

## North Walsham Town Centre 'Place Making' Proposals

- Summary: This report sets out the proposed improvements to North Walsham town centre, the consultation process that has been carried out and it seeks authority to proceed with the activities that will enable it to be implemented as part of the High Street High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ programme)
- Options considered: The report recommends a particular way forward: to progress with the place making proposals as part of the town centre improvements under the HSHAZ programme. The alternatives are either
- a. to abandon the place making project (therefore forfeiting the grant funding and the opportunity to make significant changes that will benefit the town centre); or
  - b. to revise the proposals and re-consult on alternative town centre designs (which might jeopardise the opportunity to progress the scheme within the tight budgetary timeframe that exists).
- Conclusions: The proposals affecting North Walsham town centre are considered to be beneficial to its future vitality and viability. Extensive community engagement processes were followed in the development of the proposed scheme and this has subsequently been subject to considerable consultation processes, that have elicited lots of valuable feedback. It is considered vital to maintain the momentum by progressing the proposals to the next stage of their implementation – the serving of a statutory Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) - leading hopefully to the physical works progressing as soon as it is feasible to do so. It is also considered important to pave the way for the development of the proposed bus interchange, which will be necessary to facilitate the town centre improvements.
- Recommendations: **Note the proposed design and layout changes to North Walsham Town Centre and the community engagement/ consultation process**
- Delegate the determination of the final place making designs to the Assistant Director for Sustainable Growth in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Growth**
- Delegate to the Assistant Director for Sustainable Growth in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Growth, having regard to the consultation feedback, the decision on the**

**proposed Traffic Regulation Order – on which NCC will follow the statutory consultation process**

**Agree to the potential use of the New Rd Car Park as a bus interchange and to meet the revenue costs of its future maintenance**

**Agree in principle to the permanent designation of eight spaces at the Bank Loke Car Park and eight spaces at Vicarage Street car park as free short stay (1-hour) spaces, to compensate for the sixteen (30-minute) short stay free parking spaces that would be lost on Market place should the place making scheme go ahead.**

Reasons for

Recommendations:

To enable the North Walsham 'place making' proposals to progress in a timely fashion and to ensure the land and resources are made available for the bus interchange proposals to be further developed.

#### **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS AS REQUIRED BY LAW**

*(Papers relied on to write the report, which do not contain exempt information and which are not published elsewhere)*

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Cabinet Member(s) Cllr V Gay, Cllr N Lloyd, Cllr E Seaward, Cllr D Birch, Cllr P Heinrich	All North Walsham Wards
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Contact Officer, telephone number and email: R Young, 01263 516162 <a href="mailto:robert.young@north-norfolk.gov.uk">robert.young@north-norfolk.gov.uk</a>
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### **1. Introduction**

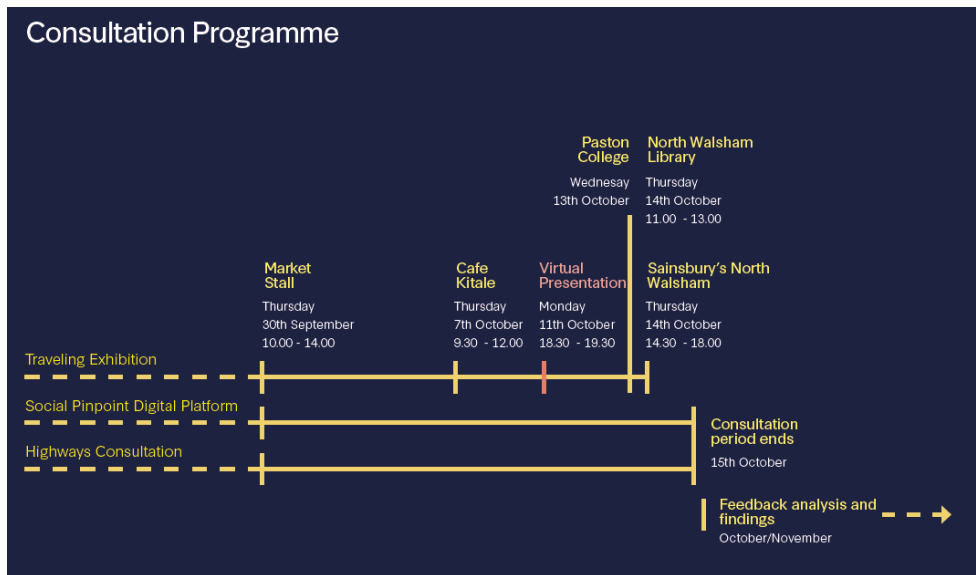
#### **1.1 Background to North Walsham High Street Heritage Action Zone Place making proposals**

1.2 At its meeting on 7th October, 2019, Cabinet resolved to delegate the formulation of the detailed programme for the High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) to the Head of Economic & Community Development in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economic & Career Development and the Portfolio Holder for Culture & Wellbeing, following a process that included Historic England and local stakeholders. The HSHAZ programme was consequently agreed.

1.3 On 7th September, 2020, authority was delegated to Cabinet, in consultation with the North Walsham Town Centre Heritage Action Zone Working Party, to determine the terms of the implementation of the scheme, including the involvement of interested parties, scheme design and implementation. Later,

once the Council's new project management arrangements were established, a Project Board was set up to oversee and steer the HSHAZ programme.

- 1.4 A key part of the HSHAZ is the improvement of the layout and design of the town centre streets and public areas. Funding for this was drawn from the main HSHAZ budget (comprising funds from NNDC and Historic England) and augmented by the successful bid to the Build Back Better Fund (administered by New Anglia LEP). Consultants were consequently procured to lead on the development of these proposals and then to oversee their implementation. Officers of Norfolk County Council have played a key role in the development of the scheme and the contractor has been procured via NCC. A project team has been established, comprising the lead consultants (Influence), their subcontractor specialist advisors (Rees Bolter Architects, BSP Consulting, HETA and Gleeds), NCC Highways officers, relevant NNDC officers and the portfolio holder for Sustainable Growth.
- 1.5 The place making proposals were subsequently developed through a process of community engagement over the summer months of 2021 and the resultant designs were then developed into a preferred scheme for formal consultation in September/October.
- 1.6 **Place making proposals and proposed bus interchange**
- 1.7 The proposals comprise two key physical interventions, *highway improvements* and *wider public realm improvements*, that are based on the following four principles resulting from engagement feedback:
  - Improving public realm
  - Safe and active travel
  - Identity tied to history
  - Community and pride.
- 1.8 The improvements to the town centre fall within the HSHAZ area (in the Conservation Area) but further proposals are set out in this report relating to the use of three of the town's public car parks (Bank Loke, Vicarage Street and New Road) in order to address/mitigate certain impacts of the proposals (the displacement of free town centre car parking and the need for a bus turning and stopping area).
- 1.9 **Consultation & engagement process**
- 1.10 The figure below sets out the place making consultation programme.



1.11 The consultation programme took place between 30th September and 15th October, with additional time allowed up until 22nd October for the 'youth' questionnaires to be returned. The metrics below illustrate the estimated numbers of people engaged in the consultation at the time of drafting this report.

1.12

Public consultation drop-in exhibitions	Estimated numbers
NW Market	200
Café Kitale	100-150
NW Library	100-120
Sainsbury's	100
Virtual online evening presentation and Q&A	5
Focus group workshops:	
Businesses	12 business owners
Accessibility*	14 people
Paston College	120 students
*visually impaired/blind, those with mobility issues and learning disabilities, including young people, and representatives of disability groups/interests including NNDC Disability Champion	

1.13 The numbers of surveys returned are as follows:

Public Realm	104
Highways	to be confirmed (35 paper ones to-date)
Youth survey	60 to-date

1.14 The substantive responses to the consultation are yet to be analysed.

1.15 The proposals were comprehensively publicised and the consultation process was promoted by:

- Letters sent to 1,600 households
- Letters sent to 196 businesses

Press articles in NW Times (delivered to every property in NW), Just North Walsham and the North Norfolk News.

- 1.16 The Council established an online engagement platform (Social Pinpoint) which was used to publicise the proposals and invite feedback. Social media was also used extensively to share the proposals and invite discussion, including NNDC's own channels and sharing with NW Town Council, NW Noticeboard (Facebook group).

## **2. The proposed town centre design changes**

- 2.1 The proposed place making scheme is shown in **Appendix X** and can be accessed by following this link to the NCC consultation documentation: <https://northnorfolkdistrictcouncil.mysocialpinpoint.co.uk/placemaking/placemaking-highways/>
- 2.1 The consultation process was designed in such a way as to understand the issues and impacts of the proposed scheme on: town centre vitality and viability; town centre businesses; accessibility; and the wider environment.
- 2.2 It was understood at the early development of the proposals that certain interests would be impacted by the scheme and therefore it was decided to incorporate additional proposals that would mitigate these. In particular, it was understood that people accessing the town centre by car for short visits would be resistant to the loss of the free 30-minute general car parking spaces on Market Place. It is therefore proposed that compensatory free 1-hour spaces be made available at both Vicarage Street and Bank Loke Car Parks.
- 2.3 Further, there was concern amongst officers at NCC's Public Transport team, and bus operators, that, were buses to be permanently prevented from travelling through Market Place, then they would need to travel on a circuitous route in order to turn around. This would add an unacceptable length to their journey time. In order to mitigate this, it is proposed that the front of the Council owned New Road Car Park be developed as a bus 'interchange' and turning facility. This would have the added benefit of removing waiting buses from the corner of New Road/Yarmouth Road and would provide far better passenger comfort facilities. Norfolk County Council is preparing the designs and it is understood that NCC would also meet the Capital costs of this scheme. North Walsham Town Council has earmarked a budget for passenger comfort facilities and it is recommended that NNDC meets the revenue costs of maintaining it. It is proposed that the land be made available for this scheme as monitoring suggests that this car park is the least well used in the town and that there is adequate supply across the town. Should it be considered necessary to provide replacement car parking for that lost it is suggested that consideration be given to the use of the land at the Cedars.
- 2.4 It is understood, additionally, that removal of through-vehicles from Market Place might have the effect of displacing that onto other roads where residents/businesses might be adversely impacted. Traffic modelling and traffic counts will be undertaken to determine the extent of such impacts, which might be addressed/mitigated by measures to discourage traffic and/or by better signposting directing traffic on the routes that have the least impact.

## **3. Next Steps**

- 3.1 Once a decision on the highway aspects of the project has been made on the preferred scheme and the traffic restriction that will be in place, Norfolk County Council will undertake the statutory Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) process. This will entail preparing and advertising the TRO, then following the statutory period of consultation the feedback will be considered before the outcome is determined and the scheme is able to commence.
- 3.2 The public realm elements of the scheme will not be contingent on the TRO process, therefore, should it be determined that these – either in whole or in part – should go ahead then they will commence as soon as it is feasible. These elements affect the Conservation Area and the settings of Listed Buildings so there are highly likely to be regulatory processes to be undertaken but it is not anticipated that there will be significant impediments to their implementation.

#### **4. Conclusion**

- 4.1 The proposals affecting North Walsham town centre are considered to be beneficial to its future vitality and viability. Extensive community engagement processes were followed in the development of the proposed scheme and this has subsequently been subject to considerable consultation processes, that have elicited lots of valuable feedback. It is considered vital to maintain the momentum by progressing the proposals to the next stage of their implementation – the serving of a statutory Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) - leading hopefully to the physical works progressing as soon as it is feasible to do so. It is also considered important to pave the way for the development of the proposed bus interchange, which will be necessary to facilitate the town centre improvements.

#### **4. Implications and Risks**

4.1 This project is part of the HSHAZ programme, which follows the Council's project management and governance arrangements. A risk log is maintained for this project. There are known issues relating to the delivery of the project but this report relates to the design aspects.

4.2 The outcome of the consultation process was not known at the time of the drafting of this report. The feedback should inform the decisions in relation to the design and layout of the scheme. If this is not paid heed to then there is a risk that the proposals will not be supported at the subsequent consultation phases and that there will be a lack of local ownership of them.

4.3 The intention is for this scheme to be the catalyst for longer term regeneration of the town centre and there will need to be continued effort to ensure their long term success. There will be a need also to monitor their impact and mitigate any unforeseen detrimental issues that arise; which will impact upon the Council's staff resource at least initially, and will potentially have revenue or capital consequences.

#### **5. Financial Implications and Risks**

5.1 This scheme will need to be delivered within the HSHAZ budget, including the external grants committed to the delivery of the proposals. A 'value engineering' process will be followed to ensure that the budget is used to best effect. The total available budget for this project is £1,970,000, which in addition to the original budget, includes an additional grant (£50,000) to support the purchase of the parcel of land at

Black Swan Loke and additional grant award from Historic England £30,000 for place making design and historic research. NNDC's contribution to this scheme is £385,000. There are significant time constraints around the defrayal of the match funding for this scheme, which officers are working with partners to mitigate and resolve. These matters are included in the project risk log and reported to the HSHAZ Project Board.

## **6. Sustainability**

6.1 The overarching aim of this initiative is to reinforce the role of North Walsham town centre and a service centre. By improving its vitality and viability this will encourage more sustainable patterns of behaviour. The proposals feature measures that will encourage access to the Market Place by means other than the private car (particularly walking and cycling). They also improve the accessibility of the centre by bus and reduce bus idling times in locations where they will cause traffic congestion and pollution in pedestrian areas. The design and development of the scheme will include measure to encourage the reuse of any existing materials, wherever feasible.

## **7. Equality and Diversity**

7.1 The scheme is intended to make access to the town centre as inclusive as possible. The development of the scheme and its subsequent consultation included specific sessions to understand the potential impacts on town centre users who have specific mobility or other needs. The ultimate scheme will be subject to a safety audit to ensure the redesigned streets are suitable and safe for their intended use.

7.2 There are no known specific or general adverse impacts upon equality and diversity.

## **8. Section 17 Crime and Disorder considerations**

8.1 Implicit within any place making designs are the principles of 'Secured by Design' and natural surveillance. The design team will engage with the relevant officer from Norfolk Constabulary (e.g. the Architectural Liaison Officer) on the final Stage 3 design, post consultation. The team will ensure all aspects of the proposals are considered in light of specific North Walsham issues prior to any approvals process being undertaken.

