

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

JOINT TRANSPORTATION BOARD

2 December 2013

**Joint Report of the Director of Highways and Transportation and the Director of
Planning, Housing and Environmental Health**

Part 1- Public

**Matter for Recommendation to Borough Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be
taken by the Cabinet Member)**

1 TONBRIDGE TOWN CENTRE TRANSPORT STRATEGY – UPDATE

Summary

**This report provides an update following an informal briefing session for
Members last month to identify appropriate ways to take this strategy
forward.**

1.1 Background

1.1.1 This report updates Members on progress with the revised Town Centre Transport Strategy for Tonbridge. It focuses on the proposed improvements to the lower High Street, which were endorsed in principle by local Members and subsequently the Joint Transportation Board (JTB) in May and June of this year.

1.2 Progress to Date

1.2.1 It was agreed by the JTB in June that Kent County Council (KCC) would commission its design consultant, Amey, to progress the agreed improvements to the lower High Street to outline design stage by the end of this calendar year. This work has been completed on schedule and a plan depicting these measures is provided at **[Annex 1]**. The outline designs were presented and discussed with local Members at a useful briefing session in November and their feedback has informed the content of this report.

1.2.2 Officers have received a number of complaints from Members and local residents about the operation of the traffic signals at The Star and Garter junction in recent weeks. These have been passed to KCC's Traffic Systems Team, which is progressing its 'health check' of key signalised junctions within Tonbridge Town Centre. Unfortunately, this exercise was delayed due to problems with the software required to model the existing operation of these junctions and possible

improvements. However, the necessary baseline traffic counts have now been commissioned and the Traffic Systems Team will be in a position to report on the potential to optimise and synchronise the signals early in the New Year. This is a key junction at a strategic access point to the town centre where an increasing level of congestion is occurring and it is hoped that some improvement can be achieved here soon.

1.2.3 The programme of improvements to the lower High Street seeks to contribute to the Transport Strategy's overarching objectives – to improve air quality, reduce interruptions to the flow of vehicular traffic, and enhance pedestrian movement – which were endorsed by the JTB in September last year. It was agreed that this would be achieved through a combination of:-

- Footway widening, to provide a safer and more pleasant pedestrian environment, create spaces for street furniture and public art and opportunities for activities and events.
- The provision of appropriately located, part-time loading bays at footway level, to reduce disruption to through traffic without hindering pedestrian movement.
- The rationalisation of controlled pedestrian crossing facilities, to smooth the flow of vehicular traffic in areas of poor air quality and better cater for pedestrian desire lines, with a view to the forthcoming redevelopment of the Botany area and Bradford Street Car Park.

Quarry Hill Road / Waterloo Road Junction

1.2.4 The conflicts that occur during peak periods when large numbers of pedestrians travelling to and from the station seek to cross Waterloo Road are highly visible. Following their street audit earlier this year, officers therefore sought to identify a proportionate solution.

1.2.5 Any improvement must be capable of accommodating the swept paths of Heavy Goods Vehicles turning into and out of Waterloo Road. This has limited the options available to the slight narrowing of the bellmouth and/or the enlargement of the central island to facilitate pedestrian crossing movements. Having considered these options at the recent briefing session, local Members unanimously agreed that the enlargement of the central island represented the most appropriate improvement.

Station Forecourt to Barden Road

1.2.6 On the advice of officers, Amey have not considered this section of Quarry Hill Road in detail, as the railway bridge is a Network Rail structure and modifications to the highway layout would require their technical approval.

1.2.7 There is nevertheless an opportunity to widen the footway on the western side of the bridge, for the benefit of vulnerable road users and to enhance this important

gateway to the town centre without impeding traffic flows. An indicative layout incorporating this improvement has been depicted on the plan provided at **Annex 1**.

- 1.2.8 It should be noted that this scheme has also been included in the Tonbridge and Malling Cycling Strategy for future consideration.

High Street / Vale Road / Barden Road Roundabout

- 1.2.9 The highway layout at this location is particularly unsympathetic to the needs of pedestrians. Those wishing to continue northbound into the lower High Street must negotiate a narrow and uneven uncontrolled crossing, which caters poorly for mobility scooters and wheelchairs.
- 1.2.10 As Barden Road is one-way eastbound, it would be possible to build out the footway on each side of the junction and to provide tactile paving to create a more level crossing opportunity which better reflects the prevailing pedestrian desire line.
- 1.2.11 It was hoped that the scale of the High Street / Vale Road / Barden Road Roundabout could be reduced to provide a more pleasant gateway to the lower High Street. However, due to the need to cater for U-turns by Heavy Goods Vehicles, Amey have advised that this would not be possible. There may nevertheless be an opportunity to install planters and/or coloured surfacing in this area to soften the impact of the junction.

Avebury Avenue to Lamberts Yard

- 1.2.12 The footway on the western side of the High Street between Avebury Avenue and New Wharf Road is uncomfortably narrow in places and very inconsistent in width. There are numerous opportunities to widen the footway to a consistent width, which would provide a more pleasant pedestrian environment, encourage pedestrian crossing movements throughout the lower High Street, and act to raise driver awareness of pedestrians and cyclists.
- 1.2.13 By widening the footway, it would be possible to provide part-time loading bays at footway level and a cantilevered shelter at the heavily-used bus stop to the south of Lamberts Yard. The access to Lamberts Yard itself could also be resurfaced to match the adjacent footway material, as it is very lightly trafficked relative to the prevailing pedestrian flows.

There is an opportunity to upgrade the controlled pedestrian crossing adjacent to The Pavilion to a puffin facility with pedestrian detection, which would ensure that traffic is kept moving when no pedestrians are present.

Lamberts Yard to Bradford Street

- 1.2.14 It is anticipated that the proposed retail redevelopment of the Botany area and new Leisure and Community Centre at Bradford Street will lead to a significant increase in the number of pedestrians visiting and crossing the High Street at this location. In order to facilitate and promote these movements, officers instructed Amey to investigate the potential to provide a raised table and/or coloured surfacing, together with a new uncontrolled crossing facility, at the High Street / Bradford Street junction. Having installed this facility, there may be case for removing the controlled pedestrian crossing adjacent to Angel Walk to ease delays to through traffic.
- 1.2.15 The scope and nature of these improvements was debated at length by local Members at the recent briefing session. A number of attendees felt that the removal of the controlled crossing in favour of an informal facility on a raised table could increase delays to through traffic and disadvantage vulnerable road users. Others predicted that the retention of the controlled crossing, coupled with the anticipated increase in footfall, could exacerbate the existing congestion and air quality problems associated with 'stop-start' traffic through the High Street. It was also noted that similar schemes in South East England had been implemented successfully within high street environments and that they had become focal points in their respective town centres. Some views were expressed that the outline proposals to introduce a sense of shared surface and environmental change could improve the perception of the area, change how pedestrians and motorists behave, manage traffic speed but maintain flows and positively improve the character of this stretch of the High Street.
- 1.2.16 In order to address the points raised, it is proposed that the operation of similar layouts in comparable locations is reviewed during the detailed design stage of the project and that the proposals are modified accordingly, taking into account existing and future pedestrian and traffic flows through the High Street.
- 1.2.17 In progressing the outline design work, it has become apparent that KCC's Structures Team are planning to undertake waterproofing and painting work to the Little Bridge during Spring 2014. In order to avoid abortive work, it may be possible to deliver the improvements to this section of the High Street alongside this scheme. This opportunity is currently being explored further by officers and a more detailed update will be provided in due course.

Bradford Street to the Big Bridge

- 1.2.18 As New Wharf Road is one-way eastbound and relatively lightly trafficked relative to the prevailing pedestrian flows, it would be possible to create a raised shared space area within the access, surfaced in a contrasting colour to the adjacent footway. This would have the effect of managing traffic and help to improve pedestrian safety at this central point.

- 1.2.19 There is an opportunity to upgrade the controlled pedestrian crossing to the north of New Wharf Road to a puffin facility with pedestrian detection, which would ensure that traffic is kept moving when no pedestrians are present.
- 1.2.20 To the north of New Wharf Road, a footway width in excess of 6 metres could be achieved on the western side of the High Street, which would create an opportunity for the installation of street furniture and public art. It could also potentially provide a venue for small-scale performances and civic events.
- 1.2.21 The widening of the footway would discourage the opportunity for vehicles wishing to make the banned right turn from the High Street in to Medway Wharf Road from pulling in to the centre of the carriageway and waiting for a gap in the southbound traffic flow. The need to accommodate left turning Heavy Goods Vehicles from the High Street in to Medway Wharf Road would prevent the installation of a major physical feature within the junction to restrict this movement; however over-runnable upstands could be provided as a clear deterrent which would also assist pedestrians crossing at this point.

20mph Zone

- 1.2.22 It has been suggested by Amey that the High Street improvements would be complemented by the introduction of a 20mph Zone between the High Street / Vale Road / Barden Road Roundabout and the Borden junction. It is anticipated that this would be advertised with signage and gateway features. Given prevailing and anticipated traffic speeds, it would be largely self-enforcing, but would have the effect, in association with other works, of signalling entry to a different and controlled traffic area to assist with environmental/safety concerns whilst maintaining flows.

1.3 Next Steps

- 1.3.1 Subject to the views of Board Members, it is proposed that the programme of improvements be progressed to their detailed design and costing stage. This exercise would consider the specification of appropriate surface materials and their ongoing maintenance, in consultation with TMBC's Conservation Officer, and would enable Members to take a view on which schemes to prioritise with the funds currently available. It is anticipated that a public consultation exercise on those schemes could then take place next year.
- 1.3.2 KCC and TMBC officers will continue to work closely with Sainsbury's to ensure that the transport impacts of the proposed redevelopment of the Botany area are adequately assessed and that the development contributes positively to the Town Centre Transport Strategy. The County Council will also explore potential funding opportunities arising from the Government's new Single Local Growth Fund.
- 1.3.3 TMBC officers will consult with all businesses between the Big Bridge and Vale Road early in the New Year and prepare a Servicing Strategy for the lower High Street.

1.4 Legal Implications

1.4.1 None at this stage.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.5.1 None at this stage.

1.6 Risk Assessment

1.6.1 Not required.

1.7 Equality Impact Assessment

1.7.1 See 'Screening for equality impacts' table at end of report

1.8 Recommendations

1.8.1 The Board **ENDORSE** the work to date and the next steps as set out in the report.

The Director of (Kent) Highways and Transportation and the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

Nil

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Screening for equality impacts:		
Question	Answer	Explanation of impacts
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	The measures outlined in this report will be designed to take account of the needs of different groups in the community in accordance with current guidance.

Screening for equality impacts:		
Question	Answer	Explanation of impacts
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?	No	See above
c. What steps are you taking to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		

In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above.