in the morning and late afternoon and its implications for the current Traffic Regulation Order;
 - The arrangement for parking in High Street/Church Street during those times when it is permitted;
 - The opportunities to enhance the barrier entrance and the environs of The Leatherhead Theatre in Church Street;
 - The design and location of street furniture;
 - The development of an action plan that will take forward ideas put forward during the public consultation to enhance the centre of Leatherhead and make it more attractive.

1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In June of this year a number of reports were taken to Surrey County Council's Local Committee and Mole Valley District Council's Executive seeking agreement to progress with a consultation regarding the High Street and potential improvements to Leatherhead. The committees resolved the following:

Local Committee:

- That officers prepare, with assistance from District officers, a public consultation on a public realm and infrastructure strategy based on the principles outlined in the report;
- That agreement be given in principle to the review of the current TRO and to consult the public on an experimental TRO that would restrict access to part of Church Street and all of High Street Leatherhead for a period of up to 18 months;
- That approval is given to tackling the list of urgent and short-term tasks within the High Street and Church Street to be funded from Section 106 payments.
- That approval is given to allocate £25,000 of Section 106 funds towards the work outlined in this report.

Mole Valley District Council Executive

- Collaboration with the County Council in formulating a public realm and infrastructure strategy to be funded from Section 106 contributions;
- Allocation of existing Section 106 contributions towards short term enhancements set out in the report, including costs associated with an experimental Traffic Regulation Order;
- The preparation of a public consultation with the County Council to canvass views on the short, medium and long term strategy for public investment in the public realm.

Since then further meetings have taken place with residents groups and key stakeholders in order to agree a questionnaire to capture people's views. The questionnaire was placed on the Mole Valley District Council website, for a period of 4 weeks in October / November 2010. Hard copies of the questionnaire were available from the Help Shop in Leatherhead and if anyone wanted to request a copy they could phone or email for a version to be posted to them. A freepost address was provided for postal replies. A video, hosted on YouTube, was also prepared to help inform residents of the issues and encourage participation in the consultation.

The consultation was promoted via residents associations, the Mole Valley Housing Association, newspaper items, Facebook and Twitter, through the town centre management and business groups, posters and fliers.

Key groups such as access groups and local employers were also contacted and encouraged to complete the questionnaires. The businesses with frontage on High Street and Church Street were consulted on a one to one basis by officers of the District Council.

A copy of the general questionnaire is attached at Annexe A with the main results set out under each question.

A copy of the analysis of the business surveys is included as Annexe B

2 ANALYSIS

- 2.1 In the region of 350 questionnaires were returned either in hard copy form or on-line. In addition, a total of 50 businesses were contacted out of a total 65 in the Church Street and High Street area. For those businesses that were not contacted, approaches were made on a number of occasions and contact details left but it has not been possible to obtain the view of every single business. But the numbers that have been obtained are sufficiently robust to be considered representative of the views of the business community on issues relating to the management of the High Street and Church Street
- 2.2 In terms of the numbers of the more general questionnaire, the actual numbers are low when the total population is considered. However it is possible to carry out statistical analysis on very small sample sizes, which can be reflective of the population as a whole. The questionnaire did not seek to ask for details of the person completing the form for fear of making it too long or putting some people off from completing the form. However, there are some questions relating to age and disability. The survey is not a referendum on the High Street; for example a sensible comment by just one person may be a suggestion we wish to progress. These limitations were understood and accepted as the survey was drawn up. The limitations of the questionnaire are recognised but the number returned is nonetheless quite a positive response compared to the numbers that have responded to surveys in the past. Given the limited resources and time available to the Councils to complete this survey, it is recommended that the sample size and responses to the survey be considered a fair reflection of opinion, which can be used to inform Members' decisions.
- 2.3 The discussion with business followed a more focussed conversation based around a set of standard questions, but which sought primarily to ask about the businesses' views on access arrangements to the High Street. Members will recall that in the summer it was suggested that an experimental Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) be considered, and that a public consultation should be carried out with businesses in the first instance. This was because of the importance of businesses to the vitality of the town and the potential impact that management changes to the public realm could have on them.
- 2.4 The discussion of the high level results the survey of business is set out in the attached report (Annexe B). An assessment of the response

to certain key questions in the questionnaire are contained in Annexe C.

- 2.5 The report in the summer of 2010 also recommended that there be some improvements made in terms of items of repair to the High Street infrastructure. Officers from the District Council have worked with County officers to progress this. Of priority were:
- Flooding issues and blocked drainage pipes, which have been repaired;
 - Repair to a leaning telecoms box, which has now been repaired by BT;
 - Removal of the broken statuettes for which an order has been placed to have them removed;
 - Replacement of cladding to the walls of the walkway at the lower end of the High Street, for which replacement pieces are being sourced.
- 2.6 Work has satisfactory been undertaken on the first two items. Prices are being obtained for the second two.
- 2.7 From an examination of the results of both the business surveys and the general questionnaire results, it is clear that there are strongly held views on a number of issues and that a wide spectrum of views is evident. However, some conclusions can be reached, as follows:
- There is a general acceptance that existing arrangements for vehicular access into the High Street/Church street broadly work, with some possible adjustments;
 - There are safety issues in relation to pedestrians that need to be addressed;
 - There is a feeling that parking should continue in the evening but there needs to be more discipline about where those cars should be parked;
 - There is an need to improve mechanisms for addressing works of repair and renewal and many of the comments were about the state of maintenance;
 - There is scope to coordinate and improve the look and locations of street furniture;
 - There are ideas that would address some of the public amenity issues that could be structured into an action plan;
 - Many of the issues raised are small scale changes which collectively may make an important change to the look and feel of the town but do not represent any wholesale change.
- 2.8 Whilst there are significant signs that Leatherhead is playing to its strengths during a period of recession, there is also a widely held view that the town centre commercial area could do better in terms of its performance and its management of the public realm. This is a challenge to the County Council and District Councils at a time of

declining local authority budgets. The 'Total Place' initiative provides a contest in which this challenge can be addressed.

3 OPTIONS

- 3.1 Option 1: to act on the results of the consultation and use this to work up a programme of improvements that can be put to consultation with members and stakeholder group.
- 3.2 Option 2: if option 1 is not acceptable, Members are asked to suggest how they would like officers to proceed.

4 CONSULTATIONS

- 4.1 A copy of the questionnaire is available at Annexe A. Detailed results of the survey and the business consultation are also available at Annexe B. During the course of the past 6 months there have been several meetings with interested stakeholders and their views on the process have been sought. An advisory group has also been formed composed of officers, Members and stakeholders.

5 FINANCIAL AND VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The only resources that have been available for this work are existing officer time and existing facilities such as SNAP software etc. To this extent, including the assistance obtained from residents and other groups, the process so far represents good value for money. Going forward, the process is about ensuring the money that the Councils have from developer contributions, is spent in the most effective way, and with public support, thereby ensuring value for money.

6 EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 At this stage the project has sought to canvass opinions from as wide a variety of people as possible as (within the limitations of officers and others time) questionnaires have been made available in different ways and through different groups to achieve that. Direct approaches were made to elderly and disabled residents of housing managed by Mole Valley Housing Association. About 7% of those responding to the questionnaire considered they had some disability.
- 6.2 Some comments about access to the High Street for disabled people have been made through the questionnaire and will be considered in the process of determining what projects should be taken forward.

- 6.3 In order to implement the recommendations arising from the study, analysis will need to include the impact of any changes on certain groups and an equality impact assessment will be carried out

7 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There have been a number of comments made about safety issues (speeding, congestion, protection of businesses) and again these are reflected in the responses to the surveys. The police are represented on the advisory group.

8 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 Section 2 and 3 of this report sets out the issues to be addressed. A number of projects could be developed in response to the consultation. These would look specifically at access for vehicles at the beginning of the day and late afternoon, they would look at parking, street furniture, access controls in Church Street and various initiatives to improve maintenance and visual amenity.
- 8.2 How these issues will be tackled can be the subject of further discussion with the public and the advisory group before reporting back to the Committee and the District Council's Executive Members.

9 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 The recommendations arise directly out of the conclusions of the public consultation and address the concerns of business, visitors and residents of the town centre. They are a logical next step in the development of an action plan for the town centre at will ensure a coordinated approach involving the tow local authorities and stakeholder groups.

10 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

- 10.1 Further detailed analysis will be undertaken on the questionnaire returns.
- 10.2 An exhibition will be prepared and held at the end of January/beginning of February to explore with the public the issues that require further design and planning.
- 10.3 The results of this with recommendations will be taken back to the Local Committee and the Council's Executive in March/April

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: Annexe A – blank version of the questionnaire

Version No. Date: Time: Initials: No of annexes:3