Abstract: This report updates the Committee on the outcome of public consultations undertaken on proposed outline environmental improvements and traffic management measures for Forfar Town Centre and seeks authority for revised outline proposals for a range of image enhancement works to be progressed to a more detailed stage in due course.

1 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Committee:-

(a) notes the outcome of the public consultations undertaken to date;

(b) approves in principle the range of proposed image enhancements outlined in this report and agrees to them being progressed to a more detailed stage in due course;

(c) agree to the renewal of the footway surface from The Cross eastwards to the Co-op on the south side of East High Street, at a cost of up to £40,000, this expenditure to be met from the Roads Department’s maintenance budget for 2004/05;

(d) agree to proceed with the proposed works on the north side of East High Street as outlined in paragraph 4.5 of this report at an estimated cost of £26,000, this expenditure to be met from the capital allocation for 2004/05;

(e) agree to proceed with the proposed works on the south side of East High Street as outlined in paragraph 4.6 of this report at an estimated cost of £28,000, subject to further consultation on the proposed adjustments to the bus bay and parking provision being undertaken, this expenditure to be met from the capital allocation for 2004/05;

(f) awaits further reports on progress as appropriate.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 In March 2003 the then Planning & Transport Policy Committee and the Roads Committee approved in principle proposed outline environmental improvements and traffic management measures for Forfar Town Centre and agreed to public consultation being undertaken (Report No. 290/03 refers). The outline proposals had been drawn up following initial consultation and aimed to improve the quality of the town centre, particularly for pedestrians. A key element of this was proposed changes to the traffic circulation patterns including the introduction of a one-way...
traffic flow northwards in Castle Street and the restricting of vehicular access to the western branch of Castle Street.

3 PUBLIC CONSULTATION

3.1 A special Area Forum was held on 18 March 2003 when the outline proposals were presented. The meeting was attended by approximately 100 people and, in short, the proposals were not at all well received. Most of the opposition related to the traffic management measures and there were concerns that they would have a detrimental impact on the economic viability of the town centre. The meeting was followed up by an exhibition in Forfar Library from 21 March to 9 May 2003. A consultation/comment sheet was also made available in Council offices in the town and the public was encouraged to make written comment on the outline proposals. A total of 235 comment sheets were taken and, although only 44 were returned, the majority registered opposition to the proposals.

3.2 In view of the overall adverse public reaction to the outline proposals, Council officers in consultation with the local elected members decided to undertake a comprehensive re-evaluation of the objectives for the town centre.

3.3 During this time, two events of significance occurred. Firstly, the Council was approached by the Angus Farmers Market seeking a meeting to discuss the possibility of part of The Myre being developed as a permanent location for the market. Following initial discussions with representatives of the Angus Farmers Market, it was felt that there was an opportunity to enhance the public value and appearance of the Myre by developing part of it as an area of open space which could accommodate a variety of uses including the market.

3.4 Around the same time, the Council was also approached by the newly formed Forfar Business Initiative (FBI). They had drawn up a number of ideas for enhancing the appearance and attraction of Forfar and wished to discuss these with the Council. Amongst these was the possibility of improving the approaches to the town, particularly from the by-pass. It was agreed in discussion with the FBI that the Council’s professional design staff would undertake an assessment of the approaches and identify opportunities for improvement.

3.5 As a result of the re-evaluation and the discussions outlined above, revised draft proposals for a range of image enhancement works have been drawn up and are outlined below. Small scale plans of the main proposals are appended to this report and larger scale plans and sketch designs are available in the Members’ Lounge.

4 REVISED PROPOSALS

Town Centre

4.1 It is now proposed that there will be no significant change to the traffic circulation patterns within the town centre. Servicing arrangements will remain unaltered, as will on-street parking although there is likely to be a small reduction in overall numbers of parking spaces.

4.2 Emphasis will be placed on improving the quality of the space around Town & County Hall and Municipal Buildings. It is proposed that the area be resurfaced in high quality materials including the existing setts which would be lifted and re-used to highlight elements of the buildings. This would be further enhanced through the use of selective uplighting. Two trees are proposed one either side of the steps to
Municipal Buildings to soften the area along with a new suite of street furniture. The designs take account of the current proposals for the provision of disabled access to Municipal Buildings. It is proposed that the taxi rank outside Municipal Buildings be relocated, possibly to the other side of Castle Street although the possible impact on on-street servicing would have to be assessed.

4.3 Similar environmental improvements are also proposed for the area of pavement on Castle Street outside the Clydesdale Bank and the small seating area at the Parish Church in East High Street. The same surfacing materials and street furniture as is proposed at the Cross would be used to give continuity.

4.4 The one element of the original proposals which did not attract opposition is the upgrading of the public transport and passenger facilities at East High Street. It is therefore proposed that this be progressed as an early phase and be co-ordinated with proposed resurfacing of the pavement on the south side of East High Street as part of the Roads Department maintenance programme for the current financial year.

4.5 In order to meet existing demand, it is proposed that the bus stop on the north side be extended westwards so that it can accommodate four buses. This will result in the loss of the four parking spaces but no comment was made regarding this during the consultation period. The pavement along this section will be widened to improve pedestrian circulation and new bus shelters provided. The latter will be funded separately through Planning & Transport’s Renewal & Repairs Fund.

4.6 Since undertaking the public consultation, further opportunities and requirements for improved public transport links to serve existing and future development in and around Forfar have been assessed, including the submission of a Bus Route Development Grant bid for Forfar (Report No. 1010/04, Infrastructure Services Committee, 2 September 2004 refers). The current bus bay provision on the south side of East High Street would not be able to accommodate such improvements and there will therefore be a need to increase capacity to take three buses. It is proposed that two bus bays be laid out in a “saw-tooth” arrangement rather than kerb-side. This is the preferred arrangement from both an operational and a passenger point of view. The third (additional) stop would be the traditional kerb-side arrangement. In order to accommodate this increase in capacity however, it will be necessary to remove the existing on-street car parking (three spaces) adjacent to the existing bus stop. It is intended that this loss be relatively short-term and that the parking provision be reinstated on the closure of Chapelpark Primary School, in the section of East High Street which is currently designated “clearway”. New bus shelters have already been acquired for this location and will be installed on completion of the works.

4.7 As the need to adjust the bus bay and the resultant need to remove the on-street car parking referred to above is a recent development, it would be appropriate to undertake further consultation before proceeding with the works.

The Myre

4.8 It is proposed that the eastern end of the Myre be developed as a multi-purpose open space. This would take the form of a circular or oval shaped surfaced area possibly with some form of water feature in the centre. Seating would be introduced and tree planting carried out to enhance the space. The layout is designed to not only accommodate the Angus Farmers Market but also other activities such as outdoor concerts. The existing football pitch would be unaffected.
4.9 It is also proposed that the layout of the public car park be altered to accommodate the provision of a central tree-lined pedestrian walkway linking the above space with Myre Road and the town centre. Additional tree planting would be undertaken at select locations throughout the car park to enhance its appearance. It is reckoned that these works can be accommodated without any reduction in parking capacity although this is subject to a detailed site survey being undertaken. Consideration is also being given to the introduction of a short-term waiting restriction (3/4 hours maximum) to encourage a turn-over of parking, making it easier for visitors and shoppers to finding a parking space.

The Approaches

4.10 An assessment of the opportunities to enhance all of the approaches into Forfar has been undertaken. This included Queenswell Road as a key circulation route within Forfar and the East Greens Car Park. A range of possible improvements have been identified and have been graded as short, medium and long term. The short-term improvements are those which could be undertaken relatively quickly, possibly through the FBI and include, for example, bulb and shrub planting on the road verge. A key aim of this assessment is to establish an agreed framework for improvements which all relevant parties would work towards and which would be incorporated in any development briefs that are prepared in due course for edge of town developments. There is also opportunity to undertake improvements at the East and West Ports and at the Zoar junction as key entrance points to the town. It is also proposed to provide tourism signing of the visitor attractions in Forfar on the by-pass as part of a larger signing initiative on the A90. This is the subject of a separate report (see Report No. 1216/04).

5 ONGOING CONSULTATION

5.1 In view of the adverse public reaction to the original proposals for the town centre at the Area Forum in March 2003, it was agreed with the local elected members that it would be appropriate to present the revised proposals for image enhancement to the Area Forum prior to consideration by this Committee. They were duly presented to the Forum in June 2004 and were generally well received.

5.2 The Forfar Community Council requested that the proposals also be presented to their meeting on 16 September 2004 and this was agreed. A written response from the Community Council is awaited but it is anticipated that this will also be favourable.

6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 It is premature at this early stage to produce detailed cost breakdowns for the various proposed enhancements other than for the proposed works on both sides of East High Street which it is estimated will cost in total approximately £54,000. This cost excludes the provision of new shelters which will be funded separately. There is currently an allocation of £91,000 within the Roads Capital Plan for the current financial year and £50,000 in the Planning & Transport Capital Plan, phased over 2004/05 and 2005/06. Further, the 2004/08 Financial Plan which is currently being prepared contains an allocation of £58,000 in the Planning & Transport Capital Budget for 2007/08.

6.2 The current Financial Plan 2003/07 provision is:-
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<td>Total</td>
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6.3 The contributions from the Common Good is provisional only and is subject to approval. SET has indicated a willingness to support works in Forfar but the level and timing of any funding has still to be agreed and will almost certainly be different from that shown above. Other potential sources of funding including the possibility of private sector sponsorship will also be investigated but ultimately the available funding will determine the extent and phasing of any works undertaken. This will be reported on further in due course.

7 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

8 CONSULTATION

8.1 The Chief Executive, Director of Finance, Director of Law & Administration, Director of Leisure Services and Director of Property Services have been consulted during the preparation of this report.

NOTE

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above Report.

AA/RM/KW
7 October 2004

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