

Central Bedfordshire Council

EXECUTIVE

6 February 2018

Dunstable High Street – Phase one

Report of: Cllr Nigel Young, Executive Member for Regeneration
(nigel.young@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Responsible Director: Jason Longhurst, Director of Regeneration and Business

jason.longhurst@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Purpose of this report

1. To provide an update on the programme of activity to redevelop Dunstable High Street following the de-trunking of the A5 through Dunstable.
2. To clarify how this is being delivered and the scope of phase one works funded by Highways England's A5 Legacy funding provided to the council by Highways England for the High Street improvements.
3. To provide opportunity for further comment on phase two of the improvement works, clarify what this covers and outcomes of public consultation to date.
4. To seek Executive's support for further bids for external funding, from Highway's England and others, in order to fully complete and deliver the scheme.
5. To inform members of the projects indicative timescales & phases.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive is asked to:

1. **endorse the delivery of phase one of the project, acknowledging that this is being delivered using the A5 Legacy detrunking funding provided to the Council by Highways England for the High Street improvements; and**
2. **provide further comment on the objectives and proposed designs for phase 2 and support bidding for further external funding in order to fully deliver the scheme.**

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

6. The project in its entirety is due to go to Overview and Scrutiny in April 2018 in order to seek further comments on the scheme in its totality. This report primarily focuses on phase one of the project. This element has been condensed due to the need for public consultation and funding constraints for delivery (by end of March 2018) to satisfy Highways England's funding requirements. This initial date has now been extended with agreement with Highways England and is set for completion May/June 2018 for Phase .
7. The project's proposed designs have been through a recent engagement activity which included the public, stakeholders, businesses and local councillors. The results of this need to be fed into the design process before presenting a final recommendation for the full and final project geographical area that will be covered in phase two of the works.
8. The Highway improvement works are part of the wider programme of regeneration improvements for Dunstable, however this report concentrates on Highway infrastructure works on the High St following the de-trunking process.

Background

9. The opening of the A5-M1 link and the Woodside connection in May 2017 continues to have a beneficial affect in reducing traffic flows along Dunstable High Street. Traffic counts conducted in July and November 2017 show a decrease in HGV traffic by 80% (in peak times) and car traffic has had a marginal reduction % change. This dramatic response illustrates the unique opportunity available but also illustrates a requirement for on-going monitoring.
10. It is imperative that in order to achieve an enhanced physical change to the High Street, advantage must be taken of the modal shift created by the opening of the A5-M1 and Woodside link roads before the High St is seen as an 'alternative' route for through traffic.
11. This type of change does suggest encouragement for carriageway reallocation in favor of other uses (footway, on-street servicing, parking etc.). There is therefore a unique opportunity both to consolidate improvements to the Highways network brought about by the new road schemes and to improve the vitality and viability of Dunstable town centre, enabling the council to implement more appropriate infrastructure for a town centre type environment rather than the current one which is focused on a strategic road network.

12. However the High Street will remain as a busy and important link in the strategic road network and traffic counts will continue to take place to ensure that any proposals need to reflect the potential fluctuations.
13. The overall scheme cost is projected to be between £6-8mil to deliver, however £1.5 million has been secured through Highways Englands Legacy initiative. In light of this the project will be delivered in Phases to represent the availability of funds.
14. Current pedestrian and vehicle access issues from and through Dunstable's High Street is a significant barrier. Therefore, the anticipated completion of the High Street Revival Project will enable growth in a sustainable way and attract inward investment through increasing Dunstable's leisure and retail offer.
15. There are many known issues with the High St a recent survey carried out by the town council showed that 72% of town Centre user's rated physical appearance as a negative aspect of Dunstable, vastly higher than the averages for national large towns (29%) and national small towns (26%).
16. The area is also subject to an Air Quality Management plan and the historically heavy congestion has led to poor journey times and subsequent 'rat-running' within the surrounding residential streets. A summary of the issues are detailed in the table below:

Table 1: Dunstable High Street Summary of issues.

Highway element	Issues
Traffic management and Road Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very High vehicle flow with High Strategic HGV traffic component • Wide Junction to allow articulated vehicle to turn safely • Extensive guard railing to protect pedestrians from vehicles • Proportionately high numbers of cluster accidents involving pedestrians • Vehicles are encouraged to process as a through movement with no encouragement to stop and shop • Poor signage allowing wayfinding to places of interest and parking facilities
Pedestrians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Junction creates a significant barrier for pedestrians to access local shops, facilities and bus stops. • The pedestrian crossings are set back away from the junction, not on pedestrian desire lines creating significant delays to pedestrians • Extensive guard railing impedes pedestrian movement and reduces footway widths to below the standard widths recommended • Wayfinding is poor

Cyclists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No advanced stop lines or cycle lanes to protect cyclists at difficult junction • Cycle parking facilities placed within inappropriate and difficult to get to location
Buses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No priority given to buses at the junction • Poor bus stop facilities (lack of shelters and real time information) • Ineffective location of bus pullover
Public Realm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The wide traffic dominated junction, guardrailing, clutter, poorly maintained footways and drains create an uninviting place to linger for very long
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The area on the cross roads is designated an Air Quality Management area. • Flood management measures are required after severe flooding has made a detrimental impact to businesses on areas of the High St

Geographical coverage

17. The geographical area for the focus of this project is based around the High Street, from South of the Square (Friars Walk) to Regent St. The area also considers the east west link, with particular focus on the pedestrian links to retail, commercial offers and areas of historical interest. Appendix A illustrates the areas and the conceptual issues and opportunities.
18. The overall focus is upon the High Street, but consideration needs to be given to where people want to get to and also understanding the potential impacts off the High St upon surrounding streets, this is a consideration for phase 2 which will also take into account other Dunstable Regeneration projects in the final design
19. The focus of this report is Phase one which concentrates on the gateways to the town and Ashton Square.

Proposed Improvements

20. Conceptual design proposals for the full scheme and phase one works were recently taken to the public, stakeholders and members in an engagement activity that took place in November – December 2017 and includes the following, with a map illustrating proposals in Appendix B:

- Way finding and Signing – Establish a way finding and signing strategy and introduce a consistent, legible, simple signing system to assist pedestrians, cyclists and motorists to access important land uses, facilities and services including car parks as well to encourage the heritage trail.
 - De-cluttering – removal of superfluous signs, furniture and guard-railing on street.
 - Redesign of junctions, removing traffic lights where this is shown to be feasible.
 - Re-allocation of carriageway space including widening of pavements and the introduction of short-stay on-street parking.
 - Re-design of pedestrian crossing points and the removal and/or re-phasing of traffic signals.
 - Relocation of bus stops and layover bays and the provision of bus priority measures, where reasonable.
 - Improve the cycle network signage and parking provision.
 - Enhancements to the public realm and the provision of seating areas.
 - Exemplar gateway features and street furniture.
 - Enhancement of the Green infrastructure where possible.
21. A project of this magnitude and available budget has determined the need for a phased implementation approach to delivery.
22. Phase one works have been designed in order to satisfy the requirements of Highways England's objectives for the Legacy funding of £1.5m and their required timescales for delivery. Phase one works have also been designed so as to be non impacted by the wider scheme proposals and to avoid any abortive works.
23. The summary of Phase one is as follows with further details found in the accompanying appendices:
- New gateway features – to mark the entrances to the centre, encourage a sense of arrival for motorists, to provide a historical and floral entrance to the town. Appendix C

- Middle Row – to re-lay the historic middle row area Appendix D.
 - De-clutter – remove redundant signage, railings and other street furniture not required or utilized. Appendix E
 - New Street lights – this fits with a wider programme of improvements to street lights in the areas and it is deemed timely and cost effective to align works.
24. In order to satisfy Highways England funding requirements work will begin on the High for St Phase 1 in February/March 2018.
25. Further external funding is being sought with a view to delivering the full program of works later in 2018/19.

Engagement October 2018

26. As part of the on-going communications activities a public engagement activity took place in December, which encouraged the public, local stakeholders and businesses to comment on the proposals so far.
27. People were provided with outline design proposals as well as information on the phases of implementing the changes based on funding availability.
28. We asked people to provide comment on the overall concept designs and also specific questions relating to the gateways, historical context and the style of the street furniture we intend to supply. A summary of the responses is as follows :

Phase	Summary response
One – Quick wins HE legacy funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The public were wholly supportive of the gateway design ideas but felt more could be done to incorporate History and Art in these locations. • There was division on the names proposed with most favoring a link to the historic past, we are working on devising an alternative that takes into account the differing views. • Support was received for the proposals to re-lay middle row and feel the proposed materials reflected the historical context of the area. • Support was received for renewing lamp columns and lights and many had noted the poor state of repair. • Overall support for removing clutter and guard-railing with some hesitation over safety for a minority. •

Overall full scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of all traffic signals to enable a better flow of traffic • Road layout in terms of a central median design was welcomed with the informal refuge in the centre very well liked. There were some concerns raised for the section where it will be a single lane – the designers will therefore revisit this in terms of traffic movements to demonstrate more clearly whether this is a viable option. • Removal of bus lane –this will be revisited based on concerns over the impact on traffic and potential congestion • Most people preferred a more traditional look but with emphasis on maintenance • Crossing points were thought to be appropriate and widely welcomed for improving accessibility • Further request for on street parking near the Post Office • Ensure that any changes match Emergency service requirements for access • More cycle provision is possible • The use of innovative traffic management controls welcomed in order to manage traffic fluctuations. • The use of tree planting overall welcomed in particular managing flooding impact • Using technological equipment for wayfinding • Encouraging the flow and integration of history • Many showed concerns for the number of HGVs still using the High St and requested a hard approach to prevention and ‘policing’ this.
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29. The results of the Engagement activity are being fed into the process of creating a final proposed design and consideration will be made to the comments and suggestions raised with an emphasis on facilitating peoples requirements where feasible and in line with the project objectives. .

30. The engagement process will continue with both local stakeholders and the public and is seen as a critical element of the projects success.

Phase one delivery

31. While the designers and engineers continue work to enable delivery of the civil engineering matters and the delivery of the ground works for the gateway features work is also on-going with local stakeholders on what will be installed to facilitate the art and historical requirements.

32. Examples of the materials used for re-laying Middle Row and the types of lamp columns and other furniture examples are also included in appendix F report.
33. The removal of any street clutter and railings is being developed to meet safety standards and also, where feasible, the requirement of Dunstable Town Councils Britain in Bloom festival.
34. It is anticipated that works on the Highway will begin in February 2018, while any disruption will be kept to a minimum continued engagement and communication will play a key role in advising the residents and businesses of any road closures etc.

Overall full scheme delivery

35. Work is continuing to provide a detailed design for the whole scheme taking into account the comments raised through the engagement activity.
36. Engagement with stakeholders will continue throughout this process.
37. A number of external funding sources are being sought and the requirement to have a detailed design is seen as a key factor in a successful bid.

Corporate Implications

38. By making major infrastructure changes to the Highways and Public Realm provision in Dunstable we are supporting the following Council Priorities:
 - Enhancing Central Bedfordshire – By creating better infrastructure (improved roads and transport links) we are helping to create jobs through enhancing the small business proposition, managing growth, protecting our countryside and enabling businesses to grow.
 - Improving education and skills – by supporting the transport links to Bedfordshire college.
 - Protecting the vulnerable improving well being – by improving the walking and cycling infrastructure we will be enabling more vulnerable road users to access the town centre. The project also seeks to tackle the issues connected with air quality and flood risk in the area.
 - Creating Stronger Communities – through a strategic engagement approach in determining the final designs we are providing the required improvements in accordance with local need.

- A more efficient and responsive council – We will be utilizing technology in order to better manage traffic demand making us responsive to real time situations.

Legal Implications

39. No direct legal implications however we have a duty under the Traffic Management Act to manage the network effectively

Financial and Risk Implications

40. Dunstable High St has been in receipt of Capital funding from the Council in order to begin delivery of the regeneration and improvement works, specifically feasibility and design works.
41. There are currently a number of external bids being prepared in order to ensure the scheme can be delivered in entirety within a reasonable time period. However a financial investment as part funding may be a requirement in order to secure investment.
42. There is a risk that the authority is not successful in securing external funding for the full scheme.
43. A further risk is that if the improvement works are not carried out in a reasonable time following the opening of the A5-M1 link and Woodside Connection that we would not be able to take advantage of the change in travel behaviour. An inability to facilitate accessibility, footfall and public realm improvements or tackle the risk of flooding would then lead to a further adverse effect on the appeal for external investment into other areas of the town and could inevitably result in future funding requirements from CBC for mitigation measures.
44. Without the improvements to traffic management included within the scheme there is a risk that Dunstable will remain an Air Quality Management area with the associated health factors. It is also anticipated that Air quality management could potentially be enforced leading to financial penalties for those authorities deemed to be ineffectually tackling the problem.
45. There is a risk that delivery of phase one works could be impacted by the tight timescales required for delivery as dictated through Highways England, this risk is being managed with a constant dialogue with the HE.
46. Other risks such as any geographical or archaeological factors will be managed through the on-going design and feasibility works and mitigation provided within the final design proposals.

47. Careful consideration has been given to the proposed materials so as to enable a proportionate balance between aesthetics and durability.

Sustainability

48. The scheme is designed to enable improved accessibility for non-car users within the town and therefore supports sustainable transport. Furthermore the scheme aims to tackle air quality and flooding pressures.

Equalities Implications

49. Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
50. We have included the requirement to ensure that any proposals are properly consulted with any groups with disabilities. However the scheme has the aim of improving access for all users. We will seek the advice of the equalities officer as proposals are developed.

Conclusion and next Steps

51. The re-development of the High St in Dunstable is a critical element with regards to the overall regeneration of the town centre and will help to unlock both improvements to the local economy as well as providing the local residents and potential visitors a more accessible and appealing place to visit.
52. The following table provides an insight into the critical milestone for the project over the next 12 months key stakeholder and public engagement will continue throughout the varying phases:

Table xx Critical milestones

Task	Date
Public Consultation on Designs	December 2017
Phase 1 detailed design completion	February 2018
Phase 1 Implementation	February 18 –June 2018
Highways England spend Deadline for Legacy Funding	March – May 2018

Phase 2 design review following engagement	Feb 2017 – May 2018
Phase 2 detailed design for member review and approval	May - June 2018

Appendices

Appendix A - Study Area with conceptual opportunities

Appendix B – Public Engagement Drawings

Appendix C – Gateway Designs

Appendix D – Middle Row

Appendix E – Decluttering

Appendix F – Materials Furniture Specification

Background Papers

None

Report author: Geraldine Davies