

Market Place, Frome Town Centre

Phase 2 Public Realm Works – Planning Statement

Policy context

The range of problems and issues associated with the town centre of Frome has provoked discussion within the community over many years. It is important to describe how these have been addressed through the local planning policy making process, as the Planning Act places a duty on local planning authorities to determine proposals in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

A good starting point in the context of this planning application, is the Frome Community Plan - a vision for Frome 2008-2028 (FCP). This was produced in 2008 and followed a consultation exercise which was the subject of around 3,000 responses. In the document a key objective was identified as: “To preserve and enhance the historic character of the town, by remodelling the town centre environment to make it more welcoming for shoppers and visitors and more beneficial to traders”. In order to achieve this, it was proposed that in consultation with others, the design of the Market Place should be improved and the best use of it examined in order to unite the shopping areas and provide an incentive for residents and visitors to come and shop. Other relevant issues raised included the need to reduce traffic, improve air quality and improve pedestrian movement and safety.

The content and findings of the above document were important issues for consideration in the subsequent production of the Mendip District Council Local Plan Part 1 Strategy and Policies 2006-2019 (MDLP) which was adopted on 15 December 2014. Core Policy 6: Frome Town Strategy (CP6) of the MDLP states, “The Council will work with partners, landowners and other interests through the Frome Neighbourhood Plan and other initiatives to deliver comprehensive remodelling of the Market Place to reduce the impact of traffic and enhance the appearance and appeal to local residents, businesses, visitors and shoppers”.

In 2011, Frome Town Council (FTC) commenced work on a Frome Design Statement (FDS). The objective of the FDS was to inform the design process in the context of implementing the improvements to the Market Place which at that time were the subject of emerging local planning policies. In addition to this and in the context of the same aim, FTC commissioned a study, known as the Frome Town Centre Remodelling Feasibility Study (TCS), to examine the potential for a wide range of improvements across the town centre with a special focus on the Market Place. The TCS which was published in October 2012, included a number of recommendations for the remodelling of the MP and improving the setting of Boyle Cross. This helped to inform the design process of the current scheme and helped ensure that the design took into account the requirements for the wider area including future pedestrian crossing points.

The FDS was adopted by Mendip District Council (MDC) as a Supplementary Planning Document in October 2015. This followed widespread consultation including a workshop event and an open day. The stated aim of the FDS is to give a detailed guide to the character of a town and identify the specific nature of the buildings and landscape that makes the town distinctive. Its purpose is to safeguard local character and to encourage sensitive, high quality design where new development occurs, whether it is a repair, refurbishment, regeneration or development project.

The document points out that the main issue with the Market Place is that despite the attractiveness and high quality of the urban fabric, the space is dominated by a high volume of traffic causing difficulties for pedestrians crossing the road. It also makes reference to the policy in the MDLP relating to the remodelling of the Market Place and identifies individual character zones, with the Market Place falling into “Zone 1: Historic Core”. The document includes details of the layout, uses, landscape, open space, townscape and materials of this zone.

In parallel with the above, work commenced on The Frome Neighbourhood Plan (FNP), with public consultation on the Plan taking place from October to December 2013. It was submitted to MDC in March 2014 and following the Examiner’s report and referendum in October 2016, the plan was made by MDC in December 2016.

Policy TC1 of the FNP states:

POLICY TC1 – TOWN CENTRE REMODELLING

Remodelling the Town Centre should provide improvements to the public realm. Remodelling of the Town Centre within the area shown on Figure 18 which accords with the following principles will be permitted:

- Improve the Town Centre environment for pedestrians.
- Reduce the impact of traffic movement from vehicles and re-order the priorities between motorised vehicles, cycles and pedestrians.
- Enhance the character and appearance of the Town Centre, taking into account guidance in the Frome Town Design Statement (October 2015) relating to this area.
- Provide an improved setting and location for the markets.
- Demonstrate that it will cause no deterioration in air quality.

Community Consultation

In the context of paragraphs 40 and 128 of the National Planning Policy Framework, (NPPF) Feb 2019, and the evolution of the scheme, it is important to indicate how the applicant has engaged with and worked closely with the local community and those affected by the proposal.

Consultation summary

Market Place Phase 2 Consultation

Frome Town Council developed a comprehensive engagement plan to ensure the wide range of users of the Market Place had the opportunity to view and in-put into the plans for the Market Place.

This included holding a public exhibition at the Town Hall from 8 November to 22 November showing the plans and visualisation for the scheme, along with options that the public could comment on regarding seating and planting. Two drop-in sessions were held during the exhibition for people to come and meet with the Project Team. All the information from the exhibition was available on the Frome Town Council website for anyone unable to come to the Town Hall, and an online poll was set up to capture comments.

During the exhibition, 81 written comments forms were received, along with 56 comments from the online poll and 11 emails to the consultation email address. Overall, there was support for improving the paved areas identified and for getting the buses off the carriageway. Visitors confirmed that the proposed crossings are where many people just now cross the Market Place and support the plans to make crossing here better.

Meetings with key stakeholders who use the Market Place were arranged to talk through the plans and gain feedback. The plans were presented to PACE Group, a disability group in Frome, and to Frome & District Civic Society. An evening meeting was set up to consult with retailers on the plans, and we met with the three main bus operators who use the Market Place to discuss the new proposed bus bay layouts.

The Designing Out Crime Officer for East Somerset was invited to come and walk around the Market Place with local police officers to talk through the proposals. Branch Managers of the banks in the Market Place were also consulted about the plans.

A number of points came out of the consultation that have led to changes to the project:

Loading and Unloading

The meeting with the retailers highlighted concerns over loading and unloading in the Market Place. In response to this, we are proposing to have a large designated loading area outside The George which could accommodate HGVs delivering to nearby shops and restaurants.

Disabled Parking

PACE Group confirmed that they support the plans to have disabled parking spaces on both sides of the Market Place; however, they have suggested that the bays here are time-limited

to enable more users to use them throughout the day. They also supported having a designated large loading bay for deliveries to stop lorries parking on the pavements.

PACE highlighted that Cork Street was a location particularly well suited for wheelchair users and welcomed the proposal of having two new disabled parking bays and dropped kerbs between Catherine House and Waterloo. Discussions with the group also highlighted the need to improve the kerbing at the existing disabled parking bays in Corks Street, and a proposal to change the hours of the existing disabled bays to run later into the evening was received very positively by the group.

Appendix A to this document is submitted as part of this application and is headed “Consultation & Policy Development Timeline – Market Place Remodelling” (CPTD). The document indicates the extent of public consultation regarding the potential improvements to the town centre and covers the period from 1995 to 2019. The document includes reference to the most recent consultation that took place in November and December 2018 and that relates specifically to the proposed second phase of works in the Market Place which is the subject of this planning application.

Frome Town Council

7 March 2019

Appendix A

Consultation & policy development timeline – Market Place remodelling, Frome

Date	Activity	Outcomes
1995	<p>Frome Town Centre Action Plan 1995 Prepared by Somerset County Council, Mendip District Council, Frome Town Council, Frome & District Chamber of Commerce & Frome & District Civic Society</p>	<p>p.6 Specific Projects: “It was recommended that the full potential of the town centre could not be realised without major improvement to the traffic situation”</p>
1998	<p>Frome Transport Strategy 1998 Prepared by WS Atkins for Somerset County Council, Mendip District Council & Frome Town Council There was extensive public consultation about the Market Place with 124 questionnaires returned.</p>	<p>The Summary included: - “Market Place/Town Centre Objective “1. To provide a pleasant and safe environment in the Market Place/Town Centre “2. To give priority to pedestrians “3. To deter traffic through the Market Place “4. To reduce the speed of through traffic “5. To accommodate the needs of public transport, taxis and delivery vehicles.”</p> <p>The final report included (p.19): - “The improvement of the Market Place has long been an ambition for many Frome residents . . . Its importance is encapsulated in the specific Market Place/Town Centre objective agreed by the Steering Group”. “It was clear that the community want to see the Market Place improved for people and not dominated by cars. This was further confirmed by the response to questionnaires in January and February 1998, when 75% of those who expressed an opinion supported enhancement of the Market Place.”</p>

2003	Frome Fit for the Future 2003 Led by Mendip District Council	Frome Area Board agreed strategy would include Project B7 Market Place New Crossings. The map for B7 shows re-paving of the Boyle Cross area and new crossings at the desire lines identified in the current planning application.
2008	Vision for Frome Community Plan 2008 Published following extensive public consultation.	Proposed improvements in the town centre including a shared space, additional crossings and possibly a limited closure of the Market Place to through traffic on Saturdays. A key document that influenced the content of the Mendip District Local Plan.
2010	Mendip Town Centres Study 2010 Vol 3 Prepared by Roger Tym & Associates for Mendip District Council	Referenced PPS4 A11“Car borne traffic detracts from the visitor experience and creates a noisy atmosphere which in general grinds against the more ambient, quality shopping.” Table 14 Surveys showed Frome and Shepton Mallet scored significantly lower than the other Mendip towns for: - “Amount and quality of pedestrianisation” “Ease of movement around the town centre on foot.” “Access for people with mobility/hearing/sight impairment.”
2011	Frome Design Statement Work started on this document in 2011. There was widespread consultation including a workshop event and an open day.	The document points out that the main issue with the Market Place is that despite the attractiveness and high quality of the urban fabric, the space is dominated by a high volume of traffic causing difficulties for pedestrians crossing the road. The Frome Design Statement was subsequently adopted by Mendip District Council as a Supplementary Planning Document in October 2015.
2012	Frome: Town Centre remodelling – feasibility study July 2012	The public consultation exercise went well with the majority of respondents wanting to see some improvement. Most preferred ‘Option 3’ which would improve the appearance and character of

	<p>Undertaken by Landscape Projects for Frome Town Council</p> <p>Town centre stakeholder meetings were held on 12 and 24 September at Trinity Church Hall and an open public meeting was held on 2 October at the Frome Cheese & Grain followed by a public exhibition at the same venue between 2 and 7 October. People were also able to make their representations online through the Town Council website and Facebook page.</p>	<p>the public realm in a sensitive way that was appropriate to the heritage of the area using traditional materials and restoring important heritage assets such as Boyle Cross. Key to this option was the introduction of new road surfaces, low kerbs, courtesy crossings and improved lighting that would make it easier for pedestrians to get around the town centre. The submitted application was influenced by this study although various amendments are reflected in the current design.</p>
September 2012 - present	<p>Consultation with Somerset County Council as highway authority</p> <p>Since the initial work on the feasibility study in 2012, Frome Town Council and Somerset County Council have held detailed discussions regarding the Market Place remodelling scheme.</p>	<p>Frome Town Council are proposing to enter into a s.278 agreement with Somerset County Council to undertake the works for formal adoption by the County Council on completion of the works. The works have been the subject of Road Safety Audits as the scheme has developed with the latest audit being issued to the Town Council in July 2018. This audit and the recent public consultation have been discussed in some depth with the County Council (the exception being the proposed disabled parking in Cork Street). In support of the planning application and in response to the latest audit, a designer's exception response has been re-issued to the County Council for consideration and as part of the ongoing technical review required for the s.278 agreement. Only minor technical issues now need to be addressed.</p>
12/12/12	<p>Decision to proceed to develop a Market Place scheme</p> <p>At a meeting of Frome Town Council on 12 December 2013, councillors received a report from Landscape Projects highlighting the</p>	<p>Councillors agreed that based on these recommendations that the Economic Development & Regeneration Manager be authorised to progress this project to the next stage. At the Extraordinary Frome Town Council meeting on 30 January 2013, councillors agreed to proceed with detailed design work.</p>

	<p>outcomes of the feasibility study. Landscape Projects recommended that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • traffic is slowed throughout the town centre by means of traffic calming measures between Butts Hill and Welshmill Road which include entrance gateways, streetscape design, surfacing, narrowing and carriageway tables. • drivers are made aware, through street design measures including paving and lowered kerbs that they are driving within a pedestrian priority area as they enter Market Place. • car parking, street furniture and other obstacles to pedestrian movement within the Market Place are removed, allowing pedestrians more freedom to cross in places which suit them. • public realm improvements, including the provision of seats, shelters and other features, reinforce the perception that Market Place is a pedestrian priority area. 	
2013	<p>Mendip District Local Plan Core Policy 6 of the Mendip District Local Plan proposes creative and imaginative public realm</p>	The policy was subsequently adopted.

	<p>improvements as well as new urban spaces which integrate new development areas with Frome's historic centre. The Infrastructure Development Plan which is an integral part of the Local Plan also specifically identifies the need for improvements to the Market Place. This was subject to public consultation in 2013 and did not yield any significant objections.</p>	
<p>October – December 2013</p>	<p>A Neighbourhood Plan for Frome A key objective for Frome Town Centre embodied within the Neighbourhood Plan for Frome is to make the town centre a more pedestrian-friendly environment whilst allowing traffic to continue to flow through it. This objective builds on the earlier consultation. A specific policy relating to town centre remodelling was included (TC1). The Plan was the subject of an extensive public consultation exercise led by Frome Town Council over a period of 6 weeks and ending on 31 December 2013. This included press and online promotion together with a series of events across the town including the following: Press Launch Monday 28th October 12.30pm – 1.30pm – Bennetts Centre, St Johns Church Hall Sunday 3rd November – Frome Super Market, Unit 15 Westway Centre Tuesday 5th November, Unit 15 Westway Centre</p>	<p>Analysis of the responses received shows that there was broad support for the proposal. The Plan was submitted to Mendip District Council in March 2014 and in April 2015, Mendip's Cabinet received the Examiner's Report. They agreed that the Plan should proceed to referendum subject to a number of modifications including a modified Policy TC1: Remodelling the Town Centre should provide improvements to the public realm. Remodelling of the Town Centre within the area shown on Figure 18 which accords with the following principles will be permitted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the Town Centre environment for pedestrians • Reduce the impact of traffic movement from vehicles and re-order the priorities between motorised vehicles, cycles and pedestrians • Enhance the character and appearance of the Town Centre, taking into account guidance in the Frome Town Design Statement (October 2015) relating to this area • Provide an improved setting and location for the markets • Demonstrate that it will cause no deterioration in air quality

	<p>'Participate Frome' - Frome Town Meeting - Wednesday 13th November – Cheese & Grain Thursday 14th November - Oakfield Academy Monday 18th November – Trinity Hall Wednesday 27th November – Selwood Academy Friday 6th December 2013 – The Key Centre</p>	<p>Following the Examiner's report and referendum in October 2016, the plan was made by MDC in December 2016.</p>
<p>15 December 2016</p>	<p>Planning and listed building consent granted on appeal for Phase 1 public realm works at Boyle Cross</p> <p>These works included: removal of existing street furniture and excavation of the existing parking area; resurfacing of the site to form new pavement area with demountable traffic bollards and replacement street furniture; renovation of the Boyle Cross monument to reinstate working fountain; new seating area and events area including pop-up power and water; removal of existing parking and formation of a loading bay/police bay</p> <p>The scheme was subject to pre and post consultation with interested parties.</p>	
<p>March 2017</p>	<p>Consultation with surrounding parish councils</p>	<p>No objections received</p>

	<p>Details of the plans for Market Place (Phases 1 and 2) were forwarded to parish councils around Frome and comments invited. An event was subsequently held at Selwood Academy on 29 March 2017 at which the plans were presented to parish council representatives.</p>	
February 2018	<p>Phase 1 works completed Works were jointly financed by FTC and MDC and the ongoing management of the area is subject to joint committee arrangements.</p>	
November & December 2018	<p>Phase 2 pre-application consultation The engagement exercise involved a public exhibition and advertised drop-in sessions at Frome Town Hall together with online and press promotion. In addition, meetings were held with various stakeholder groups including Frome & District Chamber, town centre businesses, Frome & District Civic Society, PACE (representing the views of disabled people), the bus companies and the police.</p>	<p>A summary of the outcomes of the engagement exercise can be found in the accompanying Planning Statement. Please see below a summary of the amendments that were made to the scheme following this consultation exercise.</p>
23 January 2019	<p>Public presentation at Frome Town Council meeting A public presentation of the scheme and the outcomes from the public engagement exercise was made at the Frome Town Council meeting on 23 January 2019. Councillors agreed to a</p>	<p>The amendments to the scheme included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploration of the possibility of the installation of a zebra crossing as an alternative to the proposed courtesy crossing (this idea was subsequently abandoned following technical advice from the County Council). • The introduction of reflective bands on all bollards to improve pedestrian safety.

	<p>number of amendments to take account of comments received.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An extension to the paving improvements to include the area around the southern bus stop – this was largely in response to comments from PACE. • There was no clear preference for any of the planting or seating options that were explored through the public consultation and following discussion with town centre businesses including the banks, the Civic Society, PACE and the police it was decided that no additional permanent planting or seating should be installed in the Market Place as part of the Phase 2 scheme at this stage. Rather the proposal is that these areas are repaved only and monitored to understand how they are used before any firm proposals come forward. • The installation of dropped kerbs and new disabled parking spaces in Cork Street to improve the facilities for disabled drivers following discussion with PACE. • The introduction of a new delivery bay outside The George Hotel following discussion with town centre businesses.
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