

Teignbridge District Council
Committee name: Full Council
Meeting date: 27 February 2024
Part I

Report Title

Queen Street, Newton Abbot, Pedestrian Enhancements Scheme

Purpose of Report

To confirm next steps with the Queen Street Pedestrian Enhancements project.

Recommendation

The Council approval for the following:

- (1) To reaffirm support for delivery of the Queen Street pedestrian enhancement scheme.**

Financial Implications

If the scheme does not go ahead we could be liable for part of the £200,000 costs incurred to date detailed in section 5 below which will be a cost to our revenue account. In addition any delays to the project timeline will put at significant risk the ability to spend the Future High Streets Funds allocated and return of the monies to Government. See sections 5 and 6 below.

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Legal Implications

See paragraph 5.3.
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Risk Assessment

The project is ready for delivery. Construction risks will be managed by the County Council and their contractor. The main risks associated with this report relate to the prospect of

taking forward an alternative option. Alternative options are addressed at Section 6.

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Environmental/ Climate Change Implications

Environmental impacts are addressed at Section 5.

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Background Papers

Teignbridge District Council committees and reports

1. [Executive approval of Future High Street Fund bid submission](#), July 2020
2. [Executive endorsement of Future High Street Fund project](#), April 2021
3. [Full Council approval of the Future High Street Fund Project](#), April 2021

Teignbridge Highways and Traffic Orders Committee

4. [Approval for the Spring 2022 public consultation](#) – March 2022
5. [Approval for relevant Traffic Orders to be advertised for consultation](#) – July 2022
6. [Approval of the making of the Traffic Orders](#) – June 2023
7. [Removing the prohibition of vehicles over 10m](#) – February 2024

1. Introduction

1.1 Enhancements to Queen Street in Newton Abbot have been supported through various committees and decisions, dating from 2020 (see background papers). The project is being delivered by Devon County Council with a budget of approximately £1.45 million and expected to:

- Offer pedestrians more space to move and access shops;
- Sustain footfall, dwell times and local expenditure;
- Make junctions safer by improving crossings at side roads;
- Make accessing Queen Street on foot and bicycle more attractive;
- Provide trees, other planting, seating and a more attractive street environment;
- Result in economic benefits that significantly exceed £10m over the next 30 years.

1.2 Approval of the Queen St enhancements followed public consultation and feedback, including 943 responses to a survey in Spring 2022. This was in addition to the 130 members of the public and 29 business survey responses received in 2020.

1.3 Tenders have been returned and award of contract is expected in the coming weeks, with start of construction to follow. This will be accompanied by ongoing engagement with local businesses to appraise them of upcoming timings and locations of works.

2. Timeline

2.1 The Queen Street enhancement scheme is the result of extensive work and evidence gathered over nearly 15 years. Key events and documents are summarised at Table 1 below:

Table 1: Queen Street Enhancements Main Milestones

2008	Newton Abbot's 2008 Community Plan included a 'Queen of Streets' theme centred on, 'pedestrianisation for the street, reduce motor traffic, promote themed shop frontage and as the place to eat and meet'.
2010	The Newton Abbot Regeneration Study pointed to enhancing Queen Street's pedestrian environment.
2016	Newton Abbot's Neighbourhood Plan prioritised, 'remodelling of traffic priorities on Queen Street'.
Spring 2019	Teignbridge District Council submitted a Future High Street Fund expression of interest, including high level proposals for improvements to Queen Street.
Autumn 2019	Following funding awards to an initial list of 50 destinations, Newton Abbot was shortlisted as a potential Future High Street Fund recipient and the council was asked to develop an associated business case.
Spring 2020	Public and business consultations on core principles of the Newton Abbot Future High Street Fund proposals were conducted and helped to inform Teignbridge's Future High Street Fund submission. Postal distribution to local businesses & residents.
July 2020	Teignbridge's Executive Committee approved submission of the Future High Street Fund business case to Government.
Spring 2021	The Government announced Newton Abbot as one of 57 high streets to receive a share of £830m.
April 2021	Executive Committee recommended and Full Council approved delivery of the Queen Street project with 36 votes in favour and none against the project. There were 5 abstentions and 6 absent.
Autumn 2021	Devon County Council and Teignbridge officers (supported by WSP, contractors) started work on designs for Queen Street.
Autumn 2021 to Autumn 2023	Ongoing discussions, monthly / bi-monthly between Teignbridge, Devon and Newton Abbot town council representatives, providing opportunities to review and comment on emerging designs.
December 2021 to January 2022	Stakeholder workshops held to review emerging designs and inform preparation of consultation design plans for Queen Street.
March 2022	Teignbridge Highways and Traffic Orders Committee (HATOC) approve public consultation.
April 2022 to June 2022	Public consultation on advanced design details of the project: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoted through newspapers, social media, website and the council's residents' newsletter; - Postal distribution to residents and businesses in the scheme vicinity;

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One to one meetings offered to businesses; - Online webinar sessions, including a session for businesses; - Display created in Newton Abbot library with paper questionnaires.
July 2022	HATOC considered the consultation feedback, noted and supported the scheme, and approved consultation on the relevant Traffic Regulation Orders.
October / November 2022	Statutory Traffic Regular Order consultation.
Autumn 2022 to Spring 2023	<p>Officers engaged and worked collaboratively with objectors to address concerns about business loading provision. All objections specifically related to space for loading consequently withdrawn.</p> <p>Newton Abbot Town Council representatives queried whether full pedestrianisation (rather than partial) of the scheme could be delivered.</p>
May 2023	Devon County Council secured an additional £500,000 for the project through Government's Active Travel Fund.
June 2023	HATOC approved the making and sealing of the Traffic Regulation Orders.
July 2023	Devon County Council Cabinet approved scheme construction.
August 2023	Update letter issued to Queen Street businesses and residents.
December 2023	Update leaflet issued to Queen Street businesses and residents.
February 2024	HATOC approved relaxing the June 2023 Traffic Order to remove prohibition and facilitate access of 10m vehicles, enabling one of the flexible loading bays at the west of Queen Street to be extended in length.
Spring 2024	Construction works due to commence.

3. Evidence, Outcomes and Examples of Pedestrian Improvements

- 3.1 The benefits of pedestrian enhancements to streets and town centres are well documented. There are a number of case studies that relate to cities but many others from smaller and market towns.
- 3.2 The [Government's 2020 Gear Change](#) vision explained that well-planned improvements in the walking environment can result in up to a 40% increase in shopping footfall. It also pointed to well established benefits of an improved walking and cycling environment associated with health, wellbeing, air quality and economic output.
- 3.3 Many of these benefits were reflected in the Newton Abbot Future High Streets Fund Business Case, which valued project's walking and cycling benefits at more than £10 million (compared with a Queen St scheme cost estimate of £1.45 million).
- 3.4 The Chartered Institution of Highways and Transport (CIHT) also conducted a [review of creating better streets](#). This involved an assessment of 12 projects which, as is the case with Queen Street, had been brought forward to help improve pedestrian movement and comfort by reducing the dominance of motor vehicles. The case studies included projects from smaller towns.

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- 3.5 Overall, the CIHT review found that all of the projects had a positive impact on the quality of place and ease of movement. In most cases, it also found there to be a positive local economic benefit. The only negative outcomes related to inclusivity, which the Queen Street scheme is careful to address through features like increases in blue-badge spaces, additional seating, wider pavements and raised side-street crossings.
- 3.6 The often cited [Pedestrian Pound](#) publication from Living Streets draws on various evidence and case studies that show investments in public realm and walkability to result in overall increases in footfall and trading. Similarly, the [British Retail Consortium](#) have published views that active travel schemes will play a fundamental role in rejuvenating our town and city centres.

Queen Street Footfall

- 3.7 Whilst overall retail unit vacancy rates across Newton Abbot remain comparatively low, evidence collected on an annual basis indicates that footfall, including on Queen Street, is declining.
- 3.8 Our [Newton Abbot footfall counts](#) are conducted at least two days each year across 6 daytime hours and 12 separate counting locations. This evidence has been gathered in the same way for well over a decade. Year-on-year comparison may not be statistically reliable (for example 2023 figures were boosted by one count occurring on a race day) but the long term trend towards lower footfall is considered to be more representative.
- 3.9 One key aim of the Queen Street improvements is to arrest the risk of declining footfall and help to maximise the town's potential for ongoing vitality.

Town centre parking provision

- 3.10 Car parks operated by Teignbridge District Council provide 1,437 parking spaces in Newton Abbot town centre and there are additional 313 pay and display on-street spaces.
- 3.11 The Queen Street enhancements are expected to result in a 28 space reduction in pay and display on-street parking but this is equivalent to just 1.6% of total town centre spaces.
- 3.12 A Newton Abbot Parking and Redevelopment Study is being prepared. In September 2023, a workshop involving representatives from the Town Council, Chamber of Commerce and other stakeholder bodies took place.
- 3.13 With the stakeholders' feedback in hand, a series of daytime and evening manual car park counts were undertaken between 4 October 2023 and 23 December 2023, showing an average daytime occupancy rate of 61% and an evening figure of 32%.
- 3.14 Even during the peak hour in the busiest month of the year, Newton Abbot town centre car park occupancy only reaches 70%, compared with an industry recognised optimum level of around 85%.

- 3.15 Whilst these figures confirm the availability of ample town centre parking and that the majority of car borne town centre visitors do not park on Queen Street, they do not directly address customers' ability to *pop and shop*.
- 3.16 [The Queen Street Transport Assessment](#) goes some way towards doing so and shows that the majority of on-street parking visitors to Queen Street park for more than 40 minutes (20, 40 and 60 minute tickets are available). Those visitors might reasonably be expected to join the majority of town centre visitors and make use of the nearby car parks (Cricketfield Road is approximately 160 metres away).
- 3.17 The County Council also undertook counts of pedestrian and vehicle movements on Queen Street in September 2023. Between Thursday and Saturday west of King Street they found that there were at least 7,000 pedestrian movements, compared with less than 2,400 vehicle movements between 7am and 7pm. Pedestrians on Queen St, west of King St, outnumber vehicles by 5:1 during retail hours on a Saturday (however, this figure does not discount the through traffic movements and so the actual pedestrian ratio is likely to be higher).

4. Next Steps

- 4.1 Queen Street's Pedestrian Enhancement works have been procured by Devon County Council. Tenders have been returned and a contractor is expected to be appointed shortly. Construction will then follow once the contractor is appointed. The project is expected to complete by November 2024 but will, in any event, be scheduled to avoid the peak Christmas trading period.
- 4.2 As the delivery body, Devon County Council will publicise and host key scheme updates, which will also be circulated through the usual Teignbridge newsletters and social media. In addition, local business and resident engagement will continue in order to ensure that updates are easily available and that the contractor's programme of works is clearly understood.

5. Implications, Risk Management and Climate Change Impact

Financial

- 5.1 Significant fees totalling around £200,000 have already been spent on scheme development. These are currently allocated to Devon County Council's capital budget.
- 5.2 The County Council has indicated that were the project to halt, and be abandoned, there is a risk that the capital expenditure would need to transfer to revenue. It is likely that Teignbridge District Council would be liable for at least some of these costs.

Legal

- 5.3 The majority of funding for the scheme comes from the Future High Street Fund. We are obliged to have spent the funds by March 2025.

Climate and Environment

- 5.4 Queen Street's enhancements will encourage reduced car use. Public transport access will be enhanced (there will be an enhanced bus 'bay' provided) and active travel provision will be improved.
- 5.5 The scheme is expected to cut carbon emissions and deliver overall air quality benefits within the Newton Abbot and Kingsteignton Air Quality Management Area (AQMA).

Equality

- 5.6 The Queen Street enhancements will also benefit people with additional mobility needs. Wider footways and improved crossings will make the area safer and more accessible for all users, including those using wheelchairs, mobility scooters and push chairs.
- 5.7 Blue-badge holder provision will increase overall.
- 5.8 Bus services will be retained, resulting in particular benefits for young people and older people that may not have access to a car (according to the census approximately 15.1% of residents in the Newton Abbot area do not have access to a car or van).
- 5.9 An [Equality Impact Assessment](#) was also undertaken in support of Devon County Council's Cabinet decision to proceed with the scheme.

6. Alternative Options

Do nothing

- 6.1 The Council could elect not to fund the Queen Street enhancements. If the project did not proceed, the benefits identified in Sections 1 and 3 of this report would not be delivered.
- 6.2 In addition, it is likely that the council would be liable for at least some of the £200,000 costs already incurred in relation to scheme development.
- 6.3 It is unlikely that the allocated Future High Streets Fund budget could be redirected to alternative priorities, particularly as it is due to be spent by March 2025 if the deadline extension is approved by Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC).
- 6.4 Closure of the project at this late stage could also result in reputational impacts for Teignbridge District Council, potentially undermining our track record of successfully securing and deploying place making and infrastructure funding. There may be implications for the success of future funding bids.

Pause, further consultation and bring forward an alternative scheme

- 6.5 Officers have reviewed the best-case timescales involved in consulting, developing and bringing forward an alternative scheme. Initial estimates indicate that it would take almost a year to get back to the point of having procured a contractor (see table 2). This would mean that works would be undertaken beyond the Future High Street Fund March 2025 deadline and alternative funding would need to be identified.

- 6.6 If anything, this estimate is optimistic. It makes no additional time allowances for Devon County Council committee cycles, any traffic order peculiarities and road safety audits.
- 6.7 It should also be noted that Devon County Council as transport authority would need to be the delivery body and Teignbridge District Council cannot account for their willingness to stop, reorientate and restart the project.
- 6.8 Resource implications for Devon County Council would also be an influencing factor in the possibility for changing the scope of the current work in order to meet the challenging timescales associated with the grant funding deadlines.
- 6.9 As noted in Section 2, decisions to proceed with the project were founded in robust consultation and stakeholder engagement.

Table2: Pause, reconsult and redesign timescales

Task	Time (cumulative)
Prepare fresh consultation material	2 weeks (2)
Consult	4 weeks (6)
Review responses	3 weeks (9)
Design update	6 weeks (15)
Full Council decision to consult	8 weeks, report preparation in parallel with design update (17)
Consult	4 weeks (21)
Full Council decision to proceed	8 weeks (29)
Traffic order amendments	12 weeks (41)
Project change request (if required)	In parallel with Full Council decision / Traffic Orders (41)
Procure	8 weeks (49)

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 The Queen Street enhancement scheme is ready to be delivered, with the design well developed and the appointment of contractors imminent. All necessary decisions have been made by Teignbridge District Council and Devon County Council.
- 7.2 It is recommended to proceed with the approved scheme, thus securing funding through the Future High Streets Fund, along with assessed local environmental and economic benefits.