



Meeting:	Executive Member Decision Session
Meeting date:	20 th Feb 2024
Report of:	Neil Ferris
Portfolio of:	Cllr Kilbane Executive Member for Economy and Transport

Decision Report:

Acomb Front Street Phase 2 – open public engagement on costed designs and ideas for the scheme.

Subject of Report

1. This report sets out the ambition and potential scope of phase 2 improvement works to Acomb Front Street, for public engagement.
2. Front Street is a key secondary shopping centre within the City of York Council area. The ambition and proposed delivery approach will promote economic growth and help to develop a unique local high street environment by enhancing its character and sense of place to promote diverse community use. Proposals respond to the 2021 Future of Acomb Front Street Study (AFS), and a petition submitted to Full Council in July 2023, following completion of the phase 1 works.
3. The 2021 Future of Acomb Front Street Study outlined 10 emerging ideas. The majority of which were long term ideas (10-

15years) which would require further feasibility and viability work prior progression.

4. The purpose of this report is to seek approval to undertake open public engagement on costed designs and ideas for the scheme based on the project approach outlined below.
5. The potential phase 2 elements are set out, with estimated costings alongside. The engagement process to be followed will ensure all businesses and residents and have an opportunity to contribute during the planned engagement period is attached at Annex C.
6. The council have engaged external urban designers to develop the scheme, to act as critical friends to the design process, and bring place making expertise and longer-term ideas for Front Street, which will be designed to meet the aspirations of the local community.
7. In October 2023 Executive agreed, £570,000 of UKSPF funding to be allocated to Acomb Front Street phase 2 work.
8. The potential scope of phase 2 work will consider the following:-
 - enhance the area through better placemaking, creating a more people friendly space and reducing the number of bollards.
 - extend the benefits beyond the high street to better connect local amenities; this could include highway repairs along Front Street responding to the recent petition re potholes.
 - create a more people friendly, accessible destination, with wider, more generous pedestrian crossing points, new accessible toilet facilities and improved blue badge parking.
 - consider longer-term aspirations, included but not limited to looking how to reduce the vehicle dominance in Front Street or the adoption of private frontages.
9. The potential phase 2 scope incorporates input from the urban designers to ensure a more transformative change to the gateway area, with the aim of welcoming visitors, creating pride of place through a stronger identity / character for Front Street and a better space for the community to come together.

10. Following the public engagement, officers will analyse responses and continue working with the external urban designers and the local community to finalise detailed designs in order that a fully costed project scheme can be presented to Executive for consideration and approval to proceed in summer 2024.

Benefits and Challenges

11. The benefits and challenges of the potential phase 2 works proposals are set out below:

Benefits

- i. **Quality of Design** - The appointment of external urban designers and collaboration with the local community and businesses aims to deliver: a better experience for residents and visitors; a well-developed, creative final scheme that better meets the community's needs and aspirations; a more people friendly space; the removal of a significant number of bollards; enhanced character and identity to the area.
- ii. **Accessibility** - Creating a more accessible destination through the proposed introduction of: wider / more generous pedestrian crossings / raised tables within the area; a new crossing point linking with older part of Front Street; provision of two accessible toilet cubicles and improved blue badge parking at three locations.
- iii. **Better linkages** – Proposed introduction of additional pedestrian crossing points and creating better connections through unique signage to highlight existing amenities to encourage more frequent visits and longer time spent by visitors in the park and library, and on the Front Street.
- iv. **Real time improvements** – opportunity to trial a new market operator, proposed new accessible seating and improved collaborative working with Make it York, Acomb Explore and external designers.
- v. **Long term aspirations / feasibility** - UKSPF funding is allocated to deliver transformative change in accordance with

the UK Government Levelling up Agenda. The Acomb Front Street phase 2 proposals offer the opportunity to explore the feasibility and appetite for pedestrianisation in the longer term. To do this we propose to start a discussion with stakeholders to consider the potential to further reduce vehicle dominance in the area, to create a more attractive and people friendly space, and encourage more active and sustainable travel options. The proposed scope of phase 2 will enhance Front Street in a way that will not prohibit pedestrianisation work.

Challenges

- i. **Funding** - £570,000 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) for Acomb improvements. Whilst this is a significant amount of support, where there are bold ambitions and big ideas, priorities for spend will need to be considered.
- ii. **Timescale** – works need to be completed by the UKSPF spend deadline which is March 2025. The target date for start of construction is therefore September 2024.
- iii. **Land ownership** – a large part of the high street frontages are privately owned, whilst it is designated as highway, it is not adopted (and therefore maintained) by the council. This means that any proposals in these areas would require permission from multiple landowners. There will be no permanent change to privately maintained frontages in the phase 2 proposals, for this reason, however we will aim to work directly with willing landowners on “pop up” seating or trialling events, to activate the space and hope to encourage more landowners and tenants to have dialogue about longer term options.
- iv. **Highway** – Front Street currently has two “lives”. It needs to function as both a traffic free pedestrianised area when access is restricted, but also allowing for deliveries and parking at different times of day. This brings challenges to the design process, the ambition is to better understand users’ everyday experience / understanding of what they can and can’t do at different times of the day. Whilst the current area must preserve emergency vehicle access at all times,

and must retain a kerb to delineate the highway for visually impaired users. The proposed raised tables will introduce a 20mph speed limit, however cycling access and current vehicle access would remain unchanged.

- v. **Illegal parking** – The phase 1 works introduced bollards to address the illegal parking issues raised through previous consultation exercises. We acknowledge the strength of feeling against the bollards and phase 2 will look at ways to significantly reduce the number of bollards and reduce the impact of any remaining, whilst still protecting the kerb line.
- vi. **Pedestrianisation** – means different things to different people and as such we want to better understand what it means to the residents, visitors and businesses. We also recognise there are a wide range of views from businesses and residents on “pedestrianisation”, however, it is identified as a longer-term aspiration by Acomb & Westfield Neighbourhood Forum and will therefore be explored in full.

Policy Basis for Decision

- 12. The potential phase 2 regeneration scheme for Acomb Front Street will contribute directly to the delivery of the commitments in the Council Plan (2023-27) and the Local Plan.
- 13. The scheme proposals reflect the four core ‘EACH’ commitments in the Council Plan 2023-27 – One City, for all by:
 - **Equalities and Human Rights** – Creating a more accessible destination proposing level pedestrian crossings, achieved by the introduction of raised tables and 20mph speed limit. Upgrading the existing toilet block to provide two accessible toilets units and improving Blue Badge parking provision at Front Street, Cross Street and School Street.
 - **Affordability** – The creation of a more unified destination, including sign posting local amenities will support residents and visitors alike to better access and support local facilities. The new market operator trial (commencing 16th March 2024)

enhances the retail offering of the area. The economic benefit to increasing footfall and supporting reinvestment in the local community will support a more resilient high street.

- **Climate & Environment** – Introduction of more greenery via trees and potential planters will provide welcome placemaking addition. The 20mph speed limit will slow vehicles down and therefore create a more people friendly area. Improving provision of both standard and adapted cycling racks will encourage sustainable travel in and through the area.
 - **Health and Wellbeing** – The creation of a more family friendly space that encourages people to dwell in, encouraging greater use of local amenities will help build stronger social interactions across the generations and reduce social isolation. The project team will seek volunteers to establish a “Friends of Front Street” group to build on the strong community spirit that exists. The group could help to maintain any new planters/ space and explore activities to use new community space created.
14. In addition - The UKSPF has clear criteria for outputs and outcomes criteria against its funding which are a key consideration in what the Phase 2 money can be spent on. On completion of the phase 2 scheme we are required to report against the following UKSPF targets:

Outputs

- Amount of public realm created or improved (m²)
- Sqm of land made wheelchair accessible/step free (m²)
- Number of low or zero carbon energy infrastructure installed (numerical value)
- Number of neighbourhood improvements undertaken
- Number of projects successfully completed

Outcomes

- Increased footfall
- Increased visitor numbers
- Increased visitor spending
- Improved perception of facilities/amenities
- Improved perceived/experienced accessibility
- Improved perception of facility/infrastructure project
- Improved perception of attractions

Financial Strategy Implications

15. A budget allocation of £570,000 UKSPF for Acomb Front Street was agreed at Executive in November 2023.
16. The potential scope of phase 2 works is being presented as costed options for open public engagement and takes account of this budget allocation. One of the outcomes of the open public engagement is to better understand local community priority. The final scheme design is to be presented to Executive in summer 2024 and this will have to be deliverable within the budget available.
17. The costs of the preparatory work and undertaking the engagement allow for; staff time, presentation / survey materials / venue hire, and are included under the project costs heading.

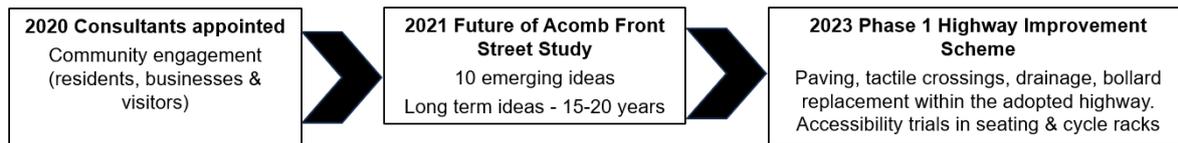
Recommendation and Reasons

18. The Executive Member is asked to: approve open public engagement on the Acomb Front Street phase 2 project approach, in order to test costed designs and ideas for the scheme and receive feedback.

Reason: public engagement, and analysis of feedback responses, is essential to enable officers to finalise detailed designs for the phase 2 works that benefit from public engagement comments; and to ensure that a fully costed scheme can be presented to Executive for consideration and approval to proceed in summer 2024.

Background

19. Front Street Acomb is a key secondary shopping centre in York. This is recognised in the Local Plan and planning policy supports it's improvement. There is a recognition that enhancing Front Street will deliver benefit, and over the past 5 years there has been investment through both local businesses and the council.



20. In the 2020 consultation respondents spoke highly of Front Street and its good mix of shops, however a quarter of respondents were critical of Front Street and areas were seen as “scruffy” with a run-down appearance. A significant proportion of the street is privately maintained, non-adopted highway. The council must therefore locate, and seek permission from the private landowners, if any works are to be undertaken within building frontages, for example siting new benches.
21. In April 2022 a report to Executive presenting the Future Acomb Front Street Study outlined 10 longer term ideas to improve the area, these ideas would require additional feasibility and viability work and the identification of potential funding sources. The study was noted by Executive.
22. In December 2022, City of York council was allocated UK Shared Prosperity Funding, part of the government’s Levelling Up Fund intended to reduce inequalities between communities. Within the ‘Communities and Place’ allocation, improvements for town centres & high streets were confirmed for York City Centre and Acomb secondary shopping area.
23. As a result of demands placed on the council during the pandemic, and restrictions on public meetings, a significant period of time elapsed between the 2020 community engagement and phase 1 work.
24. The Acomb highway improvement scheme (phase 1 works) commenced in early 2023 comprising: paving improvements; tactile crossings; new drainage; and new / replacement bollards within the adopted highway. The phase 1 works prioritised improving the condition of footways for pedestrians that had been damaged by vehicle access. These works had to be delivered within very tight spending timeframes to meet the original funding documentation from UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Phase 1 also initiated accessibility trials in seating and adapted cycle racks.

25. There has been significant challenge from the local community in relation to installation of the new bollards on Front Street, which culminated in the presentation of a petition to Full Council in July 2023, by the What A Load Of Bollards WALOB Campaign Group titled “Get Front St bollards removed and re-design the scheme in line with what people asked for”.
26. In response to this petition and acknowledging the strength of community feeling the council have engaged the original external consultants PWP Design and local urban designer, Urban Glow Design to work with the council, acting as critical friends to the design process and bringing creative expertise in developing longer-term ideas for Front Street.
27. By working with these external experts the council have been challenged to approach placemaking opportunities more creatively, building a unique character and sense of place for Front Street that focuses on delivering the community’s aspirations.
28. It should also be noted that a petition was submitted in January 2024, titled “Repair Our Pothole Acomb Front Street!”. Technically this is a failed/sunk utility reinstatement, but highways can only hold utility contractors to account for two years.
29. Highway Safety Inspectors do inspect the highway monthly in this location, and the Highway Safety Inspection Manual approved at Executive in October 2021 dictates the point at which a repair will be undertaken. The intervention levels specified in the Manual ensure that the worst defects are repaired with the maintenance funding available.
30. However, this Front Street defect has been reported a number of times, and whilst it will continue to be monitored, a repair could be undertaken as part of any works at Acomb Front Street and officers will explore this option.
31. **The objectives for phase 2 work are:**
- Improve public realm and placemaking for the area – create a more welcoming and inviting place that people want to come together
 - Respond to the What A Load Of Bollards petition

- Extend linkages and benefit to the wider high street area through unique signage, thus creating character/identity
- Responding to the recent 'pothole petition' by delivering repairs works as required
- Increasing accessibility through greater pedestrian focus
- Focus on maximising impact & project deliverability
- Engage local residents, businesses and stakeholders
- Build pride in place

32. The potential scope of phase 2 works is set out in the table below with estimated costs:

Enhance the high street		Estimated cost
Welcome gateway	The entrance to Front Street should be welcoming, inviting and create a sense of arrival for all. Proposals for the new gateway area include more seating and the introduction of tree(s) and greenery.	£40k
Bollard removal	The communities concern about the number of bollards are clearly understood and the number will be substantially reduced. A number of bollards are required to protect the kerb line, to prevent illegal parking and damage to the paving. The design process for the scheme is iterative and therefore we will test ideas with stakeholders, residents and businesses through the engagement period to deliver better placemaking opportunities and inform the final design.	£40k
Market	To enhance the current retail offering a three-month trial with a new market operator has been agreed by Make It York. Little Bird Market, an artisan market which operates across Yorkshire will commence on 16 th March and it is anticipated this will increase footfall to the area by attracting both local residents and new visitors.	£750
Pop up	To activate the area, especially during pedestrian only hours we will seek to add fun and personality/ character by investigating pop-up features to the privately maintained, non-adopted highway. These new additions will encourage residents and visitors to spend longer in the area, dwell and socialise	£30k

	As noted previously landowners' permission will be required.	
Carriageway	The carriageway will continue to operate as it does currently, a pedestrianised area from 10.30am (Mon – Fri or 9.30am on Sat.) reopening to vehicles after 4pm for loading and unloading. Cycling access will also be unchanged. However, the consultation will understand what pedestrianisation means to different people and test the desire to see further pedestrianisation.	£5k
Extend the benefits beyond the high street		
Signage & Wayfinding	Phase 2 proposes to better connect and unify local amenities as a “complete family friendly destination” via a new signage and wayfinding strategy.	£30k
Public Art/ Identity	Potential community art project such as a small mural or art trail, will require local artist/ charity support plus landowner permission.	£10k
New crossing & seating	Front Street has two distinctive areas, the high street , and the older village section. We propose to introduce a new crossing near to Morrisons junction and add much needed additional seating in the area	£30k
Create a more accessible destination		
Raised tables	To deliver the more friendly space for people when the road is closed to traffic – it is proposed to add three wide raised tables (at each end and in the centre of the high street). The middle location could be a wider raised table to create a desirable “central space”,	£150k

	and over time evolve and spill out into the non-adopted highway for activities and events. Again landowner permission would need to be sought.	
Improving Blue Badge parking	<p>It is acknowledged that the existing blue badge parking spaces at the top of Front Street (opposite Halifax) and Cross Street are frequently misused by illegal parking. The existing Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) protects the area nominated as disabled parking, but the parking bays are not individually marked.</p> <p>To improve the accessibility for Blue Badge holders at Cross Street, School Street and the top of Front Street (opposite Halifax) Bays will be made compliant to Part M standards (subject to physical limitations or Road Safety Audit requirements) and marked out accordingly. This means that enforcement can be more effective in preventing unauthorised use.</p>	£110k
Upgrading toilet block	The existing toilet block at the top of Cross Street will be upgraded from the existing one accessible and one standard toilet to provide two accessible units. This work will be completed by the council's public toilet operator, Healthmatic, to the agreed council specification, no later than June 2024. This work has already been commissioned and therefore cannot be influenced through the engagement process	£42.5k
Project costs	Initial design (including Principal Designer role), external design consultants, feasibility, surveys, engagement sessions, detailed design, and project management.	£100k

	<p>As this area is termed non-adopted highway, some preliminary feasibility work and understanding of the legal process for adoption has been undertaken.</p> <p>For the council to adopt any privately maintained highway, it must be brought up to a satisfactory standard. That standard would match the phase 1 high quality paving specification, the estimated cost of repaving work would be in excess of £350k. Therefore, alternative funding sources will need to be secured, this could be a combination of landowner contributions and external funding.</p>	
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Consultation Analysis

33. The purpose of the open public engagement work is to test the ideas set out in the potential project scope, and community priorities in the context of the costed elements set out above. We will carry forward what we learned from the previous consultation and petition.
34. The engagement process is summarised at Annex C and will provide the opportunity for businesses, residents, and stakeholders to provide feedback on the potential scope to inform the final designs for the Acomb Front Street phase 2 scheme.
35. Subject to approval here, the engagement is planned to commence on 26 February and end on 24 March 2024 (prior to the Mayoral Combined Authority pre-election period commencing).
36. Feedback from the engagement, alongside stakeholder discussions and technical advice from the designers and external experts will help to inform the final scheme design, and programme of works. This will be shared with the community and presented to the council's Executive in the summer for approval to commence delivery.

Options Analysis and Evidential Basis

37. **Option 1 – to approve the recommendation** in the report - noting that following the open public engagement, officers will analyse responses and work up a detailed, and fully costed scheme design that can be presented to Executive for consideration and approval to proceed in summer 2024.
38. **Option 2 – to refuse the recommendation** and request further design and preparatory work prior to engagement.
39. **Option 3 – to amend the recommendation** in the report requiring either further options to be included in the potential scope for phase 2 works and / or requiring additional scope for the open public engagement, as detailed at Annex C.

Analysis

40. **Option 1** - is the recommended option which sets out a potential scope, with costed options for a phase 2 scheme and a clear commitment to exploring further future potential within an achievable timescale and with resources (staff time and presentation / survey materials) committed to public engagement over a 4 week period.
41. **Option 2** - is not recommended where this option would see significant delay to the delivery of a phase 2 scheme and could result in the loss of the UKSPF budget allocation.
42. **Option 3** – if the report recommendation is amended to require either further options to be included in the potential scope for phase 2 works and / or requiring additional scope for the open public engagement there will be a delay to commencing engagement and ultimately delivery of the scheme which could increase frustration with the local community and ultimately see the loss of UKSPF budget. There is also a risk that resource is not immediately available to support further / more extensive engagement.

Organisational Impact and Implications

- **Financial**, contact: *Chief Finance Officer*.
As noted above a budget of £570,000 is available from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) for Acomb improvements, phase 2. This budget must be spent by 31 March 2025. This report details estimated costs for three areas: Enhance the area; Extend the benefits beyond the high street; and Create a more accessible destination. Estimated costs for Longer term aspirations are also detailed, but this will depend on further funding becoming available.

- **Human Resources (HR)**, contact: Head of HR
There are no HR implications contained within this report.

- **Legal**, contact: Head of Legal Services.

The recommendation in this report is to approve an engagement exercise. In deciding whether and how to consult the Council should be clear on the reasons for and objectives of such an exercise. There is no general legal duty to consult save where there is a specific statutory consultation requirement or the duty to act fairly demands it (custom and practice or a promise to do so).

Where the Council embarks on public engagement it must act in accordance with the Gunning principles, the basic requirements of which are: (i) engagement must be at a time when proposals are still at a formative stage; (ii) the proposer must give sufficient reasons for any proposal to permit of intelligent consideration and response; (iii) adequate time must be given for consideration and response; and (iv) the product of consultation must be conscientiously taken into account in finalising proposals.

- **Procurement**, contact: Head of Procurement.
Any proposed works or services that will develop from the Acomb Front Street Phase 2 report, will need to be commissioned via a compliant procurement route under the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and where applicable, the Public Contract Regulations 2015. All tenders will need to be conducted in an open, fair, and transparent way to capture the key principles of procurement. Further advice regarding the procurement routes, strategies and markets must be sought from the Commercial Procurement team.
- **Health and Wellbeing**, contact: Director of Public Health.
Public Health agree with the proposal to conduct public engagement and an analysis of responses. Public Health agree with the recommendation to adopt option one and welcome the opportunity to reduce vehicle dominance in the Acomb area whilst increasing the opportunity for people to meet and socialise to reduce isolation.

- ***Environment and Climate action***, contact: Director of Transport, Environment and Planning, and Head of Carbon Reduction.

The phase 2 improvement works to Acomb Front Street have the potential to deliver climate change benefits; supporting both net zero (by reducing car dependency and encouraging active travel) and adaptation (increasing tree planting to reduce overheating and create shade). The development of any designs identified through the consultation should aim to minimise embedded and operational carbon emissions wherever possible.

- ***Affordability*** -
The economic benefits to residents with low incomes should be documented in the Equalities Impact Assessment as part of the consultation, and how the proposals will contribute to a thriving affordable economy for all residents to benefit from, including those for whom transport out of area to access low cost retail options is unaffordable.

- ***Equalities and Human Rights*** -
Public engagement is critical to inform the Equality Impact Assessment that will accompany the final proposals. Given the focus on accessibility, the community needs full engagement alongside York Access Forum as per the engagement plan, with online and offline opportunities to engage.

- ***Data Protection and Privacy***

See Annex B

- ***Communications***, contact: Head of Communications.

The communications team has been working with the regeneration team to understand what support is required. Communications work will be needed around this report, which will include a press release. Should it be agreed to proceed with engagement, the team will be supporting to help produce the additional resources, information and promotion to support the consultation.

- ***Economy, contact: Head of Economy.***
Acomb Front Street is a key secondary shopping centre within the City of York Council area. It is positive to see the proposed Phase 2 approach seeking to build on the 2021 Future of Acomb Front Street Study, which was commissioned to identify ways to support economic growth and drive footfall in the area. The proposed engagement is a good opportunity to seek further local resident and stakeholder views about how UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) monies can be invested to deliver positive outputs and outcomes for the local area.

Risks and Mitigations

The principal project risks are:

- (i) The tight spending deadlines for UKSPF funding require all funds to be spent by 31 March 25. In order to achieve this construction must commence no later than September 2024. Carrying out open community engagement, analysis of feedback and finalising detailed / costed designs for Executive approval in summer 2024 does introduce programme risk where significant stakeholder objection or campaigning by the community, could delay the final scheme design and construction, and jeopardise the UKSPF funding. This must necessarily be set against the risk of not delivering a scheme which has strong community support.
- (ii) At this time we are advised that any monies not spent by 31 March 2025 will be clawed back by central government. To mitigate against this the scope of phase 2 has been designed to focus on the community aspirations and ideas set out in the Future of Acomb Front Street Study and address the recent petition received by the council.
- (iii) Acomb has a strong community spirit and bold ambitions, there is a significant challenge in delivering against all of these during phase 2 within the currently available funding. There is the potential that further elements can be delivered through a phase 3 project (subject to further funding and approvals)

- (iv) Discussions on any long term pedestrianisation ambition could become contentious given the contradictory views of different stakeholders, and could cause a distraction to phase 2 deliverable works.
- (v) Project components that involve additional procurement eg. public art could/take longer to deliver than March 25.
- (vi) The removal of a significant number of bollards and introduction of wide speed tables for pedestrian priority could result in an increase in illegal parking on the pavements, which the phase 1 scheme had sought to address.

Wards Impacted

Acomb, Westfield & Holgate Wards

Contact details

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Background papers

Executive April 2022: 'Future of Acomb Front Street – Enhancing Economic Growth for Secondary Shopping Areas'

Executive – October 2023: 'UK Shared Prosperity Fund

Annexes

- Annex A: Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)
- Annex B: Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)
- Annex C: Engagement Strategy