

Executive

21 April 2022

Report of the Director of Housing, Economy & Regeneration, Information and Communication Technology

Portfolio of the Executive Member for Economy and Strategic Planning

Future of Acomb Front Street - Enhancing Economic Growth for Secondary Shopping Areas

Summary

1. This report summarises the outcomes of the project to implement short term improvements to Front Street Acomb and identify longer term improvements that could be made to the area based on public and stakeholder engagement. This was part of a wider £100k project split equally across Acomb Front Street and Haxby centre. The outcomes of the Haxby project will follow the same format and therefore be reported to a future Executive Member decision session.
2. A number of immediate measures that were identified in the original project brief to support economic growth and drive footfall in Acomb during the project period have already been delivered and are set out in the report.
3. In addition consultants were commissioned to undertake engagement with the public and businesses on Acomb Front Street, seeking their views on the shopping area and ideas as to how to improve the area. Drawing on this engagement the consultants have assessed the physical environment of the shopping area and have proposed 10 longer term ideas to improve the area. These represent high level views of consultants and have not been tested for feasibility or been subject to public consultation.
4. Should any of the long term ideas that are highlighted in the report warrant further investigation additional feasibility work and engagement with key stakeholders, and residents, would be the starting point. Officers will continue to seek future funding sources such as Levelling Up, UK

Shared Prosperity or Devolution asks, or consider future council capital budgets. This initial consultation and ideas stage is the first stage of the regeneration process. The next stage requires refinement of ideas taking in to consideration the technical implications and feasibility studies. This leads on to the creation of a masterplan and delivery, subject to external funding.

5. Significant progress has already been made on Acomb Front Street and there are identified a number of interventions that can be delivered with the remaining capital budget from the initial project.

Recommendations

6. The Executive is asked to:

- 1) Note the key findings from the community engagement and the consultants' ideas for potential physical improvements to the public realm to make long term impact in line with the study brief approved in 2018.

Reason: To conclude the project and confirm it has been delivered in line with the brief approved in 2018.

- 2) Note the improvements and events that have been funded through the Acomb Front Street project to date.

Reason: To conclude the project and confirm it has been delivered in line with the brief approved in 2018.

- 3) Approve the proposed immediate improvements to Front Street from the remaining project budget and existing budgets

Reason: To continue to support the economic growth and vibrancy of Acomb Front Street.

- 4) Note the proposed long term ideas that will be considered should future external regeneration funding bids be successful. Any long term idea(s) taken forward will be subject to further feasibility and engagement and require an Equalities Impact Assessment to be undertaken.

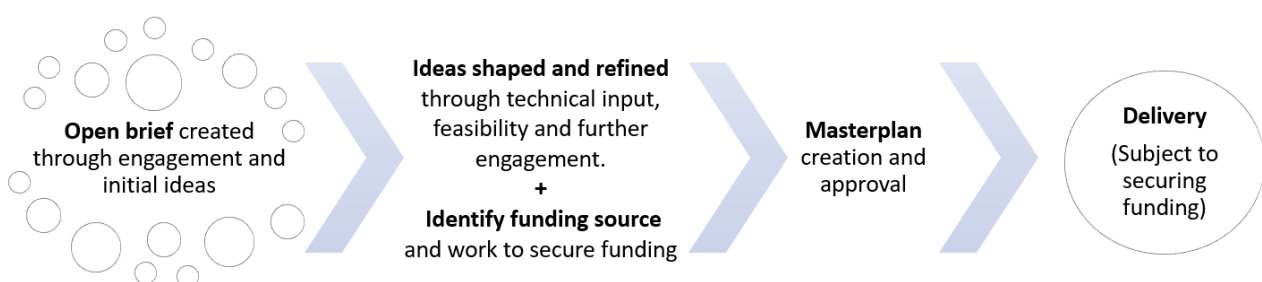
Reason: To inform the scope of future funding bids.

Background

7. On the 18 May 2017 the Executive agreed a Highways Funding Overview Report which included a proposed project 'Enhancing Economic Growth for Secondary Shopping Areas'. The project was outlined as "A review of the layout of the Acomb and Haxby shopping areas and ways to achieve additional economic growth in these shopping areas will be undertaken and costed interventions proposed, following local consultation".
8. On the 3rd July 2018 a further report was taken to the Deputy Leader (Executive Member for Economic Development) to approve a range of immediate measures to improve footfall and the street scenes in the secondary centres, and to approve the brief for a study to consider the physical improvements to the public realm to make a longer term impact.
9. The approved brief for the study required consideration of the following:
 - a. Current understanding of the catchment area and the demography of shoppers
 - b. The public realm and street layout, identifying scope for improvements with outline costings
 - c. The retail/leisure/community use mix in each area with recommendations
 - d. Transport links, car parking, and measures to sustain and build footfall
 - e. Longer term trends in retailing and their likely impact on secondary shopping areas
10. The total budget allocated was £100,000, to be split equally between the immediate measures and the study, and equally between the two Secondary Shopping Centres – Front Street, Acomb and The Village, Haxby.
11. The Haxby project mirrors the Acomb project, and therefore a separate report will be taken to the Executive Member in the summer 2022 noting the outcomes of the engagement and consultants report and also noting the delivery of the immediate measures in line with the original approval.
12. Since the July 2018 approval, the delivery of the immediate measures and progressing with the study was delayed due to Covid, with the consultants PWP Design Ltd and their multi-disciplinary partners beginning work on the Future of Acomb Front Street in March 2021.

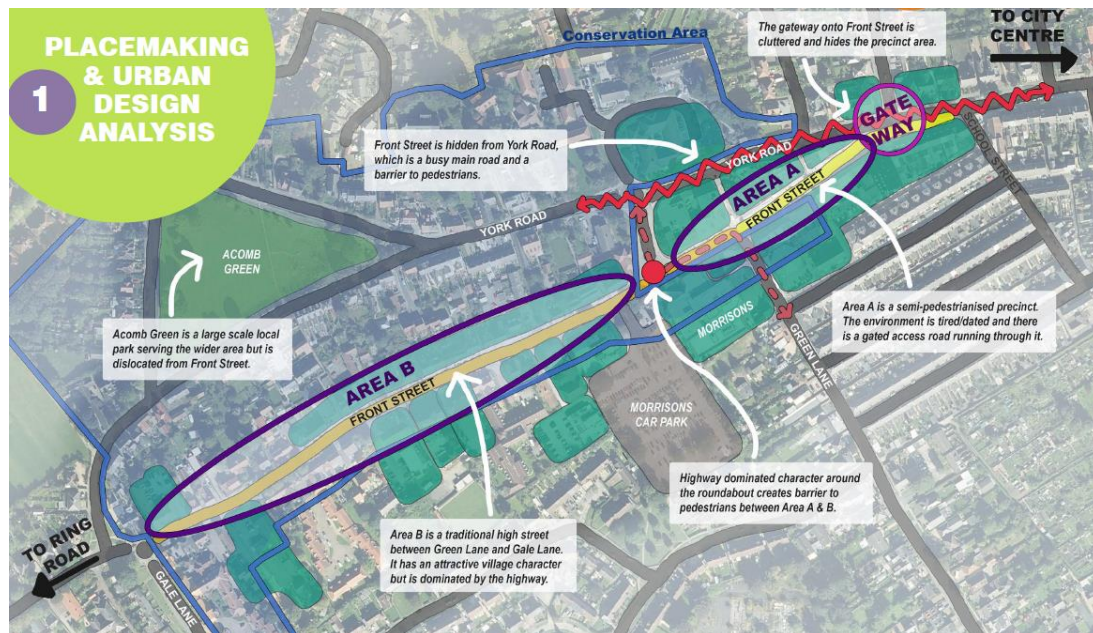
Acomb Front Street Consultants Study

13. Consultants PWP Design Ltd and their multi-disciplinary partners were appointed following a competitive tender process and began work on the Future of Acomb Front Street in March 2021, engaging residents and the business community, to obtain their views about the area, and to ask for their ideas, input and suggestions for change.
14. In addition to the feedback from the engagement, the consultants carried out an assessment of the public realm and street layout; consideration of the current access provision; and proposed a range of ideas for further exploration that could drive footfall and improve the vibrancy of the area to support economic sustainability.
15. The ideas proposed included a mix of short term pop-ups, and the design principles for longer term improvements to the street scape and public realm, identifying further feasibility, design and engagement work that would be required to bring these to fruition.
16. This initial consultation and ideas stage is the first stage of the regeneration process. The next stage requires refinement of ideas taking in to consideration the technical implications and feasibility studies. This leads on to the creation of a masterplan and delivery, subject to external funding.



Public and Stakeholder engagement outcomes

17. The purpose of the engagement was to understand the public opinion of Front Street from the point of view of local residents, businesses and visitors to the area.
18. Respondents were asked to share their ideas and suggestions as to what they would change to the area to increase its attractiveness and drive footfall.
19. An accessible mixed-method survey for residents/ shoppers and businesses was used, and separate targeted questionnaires for each cohort. The questionnaires were available online and in paper-based formats to allow for greatest reach into the community. Participants were also invited to draw their ideas.
20. Aside from the standard profiling questions, key topics included:
 - The local built environment and public realm
 - Safety and anti-social behaviour
 - Range of shops and amenities
 - Parking
 - Transport and travel
 - Individual, personal aspirations for the local area
21. The survey questions and responses are detailed in the presentation appended to this report **in Annex A**.
22. There was a good level of engagement, with over 1,200 responses recorded, and 32 businesses participating. This produced a broad range of views, often differing opinions between residents, shoppers and businesses.
23. Opinions and behaviours have been impacted by the pandemic and are reflected in this feedback.
24. Front Street was divided into two for the purposes of the survey – Area A is the semi-pedestrianised area, and Area B is the area up to the roundabout on Gale Lane. This is indicated on the image below extracted from the consultant's report:



25. Overall, 43% of respondents spoke highly of Front Street, with the greengrocers being cited as one of the best things about Front Street, closely followed by the good mix of shops and services and the convenience to them.
26. Businesses also cited parking as being one of the best things about Front Street, with 37% of businesses believing it would not be possible for their customers to walk or cycle to Front Street. The majority of residents and visitors that responded to the survey (85%) do travel to Front Street on foot.
27. Only 23% of respondents were actually critical of Front Street, with 26% feeling that the area was 'scruffy', with a rundown appearance. There being too many charity shops and bookmakers were also cited as being the 'worst thing' about Front Street.
28. Covid had a very mixed impact on peoples' behaviour with an equal proportion increasing their usage of Front Street to those decreasing their usage. Again a real mix in reasons given from shielding and online shopping to deliberately shopping locally, and incorporating a visit to Front Street as part of their daily exercise.
29. Looking to the future, the main vision for Front Street coming from businesses was to improve the appearance of the area, particularly with the planting of flowers and trees and the creation of a seating area. Some of the other aspirations were around reduced ASB, removal of traffic and increasing the variety of shops (particularly independent

ones). A number of businesses in Area A expressed an interest in spilling out their businesses onto the paved area in front of their premises.

30. The following were cited across all groups as being the top ideas for driving footfall and attracting more people to visit more frequently:
 - a. more variety in the offer particularly shops and food and drink
 - b. offering both in the day and night time
 - c. more activities such as markets or fitness classes
31. Although the engagement highlighted a perception of decline in the area, in the past year there has been a range of new businesses opening in the area, continuing to provide a varied offer:
 - Bluebird Bakery – Sept 2021
 - Heron Foods – Dec 2021
 - Wine Bar – due to open Summer 2022
 - Nail Bar (proposed)

Future of Acomb Front Street – Consultants' Report

32. The Future of Acomb Front Street report is appended in **Annex B**
33. The ideas contained within the report take into consideration the feedback from the engagement, and also an assessment of the public realm and street layout, and consideration of the current access provision.
34. It should be noted that the views expressed by both residents and businesses were broad and sometimes contradictory. The ideas presented by the consultants encompass all views and do not attempt to address such contradictions. Any future analysis of these proposals would need to address these.
35. The main aim of the ideas is to drive footfall and improving the vibrancy of the area to support the economic sustainability and growth.
36. The ideas looked at particularly areas of Front Street, of which there are 10 (see **Annex B** for full report, including graphics). These ideas would all require refinement, including further feasibility and design work, and public and stakeholder engagement to understand the support for

particular ideas and the impact of these on individuals and businesses. Any decision to move to engage on these ideas following feasibility work would be made by the Executive Member for Economy and Place.

37. As set out in the next section, there is a small amount of capital budget remaining that will be used to deliver some of the public realm improvements mentioned in the report. This is complimented by the work already undertaken by the Public Realm team to maintain the area.
38. Some of the ideas proposed are for the council to take a facilitator role to support businesses to improve the area around their own businesses. As set out in the section below, this is something that the council are keen to facilitate.
39. A couple of the ideas proposed to improve the public realm and open up the arrival point would impact on access and parking in the area. The feedback in the engagement was mixed regarding creating a car free environment. These ideas would need to be subject to technical review, and further engagement to fully understand the desire for achieving it and the impact this would have. There are no plans to remove blue badge parking or fully pedestrianise Front Street.

Delivering immediate improvements

40. The £50k budget allocated to Acomb through the Secondary Shopping Centres fund was made up of £37,500 revenue funding and £12,500 capital funding.
41. There were a number of immediate measures identified in the report aimed at improving footfall and the street scenes in Acomb in addition to the public engagement on the future of the area.
42. The projects identified were as follows:
 - a. Increasing footfall to Acomb Front Street
 - i. At Christmas (2018) – **Christmas lights**
 - ii. In the Summer (2018, and 2019 if successful) – **ADAM Festival**
 - b. Improving the street scene on Acomb Front Street
 - i. **Planters**
 - ii. **Recycling area improvements**
 - c. Improving wayfinding on Acomb Front Street

Revenue Funding - £37.5k

43. The £37.5k allocated revenue funding has been used to deliver the elements detailed below, in addition to £5,700 of DCLG Community Clean up funding and £6,064 funding through wider Economy and Regeneration budgets.

Revenue spend on Acomb Front Street through Project (£37.5k Budget)	
Engagement and Consultant Report	£20,630
Christmas Lights:	
2018	£3,664
2019	£3,486
2020	£4,964
2021	£4,446
Acomb Music and Dance Festival	£5,000
Street scene works by council Blacksmiths	£1,024
Flower Tubs	£350
Recycling area improvements	£4,500
Acomb Alive	£1,200
Total Spend	£49,264
<i>Secondary Shopping Centre Fund</i>	<i>£37,500</i>
<i>DCLG Community Clean Up Fund</i>	<i>£5,700</i>
<i>Economy and Regeneration Budgets</i>	<i>£6,064</i>

44. The additional Economy and Regeneration budgets enabled Christmas tree lights to be funded in 2020 and 2021.
45. It is important to note that, there is no further identified council funding for future Christmas lights in our secondary centres. The city centre Christmas lights are funded by the BID, not by the council.

Capital Funding - £12,500

46. Of the capital funding element of the project. £5,194 has been used to install brackets for the Christmas lights.
47. There is still however c.£7k of capital funding in the budget, which is proposed to be used to deliver a number of the short term project ideas proposed in the consultant's report.

Additional short term capital improvements for immediate delivery

48. Responding to feedback from the engagement and the ideas emerging from the consultant's report a number of additional immediate works have been identified for delivery to be delivered with the remaining capital funding.
49. These projects include:
 - a. Install a **"gateway sign"** setting an arrival point to Front Street and promoting events such as the market
 - b. Working with community groups to **paint murals** on the boards installed on the side of the toilet block building, this will improve the welcoming nature of the pedestrian and cycle link
 - c. Improve **wayfinding signage** linking key parking locations to Front Street
50. We are also proposing to engage with businesses along Front Street to increase awareness of the opportunities and potential impact of **utilising the outdoor space adjacent to their businesses**. We will work with Highways and Licensing to pull together an information pack outlining what can be done and the route to doing so.
51. In addition to these projects funded by the remaining budget, there is also work being undertaken by the Council's Public Realm and Highways teams which are contributing to the overall improvement to the area.
52. The following have either been delivered, are proposed for delivery or being monitored for future works:
 - a. Weeds removed outside the toilets, in the lane between the toilets and Boyes building/William House and in Back Lane - **completed November 2021**

- b. Varnishing of benches on Front Street – **Completing spring 2022, funded through ARG**
- c. Tree bases (x 4) – Infill tree bases with bark – **Completing Spring 2022**
- d. **Redundant lampposts** to be removed
- e. **Damaged bollards and other highways furniture including cycle racks** on Front Street – these are being reviewed and scheduled for replacement
- f. **Loose and cracked paving** referred to highways inspector as a reactive safety risk and will be inspected urgently.

Investment around Acomb Front Street

- 53. There are also a number of projects investing funding in Acomb which will benefit Acomb Front Street through improving access routes and supporting footfall in the area.
- 54. **Acomb Library Investment** - £0.5m has been earmarked for Acomb library and the land to the rear, subject to the detailed proposals, this will be used to:
 - Improve the library and café area;
 - Improve car parking, increase the provision of cycle parking and introduce electric scooters/bikes;
 - Explore co-location opportunities with partners for resident drop in services;
 - Create a community garden using the land at the rear
- 55. The proposals at the library are a significant benefit to the area, contributing to an increase in footfall and ensuring a mix of uses with the community and leisure offer.
- 56. **Active Travel Funded Cycle Route** - £200k has been earmarked in the Active Travel Fund budget to deliver a complete cycle route from the Fox pub in Holgate to Beckfield Lane in Acomb, improving connectivity to Acomb Front Street.
- 57. The provision and location of cycle parking facilities will be reviewed to ensure the benefits of the route are maximised.
- 58. This cycle route is a significant benefit to Front Street, widening the catchment of Acomb Front Street to encourage and maintain footfall beyond relying on residents in the vicinity.

59. **TSAR Upgrade** - There are upgrade works planned for the existing signalised crossing at the cross roads of Green Lane and Front Street, estimated to cost £20k.

Future opportunities to delivering longer term ideas

60. In order to realise some of the bolder ideas contained in the report, significant additional design and feasibility work.
61. Unless a delivery budget is set aside internally, producing a masterplan for the area would be done at risk without any certainty of funding to deliver the scheme and requiring further engagement without a budget to implement the plan.
62. There are a number of internal and external sources of funding that could be secured in the future to deliver a wider regeneration project, including:
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund
 - York's Devolution Place Ask
 - Levelling Up Fund Round 2
 - Unspent or new s106 funding (subject to such funds being available/permissible for use for such purposes pursuant to the respective provisions of respective S.106 Agreements)
 - Capital investment allocations in future council budgets
63. It is proposed that Acomb Front Street is considered for inclusion under the most appropriate of these different funding opportunities when the bidding criteria is announced.
64. There is also the opportunity for the local businesses and community groups to implement some of the smaller scale projects and ideas, with the council facilitating through its regulatory roles. This is often how the city centre initiatives are taken forward, with organisations and businesses such as the York Business Improvement District and the Minster playing a key role in delivery with the council in its regulatory role facilitate the delivery of key projects. The council will be reactive to proposals coming forward by traders and businesses in the Acomb area.

Council Plan

65. The study in the Acomb Front Street area, along with the findings and subsequent proposals for the area align to the following principles in the City of York Council Plan 2019 – 2023 *Making History, Building Communities* are:

- Well-paid jobs and an inclusive economy
- A greener and cleaner city
- Getting around sustainably
- Good health and wellbeing
- Safe communities and culture for all
- Creating homes and world-class infrastructure

Implications

66. The report must demonstrate that all relevant implications of the proposals have been considered. All the following sub-headings should be included. Where a sub-heading is not relevant, this should be indicated by a brief sentence under the title; e.g. “There are no legal implications”. Report authors are advised to contact the relevant Head of Department at an early stage if their report is likely to have significant implications under any of these sub-headings.

- **Financial** – The report details expenditure that has been applied against the £100k allocation for secondary shopping centres approved in budgets that have been allocated to the secondary shopping areas in May 2017. The original capital budget of £100k was amended to £75k revenue and £25k capital at Executive in June 2018. There are no ongoing financial implications arising from the recommendations in the report.
- **Human Resources (HR)** - *There are no human resources implications*
- **One Planet Council / Equalities** – Equalities Impact Assessment in Annex C
- **Legal:**

Contracts & Procurement – Any further services, works or supplies required as part of the next stage of the project to create and ultimately deliver a masterplan for Acomb Front Street must be commissioned in

accordance with a robust procurement strategy that complies with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules, as well as (where applicable) the Council's regulatory obligations under the Public Contract Regulations 2015 (and in time the Procurement Bill, which is likely to come into force (at the time of writing) in 2023). Advice should be sought from Procurement and Legal services to ensure compliant procurement exercises are carried out and appropriate contractual terms and conditions are entered into.

External Funding – Any external funding arrangements will be subject to paragraphs 6 to 8 of Part E of the Council's Financial Regulations. Further, Legal Services must be consulted during the application/Business Case stage of any external funding applications to assess any grant funding terms and conditions and to advise upon any implications under the UK Subsidy Control Regime (what was formerly known as State Aid Law).

Highways – It is noted that some of the proposals include:

- improvements to existing highways, pedestrian routes, and cycle routes; and
- repairs to and/or removal of existing street furniture and/or signage; and
- the possibility of local businesses on Front Street using outdoor space adjacent to their businesses on the public highway (e.g. outdoor seating for local bars and/or cafés; outdoor stalls/displays for local retail; etc.)

As well as the procurement implications above, Legal advice must be sought in due course if, for example, any changes to existing or additional Traffic Regulation Orders are required to facilitate such works or alternative use of the existing highway.

Licensing – Further to highways implications above, any proposal to allow local businesses on Front Street using outdoor space adjacent to their businesses on the public highway will require input from Legal Services to ensure that appropriate licensing arrangements are put in place.

Property – It is noted that some of the proposals will require collaboration with third party landowners, and access to their property, in particular with Morrison's (e.g. the proposals to transform the Morrison's ramp and space in to a landscape feature and pop up kiosk;

to work with Morrison's and other community groups and businesses to improve the pedestrian environment around Morrison's store and car park; potential creation of a network of "pocket parks" with the collaborations of local businesses such as Morrison's, Acomb WMC, Explore Libraries, etc.). Any arrangements for access to, or the acquisition of ownership of or rights over any third party owned land will need to be negotiated with the relevant landowner(s) and will require advice from Legal Services and Property Services.

- **Crime and Disorder** - there are no crime and disorder implications
- **Information Technology (IT)** – there are no IT implications
- **Property** – there are no property implications at present
- **Other** – there are no other implications at this time.

Risk Management

67. The inclusion of Acomb Front Street in any future funding bid will need careful consideration to ensure it fits the bid criteria. It is likely that it would need to form part of wider funding bids given the size and scale of the available funding routes, and would only be able to be included if it fit the criteria and did not undermine the success of the broader funding ask. The most likely successful route is UK Shared Prosperity Fund but all options will be considered.

Contact Details

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Report

Approved



Date 07/04/2022

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Wards Affected: Acomb, Westfield

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

Enhancing Economic Growth for Secondary Shopping areas.

Considered by the Executive Member for Economic Development and Community
Engagement on 3rd July 2018

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/documents/s124616/Report.pdf>

Annexes

Annex A – Public Engagement Findings
Annex B – Future of Front Street Consultants' Report
Annex C – Equalities Impact Assessment