

Agenda Item

Executive Board

2 September 2009



Enhancement and Pedestrianisation of The Strand Area, Exmouth

Summary

This is a report jointly prepared for Devon County Council and East Devon District Council and advises the Executive Board of the details of the scheme and proposes funding the scheme jointly on a 1/3: 2/3 basis with Devon County Council.

Recommendation

- a) the enhancement and pedestrianisation scheme shown on drawing no C08020/8 be approved, at an estimated cost of £3.0m including design, works and site supervision;
- b) funding for the scheme be agreed at £2.0m from the Devon County Council capital budget and £1.0m from the East Devon District Council capital budget, and the County Council's capital programme be enhanced accordingly.

a) Reasons for Recommendation

Addressed in the main body of the report.

b) Alternative Options

Addressed in the main body of the report.

c) Risk Considerations

Large scale capital projects are subject to risk that can lengthen the contract or cause financial penalties. These risks are built into the project management and tendering process. The County Council has a proven track record of managing and delivering enhancement schemes that should give Members comfort that risks will be managed and controlled.

d) Policy and Budgetary Considerations

The enhancement of the Strand is a key plank of the Council's regeneration initiative for Exmouth, provision has been in the capital programme to support this investment.

e) Date for Review of Decision

N/A

1 Introduction

Over many years there has been an aspiration within Exmouth to radically improve the quality of the town centre. The County Council has, over a number of years, undertaken a series of projects that have enhanced the link between the town centre and the estuary (Manchester Road); the link from the seafront to the town centre (Bath Road and Tower Street) as well as the public transport provision in the town centre (The Parade).

Over the last 18 months the focus has been the Strand, where a comprehensive programme of consultation has been carried within the community, businesses and interest groups within Exmouth. These consultation exercises identified a number of common themes and aspirations that have consistently emerged throughout the consultation process which form the key elements to the scheme.

2. Background

The Strand is made up of an area of approximately 9600 square metres, comprising of the roads and the gardens around the war memorial. The roads and footways are the responsibility of the County Council, whilst the Gardens are managed and maintained by the East Devon District Council.

Some enhancement work has already been undertaken within or adjacent to the Strand; the area known as the “Café Quarter” on the south side of the Strand was created in 2002 and the repaving of Manchester Road (2001) provides a link to the Estuary and main car park to the Strand.



Scale 1:1000

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Currently the perimeter of the area forms a busy gyratory road system isolating the gardens from the shopping streets and deterring easy pedestrian movement from one side to the other.

The Gardens are made up of a series of grassed areas, imposing mature trees, some of which are now reaching maturity or suffering from disease, the Listed War Memorial, a thatched shelter and a number of raised planters that divide the area. The gardens suffer from drainage issues which often cause problems for events such as the Remembrance service in November and the monthly Farmers Market.

Although The Strand is currently not within the Conservation Area, the War Memorial is a Listed building and there are a further 22 other Listed buildings on the roads facing the gardens.

There are taxi and bus facilities in the area but they are not conveniently placed and contribute to the severance experienced. The area provides a focus for activity late into the evening, particularly at the weekends, when they are associated problems of some anti-social behaviour.



3. Engagement with the Community

In June 2008, two workshops were held with invited business and community interest groups, these were then followed by a public exhibition within the gardens, to gather opinions on what people felt was valued about the area; what they would like to see retained and how they would want to use the space in the future. Over 2,000 comments and views were collected, either at the workshops and exhibition or sent as completed questionnaires or via the web site.

These consultations generated key elements and themes upon which the design has been developed:

- Creation of a flexible space at the heart of the town centre – suitable for markets, outdoor cafes, performances and more space for the Remembrance service.
- Enhanced setting for the listed War Memorial
- Pedestrianisation of key areas – resulting in greater space for pedestrians, improved safer routes that link the Strand to other parts of the town centre and the estuary side
- An attractive, modern, vibrant space at the heart of the town centre that will not only assist businesses in the area, but the town centre as a whole

- Enhancement of the Strand as a green lung within the town centre, by increasing the area of grass/landscaping areas and planting of additional trees
- The use of quality materials throughout the scheme, in combination with street furniture that will improve and enhance the setting of the adjoining buildings and War Memorial
- A new lighting scheme that creates an attractive and safer environment, highlighting features, such as the trees and War Memorial to add dramatic impact to the space
- A new glazed structure, replacing the existing shelter, providing waiting facilities for bus stops, as well as a stage for performances and a possible location for a building
- A solution to the drainage problems in the area

These ideas and aspirations were worked up into 3 indicative layouts, combining different elements and seeking to address the various issues identified. In December 2008, these 3 schemes were presented to the local civic and business community in workshops and to the general public in a staffed exhibition and longer term display in the Town Council Offices.

Following the detailed feedback received, a final draft scheme was developed and was the subject of further consultation within the community at an exhibition held in The Strand and the Magnolia Centre in April 2009. East Devon District Council's Scrutiny Committee was briefed on the scheme on site in May 2009.

Further refinement and detailed design has continued over the summer and the general layout is shown in the plans attached to this report.

The scheme requires significant changes to the existing traffic management regime in the area. Traffic is to be removed from the two main sides, with restricted access provided for servicing purposes, Rolle Street is to return to two way traffic and the flow between Victoria Road and St Andrew's Road is to be reversed. Public on-street parking has been reduced but disabled bays have been provided, as have loading areas to service the businesses, and will revert to car parking overnight.

The current taxi rank is to be relocated to a position that no longer requires passengers to cross a busy through route to access it. Provision has been made to retain a main rank and provide an additional full time and three night ranks thereby enhancing overall provision. Dedicated provision for buses to stop has been built into the scheme with provision for an enhanced bus shelter facility included. The taxi drivers and bus companies have been consulted throughout on our proposals as they have developed.

The current traffic signals at Imperial Road/Parade will be replaced with a roundabout providing improved pedestrian refuges at every crossing point.

Detailed traffic modelling indicates that the proposed traffic layout can accommodate existing and proposed flows; the scheme has been designed so that if in the future through traffic was removed from Rolle Street it could be extended to accommodate this change without major alterations and still provide a balanced, quality space.

4. Benefits of the Enhancement Scheme

The scheme will significantly improve the quality of the town centre, whilst the balance between hard and soft landscaped areas has been maintained the layout of the space will enable the area to be used for greater community enjoyment and a range of activities. The increased paved areas will enable markets, performances, and street cafes to flourish, as well as providing greater space for the Remembrance Service.

Enhanced access will build upon the existing pedestrian route from the estuary side (and its car parks) through Manchester Road and across to the Café Quarter. Increased footway width on Rolle Street will be linked with better crossing points to improve access to the Magnolia Centre.

There is considerable evidence that removal of traffic from town centres increases both the time people spend in the town and the amount of money they're inclined to spend. Changing the nature of the space, from a road where pedestrians are accommodated to one where pedestrians have priority, traffic is subservient, significantly improves the safety, feel and atmosphere.



The creation of this large pedestrian area will provide an opportunity to recreate the atmosphere generated once or twice a year when the roads are closed for special events on a more regular and varied basis. The social and commercial opportunities this presents are significant and will help transform Exmouth as a whole as well as this area in particular.

This work will 'pump prime' and provide the springboard to assist the regeneration of the whole area following the current economic downturn; the lessons from previous down turns demonstrate that it is important to continue preparations for the next economic upswing.

6. Reasons for Making Recommendation

The Strand represents a significant opportunity to regenerate the centre of Exmouth. The scheme reflects the community aspirations, established through the extensive programme of consultation and community engagement over the past eighteen months and sets the scene for further investment opportunities within the town. The scheme is also a major partnership between the two Authorities and an indication of confidence which will help to draw in private sector investment within the town. There is already evidence of such investment taking place within the Strand even prior to the work being implemented.

7. Alternative Options

During the consultation process certain alternative scenarios have emerged, in particular the closure to through traffic of Rolle Street and to link the Strand to the Magnolia Centre and the wider town centre. Further studies would be necessary to determine accurate costs for implementing this option and additional traffic modelling to analyse the impact of dispersing traffic onto other mainly residential routes. However, it is quite likely that the costs of the scheme and remediation works to cope with traffic dispersal would exceed the current funds available in the coming financial year from both our resources and those of EDDC who are jointly promoting the scheme. The scheme currently under consideration does not preclude the opportunity the option to close Rolle Street in the future.

8. Sustainability Considerations

The enhancement of the Strand addresses a wider range of objectives within the County Council's Strategic Plan. As well as seeking to improve the environment in which we live and work, it addresses the economic factors such as strengthening Devon's economy. For example, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) report "Paved with Gold" recognises how good street design contributes both economic benefits and that people value improvements to their streets. As a gateway town to the World Heritage Site – Jurassic Coast, an attractive

environment will encourage visitors to stay longer in the town, increasing the amount of money they spend, thereby supporting the local economy.

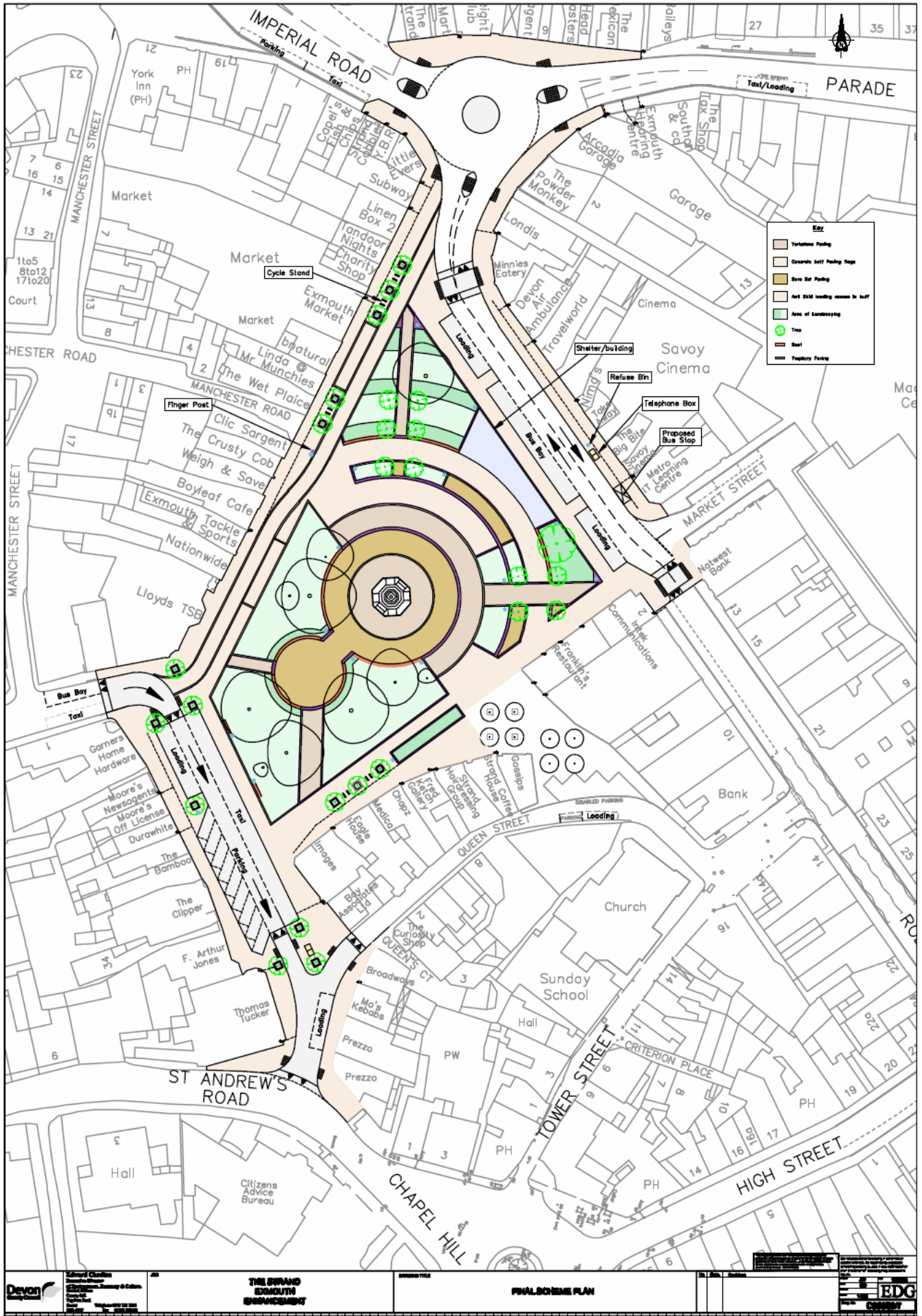
The report refers to the enhancement of the setting of the War Memorial and the adjoining buildings through the use of quality materials. The sourcing and procurement to accord with Devon's Green Policy is an important consideration. There are a whole raft of factors to consider in selecting for example, paving materials. Durability, whole life costs, embedded energy, CO₂ emissions in production and transport all need to be evaluated and balanced in coming to a decision. Whole life costs can give more reliable indicators of value for money than initial construction costs, in that good design, including materials chosen, can, over the life of the project, save money through increased durability, reduced maintenance requirements, cycle of replacement as well as less tangible or quantifiable issues, such as aesthetic appearance. As part of the quotation process, suppliers will be expected to provide evidence and accreditation that the materials supplied do not involve exploitation of workers, children or young people, in accordance with international legislation and recognised good practice. Suppliers will be judged by these criteria in addition to the usual tendering requirements.

Other factors being considered include, increasing the number of urban trees; sequential replacement of the existing trees which are coming toward the end of their life span; sustainable planting – planting for the future, with the choice of species suitable to accommodate climate change; and low energy lighting, avoiding light pollution.

9. Legal Considerations

The proposed traffic arrangements for the enhancement scheme have been developed following significant consultation; however formal public and statutory advertising of the necessary Traffic Regulation Orders will be required to implement them and the scheme.

The proposed scheme redefines the boundary between the current gardens and the highway with parts of the existing highway. There are a number of elements to the scheme, including the proposed structure, hard and soft landscaping, street furniture and lighting, where negotiations on ownership, maintenance, repair and liability are still to be resolved between the County, District and Town Councils. These will be taking place during the autumn.



Key

- Various Parking
- Concrete Slab Parking Slabs
- Area for Landscaping
- Tree
- Shelter/building
- Telephone Box
- Proposed Bus Stop
- Refuse Bin
- Bus Stop
- Proposed Bus Stop

10. Financial Considerations

The scheme has been costed £3M. With the total cost to be shared between Devon County Council and East Devon District Council on a two third to one third basis respectively, with the £2M contribution from the County Council being funded from capital receipts. Funding will be spread over the 2009/10 and 2010/11 financial years. Implementation is programmed to commence in February 2010 and the contract scheduled to take 40 weeks with completion in time for the 2010 Remembrance Service in November.

Legal Implications

Highlighted in section 9 of the report.

Financial Implications

There is currently a budget of £500k in both 2009/10 and 2010/11 for this project. However, the Capital Programme as a whole is currently underfunded by £3.3m for 2009/10 and £2.7m for 2010/11. Therefore decisions will need to be made on the use of Capital Reserves for funding this shortfall. In view of the economic climate, confirmation should be sought from DCC that the 2/3 funding from their Capital receipts is still achievable.

Consultation on Reports to the Executive

See main report for consultation undertaken. The Exmouth Regeneration Programme Board is supportive of the scheme.

Background Papers

None.

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Corporate Director

Executive Board
2 September 2009

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