

**Report to:** Lead Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment

**Date of meeting:** 14 September 2015

**By:** Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

**Title:** Uckfield High Street Improvements – Stage 2

**Purpose:** To seek approval to progress the Stage 2 Improvements, including the length of parking duration and preferred traffic management solution for Stage 2 following local consultation.

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**RECOMMENDATIONS:** The Lead Member is recommended to:

- (1) Agree in principle to the implementation of the Uckfield High Street Improvement Scheme Stage 2; and**
  - (2) Agree that the Scheme progresses with a 30 minutes stay for the 23 parking spaces on the High Street; and**
  - (3) Support the provision of up to two parking bays for blue badge holders on the High Street; and**
  - (4) Authorise the use of a one-way traffic management scheme to be utilised during the construction period subject to further consideration in conjunction with the appointed contractor, and delegate power to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport to authorise the final scheme.**
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## **1. Background Information**

1.1 Uckfield is a vibrant and flourishing town, but it suffers from traffic congestion in the High Street. With more housing already being built and further construction anticipated, congestion will get worse without significant traffic management improvements in the town centre.

1.2 Contributions from development in Uckfield and the surrounding settlements have been secured by Wealden District Council (WDC) by means of Section 106 legal agreements. This money needs to be used to mitigate the impact of development generated traffic on the roads in the town centre. To date, East Sussex County Council has received £2.5m from WDC for Stages 1 to 3. WDC continue to hold a further £1m which is potentially available for the delivery of Stages 2 to 3. Therefore the total available funding for the scheme (including interest and indexation) is £3.5m. Expenditure on Stages 2 and 3 will be managed in line with the remaining funding.

1.3 An action plan for addressing congestion in Uckfield Town Centre was agreed by the County Council's Lead Member for Transport and Environment in July 2011. The Uckfield Town Centre Project Board agreed for a public exhibition to be held in March 2012 showing four different options for addressing town centre congestion as a result of current and proposed development in the town.

1.4 The consultation results showed that improving car parking opportunities was the favoured choice and there was also support to incorporate elements of sustainable travel choices into the proposed scheme.

1.5 A further consultation, with more detailed proposed measures, was held in March 2013. The consultation outcome shaped the Uckfield Town Centre - Highway Improvement Scheme (UTC-HIS), which is being delivered by the County Council as Highway Authority on behalf of the Project Board. The project is managed by the Project Board, which is made up

of officers and Local Members of the County Council, Wealden District Council and Uckfield Town Council.

1.6 As part of the management of the project, Network Rail is constructing a new 174 space car park near Uckfield Railway Station. WDC is also making improvements to the layout and controls to the Luxford Fields Car Park so long stay use is restricted to 10 hours, therefore freeing up space that is currently filled by commuters from early morning to early evening.

1.7 The overall situation in Uckfield once the High Street Improvements are completed and the Network Rail car park is open, will be a major increase in the number of car parking spaces compared to the existing situation. Although some spaces will be removed from the High Street, there will be a net gain of 150 spaces.

1.8 The Town Centre Scheme has been split into three stages;

- Stage 1** Improvements to High Street from Framfield Road to Bell Lane - completed in November 2014 at a cost of approximately £1m.
- Stage 2** Improvements to High Street north of Bell Lane up to Church Street, along Bell Lane to junction with Bell Farm Lane. This includes introduction of a 20 mph limit, resurfacing of footways, new kerb lines with local realignment, upgrading of signal equipment and street lighting, new street furniture, tree pits incorporating drainage measures, Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) with bus shelters and a reduction of on-street car parking.
- Stage 3** Improvements to the Bus Station – to commence after the completion of Stage 2.

## 2. Supporting Information

2.1 With respect to the proposals which were developed at the exhibition in March 2013, residents and traders organised a town poll on 12 March 2015 to highlight their concerns about the proposals for a reduction to 8 on-street parking spaces (20mins loading and disabled only) in the High Street. The current provision on the High Street is 43 parking spaces.

2.2 The Scheme Project Board listened to the feedback from all sources and took on board the strength of feeling in the town. The revised Scheme now balances the demand for High Street parking spaces while still allowing for a reduction in congestion and improving the town centre. The final proposals now provide for 23 on-street parking spaces, which is felt to be the maximum number of spaces on the High Street that can be accommodated while still meeting the scheme requirements related to road safety, mitigation of congestion and funding.

2.3 The final version of the scheme was presented in a public exhibition which was held on 26 and 27 June 2015. A total of 510 people attended the exhibition, and a total of 332 responses were received. These consisted of both completed questionnaires and emails.

2.4 In summary, the consultation results were as follows;

- For the 23 High Street short stay parking spaces, 183 (55%) respondents wanted 30 minutes duration for the bays. Comments highlighted that 59 (18%) wanted parking enforcement measures in place.
- For the question relating to how many parking spaces should be dedicated for disabled use only and which spaces; 67 (20%) respondents did not want any spaces allocated

for the disabled. However 26 (8%) wanted less disabled spaces in Luxford Fields car park, 30 (9%) felt that disabled blue badge holders can park anywhere normally and if any disabled only spaces were introduced then 29 (9%) wanted them to be spread evenly in the High Street.

- For the traffic management options during the construction period, 147 (44%) respondents preferred a one-way system as their first choice, with northbound (marginally, by 1) as the preferred diversion route. 73 respondents (22%) provided no preference on their preferred choice of traffic management, and 72 (22%) preferred a partial closure. 24 people (7%) requested a full close of the High Street during the construction of the highway improvements.

2.5 Uckfield Town Council and the Chamber of Commerce have submitted their views on the scheme and these are provided in full in Appendix 1.

2.6 On the 10 August 2015 the County Council reported to the Uckfield Town Centre Regeneration Joint Committee (TCR) on the results of the consultation along with addressing the comments and concerns of Uckfield Town Council and Uckfield Chamber of Commerce.

The TCR Joint Committee resolved to agree that:

- 1a. the scheme progresses with a 30 minute stay for the 23 parking spaces.
- 1b. there will be no allocated spaces for disabled badge holders.
- 1c. further work is carried out to explore the use of a one-way traffic management solution.
2. A recommendation is made to the East Sussex County Council Lead Member of Transport and Environment to support the progress of the scheme as detailed above.
3. A formal response is provided to Uckfield Town Council including the offer of a further meeting to discuss the traffic management options for the Stage 2 work.

2.7 The County Council has consulted with the Wealden Disability Involvement Group regarding disabled only bays and it was recommended by the Group that up to two spaces be solely allocated for blue badge holders only, these bays could each be located at the northern and southern end of the High Street. Including this provision within the current proposals would demonstrate under the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 that the Scheme makes reasonable provision for the needs of disabled users within Uckfield High Street especially as Blue Badge holders can park under certain circumstances in restricted areas.

2.8 The recommendation for the 23 High Street on-street parking bays to be reduced from 60 minutes to 30 minutes waiting period will require an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order. This Order will give notice of introduction. The first 6 months of operation is then the 'objection period', after which any unresolved objections would need to be referred to Planning Committee. This Order will run for a maximum of 18 months and can be modified which will allow the County Council to monitor the effectiveness of the revised waiting period.

2.9 With regard to traffic management arrangements, the Census data for both the number of households and car ownership (2001-2011) north and south of the town showed an increase south of the town, but generally similar overall numbers. However, it is recognised that in both the north and south of the town there are attractors such as school, colleges, hospitals, retail/industry and a railway station.

2.10 Analysis of the existing 2014 flow data demonstrated that the diversion route in either direction would result in delays due to having to give-way for priority flows at the roundabouts along the A22 and A26. For the southbound traffic management option, queues would result along Bell Lane. In comparison, the northbound traffic management option would have queues at points along the A26 and A22 bypass. Therefore it is recommended that prior to construction, further consideration of a one-way diversion route should be undertaken in conjunction with the appointed contractor. This will provide the County Council with a diversion route which considers speed of construction, the contractor's specific requirements and cost implications along with the impact on the surrounding road network. The final authorisation of the traffic management arrangements can be delegated to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport.

### **3. Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendation**

3.1 The Stage 2 Improvement Scheme for Uckfield High Street should be progressed. Based on the consultation responses and the analysis provided above, the Lead Member is therefore recommended to agree that the Scheme progresses with a 30 minutes stay for the 23 parking spaces introduced by means of an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order. There will also be up to two allocated bays reserved for blue badge holders.

3.2 Further work will be carried out to explore the use of a one-way traffic management solution during the construction period with consideration given to determining whether a northbound or southbound direction is the optimum solution. It is recommended that one-way working is pursued with the decision for the best direction of travel (north or southbound) to be identified following discussions with the appointed contractor with delegated power being given to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport to authorise the final scheme.

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LOCAL MEMBERS  
Councillor Claire Dowling

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS  
Stage 2 outline design

## UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL



Minutes of the meeting of **UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL** held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre on Friday 10<sup>th</sup> July 2015 at 7.00 pm

### PRESENT:

Cllr. L. Eastwood (Town Mayor)	Cllr. D. Bennett (Deputy Town Mayor)
Cllr. P. Meakin	Cllr. M. Dean
Cllr. P. Sparks	Cllr. J. Beckford
Cllr. D. Ward	Cllr. I. Smith
Cllr. B. Mayhew	Cllr. K. Everett
Cllr. J. Love	Cllr. J. Anderson
Cllr. D. French	

### IN ATTENDANCE:

Cllr. C. Reynolds Wealden District Council  
15 members of the public  
2 members of the press

Ashley Serpis - Town Clerk

Minutes taken by Ashley Serpis

### 1.0 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members and officers were reminded to make any declarations of personal and/or prejudicial interest that they may have in relation to items on the agenda but none were forthcoming.

### 2.0 STATEMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON MATTERS ON THE AGENDA AT THE MAYOR'S DISCRETION

Several members of the public asked to speak on the item on the agenda.

**FC.30.07.15** It was **RESOLVED** to suspend Standing Orders to allow members of the public to speak.

A number of members of the public representing a number of organisations, individual shop owners and residents commented extensively on the proposals put forward.

**FC.31.07.15** It was then **RESOLVED** to reinstate Standing Orders.

### 3.0 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from:  
Town Councillors H. Firth and C. Macve

District Councillor P. Waldock

#### **4.0 TO CONSIDER THE SECOND PHASE OF THE HIGH STREET IMPROVEMENTS WORKS**

Members then also undertook extensive discussions on the proposals submitted and a variety of different suggestions and opinions were put forward and differing points and comments made.

**FC.31.07.15** Subsequently it was **RESOLVED** that:-

- (i) Uckfield Town Council ask East Sussex County Council and the Project Board to look at a further set of plans for the High Street improvements needed with a minimum of 30 car parking spaces on the High Street plus loading bays.
  - (ii) East Sussex County Council are also asked to review the traffic management options as set out to include phased works to minimise disruption to businesses.
  - (iii) If East Sussex County Council cannot accommodate such further changes, that the S106 monies are returned to developers without any detrimental financial impact on Uckfield residents.
- and
- (iv) Under the circumstance it is felt it would be inappropriate for Uckfield Town Council to respond to the questionnaire.

The meeting closed at 20.36 pm.

## **Feedback from Uckfield Chamber Committee on plans for High Street improvements and traffic flow options further to meeting on 11 June 2015**

### **The revised plans**

Whilst we recognise that you asked us to comment on the traffic flow issues rather than the revised plans, we believe it is appropriate for us to formally address the concerns we have regarding the revised plans both from our personal perspectives and in relation to our perceived response from our members.

Whilst we appreciate that you have been prepared to reconsider the plans in the light of reaction from the townspeople and traders and the referendum on parking, we do not believe that the revised plans make a sufficient retention of parking or that the proposed work justifies the significant impact it will have on the town's retailers and whilst we accept that they are an improvement we remain opposed to them.

### **Parking**

The plans allow for the retention of 23 parking places from the current 43. Of these we note that only 5 spaces are retained on the East side of the main High Street. One reason for this appears to be to move the bus stop from its current location outside Lloyds Bank to a site much further down the High Street. Given the new site's proximity to the bus station we question the need for a bus stop so near the bus station.

It appears generally that the spaces being retained are those that were to be designated as loading bays and disabled spaces. This raises the question of how the disabled who struggle to walk from the disabled spaces in Luxford Field car park to and around a hilly High Street will manage. Given that one purpose of the High Street revisions is to speed up flow on the High Street it also suggests that delivery vehicles will continue to double park and block the High Street and thus cause traffic delays.

We are still unclear why more spaces cannot be retained in the High Street. You stated that it is necessary for buses to have pull ins at the bus stops but our experience is that buses do not cause any significant delay on the High Street. (We also fail to see the need for bus shelters to be provided on the High Street).

Whilst we acknowledge that a few spaces (such as the one outside Superdrug) do cause delays and can be dangerous, we do not believe that applies to most spaces and indeed that there are a couple of places where new spaces could be created.

We are concerned that some of the tree pits will be placed where parking spaces could be placed and question whether the flooding issue could either be addressed by upgrading and cleaning the current drainage system or by building the pits but without the need to plant a tree on top. We also have concerns that the trees will attract birds that would then defecate on the new paving.

We still have some uncertainty over exactly what the Board is seeking to achieve by removing the parking. There is a strong indication that the main purpose is to improve traffic flow and clearly where spaces are dangerous to improve safety but there was also mention at last week's meeting of the need for buses to pull in (which I presume also improves traffic flow) and there is some debate

over whether there is a desire to improve the shopping experience and access. It would be helpful if you could comment on this and provide a breakdown of the reasons for removal of each of the 20 spaces that are being lost.

### **Necessity for the works at current spec**

At the meeting you commented that the surveys of townspeople in 2012 indicated that there was a desire for an upgrading of the look of the town. Whilst we acknowledge that there is room for an improvement to the appearance of the town, the nature of the buildings in the town and the lack of historic interest and other draws for the town means that the main reason people will come into the town other than to work or to commute will be because they are interested in visiting certain shops, banks or other retailers. Whilst this experience may be enhanced by attractive paving, safe road crossings, street furniture and improvements to the bus service, these will be of no value if the shops are empty. Our professional experiences and the impact of just nine weeks' of works in Autumn 2014, have shown that many retailers will be unable to survive the huge fall in takings that they will experience both during and for some time after the works take place. In addition, landlords are already experiencing uncertainty and concerns from potential tenants and existing tenants whose leases are facing renewal. Many will chose not to come to Uckfield or will look to move out of town when under the threat of extensive roadworks. This would produce a vicious circle that as more and more shops are vacated there will be less and less interest in taking out new leases and the High Street will increasingly become a retail ghost town.

We would also note that whilst the works in Autumn 2014 only physically took place in a small area of the High Street between Bell Lane and Framfield Road the financial impact of both the drop in footfall and the huge delays and traffic jams caused by the diversions impacted across the industrial estate and upper High Street and beyond.

Whilst we do not wish to suggest a Luddite attitude towards the improvements and we do appreciate the interest in upgrading the town, we have some concerns whether the upgrades are worth the pain that will fall particularly on the High Street retailers and as we stated at the meeting whether they should be performed to a lower specification, for example by the use of tarmac rather than York Stone paving, which will both reduce the work timescale and allow the moneys saved to be used to pay for night time and weekend working.

### **Business Rate Rebate**

Whilst it will have only a small impact compared to our perception of the fall in footfall during the works, it would be very helpful if we could work with Wealden District Council to agree a basis for rate reduction for High Street businesses on a calculated methodology rather than an individual application, ideally before the works commence.

### **Traffic flow options**

At the meeting Graeme Lake asked our views on the options for traffic movement during the period of roadworks. Whilst we would ideally ask that the plans are reconsidered to account for our views above and indeed further comments from the Town Council and public in due course, we have given some consideration to this matter and we appreciate you allowing us to comment.

The options presented were as follows:

- Contra flow with the use of traffic lights



- One-way traffic either North or South with the other directional flow being diverted via the bypass
- Evening working only
- Complete closure of the High Street
- Completion of small stretches of road at one time retaining two way traffic via traffic lights

As Mr Lake stated some of these options may not be financially viable.

Whilst as stated above we would ideally like to see the time period of the works reduced by reconsideration of the finish for the pavements to a lower specification which would be faster to build, our prime concern is that the substantial delays experienced particularly on the industrial estate by the works in Autumn 2014 are avoided. Whilst we appreciate Mr Lake has considerable experience in dealing with traffic delays caused by roadworks we are concerned that many of his views on the different options appeared to be based on a gut instinct and “back of a fag packet” estimates rather than full projections. Having said that we believe the delays caused in Autumn 2014 were not predicted by the traffic projection software which was applied.

We do not profess to be experts in this area. However we believe that a closure of the entire High Street albeit for a shorter period than the other options is unacceptable. Whilst we can see the logic of having one-way traffic as was applied in Autumn 2014, we feel there is a psychological impact in retaining the feel that there is a traffic flow and that the town is still open if two way traffic is retained. We do however have reservations on how severe the delays could be implementing this option.

#### **Impact of Station car park**

We would also express concerns regarding the impact which the opening of the new station car park will have on commuter parking combined with the enforcement of 3 hour restrictions in the off-street parking. We are aware that many commuters currently use Luxford Field car park as an all day car park whilst others use the roads in the lower part of New Town (around Bridge Farm Road) and Bell Lane. We believe that many commuters will not be prepared to pay to park at the station car park and on-street parking will increase. We hope that the Council will keep this under review and consider whether it is appropriate to introduce a means of parking restriction which will prevent commuter parking whilst still allowing the Bell Walk business employees to park. This could run along the lines of a parking restriction for a short period in the middle of the day or by restricting parking on one side of the road in the morning and the other in the afternoon. We do appreciate that to be effective such a restriction needs to be enforced which has cost implications though it is possible this could be covered by fines imposed.

There is also concern that the increased ability to park at the station (albeit at a cost) may attract more commuters to the town, for example to avoid the higher parking charges and fares at Haywards Heath, and that the net gain in spaces you have referred to will be offset by the increase in users and indeed drivers through the town. Network Rail’s plans to lengthen the platform seems to support the view that they are expecting use to increase.

#### **Ridgewood Farm approval**

Whilst this is a separate issue, we also note that planning has been granted for the building of 1,000 new homes at Ridgewood Farm. As has been stated in the Chamber’s letter of 28 March 2015 to Wealden District Council, whilst we recognise that a larger population will bring more opportunities

into Uckfield, we do not believe the current infrastructure can cope with this additional number of cars even with the proposed improvements to the High Street. Specifically we believe it is critical that the parts of the A22 which bypass Uckfield is dualled to prevent gridlock.

### **Canvassing views**

As you will see from the attached Press release we are calling an emergency full meeting of our members on 8 July to allow our members to express their views and to assess the feelings of the full membership on the revised plans and the proposals for traffic management.

As you are aware many High Street traders are not members of the Chamber and there is of course impact on residents and other traders so we would respectfully suggest that you consider calling a public meeting to allow these people a voice.