

BALDOCK AND DISTRICT COMMITTEE

7 August, 2007

*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT	AGENDA ITEM No.
----------------------------------	------------------------

	6
--	----------

TITLE OF REPORT: BALDOCK TOWN CENTRE ENHANCEMENT SCHEME – DRAFT PROPOSALS FOR AGREEMENT FOLLOWING PUBLIC CONSULTATION

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING AND BUILDING CONTROL

The attached report was listed as 'to follow' at the first issue of the agenda.

BALDOCK COMMITTEE

7 August 2007

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

AGENDA ITEM No.

6

TITLE OF REPORT: BALDOCK TOWN CENTRE ENHANCEMENT SCHEME – DRAFT PROPOSALS FOR AGREEMENT FOLLOWING PUBLIC CONSULTATION REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING AND BUILDING CONTROL

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To present to Members the findings of the public consultation on the draft proposals for Baldock Town Centre Enhancement scheme.
- 1.2 For Members to agree the amended proposals following public consultation to allow Building Design Partnerships (BDP), the designers, to proceed with the detailed design.
- 1.3 To gain the Members agreement on the next stage in the project programme up to the production of formal contract drawings.

A presentation of the amended proposals and the next stages in the project programme will be made by BDP and Officers at the committee meeting.

2 FORWARD PLAN

- 2.1 This Report contains a recommendation on a key decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 1st June 2007.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Baldock Town Centre Strategy, adopted in January 2006 as the Council's Statement of Policy, includes an Action Plan which requires the preparation and delivery of an enhancement scheme for Baldock town centre. This scheme is being undertaken by NHDC in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council (HCC). Completion of the Baldock bypass in Spring 2006 resulted in changes to the traffic flows through the centre of Baldock and created opportunities for enhancement of the town centre.
- 3.2 The Council appointed Building Design Partnership (BDP) in February 2007 to prepare design proposals for the Baldock Town Centre enhancement scheme and supervise the implementation of the works on site.
- 3.3 NHDC and HCC are jointly funding the enhancements works. Due to the size of Baldock Town Centre, part of BDP's brief is to determine how to make the most effective use of the funding available to achieve the best design solution and using the most appropriate materials.
- 3.4 Officers and BDP undertook a series of stakeholder workshops and attended various meetings to understand and gain the views of the local community as input into preparing the proposed design scheme. Members subsequently agreed the

draft design proposals for public consultation at the Baldock & District Committee meeting on 4th June 2007.

3.5 The public consultation period ran for six weeks starting with a launch on Saturday 9 June followed by a public meeting on 12 July 2007. The consultation period closed on 20th July 2007. The consultation was supported by a permanent exhibition in the Simpson Drive Community Centre, and the following was undertaken to promote awareness of the design proposals:

- Press releases appeared in the local paper through out the consultation period and in the Baldock Mail;
- Leaflets were hand delivered to every household and businesses within Baldock inviting everyone to attend the launch and the exhibition;
- Posters were displayed in prominent positions around the town informing people about the exhibition;
- The adjacent Parish Councils, individuals involved in the pre-consultation meetings, members of the Baldock Town Partnership and key organisations were written to and informed about the draft proposals;
- The consultants supported by officers attended a meeting of both the Baldock Town Partnership and the Knights Templar School Council during the consultation period to present and discuss the draft proposals;
- A public meeting was held on 12th July during the consultation period to enable the Baldock Members, Consultants and Officers to listen and discuss people's views and comments about the draft proposals. In excess of 80 people attended this meeting;
- The Council's website has been kept up-to-date through out the period of the project.

Section 9 of this report sets out the community involvement process to date.

4. CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 The proposed enhancement scheme relates to the town centre, (see Appendix 1 attached) and encompasses the following key principles, upon which people were consulted. These included:

- Understanding and analysing parking arrangements within the core town centre area and the surrounding streets.
- Making provision for business, visitor and residential parking within the town centre that supports the vitality and viability of the town centre now and in the future.
- Creating new public open spaces.
- Increasing footpath widths where necessary to allow for areas of activity and outdoor trading, cafes etc.
- Creating a market place and giving the market a real presence

- Improving the junction at High Street, Whitehorse Street, Church Street and Hitchin Street to increase pedestrian links and safety at this critical point.
- Introducing signs and/or other measures at junctions and gateways into the town centre to slow down and discourage through traffic, improve the pedestrian experience and safety.
- Improving the pedestrian links between Church Street and High Street.
- Reducing street clutter, improving the street scene and coordinate all elements of street furniture including trees and soft landscaping.
- Improve the physical and visual links between the town centre and Tesco's store.
- Seeking views on the location of the war memorial and public conveniences.

4.2 Nearly 200 written comments were received during the consultation period on the draft proposals. It is interesting to note that the majority of comments were in support of the scheme as a whole. Each comment has been considered and where necessary amendments have been made adding value to the overall design scheme. An analysis of the consultation responses together with the consultant's and officer responses are included in the 'Summary of Comments' attached as Appendix 2. A compilation of all these comments is available in the Members Room and on the Council's website.

4.3 The main amendments can be categorised as follows:

- (a) Category 1 – changes that have been made to the general masterplan layout including the proposed new public spaces, layout of the trees and green areas, style and character of materials and street furniture, closure of the south end of Church Street and parking allocation and locations.
- (b) Category 2 – changes that will need to be made subject to further studies within this scheme such as the access road off High Street opposite Tesco's superstore, the final location of the war memorial, the pedestrian link to Tesco's and the extent of parking controls in the immediate adjacent streets.
- (c) Category 3 – additional studies that will be needed as a direct result of the proposed scheme that will have an effect beyond the immediate area in relation to both traffic management and on street parking controls. This may include improving signage outside of Baldock diverting through traffic away from the core area and the possibility of HGV restrictions.

4.4 **The findings from the consultation and the proposed amendments made to the design proposals will be presented to Members at the Committee Meeting.** This will include amendments made in light of Category 1, to which officers are seeking Members agreement to allow those parts of the design scheme to be frozen. This will enable the consultants to proceed with the preparation of the detailed design and maintain progress on the agreed project programme.

4.5 **The studies that will be required as part of Categories 2 and 3 will also be presented at the Committee meeting together with suggested actions on how these issues are to be taken forward in accordance with the overall programme for the project** (See Appendix 3 for the project programme). Officers will be seeking Members agreement to these suggested actions.

- 4.6 A major element of the design proposal is the modification of the junction of High Street, Whitehorse Street and Hitchin Street. The preferred option is to make this location more pedestrian friendly by introducing traffic control lights with a pedestrian phase with pedestrian crossing at desired points. While a signalled junction would provide safer conditions for pedestrians and cyclists, it was considered necessary that the proposed junction be analysed to establish its capacity, possible lengths of queues and anticipate the impact on surrounding streets. An experimental layout was run to measure these effects.
- 4.7 A number of comments including complaints were received during the experiment. **These comments, the data and measurement of queue lengths from the experiment is still being analysed at the time of writing this report and will be presented together with responses to the key issues raised by the public at the Baldock Committee Meeting.**

5. ENHANCEMENT SCHEME - FINAL DESIGN

- 5.1 A report on the outcome of the studies referred to in Category 2, will be submitted to the Baldock & District Committee on 17 September 2007. If accepted, the elements from the 17th September will be added to the previously frozen schemes under Category 1, allowing the detailed design work to be completed.
- 5.2 Both Members and the local community will be kept informed of progress on the project via a series of exhibitions run at the Simpson Drive Community Centre, through the Council's website and Outlook, leaflet drops, press releases and public meetings when considered necessary and relevant to a particular stage of the project.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Terms of Reference in relation to Area Committees apply to this Report.
- 6.2 In the event that the final design scheme is agreed, there will be legal implications regarding working on the highway and allowing for a Section 278 Agreement, the procedure for any Traffic Regulation Orders required and dealing with any involvement of private land in the case of requiring necessary consents.
- 6.3 NHDC and HCC are in the process of agreeing a partnership agreement to deliver the enhancement scheme.

7. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There is an agreed capital budget for the project of £2.8m.
- 7.2 The prime partners, namely NHDC and HCC will co-fund the project development costs through staff time in relation to project development, partnership working with strategic organisations and consultancy support. In the council's case, this is to be funded through the service and financial planning process. An agreement between NHDC and HCC has been prepared to ensure that the project is run to time and on budget.
- 7.3 With regard to risk there are significant reputational risks associated with the non-delivery of the project, which has a very high public profile. The Council's risk register has been updated to reflect this area of risk. A risk register for the project has been prepared and will be maintained by the Project Team.

- 7.4 A CDM co-ordinator has also been appointed for the project to manage health and safety risks as required by the CDM 2007 Regulations.

8. HUMAN RESOURCE AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The officer time involved in the enhancement project is identified as part of the Service and Financial Planning Process for Planning & Building Control Services, and to be included in other relevant Service plans given the requirement to bring in other officers across the council at various stages in the project.
- 8.2 All efforts will be made to meet the Council's equalities plan when consulting with the local community on the design scheme and the implementation plan for the project.

9. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS

- 9.1 Officers undertook a series of workshops and attended various meetings as part of the preparation of the Baldock Town Centre Strategy. Outputs from these sessions provided a good baseline for understanding the issues raised in relation to the future enhancement of the town centre.
- 9.2 BDP, since their appointment in February 2007 have undertaken a variety of stakeholder workshops, presentations to key organisations, drop-in events and interviews. These, together with work undertaken by an earlier consultant, Buchanan's, has provide a significant understanding of the views of local residents and businesses.
- 9.3 Briefing sessions have been held with Baldock Members to gain further information and to give feedback on proposals and on progress.
- 9.4 A public consultation exercise was undertaken between 9th June and 20th July as outlined in paragraph 3.5 above.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 That Baldock and District Committee agree the amended proposals for the Baldock Town Centre Enhancement Scheme described as Category 1 presented at the meeting.
- 10.2 That Baldock and District Committee agree the actions as presented under categories 2 and 3 at the meeting.

11. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 To maintain as best as possible rate of progress the areas of work associated with Category 2 and 3 have been separated out. By asking Members to consider and agree the areas of work associated with Category 1 would release a substantial volume of work to the consultants, which would allow the momentum of progress to be maintained in the meantime while the outstanding areas of work are considered. The recommendations are offered after due consideration of the information collected over the last four months and in the full knowledge that the amended design reflects the majority and/or balanced views of the various groups consulted, survey material and expert consideration.

12. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 12.1 The final proposals include a number of design components within the overall scheme which will be resolved at the detailed design stage.

13. APPENDICES

- 13.1 Appendix 1: Proposed Masterplan showing design proposals for consultation
- 13.2 Appendix 2: Summary of Comments received to Consultation on Design Proposals – 9 June to 20 July 2007
- 13.3 Appendix 3: Project Programme

14. CONTACT OFFICERS

- 14.1 Louise Symes, Planning Policy and Projects, ext 4359
Helen Leitch, Planning Policy and Projects, ext 4513
Terry Nickolls, Planning Policy and Projects, ext 4425
David Scholes, Head of Planning & Building Control, ext 4836
Katie White, Senior Lawyer, ext 4315
Anita Thomas, Group Accountant, ext 4451

15. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 15.1 Baldock Town Centre Strategy
- 15.2 Relevant committee reports
- 15.3 Baldock Town Centre Design Proposals Exhibition documentation