

## NORTH WALSHAM MARKET PLACE IMPROVEMENT SCHEME

- Summary: This report sets out the scope of the impending town centre improvement works, the temporary impacts they are likely to have and to propose suitable mitigation.
- Options considered: The scheme is part of a programme of measures that will make very significant improvements to North Walsham town centre, its accessibility and its historic assets. In order to assist with the scheme's success it is considered beneficial to mitigate the short-term impacts it might have. An element of short-stay free car parking is considered to be a helpful concession to encourage the retention of town centre custom (footfall). The quantum, duration and location of such concessionary car parking could be varied but the proposal in this report seeks to strike the right balance between mitigating the possible impacts, safeguarding car parking revenue and avoiding the creation of a precedent.
- Conclusions: The jointly-funded (Government and Local Authority) place-making scheme will be enormously beneficial but during its implementation, there is likely to be significant disruption to the town centre, its businesses and customers. Car parking will be particularly under pressure as a result of the works and there will be a need to actively manage the parking arrangements. The Council will need to be proactive, in making the necessary arrangements in advance of the disruption, and reactive, in response to issues or representations made along the way.
- Recommendations: **To note the scope, impacts and implications of the impending Market Street improvement works and to agree the temporary provision of free-for-two-hours parking at Mundesley Road Car Park (including the appropriate provision of suitable spaces for 'blue badge' holders) from 12<sup>th</sup> September 2022 until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. If it is not feasible to make such provision in a timely way at Mundesley Road Car Park then Vicarage Street should be the default car park for the concessionary car parking.**
- Reasons for Recommendations: This recommendation is being made to mitigate the potential impact the impending works might have on town centre footfall.

Cabinet Member(s) Cllr Richard Kershaw Cllr Eric Seward	Ward(s) affected All North Walsham wards
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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 A central element of the North Walsham High Street Heritage Action Zone (NWHSHAZ) is the 'place-making' scheme. This includes improvements to key areas of public realm and to the accessibility and circulation within the town centre.
- 1.2 Council, at its meeting in September 2020, gave the go-ahead for the scheme to proceed following confirmation of the funding package. Cabinet, at its meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2021, delegated "the determination of the final place making designs to the Assistant Director for Sustainable Growth in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Growth."
- 1.3 The programme of interventions under the HSHAZ has followed the Council's project management and governance procedures and has recently been overseen by the Council's HSHAZ Board, with periodic reports to the Cabinet Major Projects Working Party.
- 1.4 The second phase of the place-making scheme involves the improvement to the appearance, accessibility and amenity of the Market Place area of North Walsham. The Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) for the scheme was approved on 18<sup>th</sup> August and consequently the works are planned to commence on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2022. The works are expected to take 23 weeks to complete. Council officers have been working with the design and funding advisors, together with Norfolk County Council and the contractor, to ensure that the scheme can be implemented in a way that makes most effective use of the available funding, optimises the achievement of the HSHAZ objectives and minimises temporary disturbance and short-term adverse impact on town centre interests, including businesses, customers, market traders and other town centre users.
- 1.5 This report sets out the scope of the Market Place improvement scheme, the logistical arrangements that need to be in place for the works to proceed and the mitigation planned in order to address any potential adverse impacts on the vitality of the town centre for the duration of the works.

## 2. The scope and impacts of the scheme

- 2.1 The scheme involves widening pavements, creating safer crossing points, landscaping and installing street furniture, in order to improve the town centre for businesses and their customers, and reinforcing the town's historic importance. This phase includes the main street, Market Place, and its junctions with King's Arms Street (to the west) and Church Street (to the East). The proposals emerged from extensive consultation and engagement and have received widespread support. Issues that local businesses identified, such as vehicular access for loading and access by customers in the evening, have been incorporated into the scheme design and the TRO.

- 2.2 The first phase of the town centre public realm improvement programme (place-making), Church Approach at the eastern end of Market Street, is awaiting delivery of the benches and railings, prior to its imminent completion. This has created a valuable amenity area and an attractive setting for St Nicholas Church, as well as improving pedestrian routes around the town centre.
- 2.3 A complementary (but separately funded) part of the programme was the establishment of a transport hub on the site of New Road Car Park, where the creation of three new bus bays and ancillary facilities (seating, shelters etc) has enabled the removal of buses from the main Market Place and from nearby roads, where congestion and pollution detracted from the environmental quality and safety of town centre streets. This has improved accessibility to the town centre by public transport and has improved passenger comfort. In doing so, it has enabled a redesign of the Market Place to materialise.
- 2.4 As a consequence of the Market Place improvement scheme, fifteen general (30-minute free) on-street car parking places will be replaced with sixteen one-hour free spaces in suitable locations on town centre car parks. At its November 2021 meeting, Cabinet agreed 'in principle' that the replacement car parking would be split equally between Bank Loke and Vicarage Street car parks; however it is now considered more logical and beneficial for the distribution to be: ten spaces at Bank Loke and six spaces at Vicarage Street. It should be noted that the scheme retains the same number of on-street 'blue badge' spaces on Market Place, and also allows for satisfactory arrangements for deliveries to town centre businesses and for customers to collect goods at appropriate times of the day.
- 2.5 The split of free car parking to replace that displaced by the scheme is suggested to be as follows:
- ten new (1hr free) spaces at Bank Loke Car Park, and 6no. (1hr free) at Vicarage St. Car Park.
  - The existing three (half-hour free) spaces at Bank Loke Car Park would be relocated in the vicinity of the electric vehicle (EV) charger spaces and become 1hr free, thereby allowing for the right hand side (east) of Bank Loke Car Park to be easier to signpost and enforce, being made up of:
    - o blue-badge (4 no. allowing for the Black Swan gardens work);
    - o EV spaces (6 no. – as existing); and
    - o 1hr free parking (13 in total).
- This is proposed to be effective from the time at which the on-street spaces are removed.
- 2.6 For the duration of the Market Street improvement works, the town's street markets will be displaced. Agreement has been reached with North Walsham Town Council, which operates the weekly Thursday market and the monthly seasonal farmers' market, to temporarily relocate them to the western side of Bank Loke Car Park. This will, however, leave no room for general car parking at that part of the car park on Thursdays (and very little on the days the farmers' market is held) and therefore additional spaces have been created at Vicarage Street Car Park by the re-lining of the seldom-used coach bays to become car parking spaces. Coaches are now permitted to use the recently opened free car park at Hornbeam Road.

- 2.7 There is no doubt that the disruption to North Walsham town centre whilst the works are on-going will be extensive and protracted and there are fears that this may adversely impact on town centre footfall (custom). Mitigation is therefore proposed to reinforce the message that the town remains 'open for business' in the form of a marketing/communications campaign and by the provision of some short-term temporarily free car parking. It is therefore recommended that free two-hour parking be provided at Mundesley Road Car Park from 12th September 2022 to 31st March 2023. It should be noted that it is vital to ensure that a suitable proportion of those spaces that are free for two hours are accessible to holders of 'blue badges'. If it proves to be not feasible for suitable provision to be made at Mundesley Road Car Park then it should be located at Vicarage Street car park. It will be important also to monitor the impacts of this provision on car parking across the town to ensure that sufficient parking is available throughout.
- 2.8 The potential financial implications of this are noted below, but consideration also has to be given to the potential impact if customers choose not to visit North Walsham because of the disruption caused by implementation of the town centre improvement works. The fear is that if shoppers' habits change (i.e. they choose to shop elsewhere) it will be challenging to bring them back again and this will also have a financial impact, not merely in the short term.
- 2.9 In order to maintain the positive momentum the investment has brought, and ensure key local stakeholders continue support the programme, we need to ensure messages are timely, consistent and informative. This will be both to provide practical information about what is happening, when and what the implications are, and to positively promote the project and town more generally. Messages about the improvement works must clearly set out the interim arrangements for in a way that is easily digested by the local community, visitors and the business sector. This will involve both digital messaging and physical signage within and on the periphery of the town, together with leaflets (with QR codes where appropriate). The Council will need also to be responsibly reactive in its communications, to address local matters as and when they become known. It is proposed that an 'oversight group' be established as a means of ensuring effective communication between the Council and the various representatives of local interests.
- 2.10 The Temporary Traffic Regulation Order (TTRO), developed by the NCC Highways team, will address the practical and logistical challenges presented by the scheme's implementation. The HSHAZ team will work closely with NCC to ensure suitable signage is erected to direct drivers to the appropriate car parks and will ensure local matters are duly addressed by the contractor as appropriate.

### 3. Corporate Plan Objectives

- 3.1 The matters addressed in this report relate to the following Corporate Plan objectives and delivery themes:
- Boosting business sustainability and growth:** "facilitating the transition of our town centres to be places which are attractive and accessible for living, working and for leisure"

**Quality of life:** “delivery of the North Walsham Heritage Action Zone programme”

**Financial sustainability and growth:** “investing in environmental and economic initiatives which deliver positive outcomes and a financial return for the authority.”

#### **4. Medium Term Financial Strategy**

There are not considered to be any material impacts upon the MTFs as a result of the recommendations in this report.

#### **5. Financial and Resource Implications**

The resources relating to the implementation of the scheme are covered by the appropriate project budget. The financial implications of the suggested car parking arrangements are impossible to quantify accurately. It is possible that the proposed concessionary pricing will result in reduced revenue but if that helps retain customers and prevent them changing their town of choice, then any reduction is likely only to be short-term. If concessions are not made - and fears that drivers choose *not* to visit North Walsham become reality - it is possible that the number of car park customers would reduce, thus causing a short-term, and potentially more long-term, drop in revenue. The actual (nett) costs of this can only be hypothesised but, as an indication of the worst case scenario, if all short-stay customers choose to use the proposed temporarily free two-hour spaces (i.e. no customers paid for parking of up to two hours on any of the town centre car parks) then the loss of income could be substantial. For the period September 2021 to March 2022 the total income on North Walsham car parks from two-hour tickets was £34,211.75 (broken down as follows: Bank Loke £13,024.10; Mundesley Rd. £4,439.45; New Rd. £5363.45; Vicarage St. £11,384.75). There is a possibility of course that the provision of concessionary car parking might change people’s behaviour and they might choose to visit North Walsham *in preference* to other areas, or they might swap from their usual North Walsham car park to the one with concessionary short-stay parking. It might also be the case that the provision of two hour free parking might encourage people to extend the duration of their stay.

#### **6. Legal Implications**

The arrangements would need to comply with the Car Parking Order (CPO) and consideration will need to be made about amending the Order as appropriate.

#### **7. Risks**

A risk log specifically for car parking has not been prepared but once the outcome is known and the arrangements are agreed, the implications of the Market Place improvement scheme will be added to the overall HSHAZ risk log.

#### **8. Sustainability**

There are not considered to be any impacts upon sustainability as a result of the recommendations in this report.

#### **9. Climate / Carbon impact**

The matters referred to in this report relate to reinforcing the vitality and viability of North Walsham town centre. If the town remains as a thriving service centre, it should reduce the number and length of journeys made by residents of the town and its catchment. The impact on carbon emissions cannot realistically be calculated but it is hoped that the proposals will help to facilitate no net increase.

**10. Equality and Diversity**

There are not considered to be any impacts upon equality and diversity as a result of the recommendations in this report, provided that accessible ('blue badge') parking spaces are amongst those to which the proposed concessionary car parking applies.

**11. Section 17 Crime and Disorder considerations**

There are not considered to be any impacts upon crime and disorder as a result of the recommendations in this report.

**12. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The jointly-funded (Government and Local Authority) place-making scheme will be enormously beneficial but during its implementation, there is likely to be significant disruption to the town centre, its businesses and customers. Car parking will be particularly under pressure as a result of the works and there will be a need to actively manage the parking arrangements. The Council will need to be proactive, in making the necessary arrangements in advance of the disruption, and reactive, in response to issues or representations made along the way.

Cabinet is asked therefore to note the scope, impacts and implications of the impending Market Street improvement works and to agree the temporary provision of free-for-two-hours parking at Mundesley Road Car Park (including the appropriate provision of suitable spaces for 'blue badge' holders) from 12<sup>th</sup> September 2022 until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. If it is not feasible to make such provision in a timely way at Mundesley Road Car Park then Vicarage Street should be the default car park for the concessionary car parking.

This recommendation is being made to mitigate the potential impact the impending works might have on town centre footfall.