

Report to: Lead Member for Transport and Environment

Date of meeting: 23 September 2024

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Title: Hastings Town Centre Public Realm and Green Connections – update

Purpose: To consider the outcomes and recommended next steps following further discussions with Hastings Borough Council regarding Hastings Town Centre Public Realm and Green Connections project.

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Lead Member is recommended to:

- (1) Note the consultation outcomes of the stakeholder and public consultation as set out in the 15 July 2024 report;**
 - (2) Note the outcome of further discussions with Hastings Borough Council following the Lead Member’s decision on the 15 July 2024 to defer the decisions regarding Hastings Town Centre Public Realm and Green Connections; and**
 - (3) Approve incorporating two-way bus and cycle movement in Harold Place and Havelock Road into the revised scheme scope and progress 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. In November 2023 East Sussex County Council entered into a grant funding agreement with Hastings Borough Council (HBC) to receive £9,754,458 of Towns Deal funding as the delivery partner for Hastings Town Centre Public Realm and Green Connections project. The scheme focusses on the Havelock Road and Harold Place corridor in Hastings town centre 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.

1.2. Between 22 January and 1 March 2024 the County Council publicly consulted on the proposed designs for the project. A consultation outcome report was considered at the Lead Member for Transport and Environment decision making meeting on 15 July 2024 which recommended to incorporate two-way bus and cycle movement on Harold Place and Havelock Road into the revised scheme scope and progress the project to detailed design and construction.

1.3. The Lead Member for Transport and Environment resolved to defer consideration of a decision on the scheme to a future meeting in order that further discussions could take place between the County Council and HBC.

2. Supporting Information

Outcomes of strategic discussions

2.1. Following the Lead Member’s decision at the meeting on 15 July 2024, HBC requested discussions with the County Council, Southern Water, Homes England and the local bus operator,

to further understand how the Hastings Public Realm and Green Connections project could integrate within the Borough's wider vision and strategy for the town.

2.2. HBC and County Council officers met with Southern Water on 24 July 2024 to discuss Southern Water's plans for the town centre over the next 5 years. Southern Water reiterated comments they made during the consultation period, that there is planned investment in Hastings and Bexhill from 2025 to 2030 to include highway treatment works, interventions to take roof run off, and stormwater overflow management. Until the funding period starts in April 2025, the specific scope of works and site areas are unknown. Southern Water has agreed to put in place a point of contact for the project design team to keep updated on scheme developments. Southern Water have confirmed that proceeding with the Hastings Public Realm and Green Connections project will not negatively impact funding for their upcoming Southern Water Stormwater Management Taskforce.

2.3. HBC have been working with Homes England (HE) over the last 12 months on developing a Strategic Regeneration Investment Framework (SRIF), detailing potential opportunities for investment in housing, leisure, and employment regeneration in the town centre. HBC officers met with HE on 13 August 2024 to discuss the SRIF timescales and funding availability. HE advised that they are not currently able to confirm funding for investment plans but have agreed to meet with HBC Lead Members and senior officers to review the proposals in mid-September 2024. A verbal update on the discussion points from this meeting will be provided at the Lead Member for Transport and Environment meeting on 23 September 2024. The County Council had already been working with the consultants developing the SRIF to ensure that the Hastings Public Realm and Green Connections project aligns with the emerging wider vision for the town, however, further opportunity for integration can only take place once the allocation of SRIF funding is confirmed.

2.4. County Council officers and HBC officers met with the Leader of HBC and local bus operator directors on 12 August 2024 to further discuss the impacts that the proposed design options – one-way northbound or two-way on Harold Place and Havelock Road – could have on the bus services in Hastings and future investment across the wider network. If a one-way design option which increased the journey times of routes through the town centre is progressed, there remains a risk of having a negative impact on bus services across the wider network. To retain the existing service pattern and offset the potential increased journey times of between 1 and 3 minutes per bus, would have a significant financial impact that could see additional subsidy being required to maintain operations. This would also impact current policy and strategy objectives as part of the East Sussex Bus Service Improvement Plan.

2.5. The local bus operator remains committed to working with the County Council and HBC to support the regeneration of the town centre to review options for timesaving across the network. However, at this time any such bus priority measures to enable bus journey time savings are unidentified and unfunded, and a commitment to implement such improvements prior to the construction of this scheme would be required to mitigate against these risks.

2.6. HBC has indicated a preference to see a town-wide transport review to understand the strategic opportunity for changes to the transport infrastructure in the town. Such a study would need to consider the County Council's existing transport policy framework and a wide range of interventions set out in the emerging fourth East Sussex Local Transport Plan and its accompanying Investment Plan under the four themes – tackling climate change and enhancing the local environment; safer healthier and more active travel; integrated and accessible transport for all; keeping East Sussex Connected. A comprehensive study of this scale and scope could take up to 18-months to develop and significant additional funding would be required to undertake this. At this stage there is no scope in the Hastings Public Realm and Green Connections project to either fund or undertake this major transport review.

2.7. Based on the outcomes of the requested discussions detailed in paragraphs 2.2 to 2.6, the two-way movement for buses and cyclists on Havelock Road and Harold Place (Option 2) remains the preferred and recommended option to incorporate into the scheme design to maximise the benefits of the existing funding opportunity as part of the Hastings Towns Deal.

Delivery Risk

2.8. The officer recommendation considered at the Lead Member's July 2024 decision-making meeting set out a compromised option taking into account public consultation feedback and minimising the impact on accessible sustainable transport, supporting local businesses, residents and visitors, whilst still maximising significant benefits for the town centre through improved active travel connections, increased green spaces and flood mitigation planting as well as public realm improvements. The two-way design option meets the majority of the external funding Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and project objectives alongside others set out in the original business case considering the usage and accessibility of the town centre. This design option also provides opportunity to assess further greening interventions which could be possible on Havelock Road, such as the use of pinch-points in the carriageway to allow for additional Sustainable Urban Drainage planting. County Council officers will continue to work with HBC officers to review these options, alongside continued engagement with key stakeholder groups such as the Garden Town Team and local business representatives.

2.9. The decision to defer consideration of the scheme to allow for further discussion between County Council and HBC has resulted in a pause to the contract with the project's design consultancy. Due to the close end date of the existing contract and the lengthy process which would be needed for an extension, there has been a requirement to terminate the existing contract. If a decision is made to proceed with the detailed design and construction of the Public Realm and Green Connections scheme a procurement exercise would need to be undertaken to re-procure design consultants which could take up to 4 months.

Legal Implications

2.10. The County Council have signed a grant funding agreement (GFA) with HBC, as the Town Deal accountability body, with a project delivery end date of March 2026. A change of project scope would hinder the project's ability to meet funding KPIs and place the existing funding agreement with HBC and the government at risk. The project is also in receipt of match funding of £400k from the South East Local Enterprise Partnership from the Hastings and Bexhill Movement and Access Corridor Package specifically for improvements to the Havelock Road section of the scheme. This funding would have to be returned to the package if the Havelock Road element was removed from the scheme's design and/or construction plan.

Financial resource implications

2.11. Significant staff resources have been invested in the project to date by the County Council and there is a financial implication to continue leading on the delivery of this scheme in the context of the risks outlined in paragraphs 2.8 and 2.10. As stated in the grant funding agreement the County Council could be liable to pay back some or all the funds claimed if the funder is not satisfied that the project will be delivered within the agreed timescales and/or target outputs, or progress towards delivery of outputs is unsatisfactory. Further delays to the project or significant scope changes also pose a financial risk to the County Council. Agreement to these changes can be sought from the government but would need to be led by HBC as the local accountability body for the funding and agreement to any changes is not guaranteed.

Communication and Engagement

2.12. As referenced in paragraph 2.8 in this report, County Council officers will continue to work with HBC officers on the development of a stakeholder communications and engagement strategy as this progresses. This will include further engagement with the Garden Town Team, along with co-design workshops at key stages of the detailed design stage to seek valuable input from key stakeholders.

Next steps

2.13. To proceed with the scheme and accept the risks stated above the County Council would require support from HBC to proceed with the recommended two-way bus route on Havelock Road and in the submission of a formal Project Change Request (PCR).

2.14. This PCR would request an extension to the funding deadline to allow for sufficient time for detailed design and construction. County Council officers would also work to procure consultants to deliver detailed design and construction support. During detailed design, consideration would be given to opportunities to maximise benefits on Havelock Road, including greening and Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems. These measures will need to be balanced with sufficient transport and active travel provisions and be subject to Road Safety Assessments.

3. Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

3.1. The Hastings Town Centre Public Realm and Green Connections project funded through the Hastings Town Deal represents an enormous opportunity to support the ease of movements between the rail station, town centre and seafront via the Havelock Road and Harold Place corridor and improve the town's public realm. The County Council, as delivery partner, entered into a grant agreement with Hastings Borough Council, as the accountable body for the funding, to receive £9,754,458 of Towns Deal monies towards the project.

3.2. Consultation on the project proposals were undertaken between January and March 2024. Following the consultation outcomes, including the concerns regarding the detrimental impact on bus operations in the town centre, the preferred recommended scheme to retain two-way movements on Harold Place and Havelock Road was presented at the Lead Member's decision-making meeting on 15 July 2024.

3.3. Following the Lead Member's decision to defer consideration of the consultation outcomes and next steps, further positive and constructive discussions between parties stated in section 2 of this report have taken place and have demonstrated that wider town centre initiatives will not be dependent on the progression of the Hastings Town Centre Public Realm and Green Connections project. The risks to project delivery and funding do however remain significant and the pause to the project to allow time for further discussions has resulted in the need to re-procure design consultants and seek a Project Change Request via Hastings Borough Council and Government.

3.4. The Lead Member is therefore recommended to note the outcome of further discussions with Hastings Borough Council following the Lead Member's decision on the 15 July 2024 regarding Hastings Town Centre Public Realm and Green Connections;

3.5. Approve incorporating two-way bus and cycle movement in Harold Place and Havelock Road into the revised scheme scope and progress to detailed design, including considering further opportunities for planting and sustainable urban drainage into the scheme, and construction; and note the consultation outcomes of the stakeholder and public consultation as set out in the July 15 2024 Lead Member for Transport and Environment report.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

Councillor Daniel

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Minute 16. [Agenda for Lead Member for Transport and Environment on Monday, 15th July, 2024, 10.00 am | East Sussex County Council](#)

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