

## **REGENERATION, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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### **DE-CLUTTERING STROOD HIGH STREET - UPDATE**

Report from: Robin Cooper, Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture

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#### **Summary**

This report provides an update on the A2 High Street de-cluttering pilot project in Strood.

At the Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of the 27 June 2013, within the Task Group report 'De-cluttering Streets in Medway' it was recommended and supported that Strood High Street be used a pilot project for de-cluttering streets. Cabinet subsequently agreed this recommendation on the 9 July 2013.

It was further recommended at the Task Group meeting of the 23 May 2013 that engineers determine if the existing pedestrian pinch point outside 107 High Street (Rainham Meats) could be eliminated, thereby allowing the possible removal of the pedestrian guardrailing at this location.

#### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

1.1 At the Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of the 27 June 2013, members requested that a report be brought back to this committee in 12 months time updating members on progress and the impact of the pilot scheme in Strood.

#### **2. Background**

2.1 In the Government's white paper 'Creating Growth, Cutting Carbon: Making Sustainable Local Transport Happen' it was stated that De-cluttering is a fundamental part of providing high quality public spaces – and one where significant improvements can be achieved at relatively low cost. It involves dispensing with unnecessary signs, traffic signals, road markings and other street furniture to make streets tidier and easier to use. In August 2010, the Secretaries of State for Transport and Communities wrote to council leaders highlighting the Government's commitment to reducing street clutter, asking them, as local leaders, to make the same commitment.

- 2.2 This was followed in October 2011 with the Department for Transport's (DfT) 'Signing the Way' paper, a policy framework was proposed for ensuring that the traffic sign system in Great Britain meets the future needs of all road users, while building upon the existing and established traffic sign system. It sets out recommendations for improving the information that traffic signs communicate to road users by providing more freedom for decisions about signing at the local level.
- 2.3 The research and review undertaken for this Policy has shaped a series of wide-ranging recommendations, including the reduction of signing on the road network. It was recognised that traffic signs can clutter the highway network if used to excess. Further, that traffic sign clutter is unattractive and is a potential distraction to road users.
- 2.4 The DfT framework further provided a range of measures to improve this negative effect of signing by:
- Setting a clear policy context for placing traffic signs where they are required.
  - Recommended that local authorities take a wider policy approach to designing and delivering traffic signs, which positively impact on the local environment.
  - Providing guidance on the different techniques for auditing of traffic signs and the removal of unnecessary signs.
  - Reducing the regulatory requirement for placing combinations of traffic signs and road markings.
  - Providing thresholds below which it will be unnecessary to provide some repeater signs.
- 2.5 Street clutter is the proliferation of street furniture such as:
- Bollards, pedestrian guardrailing, railings, street litter bins and redundant sign posts
  - Unnecessary signage and road markings
  - Signs that are too large for their purpose
  - Posts, including lamp columns and traffic signal posts
  - Traffic signal control boxes, feeder pillars and utility cabinets
- 2.6 The benefits of de-cluttering are listed in part below:
- Reducing environmental impact, primarily visual aesthetics, but also the carbon footprint for electrical supplies and production of increasingly scarce materials.
  - Reducing the number of obstructions that can possibly impair pedestrian movement, particularly those that are visually impaired.
  - Reduce installation and future maintenance costs.
  - Create places - bring out local character and distinctiveness of buildings and open spaces.

2.7 The A2 High Street in Strood was proposed by the Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee De-cluttering Task Group on the 23 May 2013 as a pilot project for de-cluttering, this was recommended by the Regeneration Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 27<sup>th</sup> June 2013, with Cabinet approval on the 9 July 2013. There is a Local Transport Plan allocation of £50,000 to progress the pilot de-cluttering scheme.

2.8 The aim of the pilot de-cluttering scheme is to undertake:

- A review of street furniture along the A2 High Street, Strood, from its junction with Gun Lane to the junction with Station Road, with a view to de-clutter the street scene by the rationalisation of signing, guard railing, bollards and other street furniture.
- Undertake a general review of the street furniture along the route in terms of identifying shortcomings where applicable.
- Learning outcomes associated with de-cluttering that feed into future schemes and relevant policies.

2.9 The scheme has been expanded to include the following measures to aid non-motorised movements:

- Removing the pedestrian pinch point outside Rainham Meats, 107 High Street, by increasing the footway width, whilst ensuring that there is a smooth transitional alignment on the carriageway.
- Removing the pedestrian pinch point outside St Nicholas Church, at the junction with Commercial Road, by increasing the footway width, whilst ensuring that there is a smooth transitional alignment on the carriageway.
- Removing the pedestrian pinch point on the northern side of the carriageway on the eastbound approach to the junction with Station Road, by increasing the footway width, whilst ensuring that there is a smooth transitional alignment on the carriageway.
- Converting the existing Pelican crossing located at 59 High Street to a Puffin crossing (this will aid both pedestrians and traffic flows).
- Introducing a Zebra crossing on Gun Lane to encourage safer pedestrian movements in view of the relocation of Strood Library from Bryant Street to the High Street.

### **3. Current Position**

3.1 Traffic and pedestrian surveys have been undertaken to determine existing traffic flows and pedestrian crossing desire-lines under the current conditions and for a virtual day the traffic data is summarised overleaf:

- Eastern section of the High Street (near Lloyds TSB Bank)
  - 12,856 vehicles per day with a peak hour flow of 924 vehicles.
  - Average mean speed was 19.6mph
- Western (near Halifax Building Society)
  - 17,572 vehicles per day with a peak hour flow of 1,153 vehicles
  - Average mean speed was 17.0 mph

Following any works, traffic and pedestrian data will be collected so that suitable comparisons can be made.

- 3.2 The route forms a strategic link in the A2 corridor and the study team has used current guidance associated with sign rationalisation and latest policy to review the signing along the route in terms of its appropriateness with a view to identify signs that can be removed, relocated, combined or amended in some way.
- 3.3 The requirement for guardrailing has been reviewed in the context of current requirements along the route with a view to rationalising its quantity without undue effect on safety. Bollards and other items of street furniture have been assessed as to their suitability for purpose with a view to rationalising their quantity without undue effect on safety. The study team has also noted areas of concern associated with lack of HGV signing along the route, or non-compliance to standards in terms of all road users and made comment as to possible improvement.
- 3.4 Capital Projects have completed a detailed design for removing the pedestrian pinch points outside St Nicholas Church and Rainham Meats, see plans at Appendix A. In addition, following an internal discussion with other scheme clients who have on-going schemes in Strood High Street, it was agreed that Capital Projects determine if the footway width on the northern side of the carriageway on the approach to the junction with Station Road could be widened. Footway widening on the section of the High Street could negate the need for raised kerbs and pedestrian guardrail – these works would form the basis of a further phase.
- 3.5 The proposed scheme excluding the design for the widening on the approach to Station Road and the widening of the footway outside St Nicholas Church was subject to a Combined Stage 1 & 2 Road Safety Audit undertaken by the TMS Consultancy, in accordance with the Department for Transport standard HD19/03 'Road Safety Audit'. The audit raised several issues and a subsequent Exception Report has been prepared and accepted by the Road Safety Manager.
- 3.6 Following the internal client officer discussion, it was noted that several proposals were being considered for the A2 High Street junction with North Street. It was agreed that de-cluttering proposal on North Street be included as part of the scheme that is jointly being undertaken by Traffic Management and Transport Operations, and pedestrian guardrail would be addressed at this time.
- 3.7 It is recognised that the Pilot Project has expanded to incorporate other Local Transport Plan interventions for the High Street, including accessibility and modal shift, and whilst there will be cost savings associated with a combined scheme these aspects will be separately funded as detailed below:
  - Rainham Meats footway widening at £23,138
  - St Nicholas' Church footway widening at £29,378.36
  - NatWest Bank Near Station Road junction footway widening at £24,667.50
  - Puffin crossing conversion (outside Iceland) at £30,000
  - Zebra crossing on Gun Lane at £30,000

## **4. Next Steps**

4.1 With regard the Pilot Project the following next steps are to be undertaken:

- a) Following guardrail removal there is some concern that parking may occur adjacent to the Automatic Telling Machines. The Capital Projects team is to provide suggestions to prevent footway parking in the event that considerable on-street parking should occur after scheme implementation i.e. CCTV surveillance, low level landscaping, seating, etc
- b) Traffic Management to progress with design for converting the existing Pelican crossing (outside Iceland) to a Puffin crossing, where on installation pedestrian and traffic flows will be improved.
- c) Incorporate the recommendations of the road safety audit and additional footway widening into the design.

4.2 At the Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of the 27 June 2013, a number of recommendations were agreed, as listed in Appendix B.

4.3 A number of these recommendations are ongoing, due to the relationship with the Pilot Project and the complexity involved. Further, through the design process in delivering the Local Transport Plan Capital Programme, officers have made recommendations where signage could be reduced or where surplus to requirements, removed.

## 5. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Congestion	Footway parking following guardrail removal, leading to slow vehicle journey times in Strood town centre, impacting on growth, businesses, visitors and bus services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parking enforcement</li> <li>- Low level landscaping</li> <li>- Seating</li> </ul>	Medium
Pedestrian accidents	Following guardrail removal, pedestrians may cross at inappropriate locations leading to possible vehicle / pedestrian conflict. (Note, this is a current situation, as there are gaps in the guardrail, which are not obvious to passing traffic who will, therefore, not be expecting pedestrian movements)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Following guardrail removal, officers will monitor pedestrian movements and record any near misses in the High Street so that contingency measures can be introduced.</li> <li>- Contingency arrangements will be made to reinstall guardrail should the need arise.</li> <li>- Footway widening</li> <li>- Pedestrian crossing improvements</li> </ul>	Low

## 6. Consultation

6.1 Following a satisfactory road safety audit of the footway widening and completion of the design the proposal will be then sent out to public consultation, including:

- Fronting properties.
- Strood Town Centre Manager and Town Centre Forum.
- Guide Dogs for the Blind.
- Kent Association for the Blind.
- Medway Learning Disability Partnership.
- Local members and the Portfolio Holder.
- Kent Police and statutory undertakers.

There will also be a public consultation that will be held locally.

- 6.2 Due the complexity of the scheme, in particular the potential contentious issue of pedestrian guardrail removal where negotiation may be required, a proposed works start date cannot be provided at this stage. Further, the works at Darnley Arch are scheduled for this financial year and there will likely be significant traffic congestion during this period and, therefore, as a result, the footway widening and guardrail works will be planned for 2015/16.
- 6.3 Post works, collision data, pedestrian movements and traffic speeds will be closely monitored and emergency measures will be introduced should they be required.

## **7. Financial Implications**

- 7.1 The detailed cost of the works will be determined by officers during the design stage and programmed where appropriate. The works as identified in sections 2.8 and 3.7 are programmed to be funded from the Local Plan Integrated Transport block 2014/15 allocation.

## **8. Legal implications**

- 8.1 There are no legal implications as the report is for noting.

## **9. Recommendation**

- 9.1 Members are asked to note the report, and the work underway to reduce the number of obstructions to pedestrian movements and improve the visual appearance of Strood town centre.

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### **Background papers**

- Department for Transport's (DfT) 'Signing the Way' October 2011.

### **Appendix A**

- Strood High Street De-cluttering Assessment
- Drawing No: 731812/100/01 – Site Layout and Construction Details, Sheet 1 of 3.
- Drawing No: 731812/100/02 – Site Layout and Construction Details, Sheet 2 of 3.
- Drawing No: 731812/100/03 – Site Layout and Construction Details, Sheet 3 of 3.

## Appendix B

The specific recommendations were as follows:

1. That Medway Council systematically de-clutters its public spaces on a case-by-case basis and in association with future maintenance work or new capital and developer initiated schemes.

That an overarching Streetscape Manual, supported by policies relating to street furniture, traffic signs and road markings, would guide this process and these policies be tested as part of a pilot de-cluttering scheme in Strood Town Centre.

2. That the Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture develops a Streetscape Manual to ensure a consistent and coordinated approach to the design, management and maintenance of our public spaces. The Streetscape Manual would include policies relating to street furniture, traffic signs and road markings.
3. That a Pedestrian Guardrail Policy for Medway be developed and implemented. Prior to the implementation of this policy, pedestrian guardrail assessments should be undertaken in accordance with Transport for London's 'Guidance on the Assessment of Pedestrian Guardrail', May 2012.

The Integrated Transport team within the Regeneration, Community and Culture Directorate to lead on proposals to retain or remove pedestrian guardrail.

A record of all street furniture removed, will be recorded in CONFIRM (the Council's Asset Management System), so that collision monitoring can continue at sites where street furniture is removed.

4. That sections of bollards and railings be removed on a case-by-case basis. Where parking restrictions exist bollards should not be required and it is recommended that they be removed. At locations where there is an absence of parking restrictions, the introduction of specific verge parking restrictions should be considered to control parking at these locations. If bollards are required at certain locations then these should be of a consistent type.
5. That authorisation is obtained from the Department for Transport for all manufacturer types so to be able to replace the base-lit traffic bollards with either self-righting unlit retro reflective bollards or self-righting solar powered bollards.
6. That the Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture investigate the potential for reducing the number of lamp columns on Medway's streets by adopting a more cost effective and sustainable lighting system, and installing traffic signals on lighting columns at certain locations, whilst not decreasing lighting levels in Medway.
7. That a policy on 'A' Boards, tables and chairs, and shop front displays be developed, that balances the needs of businesses and the public's expectation of an unobstructed highway.



8. A Signage Policy for Medway be developed and implemented, incorporating:
- a) A review of destination signage;
  - b) The removal of warning signs unless there are genuine hazards that would not be readily apparent to the driver without the sign;
  - c) A review of existing Traffic Regulation Orders;
  - d) A risk-based analysis and individual site assessment undertaken when considering placing only one of the safety critical signs, such as 'No Entry' where it may still be appropriate to place two terminal signs;
  - e) Consideration of the spacing of repeater signs in their relation to other repeater and terminal signs;
  - f) Consideration be given to placing repeaters on 'major roads' within 100m of 'minor road' junctions that have a lower speed restriction and that the lower speed limit terminal signs on the 'minor road' be removed;
  - g) Only terminal speed limit signs on principal roads should be lit;
  - h) That the size of signs be reduced where applicable;
  - i) Worded and diagrammatical markings, such as 'Keep Clear' and 'Slow', should be assessed to establish if there is a need for their retention;
  - j) An assessment of hatchings for each island;
  - k) A review of the condition and legality of waiting lines;
  - l) The use of yellow line markings to No.310 (primrose) or No.353 (deep cream) with a 50mm width should be considered in all conservation areas to minimise impact;
  - m) A 75mm size line be used for all routes with a speed limit of 40mph or less, which are outside the conservation areas;
  - n) 'At Any Time' plates be removed on a case-by-case basis as they no longer require restriction plates unless there are loading restrictions;
  - o) The "x" height for all street nameplates for junctions off the Primary Routes should be 90mm in height. Otherwise for all the other routes within a study area that an "x" height of 75mm be adopted.
9. A tourist signing policy be developed based on TA 93/04 'Traffic Signs to Tourist Attractions and Facilities in England: Guidance for Tourist Signing - General Introduction', that is mindful of Medway Council's bid for World Heritage Status for Chatham dockyard and its defences. Decisions to be made after consultation with tourism destinations within Medway.
10. The following methodology be used as part of the assessment on any maintenance work or new capital scheme:

That experienced officers from traffic/road safety and highways maintenance, together with an officer with a design background walk roads in any study recording and commenting on:

- All forms of road signing including road markings.
- The feasibility of rationalising signs thereby reducing sign numbers.
- The appropriateness of existing signs and whether they supported the existing traffic regulation orders on site.
- The material of the existing signs.
- The condition and size of existing signs.

- The location of each item of street furniture or marking.
- Whether there would be any safety implications if the street furniture or markings were removed.
- Whether additional furniture or signs are appropriate.
- The requirements for existing guardrail.
- Whether street lighting could be reduced and improved, with the assistance of a street lighting engineer.

Additionally, when items at crossing locations have been identified for removal that discussion should be undertaken with relevant groups representing the visually and mobility impaired.

The study should also include:

- Litter bins; condition, location and need.
- Bus shelters; location and condition.
- Bollards and other similar street furniture.
- Traffic Islands, condition and comments on the crossing locations.

All information be recorded on data sheets, including a decision / recommendation for each individual item of street furniture. The results of the on-site surveys can then be collated and formalised with relevant photographs inserted to provide a readable spread sheet, which identified each item of street furniture, material, location, condition and whether the sign was required or could be reduced in size.

11. Prior to the final approval of the Streetscape Manual, Pedestrian Guardrail Policy, Signage Policy and Street Furniture Policy that a pilot scheme, funded via the Local Transport Plan, be undertaken in Strood High Street from Gun Lane to Station Road. This pilot will be used to inform the final manual and policies.
12. Recognising that the quality of the street scene was not solely within the purview of the Council that local businesses within the pilot area be advised of the de-cluttering pilot and encouraged to review their shop fronts and advertising during the course of this process.
13. That all Ward Members are consulted before the removal of any street furniture in their wards as part of the de-cluttering programme.