

Agenda item 7

For decision – Next steps on Market Place improvements

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Summary

The purpose of this report is to feedback on the outcomes of a public engagement exercise relating to proposals for a second phase of Market Place improvements. In summary, the response was generally positive, but some amendments are now proposed to take account of comments received. These primarily affect the seating and planting options, the arrangements for proposed new pedestrian crossings and the extent of paving improvements. Amongst the proposed amendments are the substitution of the proposed informal and uncontrolled crossing at the bottom of Bath Street with a zebra crossing.

At the meeting, a presentation showing plans and visualisations will be presented for councillors' consideration with a view to approval of the submission of a planning application to Mendip District Council. Delegated authority is also sought for discussions to continue with the Highway Authority to secure their approval of the proposals that directly affect the highway.

Background

A public engagement exercise has just been completed around proposals for a second phase of Market Place improvements.

The main objectives of the scheme are to reduce congestion caused by the current alignment of the bus laybys, making the Market Place more pedestrian friendly and attractive. The key elements of the scheme that were subject to consultation include:

- A realignment of the existing bus laybys to enable buses to park off the carriageway and so reduce traffic congestion
- Better bus shelters including Real Time Information to improve the experience for bus users
- New informal and uncontrolled pedestrian crossings to make it easier for pedestrians to cross the road at popular crossing points
- Wider and improved pavements in parts of the Market Place together with improved planting and seating – various options were presented for comment
- The removal of the railings on the junction of Cork Street and Market Place and their replacement with strategically placed bollards
- A new loading bay outside The George and a new disabled parking bay on the opposite side of the Market Place

The engagement exercise involved a public exhibition and advertised drop in-sessions at the Town Hall together with online and press promotion. In addition, meetings were held with various stakeholder groups including Frome Chamber and town centre businesses, Frome Civic Society, PACE (representing the views of disabled people), the bus companies and the police. Prior to this exercise, there had been extensive discussions with Somerset County Council as Highway Authority which informed the proposals that were presented and to date, they have raised no objection. A summary of the outcomes of the engagement exercise is attached as [Appendix 7.1](#).

Proposed amendments to the scheme

In response to the comments received, the following amendments are now proposed:

- The installation of a zebra crossing in place of the proposed informal and uncontrolled pedestrian crossing between Boyle Cross and Market Cross Café which would improve safety. Some bollards would be installed on the approach to the crossing in Bath Street to keep sight lines clear for pedestrians and drivers alike. This is subject to the views of the County Council as Highway Authority who had previously indicated that they would not support a zebra in this location due to national highway guidelines. However, Frome's county councillors have confirmed their support for this new approach.
- The use of 'Look Left' and 'Look Right' markings on the remaining informal crossing
- The introduction of reflective bands on all bollards to improve pedestrian safety
- An extension to the paving improvements to include the area around the bus stop on the southern side of the Market Place and the commissioning of new railings in this location utilising the talents of local ironworkers. We have investigated the possibility of altering the levels of the pavement in this location to remove the retaining wall. However, to achieve an acceptable gradient for this purpose would involve major engineering works including re-profiling not only the footway but also the main carriageway and the re-routing of services. This course of action is not recommended owing to the cost and disruption these works would cause.
- There was no clear preference for any of the planting or seating options through the public consultation. However, following discussion with town centre businesses including the banks, the Civic Society, PACE and the police it is recommended that no additional permanent planting or seating is installed as part of the scheme at this stage. Rather, the proposal is that initially, these areas are repaved only and monitored to understand how they are used: where are the desire lines, where is the best place for seating etc. Subject to the outcome of this monitoring exercise, it is proposed that we consider then whether further planting/seating is necessary and, if so, where.
- The installation of dropped kerbs and additional disabled parking spaces in Cork Street to support disabled drivers. This would not impact on designated taxi bays. It is also proposed that the existing time limits to disabled parking are extended to enable evening parking by disabled drivers. It is recommended that damaged bollards in Cork Street close to the Westway Cinema are replaced and the design to match other new bollards.
- The introduction of a new delivery bay outside The George, enabling larger HGVs to deliver to nearby shops and restaurants. This is in response to consultation with town

centre businesses that are finding deliveries increasingly difficult in the town centre with a reliance on parking on pavements with attendant damage and obstruction to pedestrians. Some disabled parking would be retained outside The George to complement enhanced provision in Cork Street and on the opposite side of the Market Place near the Subway take away. These arrangements are subject to being able to secure the necessary Traffic Regulation Order.

- In addition to widening the bus bays, it is proposed to amend the radii of kerbing on the bus bays to make it easier for bus drivers to enter and exit the bays.

Proposed traffic management arrangements

Consultation with town centre businesses included engagement around traffic management arrangements whilst work is in progress. In line with the preference of those consulted, it is recommended that a one-way flow of traffic in the Market Place is enabled. Not only will this minimise disruption to the traffic flow but also it will be the best alternative in terms of protecting pedestrians and the construction workforce during the works. It will also enable the works to be delivered more quickly and temporary bus stops can be installed on the carriageway without impacting on the flow of traffic through the one-way zone.

Planning consent

Mendip District Council as Planning Authority have indicated that implementation of the scheme is subject to planning consent. It is therefore proposed that a planning application is submitted as soon as possible.

Financial considerations

The cost implications of the scheme are still being assessed. It is recommended that the Town Council goes out to tender to obtain competitive quotations to deliver the scheme with a report to be brought back to Council as soon as possible to enable budgeting to be finalised.

Recommendations

1. Approve the Market Place Phase 2 scheme including the proposed amendments as detailed in this report.
2. Delegate to the Deputy Town Clerk in consultation with the Project Sponsor to:
 - a. finalise the design of the scheme
 - b. submit a planning application to Mendip District Council as soon as possible and submit any necessary amendments in response to comments from planning officers
 - c. secure the approval of Somerset County Council as Highway Authority including the introduction of a TRO to enable proposed new delivery and disabled parking arrangements to be implemented
 - d. consult with Somerset County Council around the proposed introduction of a one-way traffic flow in the Market Place whilst works are in progress
 - e. undertake a tender exercise to obtain competitive quotations to deliver the scheme with a report being brought back to Council as soon as possible to enable the budget to be finalised
 - f. review how the new re-paved spaces are used following completion of the scheme and, if necessary, bring forward further proposals for seating and planting which will be subject to public consultation