

CABINET

10 October 2017

OAKHAM TOWN CENTRE

Report of the Director for Places (Environment, Planning & Transport)

Strategic Aim:	Sustainable Growth	
Key Decision: Yes	Forward Plan Reference: FP/140617	
Cabinet Member(s) Responsible:	Mr T Mathias, Leader, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Places (Highways, Transport and Market Towns)	
Contact Officer(s):	Dave Brown, Director for Places (Environment, Planning & Transport)	01572 758461 dbrown@rutland.gov.uk
	Neil Tomlinson, Senior Highways Manager	01572 758342 ntomlinson@rutland.gov.uk
Ward Councillors	Oakham North East - Mr J Dale and Mr A Walters Oakham North West - Mr R Gale and Mr A Mann Oakham South East - Mr B Callaghan and Mr T Mathias Oakham South West - Mr O Bird and Mr R Clifton	

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

1. Approves the vision for Oakham Town Centre as the unique, attractive and vibrant heart of the county.
2. Approves the selection of Option A (one-way), as the preferred design to be taken forward for detailed design.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To consider a vision for the regeneration of Oakham Town Centre that will ensure a vibrant future for the Town and to determine which option is taken forward for detailed design.

2 VISION

- 2.1 As the heart of one of England's most beautiful and historic counties we want Oakham to have a unique, attractive and vibrant town centre – a historic town for the future. Improving the public realm is the key to attracting more visitors and developing a thriving daytime and evening economy with a range of national retailers, local shops, markets, pubs and restaurants. We will invest in creating a high quality, distinctive and inspiring public realm we can be proud of. We will put

people above traffic whilst respecting the heritage of the town centre and ensuring there is the right amount of parking in the right places.

- 2.2 We are not unique in developing a vision for change. Traditional high streets continue to face a number of challenges which have led to declining footfall. More retail activity is taking place online and out of town.
- 2.3 Towns around the country are reinventing themselves starting with a change to the built environment. Examples include Hucknall, Poynton, Preston and Brighton (see Appendix 1).
- 2.4 The town centre has remained unchanged since the opening of the Oakham Bypass in 2007. At that time its main purpose was to accommodate large volumes of through traffic. Today it is primarily a retail, leisure and social space.
- 2.5 There has been and continues to be considerable support from the public to improve the town centre and frustration about the lack of action. An overwhelming majority of consultation responses wanted something done. Comments included:
 - “Oakham town centre is dying. Something drastic is needed.”
 - “Brilliant idea, should of happened years ago.”
 - “At last! A more pedestrian oriented town centre.”
- 2.6 During the 10 years while the plan for the Town Centre has been debated, the situation has continued to deteriorate. The town centre has narrow unattractive pavements, infrequent crossing points and vehicles dominate. The street furniture is sparse, unattractive and in need of maintenance (see examples in Appendix 2). Previously these plans may only been considered to be aspirations, however capital funding is now available to make improvements.
- 2.7 Creating a town centre atmosphere which is vibrant and attractive to both residents and visitors can be achieved through:
 - reducing the dominance of traffic;
 - making more space for people to walk, shop and relax;
 - providing easier pedestrians crossings;
 - improving the market place;
 - high quality paving and street furniture in keeping with conservation area status; and
 - maintaining adequate parking and access.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council’s Corporate Plan includes a target of implementing the Oakham Town Centre Improvement Scheme by September 2018.
- 3.2 According to Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimates the population of Oakham and Barleythorpe was around 12,000 in 2015. This is forecast to increase by 25% to around 15,000 by 2036. Population growth is also likely to be accompanied by demographic change. Despite a growing population, given the challenges described above, action is required to prevent the centre of Oakham experience a gradual decline with lower footfall, fewer retail premises and a trend

away from inward investment.

- 3.3 The number of visitors to Rutland generally is also forecast to increase. The town centre could have an important tourism role, with Oakham Castle located within the historic core and Rutland Water located within easy reach. In addition to encouraging local residents to remain in Rutland to do their shopping, the scheme will help to draw in some of the 1.75 million people that visit Rutland each year, few of whom currently incorporate Oakham into their itinerary.
- 3.4 To deliver the vision for the town centre 2 options are currently under consideration as follows:
- **Option A** – One-way with traffic flowing west to east, incorporating chevron parking, loading bays, high quality surfaces and wider pavements. The direction of the one-way flow was chosen to avoid traffic queuing along the High Street when the level crossing is closed.
 - **Option B** – Two-way traffic flow with an enhanced pedestrian environment and high quality surfaces.

4 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

- 4.1 A stakeholder engagement strategy was developed by a Project Board and approved by Cabinet on 17th Jan 2017 (report no 19/2017). Stage 1 of the strategy involved working group meetings to consider 3 design concepts. The responses were assessed by the Project Board and the Council's design partners (AECOM) using the Place Standard Assessment Tool.
- 4.2 2 options were developed as outline designs. Stage 2 of the stakeholder engagement was a public consultation exercise on these options. The consultation ran from 11th June until 14th July 2017 and involved public exhibitions in the Market Place, leaflets and a website. In addition 300 businesses were invited to an evening event to discuss the proposals.
- 4.3 Feedback was collated using an online consultation form and leaflets, which could be returned via freepost or ballot boxes on the display vehicle and at the Council Offices. Consultees were asked which option they preferred and had the opportunity to provide further comments.
- 4.4 The consultation was publicised via local media (local radio and newspapers), the Council's Twitter account, website, display vehicle, email notifications, displays in the Council reception area and stakeholder engagement sessions.
- 4.5 The 3rd and final phase of the engagement strategy will involve consultation on matters of detailed design, construction methods and timing. The stakeholder engagement strategy sets out which groups will be consulted. These include:
- Ward Members;
 - Oakham Town Council;
 - Oakham Town Partnership;
 - Property owners;
 - Market traders;
 - Retailers and other town centre businesses;

- Town centre residents;
- Oakham in Bloom; and
- Rutland Access Group

5 CONSULTATION RESPONSES

5.1 952 responses were received to the Council's consultation and a summary can be found in Appendix 3. The results were as follows:

- Option A - One-way – 53%
- Option B - Two-way – 44%
- Neither Option – 3%

5.2 Only 29 responses did not choose an option with the overwhelming majority in favour of an improvement scheme.

5.3 Qualitative analysis was undertaken of the comments made. The main issues were:

- the impact of any changes to traffic flows;
- parking provision
- delays due to the level crossing; and
- retail choice

5.4 These issues are covered in detail in the sections below with the exception of retail choice. The comments related mainly to a misconception that the Council can control this directly through the planning process. One of the objectives of the project is to improve retail choice by increasing footfall and the amount of time shoppers spend in the town centre.

PETITION

5.5 A petition entitled 'Say NO to a One-Way system on Oakham High Street' was set up by an owner of a business in the town centre. This petition received around 743 responses. Of these 293 were made online. Some names appeared on both the online and paper petitions and some responses were anonymous. Some signatories also responded to the Council's consultation in addition to signing the petition.

5.6 One of the responses to a petition listed in the Council's guidance is to hold a consultation, which in this case has already taken place. The consultation was a fair and open exercise which set out the full details about both of the available options.

5.7 The consultation process provided information in a range of formats, and allowed people the opportunity to respond via post or online. Additional support was available for those who were unable to respond by either of these means. In addition a number of consultation events were run to enable residents and visitors to ask questions about the project.

5.8 In comparison to the Council's consultation, the weight given to the petition needs to take account of the following:

- Signatories were unable to access clear information on both available options and make a decision on the basis of this information;
- There would have been no opportunity to seek clarification regarding any questions about the proposals; and
- The petition, by nature, was inherently biased and did not enable those who support a one way system to express a view.

OTHER RESPONSES

- 5.9 Eleven letters were received, ten offering objections to Option A. All objectors to Option A had also completed a consultation form and all but one had signed the petition.
- 5.10 Oakham Town Partnership (OTP) responded with a letter supporting a one-way system, albeit different to Option A and with caveats. These included material type, direction of one-way (their opinion differs to that of AECOM), analysis of effects on alternative routes and that parking issues would be dealt with at the detailed design stage.
- 5.11 The Oakham Neighbourhood Plan group commissioned a survey delivered to 5500 properties in March 2017, as well as the facility for online responses. They received 1592 (29%) responses. The responses to the two most relevant questions are summarised in Appendix 4. In relation to the town centre scheme the points of notes were:
- 47% of respondents (710) agreed that Oakham needed a one-way system to reduce traffic congestion (23% responded as neutral and 29% were opposed).
 - A further question asking if residents thought a one-way system would reduce congestion at level crossings drew a 44% 'Yes' v 38% 'No' response (18% no opinion)
 - 52% of respondents (767) agreed that Oakham needed more long term pay and display parking.
 - 42% of respondents (647) were extremely concerned about traffic delays due to the level crossing closure times (see Section 8).

6 IMPACT OF A ONE-WAY SYSTEM

- 6.1 A number of consultation responses raised concerns around the effects of diverting westbound traffic from the High Street onto Station Road and South Street, and the effects it would have on traffic volumes and queuing at the junctions of New Street/High Street and Station Road/Melton Road.
- 6.2 Traffic surveys and modelling were carried out during the concept design stage. This work concluded that a one way system was feasible. However, following the consultation exercise further traffic surveys, modelling and analysis was carried out to explore in more detail how the one-way system would change traffic flows on adjacent roads.
- 6.3 The traffic survey was undertaken by the Council's design consultants (AECOM) from 24th to 30th July, with cameras set up and the results analysed with revised

flows and predictions using traffic modelling software. This determined the level of additional congestion at specific locations, and whether any delays are acceptable in terms of junction capacity. It also identified potential solutions for any of the areas where issues were identified. The impact of school holidays and road works were taken into account as described in 6.7 and 6.8 below.

- 6.4 The study analysed the network with and without westbound closure to determine the effect of a one-way system. It assesses what alternative routes will be taken by westbound traffic and the proportions on each route and the effect of the traffic increases on these alternative routes.
- 6.5 A survey was also carried out to assess the amount of through traffic currently using the High Street.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

- 6.6 The redistribution of traffic is shown in Appendix 5 and the results of the analysis are summarised in Appendix 6 (One-Way Traffic Analysis).
- 6.7 Manual traffic counts were undertaken on Friday 28th July, with automatic traffic counter (ATC) counts undertaken between 24th to 30th July. This period was chosen, as there were no road-works on any of the associated areas of the network that would have a significant impact on traffic flow.
- 6.8 To take account of school holidays comparisons were made with ATC counts undertaken in May 2017, making an allowance for the effects of road works at that time. The following factors were calculated to convert school holiday to school term time traffic flows:
- AM Peak 1.47
 - PM Peak 1.20
- 6.9 The table below details the calculated peak traffic flow variations due to the implementation of a one-way eastbound option.

Road, Direction and Time	Current Flow (vehicles per minute)	Proposed Flow (vehicles per minute)	Current ratio of flow to capacity (RFC)	Proposed ratio of flow to capacity (RFC)
Station Road, Westbound AM Peak	4.7	5.6	22%	27%
Station Road, Westbound PM Peak	4.1	4.9	20%	23%
South Street, Westbound AM Peak	3.3	4.2	16%	20%
South Street, Westbound PM Peak	3.0	4.4	14%	21%
New Street, Northbound AM Peak	1.8	2.7	9%	13%
New Street, Northbound PM Peak	4.0	5.3	19%	26%

CONCLUSION OF TRAFFIC ANALYSIS

- 6.10 Traffic will be redistributed as shown in Appendix 5. The increase in flow will be

modest in terms of the increased numbers of vehicles per minute. However, the percentage increase will be between 19% and 54%. Flows will remain well within the capacity of the roads and junctions.

6.11 A comparison of the factored existing flows with the one-way option shows that:

- Westbound flows on High Street are in the order of 7.5 vehicles per minute. Redistribution of these trips to other routes does not all occur on the local roads (Station Road and South Street). Some drivers will choose to use the bypass.
- The roads which accommodate the redistributed traffic are currently operating well below capacity even at peak times. The increase in traffic flow is low in absolute terms even though it may appear significant in percentage terms. The additional flow is not forecast to cause any major issues.

6.12 Further analysis was undertaken of the pinch points, constraints and restrictions along the alternative routes, and measures to mitigate these will be addressed during the detailed design stage and allowed for within the budget. The following mitigation measures may be required:

- Removal of parking bays adjacent to the old Odd House public house;
- Restricting parking to off-peak hours on Station Road between Burley Road and Church Street;
- Upgrading of pedestrian crossings on Station Road and Melton Road;
- An additional crossing on Station Rd.
- Carriageway widening between Station Approach and Northgate;
- Review of Parking arrangements on New Street; and
- Modification of the junction arrangements at New St/High St, Mill St/South St, South St/Uppingham Rd and Station Rd/Burley Rd.

THROUGH TRAFFIC ANALYSIS

6.13 Analysis was undertaken of the video surveys taken in May 2017. These surveys were carried out when there were no significant restrictions on the networks. Data was reviewed from 6 camera locations along the High Street. The assessment identifies the proportion of through trips, on-street parking and vehicles turning down side streets along High Street.

6.14 The study provided the following information:

Time Period	Through Movements	Turning down side street	On Street Parking
08:00-09:00	17%	60%	23%
09:00-10:00	7%	73%	20%
11:00-12:00	13%	73%	13%
14:00-15:00	30%	60%	10%
17:00-18:00	37%	57%	7%
Average	21%	64%	15%

- 6.15 The conclusion is that at some times of the day around a third of the traffic on the High Street is using it as a through route. This is consistent with the traffic analysis prediction that some of the redistributed traffic from a one-way system will use the bypass. The report is in Appendix 7.

7 PARKING

- 7.1 Many responses related to the provision of additional town centre parking and some opposition to the provision of chevron/echelon parking.
- 7.2 Guidance and road safety advice concurs that any authority considering a non-parallel parking solution ought to be following the advice in the Traffic Signs Manual. This states that bays should be angled so that drivers are required to reverse into them. This is safer than reversing out, when visibility might be restricted by adjacent parked vehicles. This will be self-enforcing as it will be extremely difficult for vehicles to manoeuvre into these parking bays in a forward direction. The Council's civil enforcement powers will be restricted to parking out of bay and overstaying.
- 7.3 Work is underway on a parking sufficiency report to ascertain the current use of parking assets, how best they can be utilised, the need for additional parking and what scope there is to meet this need. It is recognised that this work is intrinsically linked to the town centre project but not to the choice of which option should be taken forward to the detailed design stage.
- 7.4 Currently, no single car park is more than a 5 minute walk from the centre of the town. Proposals to offer free parking for a limited period of time after scheme implementation have been suggested by OTP. Time-limited free parking during the construction of the works can be accommodated within the overall scheme costs.

8 LEVEL CROSSING

- 8.1 The presence of the level crossing has a significant impact on traffic flow in the town. The direction of the one-way flow was chosen to avoid traffic queuing along the High Street when the level crossing is closed.
- 8.2 During the consultation process there were numerous anecdotal accounts of the level crossings being closed for extended periods of time.
- 8.3 Manual traffic count surveys were undertaken at the Melton Road level crossing in 2010, factored using automatic traffic count data in 2012, and combined with video survey data undertaken in May 2016. This has been used to calculate average traffic flows, closure times and vehicle waiting times.
- 8.4 The 7-day average closure time for the level crossing was 10 minutes in the hour, peaking at 18 minutes in the hour between 07:00-08:00hrs on a Tuesday and Thursday. The weekday average between 06:00-18:00hrs was just under 13 minutes.
- 8.5 The average waiting time for vehicles at the crossing was calculated as 2mins 30seconds, with an average 95 vehicles queuing per hour.
- 8.6 The maximum timetabled number of closures per hour, both freight and passenger

is 10 trains per hour. Video monitoring data showed this to be nearer to 5 trains per hour between 07-08:00 and 4 trains per hour between 15-16:00hr.

- 8.7 Although the perception of delay does not appear to match the reality, it is recognised that the level crossing causes frustration leading to some poor driver behaviour. Enforcement action is regularly taken against drivers who pass the barrier warning lights at red. U-turns are also a common occurrence which can cause a road safety issue.
- 8.8 Since the 1990's Network Rail has declared a long term desire to increase the number of freight trains using this line. However, this will require significant investment in signalling to increase capacity. Currently there is no indication when this project will proceed; however, the direction of flow of Option A has been chosen to ensure traffic does not backup through the town centre.

9 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 9.1 The Council could choose to do nothing to improve Oakham Town Centre. Given the challenges faced by high streets in general and Oakham in particular, it is likely that the town centre will suffer a spiral of decline with a reducing footfall leading to reduced inward investment. Significant maintenance work will still be required as the footways and carriageway have reached the end of their useful life. This is likely to cost in the region of £400k using similar materials to the existing surfaces (asphalt and concrete paving).
- 9.2 Option B (two-way) will improve the quality of the public realm, however the scope for significant improvements is limited by the need to retain a wide carriageway. There will also be limited scope to improve pedestrian crossing facilities around the Mill Street/Burley Road/High Street junction. In addition this option received less support than Option A.

10 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Approval to fund construction will not be sought until the detailed design is complete and a target cost has been established. Funding of up to £378k for the current design works was approved as part of the 2017/18 highway capital programme (Cabinet report 6/2017).
- 10.2 The scheme is likely to cost in the region of £3M to construct, plus design and survey costs of up to £0.5M, and will be subject to full Council approval. This cost is derived from 2 independent estimates compiled by AECOM and Eurovia based on their experience of similar public realm schemes.
- 10.3 There are a number of potential capital funding sources, as listed below. As there will be no use of revenue there will be no impact on council tax.
- The National Productivity Investment Fund;
 - Highway capital maintenance grants;
 - Integrated transport capital grants;
 - Capital receipts;
 - Section 106; and
 - Community Infrastructure Levy

- 10.4 If approved, the scheme will be constructed under a target cost contract using the Midland Highways Alliance Medium Schemes Framework. Once the detailed design is complete the target cost will be agreed with the contractor based on labour, materials and equipment costs. The Council will pay the actual cost of the works and an agreed percentage for overheads and profit. A pain/gain sharing mechanism will be used to distribute any under or overspend between the Council and the contractor. This mechanism incentivises the contractor to construct the works as efficient as possible by gradually decreasing the Council's share as the cost increases.
- 10.5 To allow sufficient time for detailed design, accurate target costing and further presentations to stakeholders and the public, the final design will be presented to Cabinet in February 2018. If Cabinet are minded to recommend the design and budget for approval to full Council, this will be in March 2018, as outlined in the original Stakeholder Engagement Strategy, (Cabinet report 19/2017). The Growth, Infrastructure and Resources Scrutiny Panel may also wish to discuss this project.

11 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- 11.1 In order to undertake works to the existing carriageway and footway, the Council will need to put in place Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders pursuant to the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 following the appropriate legal procedure. In addition, in order to permanently alter the use of the highway by restricting the direction of travel to one direction, the Council will need to make a permanent Traffic Regulation Order pursuant to the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, which must first be approved by the Council's Cabinet. As part of this process, the Council will need to consult a range of consultees including the Police, Fire and Ambulance services. There will also be a period where the intention to make the Traffic Regulation Order is published and members of the public may submit objections to the Council. The Council will need to ensure that the authority given by Cabinet to enact the Traffic Regulation Order is sufficiently robust to give power to the Director for Places (Environment, Planning and Transport) to respond to and, if required, rebut any objections. The statutory time periods required to put in place Temporary and Permanent Traffic Regulation Orders will be considered as part of the schedule for the works.
- 11.2 A report requesting approval of the final design, target cost, funding sources and programme will be brought to Cabinet for consideration in February 2018.
- 11.3 Council approval will be required as the budget will exceed £1M. If approved by Cabinet it will be brought to full Council for consideration in March 2018

12 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 12.1 Equality impact screening has been carried out which has identified that the scheme will potential affect accessibility for the disabled. Rutland Access Group (RAG) has been identified as a stakeholder and an equality impact assessment will be incorporated into the design and assessment process. RAG has indicated that it favours Option A.

13 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 Safety audits will be incorporated into the detailed design process. A significant

number of pedestrian accidents have been recorded in Oakham Town Centre since our records began (1994). The improvement to pedestrian facilities included in this project will have a positive impact on road safety.

14 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 The scheme aims to improve the town centre environment, reduce traffic flows, improve air quality and encourage visitors to stay longer.
- 14.2 Mental health and wellbeing can be improved by increasing the opportunity for congregation and socialisation.

15 CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 15.1 Option A (one-way) provides the greatest opportunity to deliver the vision for the town centre by improving the pedestrian environment while balancing the desire to maintain the number of parking spaces on the High Street. This option will also improve the environment and reduce the dominance of vehicles by removing a significant amount of traffic.
- 15.2 Option A was the most popular option from the consultation exercise. However, it is acknowledged that a significant number of signatories signed a petition against this proposal. The weight given to the petition must take account of the limitations set out in section 5.8. Considering all responses, including the Neighbourhood Plan consultation, on balance Option A is considered to be the most popular option.
- 15.3 It is recognised that the consultation exercise identified concerns about:
- the impact of the redistributed traffic on adjacent roads; and
 - a reduction in passing trade as a result of lower traffic flows.
- 15.3.1 To deliver the vision for the town centre the traffic on the High Street will need to be reduced. This will cause an increase in traffic on adjacent roads. The traffic analysis shows that these roads have the capacity to accommodate the increased flows with mitigation measures that will form part of the detailed design.
- 15.3.2 It is not possible to model the impact of reducing the volume of traffic on trade. However, evidence shows that well planned public realm improvement schemes can significantly boost footfall and trade (see 16.4 The Pedestrian Pound – the business case for better streets and places). This report states “there is consistent evidence that customers like pedestrian environments and dislike traffic. Retailers have been shown to over-estimate the importance of the car for customer travel.”
- 15.4 It is recommended that Option A is taken forward to the detailed design stage for the following reasons:
- It is the option which most closely aligns with the vision and objectives set out in section 2;
 - It was the favoured option from the consultation exercise; and
 - The areas of concern raised during the consultation exercise can be addressed through the detailed design.

16 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 16.1 ONP Big Survey Results
https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/746b8c_2b26690238f2459991b76fb73909323a.pdf
- 16.2 Retail Capacity Assessment <https://www.rutland.gov.uk/my-services/planning-and-building-control/planning/planning-policy/local-plan-evidence-base/economy-and-employment/>
- 16.3 Local Plan Review <https://www.rutland.gov.uk/my-services/planning-and-building-control/planning/planning-policy/local-plan-review/>
- 16.4 https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/media/1391/pedestrianpound_fullreport_web.pdf

17 APPENDICES

- 17.1 Appendix 1 – Example schemes
- 17.2 Appendix 2 – Examples showing the current state of the high street
- 17.3 Appendix 3 – Consultation Summary
- 17.4 Appendix 4 – Oakham Neighbourhood Plan Consultation Extract
- 17.5 Appendix 5 – Traffic Redistribution
- 17.6 Appendix 6 - One-Way Traffic Analysis
- 17.7 Appendix 7 - Through Traffic Analysis

A Large Print or Braille Version of this Report is available upon request – Contact 01572 722577.