



## Annexe A

### **LEATHERHEAD TOWN CENTRE TOTAL PLACE PROJECT**

**03 MARCH 2011**

#### **KEY ISSUE**

Members are requested to approve the response to the public consultation undertaken to determine the priorities for expenditure on Leatherhead town centre using developer contributions. The reports sets out for agreement short term projects for High Street and Church Street and recommends further work on longer term projects based on ideas generated by the public.

#### **SUMMARY**

In December 2010 Members considered a report on a questionnaire devised to test opinion on a range of public realm issues. The impetus is a Total Place project funded by developer contributions and designed to support the economy of Leatherhead and make it a more attractive town. The questionnaire findings were reported and agreement given to hold a public exhibition that set out the suggested way forward and priorities for funding. This report summarises the draft priorities and the public response to them during the exhibition. It asks Members to agree a list of priorities as a basis for future work and expenditure. A parallel report will be presented to Mole Valley District Council's Executive in April

#### **OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

- (i) That the public responses to the exhibition be noted as a basis for conclusions reached;
- (ii) That the immediate priorities for environmental enhancement and public realm management relating to High Street and Church Street, Leatherhead as set out in this report be agreed;

- (iii) That the wider infrastructure and strategic needs of the Leatherhead town centre be considered with Mole Valley District Council and reported to the Committee during the coming year.

## 1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In June 2010 the Committee agreed a number of recommendations in relation to Leatherhead Town Centre. First, Members agreed to feed back to the public the results of the public questionnaire and business consultation undertaken last autumn. Secondly, a public exhibition was to be held to suggest ways in which the two councils should respond to the consultation, setting out short term and longer term projects to be funded from immediately available and potential future developer contributions (Planning Infrastructure Contributions). Thirdly, particular areas would be considered, including the issue of access to the pedestrian zone of Church Street and High Street, parking within the pedestrian zone public realm enhancements in Church Street measures for longer term planning.
- 1.2 Members are reminded that there is £350,000 immediately available for public realm improvements. In consultation with a local advisory group composed of local Members and organisations, there was a strong opinion that expenditure should be based on an agreement of certain principles of management, particularly on a review of the current arrangements for access and parking in the pedestrian zone. Therefore, although the current sum of money available for projects is comparatively modest, local interest groups wished to re-examine the terms of the Traffic Regulation Order to ensure that any improvements in the short term would not be overtaken by changes to the management of the town centre in the future.
- 1.3 Turning to the actions agreed at the December meeting of the Committee, the results of the consultation in the autumn has been made public and summary statistics and a report have been made available. These are available on the web site of Mole Valley District Council. The planning exhibition took places on 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> January in an empty shop unit in Church Street. 350 people visited the exhibition which provided the opportunity again to feed back the detailed results of the autumn surveys and suggest future projects. Each of the areas identified in the previous report were explored further with the public at the exhibition.
- 1.4 The Leatherhead Town Centre Advisory Group has continued to meet at each stage of the consultation and prior to meetings of the Local Committee and the District Council's Executive. The Advisory Group is chaired by Councillor Tim Hall. These meetings provide an opportunity to gauge local opinion. The latest meeting of the Advisory Group is due

to take place on 16<sup>th</sup> February and any comments will be fed back to the meeting of this Committee as necessary

- 1.5 The exhibition held in January consisted of a series of panels that set out the concerns or issues that had been expressed in the questionnaire surveys. There was also an examination of the vision for the town and the elements of that vision that people had identified were important to the realisation of that vision. The exhibition then set out the current thinking on priorities and asked a series of questions about how those priorities might be achieved. There were comments books for people to express their views and a board to allow visitors to express quick comments of specific issues. Both the exhibition panels and the comments made during and after the exhibition are available on the District Council's web site.

## **2 ANALYSIS**

- 2.1 One of the primary purposes of the exhibition was to set out a response to the earlier questionnaires and suggest how the two councils might decide on their priorities. The approach set out in the exhibition was as follows:

1. Vehicular access to the pedestrian zone would be retained from the late afternoon to the following morning;
2. the entrance to the pedestrian zone in Church Street would be redesigned;
3. The location and design of street furniture would be reviewed;
4. there would be a greater degree of control over the location of evening parking within the pedestrian zone;

- 2.2 In terms of priorities and next steps, the exhibition put forward the following as a way forward:

- 1 There would be immediate attention given to repairing the existing surfaces and features;
- 2 There would be a review of the Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) to see if there are advantages to allowing cars into the pedestrian zone from 4.30 pm rather than 6.00pm;
- 3 There would be a review of the placement of street furniture which could impact on 4. below;
- 4 There would be an examination of the arrangements for evening parking with a view to greater discipline and regulation;
- 5 There would be a review of maintenance arrangements;
- 6 The barrier entrance to the pedestrian zone in Church Street would be redesigned;
- 7 An assessment would be made of the scope to enhance the area outside the theatre

- 2.3 In the longer term there would be an infrastructure plan produced to co-ordinate various projects to make the town more attractive and customer-friendly.
- 2.4 As well as suggesting what might be achieved, the question of how was also raised. Visitors to the exhibition were invited to suggest how the priorities might be tackled. The issues raised were in response to those that emerged from the consultation:
- Church Street: how would the vehicular barrier be designed? What simple improvements would make the area more attractive?
  - Planting and Hanging baskets: how would more colour and planting be achieved given the physical limitations of an urban environment? Where could planting be placed? There is also the question of how a revenue funded project could be sustained and how the funding could be raised. Vandalism has been an issue in the past with ground level planting.
  - Amendments to the Traffic Regulation Order (TRO): would general parking from 4.30pm within the pedestrian zone benefit the businesses and customers? Would it disadvantage pedestrians? What about parking and access in the morning?
  - Parking in the Pedestrian Zone: How could parking be better controlled in the evening? How should parking spaces be provided without excessive road markings and street furniture?
  - Street Furniture: Is it possible to reduce the amount of clutter created by street furniture? What is necessary? Can it be made more attractive? Should space be provided for restaurant tables and chairs?
  - Repair and Maintenance: in a period of financial restraint on local authorities how can ways be found to raise standards of maintenance?
  - Private Property: How can improvements to business and private property be encouraged? Are there good examples of property maintenance and presentation that could be followed?
- 2.5 The response to these issues made during and after the exhibition is set out below.
- 2.6 A quick scan of the responses will show that for everyone that feels passionately about a particular matter or issue, there will always be someone else that feels just as passionately but has a different perspective and solution. That is the nature of the management of the town centre. There is no perfect solution and ever solution has its benefits and disbenefits.
- 2.7 For example, one respondent, a resident of 40 years standing, remembers campaigning to have the High Street pedestrianised because of the poor environmental conditions that pertained at that time. That person still feels strongly that pedestrianisation was the right approach, but others consider that the lack of through traffic is the reason for what they see lies behind the current ills of Leatherhead

- 2.8 Looking at the issues that the public were asked to comment on, the following are a summary of the responses:

#### Church Street

- 2.9 There was a great deal of comment about Church Street at present because of the interest of a national food chain in two of the empty units there. This resulted in some optimism for Church Street and the town centre as a whole. There is some scepticism that the development will take place and concerns about the impact on short term parking, but strong support for the occupation of the currently empty units.
- 2.10 There were not large numbers of comments about the street, but of those that did comment, there was support for the proposals to improve the barrier entrance and look at ways of improving the setting of the theatre. One respondent asked that the redesign of the entrance to the pedestrian zone be 'artistically subtle and not flamboyant'.
- 2.11 A possible solution to the barrier would be automatic rising bollards. There are examples of these in sensitive historic locations and they can be combined with access control systems, including swipe and proximity cards, mobile phones and button control. Such a solution is likely to be costly, but it would give flexibility over access for a variety of users and it is a visually more acceptable solution than the current barrier. Safety features prevent the bollard from rising if a person or vehicle is over the bollard.

#### Planting and Hanging Baskets

- 2.12 Both during the questionnaire consultation and the exhibition there were requests for additional planting. Trees are thought to enhance the urban environment, although this would be difficult to achieve given the many services that lie beneath the streets. In the short term that is little opportunity to provide additional street trees and space is also limited.
- 2.13 Hanging baskets and floral planters during the summer and autumn months are popular but there is currently no revenue budget available from the District Council. For ground level planting, vandalism is a significant problem. However, given the perceived value of seasonal planting, there should be some exploration of a scheme that can involve the business community. There would not reason in principle why hanging baskets and seasonal planters could not be accommodated within the public highway subject to detail and funding the funds to do it.

#### Amendment to the Traffic Regulation Order (TRO)

- 2.14 The question put to the public was whether the TRO should be amended to allow general traffic and parking within the pedestrian zone from 4.30pm rather than 6.00pm. Access is already permitted for deliveries and the barrier is open. Comments from the public suggest that this

period is already abused and enforcement is difficult. When vehicles are ticketed, customers and businesses feel aggrieved.

- 2.15 If a rising bollard could be installed in Church Street a greater degree of control could be exercised over access for non-delivery vehicles and the problem might resolve itself. However, the case for easing access still needs to be considered.
- 2.16 Of those that indicated that they would welcome a relaxation of the access arrangements, the following arguments are put forward:
- The street is less busy with pedestrians;
  - It provides customers with a pop and shop facility at the end of the day when shops are still open;
  - It makes the collection of larger items easier;
  - It is good for disabled driver and mothers with children.
- 2.17 Allowing vehicles into the pedestrian zone from 4.30pm to 6.00pm is likely to attract significant numbers of vehicles. Free parking would be available when other off-street parking would not be free. If the proposal to charge for some on-street parking goes ahead, the High Street would become an even more attractive proposition. A number of visitors to the exhibition were aware of the Council's investigations into on-street parking charges and there were considerable opposition to it.
- 2.18 There are mixed views on question of general access from 4.30 pm but more expressions of support than against. However, there are significant issues to be considered before a relaxation could be introduced. These are:
- The potential conflict with loading and unloading;
  - The significant increase in car access to avoid the charging in the off-street car parks
  - Possible conflict with the market
  - The interference with shop access and windows resulting from haphazard parking.
- 2.18 If this idea is to proceed, measures to manage the location of car parking in the town centre would need to be introduced to balance increased vehicular access with the needs of the pedestrian. As a compromise, and if a more sophisticated barrier into the pedestrian zone could be installed, access for disabled drivers only might be provided from 4.30 pm.

#### Parking in the Pedestrian Zone

- 2.19 There was support in the earlier questionnaire for better control of car parking within the pedestrian zone. Visitors to the exhibition were asked to suggest how this might be achieved. The most common suggestion was to permit parking on one side of High Street only. There was also a request to make parking places clear. Without a constant, on-site

enforcement, restrictions will have to be self-enforcing. This requires physical restraints using street furniture. Devising a scheme to confine car parking to certain areas of the street will need, therefore, to be designed alongside a review of the street furniture.

### Street Furniture

- 2.20 There was support for the review of street furniture. There was recognition that there is room for improvement. Suggestions were made that there are too many litter bins. Others asked for additional seating. Yet others commented on the location of seating outside public houses that attracted anti-social elements.
- 2.21 Mention was made of the need to have regard to the requirements of disabled people, particularly visually impaired and blind people. Street furniture can create an obstacle course for them. Removable bollards might be helpful and allow the street to be unobstructed when there are festivals taking place the town centre. The desire for a simple, uncluttered environment came though. Mention was made of commercial A-Boards and the need to reduce these in number.

### Repair and Maintenance

- 2.22 Understandably, this is a key for many respondents. There were some calls to replace existing surface materials, but this is not practical in the short term and may not be desirable in the longer term. Arrangements have already been made to undertake repairs to surfaces and structures in early March. This programmed work will help to respond to these concerns, but the issue of ongoing maintenance still needs to be addressed. It might be possible to agree a protocol for dealing with maintenance in the future. This would deal with response times on damaged paving to the number of pressure washes that are undertaken. Any arrangements will need to be realistic and reflect the budgetary constraints. However, a failure to keep up with repairs will damage the reputation of both councils.
- 2.23 The work programmed for early March will include the removal of the remaining small statues along High Street. Whilst there are some people who like the statuettes, most people appear to recognise that they should be removed from their vulnerable location in High Street. Alternative locations could then be explored.

### Private Property

- 2.24 During the consultation the emphasis has been on the public realm. However, the properties that line the central streets have a considerable influence on the character of the town. Some visitors to the exhibition said they would like to see better shop fronts and signage; parts of Church Street were mentioned in particular. It was suggested that a

shop front design award should be introduced. These will be matters for the District Council or Chamber of Commerce to consider.

### 3.0 OPTIONS

- 3.1 The approach advocated in the exhibition and being put forward for agreement by the Local Committee and the District Council's Executive is one that will deal with immediate repairs works. It will look to providing more discipline into the arrangements for evening car parking and, allied to this, there will be a review of street furniture throughout the pedestrian zone. There will be an examination of the design and control of the barrier into the pedestrian zone in Church Street, possibly linked to environmental improvements in the area outside the theatre. The TRO will be reviewed and a report brought to the Committee later this year to consider the merits of relaxing access to the pedestrian zone from 4.30 pm rather than 6.00 pm. Other ideas for the wider town will be considered as part of a strategy for the future coordination of developer contributions.
- 3.2 Although there were views expressed during the exhibition that ran counter to the approach being put forward, there seemed to be good support for the conclusions being recommended to the two councils. Certainly the priority given to maintenance was universal, although some people would like to start again.
- 3.3 With regard to parking in High Street in the evening, there will be those who oppose it and those who oppose restrictions on car parking. There is a middle ground that exceeds to the request from some businesses and some customers to retain vehicular access in the evening but seeks to provide better management of parking in the interests of the pedestrian. The object of the approach is to find a better balance.
- 3.4 Church Street may provide a number of opportunities. There is the opportunity through technology to provide more effective control of who enters the pedestrian zone. There is the potential to increase the retail offer and raise footfall and to look at ways of enhancing the public realm without a comprehensive redesign. There was some support for the scheme that was designed for Church Street in the recent past and this may be part of the longer term thinking.
- 3.5 Both in the questionnaire responses and during the exhibition, there was a request to look strategically and longer into the future. Whether this should be in the form of an infrastructure strategy or an area action plan will need to be considered in the light of the officer resources to prepare such documents. Many of the criticisms of the town centre were wider than the High Street and Church Street and involved a greater level of expenditure than is currently available. A more strategic document would be the place to deal with these issues.



- 3.6 Option 1: to agree the priorities set out in the report and as presented to the public during the consultation exhibition.
- 3.7 Option 2: to seek the Committee's instructions on a revised list of priorities to be developed as a basis for the future work programme.

#### **4.0 CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 The arrangements for consultation are outlined above.

#### **5.0 FINANCIAL AND VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 At this stage, on firm prices have been agreed for individual projects. There is £350,000 immediately available for the immediate priorities, of which £25,000 is being provided by the County Council and the remainder from District Council developer contributions. The immediate repair work will cost in the region of £12,000.
- 5.2 The purpose of this report and the preceding consultation was to ensure that spending priorities are in line with public expectations and that decisions are made for the long term management of the town centre that will avoid abortive expenditure in the short term?

#### **6.0 EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are important issues relating to access for disabled people that will need to be considered during the detailed planning stage of individual projects. The Mole Valley Access Group is represented on the Advisory Group and further detailed consultation will be required when plans are prepared.

#### **7 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The consultation did throw up some issues relating to anit-social behaviour in the town centre and regard will be paid to those comments when plans are being prepared. The police are represented on the Advisory Group

#### **8 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 8.1 Section 3 of this report summaries the priorities for action and the public response to it. The main task is to deal with repairs to the public realm in Church Street and High Street and this is already in hand. Questions of access and parking lie at the heart of the management of the pedestrian zone and they need to be resolved before issues of street furniture and the enhancement of Church Street can be finalised. Wider priorities for enhancement of the public realm will pick up ideas

expressed during the consultation so that there is a co-ordinated approach to spending plans.

- 8.2 The overall approach is to ensure that the town centre is accessible and user friendly and that activities, both social and economic, take place within an environment that encourages social interaction and business activity.

## **9 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION**

- 9.1 The recommendations are designed to ensure that there are clear priorities and that there is a coordinated approach. Both these aspects to the strategy will ensure that there is value for money and that the two council's work together on agreed priorities.

## **10 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT**

- 10.1 Work on the repairs to section of High Street and Church Street are scheduled to begin on 28<sup>th</sup> February
- 10.2 A further report will be presented to the Committee at an early stage on the TRO and whether any changes would be recommended.
- 10.3 Depending on the outcome of the TRO review, work design work would be undertaken on both the entrance to the pedestrian zone and on the arrangements for street furniture, bearing in mind the requirement to impose some discipline on the car parking in High Street/Church Street

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