

Report to: Lead Member for Transport and Environment

Date of meeting: 15 July 2024

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Title: Hastings Town Centre Public Realm and Green Connections consultation outcome

Purpose: To consider the outcome of the Hastings Town Centre Public Realm and Green Connections consultation and approve the scheme to be taken forward to the next design stages and construction.

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Lead Member is recommended to:

- (1) Note the outcomes of the stakeholder and public consultation for Hastings Town Centre Public Realm and Green Connections;**
 - (2) Approve incorporating the alternative proposal to retain two-way bus and cycle only movement in Harold Place and Havelock Road into the revised scheme scope in response to the consultation outcomes, stakeholder feedback and option assessment relating to the bus re-routing proposals in Hastings town centre; and**
 - (3) Approve the updated design option at recommendation 2 above is progressed to detailed design, including considering further opportunities for planting and sustainable urban drainage into the scheme, and construction.**
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1 Background Information

1.1. In November 2019 the Government's Towns Fund programme allocated £24.4m to Hastings Borough Council. The aim of the Towns Fund is to drive the economic regeneration of Hastings to deliver long term economic and productivity growth through investment in urban regeneration, infrastructure, and connectivity.

1.2. Working in partnership with the Borough Council and the Hastings Garden Town Team, the County Council developed an initial business case seeking £3.38m of Towns Fund for the first phase of the Hastings Town Centre Public Realm and Green Connections project. This was approved by the Hastings Town Deal Board in September 2022.

1.3. Following the withdrawal of another Towns Deal project from the programme in early 2023, the Town Deal Board allocated a further £6.375m to the project. The County Council supported the development of a secondary business case for a wider project boundary within Hastings Town Centre utilising this additional funding, which was approved by the Hastings Town Deal Board in May 2023. In total there is £10,154,458 available towards the project; £9,754,458 of Town Deal funding and an additional £0.4m match funding previously secured from the South East Local Enterprise Partnership. As part of the development of these business cases, a preliminary design up to RIBA2 stage (Royal Institute of British Architects concept design stage) was developed. Key stakeholders including local bus operator Stagecoach, Southern Water, Hastings Business Improvement District and East Sussex College were consulted to inform the preliminary design.

1.4. Following approval from the Lead Member for Transport and Environment at her decision-making meeting on 20 November 2023, the County Council, as the local highway authority and project delivery partner, entered into a grant funded agreement with Hastings Borough Council, the Accountable Body for the Hastings Town Fund. To address financial risks surrounding project delivery, additional clauses were included within the grant funding agreement to ensure both parties (Hastings Borough Council and East Sussex County Council) agree that if the intended scope of

the project may result in overspend, methods of amending and de-scoping the project to ensure an overspend is not incurred and the integrity and core outcomes of the project are maintained, will be agreed.

2. Supporting Information

Design Development

2.1. The Hastings Town Centre Public Realm and Green Connections scheme focusses on the Havelock Road and Harold Place corridor supporting the ease of movement from the rail station as a key gateway into the town, through the heart of the town centre and across the A259, which runs parallel to the seafront promenade, to the beach beyond. The scheme extent is at Appendix 1.

2.2. The scheme proposes a central, adaptable public space for the Havelock Road, Queens Road, Harold Place and Robertson Street area, to create a sense of place in the town centre and provide a focal point which could flexibly accommodate a range of events, activities, and festivals across the year. In addition, the concept proposals included potential changes to the routing of traffic in the town centre and in particular buses using the pedestrianised section of Queens Road by making Havelock Road one way only northbound as well as the introduction of a two-way segregated cycle route from the station to the seafront.

2.3. The proposals aim to improve the public realm along the Havelock Road/Harold Place corridor, as well as in Wellington Place towards the Albert Road underpass. Increased tree planting and the introduction of biodiverse ecologies are included within the proposals which have benefited from guidance via the Hastings Garden Town Team to provide 'greening' in Hastings town centre, as it helps to enable increased housing and leisure opportunities.

Equality Impact Assessment

2.4. An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) on the proposed scheme, at Appendix 2, was produced prior to public consultation. This identified that, on balance, the benefits of the scheme for improved public safety through increased lighting, additional pedestrian crossings and improved public realm and accessible furniture outweighed the potential negative impacts.

2.5. Where equality issues were identified, such as the potential for confusion to be created with some protected characteristic groups when changing the bus stop and taxi rank locations and the possible impact of redesigning the road space and movement of blue badge disabled parking spaces, mitigating measures will be identified. An additional accessibility audit, at Appendix 3, has also been commissioned to review further the accessibility of the site, which will be used to inform the detailed design stage.

2.6. Where reasonably practicable, the designs will seek to address the comments raised in the audit. The EqIA will be updated at detailed design and construction stages.

Local engagement

2.7. A comprehensive stakeholder mapping exercise was undertaken which identified key interest groups or those who could be affected by the proposals. County Councillors and Borough Councillors directly inputted into the proposals prior to the public consultation taking place, with local Hastings Borough Councillors identifying key priorities such as the widening of the scheme and consultation scope to include an east/west corridor from Robertson Street to Wellington Place alongside views regarding the re-routing of buses via Queens Road and the long-term maintenance and safety requirements for the scheme.

2.8. The Hastings Garden Town Team provided regular input into the development of the proposals, maintaining a consistent vision for the town centre that would see pedestrianisation prioritised with the removal of traffic along Havelock Road and Harold Place. Local bus operators, local businesses and organisations representing the business community, sustainable and active travel groups, accessibility groups and local campaigners, education providers, emergency

services, and voluntary and community sector organisations were also engaged with on the proposals prior to the wider public consultation.

Public Consultation

2.9. The public consultation on the concept design proposals ran for a 6-week period from 22 January to 1 March 2024. Ahead of the consultation, a series of engagement sessions were undertaken to brief key stakeholders and local County and Borough Councillors on the consultation programme. The approach and activities for consultation can be found in section 2 of the Consultation Report at Appendix 4.

2.10. In summary, the consultation included online survey and easy-read brochures, multiple in-person public events at prime locations such as Priory Meadow Shopping Centre, several focussed workshops with key stakeholder groups, 2,300 postcards delivered to residential addresses and businesses in the town centre area and further promotion via social media and press releases. Engagement meetings also took place with all statutory consultees who are formally consulted as part of planning processes.

Consultation analysis and outcomes

2.11. The outcomes of the consultation are set out in the Hastings Town Centre Public Realm and Green Connections Consultation Report at Appendix 4. The public consultation survey asked for feedback on the overall town centre design and each specific area of the scheme, as well as current perceptions of the town and perceived safety. A total of 972 survey responses were received, including 82 paper copies. Over 90% of respondents were Hastings' residents.

2.12. In response to the closed survey questions regarding what respondents think of each area of the schemes, respondents replied as follows:

Area	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree / disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Did not answer
Overall Town Centre proposal	25%	25%	17%	15%	18%	0%
Changes to bus routes	13%	17%	37%	12%	20%	1%
Harold Place	21%	28%	24%	10%	16%	1%
Station to Seafront segregated cycle route	26%	23%	21%	11%	18%	1%
Wellington Place	21%	31%	30%	8%	9%	1%
Central area	26%	29%	20%	12%	13%	0%

2.13. Analysis of the quantitative responses shows that half the respondents supported the overall proposals whilst around a third did not; 30% supported the changes to the bus routing in the town centre and almost half supported the station to seafront segregated cycle route along Havelock Road and Harold Place. Over half also supported the place shaping proposals for Wellington Place and the central area of the scheme.

2.14. Qualitative analysis of the consultation responses and stakeholder engagement highlighted similar concerns around the proposed changes to the bus routes in the town centre. These included the safety of mixing pedestrians and buses on Queens Road, access to the Town Hall, and the impact on accessibility to bus stops. It should be noted that the high percentage of 'neither agree nor disagree' responses could be largely attributed to the lack of detail shared regarding the bus re-routing proposals as these had not been confirmed with the local bus operator prior to consultation.

2.15. Other key themes highlighted throughout the consultation included pedestrian/cyclist safety in shared use areas; enforcement of traffic restrictions; the cost of ongoing maintenance of the green spaces; exacerbating existing antisocial behaviour; and access to public toilets. Detailed responses to the key themes, trends and comments are set out in the consultation response report at Appendix 5.

Maintenance and personal security

2.16. It is proposed that a maintenance led approach be applied when selecting the necessary public realm materials and the County Council's Asset Management team will continue to be engaged throughout the detailed design stage. The additional planting and soft landscaping will be maintained by Hastings Borough Council who are currently developing a long-term management and maintenance plan for the town centre which will include policies for maintenance of the project area.

2.17. As part of the detailed design stages of the project, further engagement will also take place with Sussex Police's 'Design Out Crime' Officer and Hastings Borough Council's Community Safety Manager to address enforcement and antisocial behaviour concerns raised during the consultation.

Review of the bus routing proposals

2.18. At present, Harold Place and Havelock Road is two-way with buses, taxis and cyclists only going southbound whilst northbound is open to use by all traffic including buses. As highlighted in sections 2.11 to 2.13 of this report, a high percentage of respondents did not agree with the proposed changes to bus routing in the town centre with the closure of Harold Place to traffic and the use of the current pedestrianised section of Queens Road to run buses through and then northbound up Havelock Road to the rail station.

2.19. Consequently, 2 further design solutions have been developed aimed at retaining and balancing the need for sustainable transport and active travel access into the town centre, while also offering scope to incorporate greening and planting. These concept options are:

- Option 1: Retains northbound lane on Havelock Road and Harold Place for buses only with two-way segregated cycle lane. Southbound buses would be re-routed via Devonshire Place and South Terrace. Existing northbound general traffic to the station would be re-routed elsewhere on the local road network.
- Option 2: Retain both lanes on Havelock Road and Harold Place for two-way bus movements with cyclists also able to use the bus lanes. Existing northbound general traffic to the station would be re-routed elsewhere on the local road network.

2.20. A stakeholder workshop was held following the public consultation to receive feedback and help shape the ideas further especially around balancing bus and active travel infrastructure in the town centre alongside the planting, maintenance, and hard landscaping aspects of the scheme design. In addition, a detailed options assessment and analysis of these 2 options are set out in Appendix 6 which considers the wider transport policy context around the emerging Local Transport Plan 4, the requirements of the East Sussex Bus Service Improvement Plan and active travel (walking, wheeling and cycling) alongside the effects on the operation of bus services who traverse or terminate in Hastings town centre.

2.21. Taking into consideration the views and opinions expressed during the public consultation, the views of key stakeholders such as local Members, the Hastings Garden Town Team, the bus operator, bus community and other local interest groups through the further feedback sessions on the alternative bus routing options, the modelling of the transport and bus operational effects of all options, and the wider transport policy context, on balance it is recommended that Option 2 – retaining two-way movement for buses on Havelock Road and Harold Place - is incorporated into the refined design for the Hastings Town Centre Public Realm and Green Connections scheme.

2.22. Incorporating Option 2 into the design will ensure that the impacts on bus operations are minimised whilst also improving provision for cyclists and removing northbound general traffic from the Havelock Road/Harold Place corridor. In doing so it is recognised that this compromise solution will not

be met with complete approval from all key stakeholders. However, pursuing this option will still achieve the key business case objectives such as improving the public realm and planting in the town centre thereby creating a greater sense of place in Hastings town centre. If Option 2 is taken forward, it is recommended that further options are explored during the next design stage to include planting and sustainable urban drainage along Havelock Road while retaining two-way bus lanes along this corridor, subject to sufficient flexibility in the budget.

Next steps

2.23. The scheme, incorporating the recommended changes for bus and cycle routing on Havelock Road and Harold Place outlined above, as well as other consultation comments where practical, is due to progress to RIBA3 (Developed Design) stage with a planning application due for submission in September 2024. The subsequent detailed design process will also include continued engagement with key stakeholder groups including the business community, accessibility groups and transport groups. The Towns Deal delivery deadline for the project is March 2026.

3. Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

3.1. Through the Hastings Town Deal, the Hastings Town Centre Public Realm and Green Connections scheme presents a significant opportunity to invest in enhancing connectivity between the train station and seafront, by improving the public realm, enhancing opportunities for safer walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport journeys in the town centre, as well as maximising biodiversity and green spaces to contribute to the health and wellbeing of people and to help protect against a changing climate.

3.2. Following public and stakeholder consultation undertaken in early 2024, there was a mixed response to the proposals. Whilst there was a good level of support for the segregated cycle route along Havelock Road and Harold Place, alongside the creation of a new public realm space for the central area and place-shaping in Wellington Place, there was less support for the proposed changes to bus routes with strong opposition for the re-routing of buses on the current pedestrianised section of Queens Road. The Lead Member is recommended to note the outcomes arising from the consultation on the Hastings Town Centre and Green Connections proposals.

3.3. In response to the consultation feedback on the re-routing of buses in the town centre, two alternative design options have been developed; firstly, to enable bus movements one-way northbound on Havelock Road and Harold Place with a segregated two-way cycle route, or secondly, retain two-way movements for buses and taxis only on Havelock Road and Harold Place with on-carriageway cycle lanes in both directions. These alternative designs were presented to key stakeholders including the bus operator, the business community and local interest groups to seek feedback and refine the proposals. Either alternative design would still deliver against key business case outputs around the extent of improvements to the public realm and pedestrian space, as well as planting to create new biodiverse ecosystems in the town centre.

3.4. Based on the analysis presented in sections 2.18 to 2.22 as well as in Appendix 6, it is recommended that two-way movement for buses and cyclists is retained on Havelock Road and Harold Place (Option 2) and incorporated into the scheme design; that opportunities to include further planting and sustainable urban drainage along Havelock Road while retaining two-way movement are considered at the next design stage, and that the revised scheme scope is progressed to detailed design and construction.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

Councillor Daniel

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Minute 43. [Agenda for Lead Member for Transport and Environment on Monday, 20th November, 2023, 10.00 am | East Sussex County Council](#)