

CABINET

Morecambe Area Action Plan - Improving Morecambe's main streets 4 October 2011

Report of Head of Regeneration and Policy

PURPOSE OF REPORT				
To propose a further initiative to improve main streets and spaces in and around Morecambe's established centre as part of work to support delivery of the emerging Morecambe Area Action Plan.				
Key Decision	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Non-Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Referral from Cabinet Member
Date Included in Forward Plan	29 August 2011			
This report is public				

RECOMMENDATIONS OF COUNCILLOR HANSON

- (1) That the Head of Regeneration and Policy work up outline proposals and cost estimates to improve New Town Square and Euston Road and, as part of preparing its budget recommendations, Cabinet uses these as a basis to consider whether appropriate budget provision be included in its General Fund Capital Programme for 2012/13.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The 2011-14 Corporate Plan sets Economic Regeneration as one of the council's four corporate priorities and the Lancaster District Core Strategy, adopted in 2008, makes central Morecambe the regeneration priority in spatial terms.
- 1.2 Reflecting for this the council is preparing the Morecambe Area Action Plan (MAAP). Officers report on progress with this to the Planning Policy Cabinet Liasion Group. This autumn officers are bringing forward outline plan options as a precursor to the more formal stages of plan-making next year.
- 1.3 In work to prepare the plan, evidence and extensive consultations to date makes clear that whatever plan options the council ultimately decides on the need to support the established commercial centre of the town in and around Euston Road, the Arndale and Victoria Street will be common.

1.4 This report proposes one initiative by which the council can further help support the centre into the future and which it is timely to consider now in order that decisions on this can inform action plan delivery in the next few years.

1.5 The report is brought forward at the request of the portfolio holder.

2.0 Proposal Details

2.1 The action plan work affirms what many already know - that Morecambe's established centre is underperforming and its offer deficient. Most town centres are variously struggling in these difficult economic times and in the face of changing trends including the migration to online shopping. If established centres are valued it is imperative to support these.

2.2 The MAAP will bring forward many proposals but it is readily apparent that one element must be physical improvements to the main streets and spaces that are the setting for business activity including retailing. Unless the main streets and spaces are easy and legible to walk, pleasant and safe to be in and therefore attractive to residents and visitors alike the established centre will not offer what people expect of it and will not compete into the future.

2.3 Public initiative is essential to drive and coordinate improvements to streets and spaces. The established centre has seen very little investment in public realm for several years and work emerging through the MAAP will evidence just how tired and sub standard many parts are. The council though has begun to address this. It secured an upgrade to part of Euston Road as part of the new Travellodge development and this points the way to what can be done.

2.4 The council has already made budget provision for the second Morecambe Townscape Heritage Initiative – 'A View for Eric' (THI2) which will commence at the beginning of the new year. This will enable the council to deliver a major improvement of the Market Street, Victoria Street and Euston Road area funded by a combination of public and private investment (including council). A lot of work will however be required to work this project up including public engagement and detailed highway planning. This will take some time and therefore officers do not propose delivery until at least 2013 /14.

2.5 Euston Road through to New Town Square is the part of Morecambe centre that presents to many visitors coming from the promenade and is critical to supporting trading in the Arndale. Although benefitting from being pedestrianised, Euston Road presents poorly to Marine Road and in its present design New Town Square is inadequate as a public place and serves to both obstruct and obscure pedestrian movement to and from what is the best used entrance to the Arndale. As the main street and public space respectively in the established centre these are very tired.

2.6 A project to improve the design and layout of these would make for a logical

phase of work to connect with the THI2 public realm works. The works secured via the Travelodge development, what is now proposed and that programmed through THI2, taken together would transform the main streets and spaces in and around the established centre within three years. This should underpin other actions to come forward through the area action plan and help position the established centre to be competitive into the future and greatly help make the centre a fitting and integral element in the town's offer as a visitor destination.

- 2.7 In particular, the proposal should help drive increased footfall and trading both on Euston Road and into the Arndale (where footfall is steadily declining) and through to Morecambe Library. The emerging action plan will include complementary proposals to support and sustain the Arndale and the Library and these will of course be assisted by the works to public realm through THI2.
- 2.8 Officers therefore propose that as part of its budget proposals for 2012/13 Cabinet consider making provision for project works in that year to New Town Square and Euston Road. The sum of £200k is proposed to provide a robust budget framework. It is estimated that this will provide for a quality result that makes New Town Square and Euston Road quite special. The works should include new street surfacing, street furniture, new lighting and artworks – possibly incorporating in an appropriate way the existing mosaic in new Town Square.
- 2.9 As stated the works programmed through THI2 for the Victoria Street area will be funded by a combination of public and private monies. Such a partnership approach is right and officers would approach the local business community with a view to securing private contributions to works to New Town Square and Euston Road, should they ultimately progress. The amount the council ultimately invests in the work might then be net to these.

3.0 Details of Consultation

- 3.1 The Morecambe Area Action Plan will be a Local Development framework Document. Continuing work to prepare the Plan involves very extensive statutory and non-statutory consultations and community engagement by officers, as did that to prepare THI 2 and secure funding for this. The engagement work is on-going but to date has included community and school workshops, drop-in events, topic papers, presentations and stakeholder meetings. Further information can be found at www.lancaster.gov.uk/morecambeaap. Into the future aspects will be progressed as partnership projects including with private developer partners as appropriate.
- 3.2 To take forward the option 2 proposal forward officers led from the Regeneration and Policy Service would prepare outline proposals and cost estimates. Subsequently the Service should consult on these with a view to reporting back to the portfolio holder as appropriate. Consultations with relevant groups would include the local business community and the Morecambe Town Council.

4.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

4.1 **Option 1 – To rely on the private sector for any investment to improve New Town Square and Euston Road in line with the emerging Morecambe Area Action Plan.**

4.2 This option would mean that the council would not take a lead in effecting improvements in with and to support delivery of the emerging Morecambe Area Action Plan. It would mean not undertaking outline design work and preparing budget estimates and not seeking to bring forward considered proposals via appropriate community engagement. It would not necessarily mean that nothing happens but the council would be entirely reliant on the private sector to achieve improvements. Recent history evidences relatively low levels of private sector investment in Morecambe centre but the recent Travellodge development shows that it can be instrumental in effecting improvements to public realm. In addition the option would still permit the council to directly bring forward improvements to public realm as possible as part of “A View for Eric”, the second Morecambe Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) 2. These must be within the area of the THI and will likely be focused on Victoria Street and Market Street.

4.3 The **advantages** are that the option will lead to no additional demands on the General Capital Fund and reliance on the private sector to fund extra investment and improvements is in principle appropriate in circumstances where the public sector cannot afford to commit resources.

4.4 The **disadvantages** are that given national and local economic circumstances and that Morecambe evidences generally limited levels of private sector investment no assurance can be given that New Town Square and Euston Road can be improved within any timescale.

4.5 The **risks** are that without a delivery lead from the council the private sector will not fill the gap and improvements cannot be achieved within at least the short to medium term meaning the town centre is not positioned well and competitively for the future. In this event this option would not support the trajectory of the emerging Morecambe Area Action Plan.

4.6 **Option 2 – The Head of Regeneration and Policy work up outline proposals and cost estimates to improve New Town Square and Euston Road and, as part of preparing its budget recommendations, Cabinet uses these as a basis to consider whether appropriate budget provision be included in its draft General Fund Capital Programme for 2012/13.**

4.7 This option would mean the council takes a lead to vision what improvements may be possible. At minimum it would make for preparation of outline proposals that should fit to the emerging Morecambe Area Action Plan and might set a template for the council and others to work to into the future. Further, the option provides that as part of the budget process and preparing its recommendations to council Cabinet might consider whether the council might also take a funding lead and direct and programme implementation.

- 4.8 This option would by no means preclude the council from working to secure private sector funding contributions to the improvements and contributions that if secured might mean the council can reduce its outturn expenditure.
- 4.9 The **advantages** include that improvement of New Town Square and Euston Road will likely be integral to any options brought forward through the emerging Morecambe Area Action Plan and Option 2 is therefore likely to be highly supportive of plan delivery.
- 4.10 Works to New Town Square and Euston Road would make for an environment fitting to its functions, a place more active, pleasant and safe to spend time in. This should add significantly to the attraction of the established centre to the benefit of business trading and its general competitiveness in difficult economic conditions. Taken together with works to public realm anticipated via THI2, this should be quite transformative for the main streets and spaces in and around Morecambe's established commercial centre.
- 4.11 Option 2 provides for partnership working and for securing funding contributions from the private sector. Even if a funding lead by the council proves unaffordable for the council to vision what might be achieved should encourage the private sector to step forward. Further, should the council prove able to provide a funding lead private contributions as can be secured should make for reductions in net outturn expenditure by the council.
- 4.12 The main **disadvantage** of option 2 as compared to option 1 is that this option requires more commitment of officer time in bringing forward outline proposals and in due course and, subject to the budget process might have cost implications via an additional demand on the General Fund Capital Programme.
- 4.13 Turning to **risks** one is that option 2 will unduly raise stakeholder and community expectations only for these not to be met if it proves unaffordable for the council for it to take a funding lead. A further risk identified is that the desired regeneration will not happen because the net affect of wider adverse factors e.g the decline of established small centres in the face of changing consumer trends and competition proves stronger.
- 4.14 **Officer Preferred Option**
- 4.15 Option 2 is preferred as it will inform Cabinet, in preparing its recommendations to council as part of the budget process, in considering an important aspect of how the council might provide support to the performance of Morecambe's established centre, very likely to be an early priority for the emerging Morecambe Area Action Plan. Taken together with works to other public realm via THI2 improvement of New Town Square and Euston Road should make for a coherent programme of phased works to streets and spaces over three years.

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 The report sets out options for securing further improvement of the main streets and spaces in the established commercial centre. This fits to the emerging understanding and analysis of the issues affecting central Morecambe as part of preparation of the Morecambe Area Action Plan. The hope is that main streets in and around the centre might be transformed within three years to the benefit of the competitiveness of the centre and its attraction to residents and visitors alike.

RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK

The 2010-2014 Corporate Plan sets Economic Regeneration Priority as one of four priorities for the council and the second Morecambe THI is identified as one of the actions under "Visitor Economy". In spatial terms the Lancaster District Core Strategy, 2003-2021 adopted 2008 makes central Morecambe the regeneration priority for the council and the community (Policy ER2). Work on the Morecambe Area Action Plan reflects these priorities and is central to achieving on them. The proposals now made will be integral to plan options likely to be brought forward.

The September 2011 Cabinet meeting considered a report on a Priorities Review that detailed on a number of areas of activity that cabinet members had requested be considered in more detail. This is to be fed into the corporate plan and budget process (Minute 34). As an established spatial planning and regeneration priority this proposal might reasonably be considered as part of the corporate plan and budget considerations.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

Option 2 would contribute to diversity objectives by enhancing streets and spaces for multiple uses. It contributes indirectly to positive Human Rights objectives and there are no adverse Human Rights implications. It contributes directly to meeting community safety objectives by providing an improved quality of environment that is more attractive and safer to be in by virtue of streets and spaces such New Town Square being more active and in more beneficial use including into the evenings. By adding to the vitality of the established town centre it supports sustainable patterns of travel and consumption. There are no rural implications.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Option 2 has no funding available at present. As an example an additional £200K of Council capital investment would have an annual revenue impact of around £10K in minimum repayment provision (MRP) and a further £9K in interest payments (although this could be reduced if internal cash was used rather than taking on loans). The proposal, including more costed details of the works proposed, would need to be assessed against competing schemes as part of the budget process.

Improvements to public realm can have cost implications both capital and revenue in

management and maintenance and this would need to be considered in the design process and in subsequent budgeting as appropriate.

OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Human Resources:

None

Information Services:

None

Property:

None

Open Spaces:

The project is to improve main public spaces in the town. Improvements may have implications for management and maintenance and cost implications would require consideration at design stages.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The s151 Officer has been consulted and would highlight that consideration of such potential growth as part of the budget process is in line with the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. It ensures that all such growth bids can be considered alongside each other in context of the Council's proposed priorities and other spending needs or requests, and what is affordable. At present the Council's financial outlook shows that it needs to make financial savings, however, and this need would increase in order to provide any scope for growth. There is always the risk that even if growth proposals are to be considered further, they will ultimately prove unaffordable given other spending pressures. Expectations of stakeholders require careful management, therefore.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Regeneration and Policy Service files.
Report to Cabinet 7 October 2008 (Minute 66).

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