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| MEETING | WESTFIELD WARD COMMITTEE |
| DATE | 28 FEBRUARY 2024 |
| PRESENT | COUNCILLORS COLES, NELSON AND WALLER |
| APOLOGIES | COUNCILLORS |

1. **AN UPDATE ON ACOMB FRONT STREET**

Cllr Lomas welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Part 1 - Statement from What a Load of Bollards (WALOB) campaign group

We are from the What a Load of Bollards group which was formed the day after, to quote: "Acomb woke to find £400,000 had been squandered on a half paved High Street and 138 bollards." This was from Rachael Maskell MP during a session in the House of Lords where she demanded a parliamentary scrutiny into the "misuse" of the government money which was awarded to Acomb for the purpose of regeneration.

We also represent the official Friends of Front Street group – I am the Communications officer and Carla is the Chair – and Carla is also the Treasurer of the Greater Acomb Forum, so while we realise you will be gathering many different views from the community in your surveys and drop in sessions, we believe we can fairly represent interested members of these groups who will be directly affected by what happens next on Front St.

As we have been so deeply involved from the start and part of every public meeting and many discussions and conversations with various councillors and council officers (as well as providing a great deal of press coverage), we can confidently say that while moving positively, unfortunately we don't believe the new list of interventions proposed by the council to - another quote, this time from Cllr Peter Kilbane: - "sort out the mess on Front Street" – show that enough lessons have been learned. We used the term "shopping list" at our last presentation to the Council Executive and council officers liked this term. But we did not mean it as a list of essential items. To us, the list you present today is like a supermarket trolley dash: grabbing at random goodies and looking for ways to use up large amounts of money on anything that catches your eye.

When we learned the remainder of the government regeneration money would be awarded back to us to sort out Front Street, we asked, as we have always asked, as the original £20,000 consultation asked, for one level high street and a welcoming open community space. A design-led initiative where people can walk freely, mingle, chat, meet, drink coffee outside, socialise, enjoy markets in an attractive pedestrian-friendly urban space. We were told £570,000 was not enough money to achieve this so we began to show examples of other areas in the UK where this has been done and suggesting creative and inexpensive ways where it could be done. Pivotal is removing all the bollards and being brave enough to tackle the pointless road where, already, vehicles may not travel during the day. We asked that it be filled in with a very committed eye to making this completely traffic free in the future - but this was dismissed.

We see several complex half attempts to address it with raised tables while the bulk of the money is set aside for lots of trimmings and unnecessary add-ons adding more clutter and still ignoring a central vision and creative outlook for this overlooked corner of the city.

With these proposals locals will still have a restricted space built entirely round protecting a largely unused road - but with £30k worth of signs to direct local people to places they already know how to get to. A £30k gateway at the wrong end of the street (most people approach from Acomb not Holgate), £42,000 worth of posh toilets – though these are available in the library, the Gateway Centre, Morrisons and all the Front St cafes - oh, and £110k on parking areas and yet more on seats outside a very unattractive building with a view of a busy road and a hairdressers.

Again, we see these as hugely expensive trimmings distracting from the real work that needs to be done. The bollards need to go – ALL the bollards – the road needs to be on one easy level for free movement for all. We know that makes the council nervous so, for now, divide up the street with paved crossing areas, put a stop to the cars who do not need to use the road at all and simply allow deliveries and disabled vehicles access during the existing time restrictions (or greater time restrictions please!) while giving energetic and serious action towards a completely traffic-free street in the near future. We believe Shared Use would work well here and are disappointed that officers seem to have many answers as to why this is not possible and none that show serious thought has gone into its consideration.

We still have hope that the council will begin to really listen and work with us instead of coming up with its own solutions and then holding public sessions asking people to like what they have already decided upon. Show this community that you are able to deliver long term, effective sustainable change that really means something for the future of Front Street! Thank you. Cllr Lomas – thanked WALOB group and welcomed the opportunity to work with the community and build upon the collective passion for placemaking. Great to see so many people attending, sharing their thoughts and participating in the conversation.

Part 2 - Presentation from City of York Council Regeneration Team

Head of Regeneration, David Warburton

- Thanked everyone for coming and for the WALOB group participating and keeping in touch with council. Agenda this evening is about phase 2. Presentation on screen
- Context and history of phase 1 detailed: UK Shared Prosperity Funding - £395k to Front Street. Money granted from Government and had timeframe wherein it needed to be spent by March 2023. Addressed concerns from previous consultation including uneven paving and illegal parking. Cars parked all over Front Street was continuously raised as a concern (photos shown)
- Barriers faced during phase 1 included land ownership within shopping area, where some of the land is privately owned highway rather than council adopted land. This meant that council was unable to repave some areas within the tight timeframe.
- 2021 Future of Acomb Front Street study contained emerging ideas towards a longer-term vision for Front Street.
- Phase 1 summary – Significant investment in the condition of Front Street including new cycle racks, new accessible seating in partnership with Access Officer at CYC, new paving, new crossings, and bollards to protect new paving and to prevent cars driving over/ damaging the new pavement/ minimise long-term maintenance and upkeep costs
- Phase 2 ideas are not fixed, open to conversations, opportunity to influence best way to use funding.
- Brought two external local urban designers on board as critical friends to the project, to challenge our thinking, help us link with

Future of Acomb Front Street work and think more creatively with the Phase 2 ideas (Andy from Urban Glow Design in attendance).

Regeneration Project Delivery Officer, Julie Stormont-Dauber

- We have spent the last year listening, welcoming different views, spoken with and challenged by stakeholders, council technical officers and urban design expertise.
- £570k funding for Phase 2 for Front Street – current engagement wants to understand community priorities for that funding, and use feedback to inform the final design in the best way we can for Front Street and the community. This funding will not deliver everything, we. We can't deliver everything with this Phase 2 funding or timeframe, but we want to work with community and understand your placemaking priorities, and establish a first step towards shared longer term aspirations.
- Phase 1 used feedback from residents and the 2018 consultation from Acomb and Westfield Neighbourhood Plan, and the 2020 Future of Acomb Front Street consultation.
- Phase 2 ideas have reflected these, and also the 2023 WALOB petition responses: removal of bollards, trees and planters, level pavement, more seating, welcoming and accessible, street designed for people, not cars.
- Phase 2 aims – people-friendly space, family friendly accessible destination, improve visitor experience so people to stay longer and increase footfall, and get more out of their visit to Acomb, reduce vehicle dominance in the street, create a 'wow' entrance – sign saying Front Street, build upon Acomb's character and personality, decluttering the street including removing some of the bollards, new wide generous pedestrian crossings, more accessible blue badge parking.
- Timeline
 - Council Executive's decision 20/02/24 to commence public engagement
 - Engagement for 4 weeks to 24 March 2024 – test ideas, feedback will further inform and shape the final design
 - April-June 2024 analysis of feedback and inform detailed design
 - Summer 2024 – detailed design and costings reported to Executive to commence delivery

- Four key elements:
 1. Enhancing the high street
 2. Creating more accessible destination
 3. Extending the benefits beyond the high street
 4. Longer term aspirations

1. Enhancing the high street

- Welcome gateway – sociable/ sculptural seating, add character, colourful and social meeting places, new tree/ planting, declutter space and take out any unnecessary bollards, a new 6m wide generous level wide-paved crossing, wayfinding sign/ welcome totem would be to welcome new visitors and help people navigate, improve blue-badge parking
- Central space – people-friendly, accessible, wide middle raised table as a central hub – potential pop-up seating/ planters in the short term to frame the space and activate the area, as well as investigate future use by cafes/businesses (subject to permission from private land owners), review bollards
- Aim for a third raised tables outside the Gateway Centre – these are wide pedestrian crossings, flush to the pavement, to create a more pedestrian friendly feel to the shopping area by day, and by night a 20mph speed limit is required for the raised tables, making it safer when the road is open.
- Significant reduction in bollards on both sides.
- Imminent high street activity – market operator approached the council/ Make It York for a three-month trial market: 16th March, 20th April, 18th May.
- Toilets – standard toilet is out of action. Will deliver two unisex accessible toilets, including baby changing (by June 2024) to compliment making the space more usable/ accessible. Used by drivers, residents, businesses.

2. Creating a more accessible destination

- Make blue badge access more accessible, 6 accessible blue badge spaces instead of 7 non-compliant spaces (subject to Road Safety Audit) – near Halifax bank, Cross Street, School Street
- Resurface Cross Street to make pedestrian and cycle route wider/ safer route to toilets

3. Extending the benefits beyond the high street

- Wayfinding signs - encourage new people/ visitors into the area, or residents who don't currently use Front Street. Could include welcome 'gateway' sign(s).
- Public art / identity
 - Celebrate community identity and community spirit
 - Vibrant and colourful
 - Checking permissions for public art option – toilet block/Working Men's Club/Morrisons/local businesses
- New crossing and seating - connect main shopping area with older part of Front Street to make crossing safer for pedestrians, and add more seating near Working Men's Club

4. Longer term aspirations

- Need to understand whole community's desire to pedestrianize street – feasibility study to consult with residents and businesses.
- Pop-up trials to test community use within the shopping area (subject to landowner agreement) and work with landowners to explore options/ potential future adoption of the privately owned highway.
- Better connections between the two areas of Front Street (shopping area to the old village/ Explore), more to do on costs and feasibility for further pedestrian improvements.

5. Use of the Road

- Various traffic regulation orders are in place (table showing times and types of access permitted).
 - Access is restricted when the traffic gate is closed
 - Road is open to vehicles for loading and unloading, and blue badge parking in the morning and afternoon
 - Road is open to all users 6pm – 8am and Sundays
- Any changes to vehicle access would require extensive consultation, and is likely to include a public enquiry (if leading to further restriction on access) which would take longer than the Phase 2 funding timeframe. We want to understand peoples views on access/ pedestrianisation in Phase 2, and make sure that any work done now doesn't preclude potential further changes in the future.
- Acomb is unique in having the traffic gate as a physical restriction. In comparison the city centre is difficult to walk through on a morning as parking is not restricted in the same way.

6. Ways to get involved

- Online survey takes 10-15 minutes, asks thoughts on each potential idea, includes photographs and visual prompts, asks user their priorities – survey deadline is 24th March 2024.
- 4 drop-in sessions – today and tomorrow at Gateway Centre, Acomb Explore library next Thursday 7th March, and at Gateway Centre 16th March to coincide with the first market.
- More info on website www.york.gov.uk/AcombFrontStreet

Please help us to share the survey link far and wide. The options discussed today are ideas – not plans. The feedback will shape the final design, with delivery due to start in September.

Part 3 - Discussion & Questions

Cllr Lomas noted that she was part of Acomb Neighbourhood Plan some years ago, who identified the need to join up and connect the two sections of Front Street, where the two roundabouts physically separate ‘old Front Street’ and ‘new Front Street’. People don’t continue on from one part to the other, and this reduces footfall to businesses further down the street.

Question 1: Did you ask landowners about adoption of whole precinct in Phase 1?

No, there was not enough time to deliver this in Phase 1 between December 2022 and March 2023.

Question 2: Heard about the market trial, get the sense that we will be able to use the space in different ways in the future, reducing the bollards is an important step towards a multifunctional space. Front Street is blessed with a flat pavement, compared to Parliament Street, but the design is still led by the road. We want to create Acomb Festival. Phase 2 should create a dynamic space for community activity e.g. anchor spot for tent or fair.

Noted – discussed below.

Question 3: Some of us like the bollards, and this means council spend less money on repairing pavements. Better pavements mean less falling. Moving a pedestrian crossing would not go down well with residents if it is too near the

houses (zebra crossing location objected to by residents). How do people who get off the bus at Green Lane and then access the doctors? People park at Morrisons and then have to cross multiple roads to get to The Garth.

Noted.

Question 4: It all seems to be down to deliverability/ conduit for officers to enact. The resolutions don't allow Acomb to have aims. Rather than seeking landowner permission, should get business people to work with you to deliver the new measures. How many businesses are here/ have you reached? Can we ringfence money to give us more time to deliver what we want? Can there be collaboration with local businesses? Although there are time restrictions, would it be better to have more time and deliver a stronger scheme?

The funding deadline is March 2025. We note and understand your frustration/ feelings that this project has been hurried. The money is from Central Government / Treasury and comes with spending deadlines/ regulations. Unfortunately, we cannot ringfence money. We therefore want to create a list of things the community wants to see happen ("oven ready projects") so that we can respond quickly and appropriately in the future if more funding were to become available.

Question 5: What is a raised table? What does it look like?

A wide level pedestrian crossing, flush with the pavement. Like a long wide speed bump. Cost estimate includes conservation spec materials, likely to be paved rather than tarmac. Create a feel that the car is a guest in a pedestrian space.

So cars can go over paving? Depends on things such as foundations and servicing underneath paving.

Question 6: Can there be a very long raised table across the whole street? WALOB want a blank canvas, a level space with no cars. The road is unnecessary and does not allow people to naturally evolve and do what we want to do. We want market, artists, pavement cafes and planters, but they can come later. Give us the space and the community creativity will follow.

A shared/ level surface is unsafe for anyone blind or partially sighted who use kerb to help navigate safely. Currently we do not plan to change access/ traffic regulation orders in the shopping area, or to fully pedestrianise it – this takes research, time, further funding, consultation and if anyone objected then it

would need a full public inquiry. We know that some businesses would not support pedestrianizing the street, and therefore we propose to start to look at feasibility and options, and what people need and want at this stage, i.e. to start the conversation.

For comparison, Parliament Street is a pedestrianised area at certain times of day, but it still has the street though at HSBC side for traffic at certain times of day.

Question 7: Can these proposals be realistically achieved within £570,000?

Slide with cost estimates put back on screen.

Question 8: Resident understood that whilst some things sound nice to do, or are nice ideas, but asked how will each part be decided? Consultation is expensive – does the survey ask whether people would like pedestrianisation in the future? Does the survey ask about artwork?

Yes – the survey content was explained.

Question 9: Does the survey disaggregate lumped costings?

Yes, the survey breaks down costs and covers each topic such as wayfinding and art separately.

Question 10: Is there time to change the design after the survey feedback and deliver it?

Yes - slide with timeline put back on screen.

Question 11: How can car use be deterred? Are there any minor changes that can act as disincentives for drivers passing through Front Street? Low priority for traffic lights at end? Prohibit left turn?

The existing traffic regulation orders that are in place were explained, including only unloading and loading vehicles at certain times.

Further temporary traffic regulation orders could be made, like the market trial, to close the street for trial festival/ events, to test how/ if people would use the space.

Question 12: Could the road be blocked off at one end? Allow access, but in/ out same way?

This would still require consultation as it is a change of the way a highway is used. Some vehicles would need a large turning circle.

Question 13: What do you mean by “non-abortive costs”?

Abortive work or costs refers to work that has been carried out, but is no longer needed, and will not form part of the final scheme. Undoing a piece of work, results in paying twice. Bollards alone did not cost £400k, the resurfacing and paving was the majority of the cost.

Question 14: How much will it cost to remove the bollards? Can they be sold/ relocated?

The cost estimate for removal of the bollards is £40,000. They would be re-used elsewhere in the city.

Question 15: Sense the potential to reclaim a human space over vehicles in the long term, and an opportunity to test how the space could be used, such as the market x3 trial dates. Curious as to whether there is an ambition to test this beyond the market, to get feedback on what might be possible in the future to continue the ambition and build consensus where possible? (e.g. Bilbao art spaces commissioning work/ bids from local artists)

We can trial things and bring things back - such as the market. The operator sought out the market space – if the three-month trial is successful, it can continue. We would like to look at other ways to use the space too. Can apply for Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders to close the street for events/ markets (approx. £750, for up to a year).

Discussion of concept tactical urbanism, experimenting with using places, ‘Try before you buy’ with the street as the canvas.

Question 16: Legislation 1959 Consolidated Corporation Act, adopted in Leeds and gives extra power/ flexibility on roads/ parking on verges or pavement. Several acts of parliament have not been enacted around the country and should be looked at.

Not aware of that legislation.

Resident noted that Guide Dogs Association campaigns against pavement parking.

Question 17: Part of the highway isn’t owned by the highways authority. Local authority can consider adopting it, or can serve notice to require owners to fulfil their duty to bring paving up to standard. If owners don’t do it, the local authority can do it and claim money back from the

owner. Has thought been given to adopting the private land owned? (Former highways lawyer)

There is lots of legal complexity. The paved area in front of some of the shops is designated as highway, i.e. with a right-of-way over it, but it is not adopted and maintained by the council. The owner has a duty to keep highway in good order and condition. It is not always the business owner that owns the land/ property.

We did explore adopting it, but it would have taken significant chunk of the Phase 2 money to bring the remaining paved area up to an adoptable standard before council would take on the liability for all repair and maintenance in perpetuity. And the process is quite lengthy. We did not feel it would meet the current brief of what the community want to see happen on Front street in Phase 2.

Question 18: Excited about the proposals and like the ambition of them. Would like to see more focus on art/ greenery and sustainable options. Significant cost to remove bollards - seek to balance with alternatives, such as reinforced planters/ trees, to find a solution that meets both the aesthetic and the safety brief.

We acknowledge that there are currently too many bollards, and that benches, trees, planters and bins could also be used to deter parking on pavements.

We want to harness the enthusiasm of the community, including art and murals, can bring high impact for a relatively low cost, e.g. utility boxes could be painted to create an art trail by local artists.

Question 19: Great to see wayfinding and identity included in the ideas. Greater Acomb Community Forum have created a logo/ icon for the wider area that could be implemented into the wayfinding/ mural or art work to create an identity that the whole community can be united under. Happy to share into the Front Street project.

Great idea for logo and community identity to come from the community – open to all ideas at this stage/ seeking wider thoughts from the community.

Question 20: Need to give people with wheelchairs, pushchairs, mobility aids/ walking frames longer to cross the road at traffic lights.

Noted.

Question 21: How wide will the raised tables be?

Crossing A is 6m wide, B would be at 7.5m (restricted by gullies), C also at 6m wide. They would have new pedestrian friendly surfacing and tactile paving at the edges for blind or partially sighted users.

Question 22: Could the central space/ raised table be used to host a marquee? Will there be access to infrastructure such as electrics and marquee anchors to facilitate events such as stalls/ fair/ pop-up music band/ events/ community use in the future?

The issue is that the raised table is a crossing, and the highway needs to be accessible for emergency vehicles at all times/ cannot be obstructed, but we note the appetite from residents and councillors for flexible-use space in the vicinity/ could frame / sit beside the space. A pop-up water and power outlet would cost approximately £15-20k. This has not been costed currently into initial ideas, but is something that could be looked at if it was a community priority or if further funding were to become available.

Question 23: If people respond to consultation to say most people want to get rid of the road through the middle and create a new space? Could we move deliveries to the layby near toilets to help businesses load/ unload? Why waste this money now when we will need more in 2 years? Funding on Phase 1 bollards to be undone in Phase 2, will we need to undo Phase 2 raised tables in Phase 3? Do we have time to change Phase 2 now? We need a 10 year plan and a plan of how we get there, not a bit by bit approach. Would plans still go ahead even if survey outcome indicates people want full pedestrianisation? How would it be sustainable with timings and resident wishes.

If the vast majority of survey respondents ask for fully pedestrianised street, we would ensure that we construct something that would not prevent or obstruct future pedestrianisation. Residents views will be heard.

Cllr Lomas reminded residents about the need for longer term plans too. We can't achieve everything now, but we do want to spend the money we have now in Acomb. The big challenge is that we don't want to interrupt any future plans, but still want to be able to use the investment in Acomb in the best way that we can.

Question 24: Have you approached Morrisons for funding to address how their building breaks up Front Street into 2 parts. They need to support and take responsibility for their building breaking up new and old Front Street/ hostile infrastructure/ character of site.

Morrisons are in support of what we want to do in the community and are open to ideas. We are in conversation with them, and we have communication channels open.

Cllr Lomas – residents or “Friends of” group could approach Morrisons community fund, approach them to contribute to whole effort.

Resident responded that it could be good for Morrisons business too.

Question 25: Do we need wayfinding?

Wayfinding signage aims to bring more people into Acomb from wider area, signpost links to library, car parking, park, shops etc. to use the space, support businesses, add vibrancy.

People that shop in Front Street aren’t necessarily from the Acomb area. Signs could help them find their way around, and present a more welcoming place to people who do not use the area.

Question 26: Businesses still need to be able to operate, we would not want them to feel pushed out or have to change their business model.

We need to ensure we speak to businesses and landowners about what they need from the street and whether pedestrianisation might help or hinder them. We don’t want to drive shops or business away or make life more difficult for them. We need to understand the opportunities and challenges, and see what options there are.

We held a zoom call with Acomb Alive businesses for Phase 1, and have spoken to them about when is the best way and best time to come and talk to us, to suit their schedules. We have programmed meetings and drop-in events at different times.

Part 4 – Next steps

Question 27: Will there be a follow up meeting?

There will be another joint ward committee with the council team, businesses and residents before the council’s Executive are presented the final scheme in the summer for approval.

Cllr Lomas thanked everyone for coming, their patience, their time and for taking part.

8:40pm meeting close.

, Chair

[The meeting started at Time Not Specified and finished at Time Not Specified].