

TOWN CENTRE ENHANCEMENT SCHEMES – FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks Members views on a proposal from Essex County Council Highways to re-allocate traffic management funds currently earmarked for schemes in Rochford town centre to assist the implementation of the enhancement schemes in Hockley and Hullbridge.

2 ALTERNATIVE FUNDING PROPOSAL

- 2.1 The County Council has allocated a total of £100,000 towards the implementation of schemes in Rochford town designed to improve traffic management and flows.
- 2.2 Given the shortfall between expectation and delivery in respect of both the Hockley and Hullbridge enhancement schemes, the County has reconsidered the basis on which the traffic management budget can be allocated.
- 2.3 In respect of the enhancement schemes for Hockley and Hullbridge, it has been concluded that an improved environment for pedestrians visiting local shopping areas will result in fewer car journeys and that, therefore, some of the funding for traffic management schemes in Rochford Town Centre might be reallocated.

3 DISCUSSION

- 3.1 The development of schemes designed to improve traffic management in Rochford town centre is, at present, focused on options for altering the access to Back Lane car park.
- 3.2 The former Rochford Town Centre Working Group, when meeting to discuss options for environmental and infrastructure improvements to the town centre, concluded that traffic flows might be significantly improved if a new access (in-only) was created to the Back Lane car park at the end of Locks Hill, with the existing entrance becoming an exit only to Back Lane.
- 3.3 Work has been progressing to develop a scheme for Members consideration, and the intention was that this be funded from the County's traffic management budget. It is anticipated that a report will be forthcoming on this proposal to the next meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 17th October.

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- 3.4 However, it is expected that the total cost of this scheme would be of the order of £15,000, including consultants costs, and there is then an opportunity for Members to consider whether the balance of the traffic management budget should be reallocated to further the enhancement schemes in Hockley and Hullbridge.
- 3.5 Clearly the reallocation of funds will limit opportunities for much needed traffic management measures in Rochford town centre. On the other hand, if a scheme for altering the access arrangements to Back Lane car park were to be implemented, it might very well be prudent to wait until this has bedded-in before exploring, at a later date, other options for traffic management improvements.
- 3.6 On this basis, it is considered that the balance of the traffic management budget (£85,000) might best be used to further the Hockley and Hullbridge enhancement schemes, though a decision would need to be taken on the division of the funds between each location.
- 3.7 The budget allocated for Hullbridge will be used for the completion of initial enhancement scheme. It is estimated that a further £25,000 will be required to implement the additional works, including street lighting.
- 3.8 The budget for the Hockley scheme is £180,000 (including £30,000 from the Parish). The trenching and ducting work for the cabling has cost £64,000 due to a change in the scope of the works and the need for additional hand digging around existing services. Work has now commenced on the paving works: it is estimated that the cost of the paving, new street lighting and the provision of the half lay-by will be £207,000. Therefore, taking account of the money spent on the cabling and ducting work, there is a shortfall of £91,000 for the completion of the Hockley scheme.
- 3.9 To enable the Hockley and Hullbridge schemes to progress, it is proposed that £85,000 of the Rochford town traffic management budget be reallocated. There are two options for Members to consider. First, allocate £25,000 to Hullbridge to construct the additional phase of that scheme, with the balance of £60,000 going to Hockley. This would still mean a shortfall in the Hockley budget and further work would be required to decide on priorities. Second, allocate the whole £85,000 to Hockley with the aim of completing the scheme.

4 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The town centre enhancement schemes are designed to improve the environment of Rochford, Hockley and Hullbridge. The part completion of the intended scheme in Hockley reduces the effectiveness of the

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resulting environmental enhancement. The additional phase in Hullbridge would extend the benefits of the main scheme.

- 4.2 The traffic management budget was intended to implement schemes designed to improve the flow of traffic in and around Rochford Town Centre. Subject to Member approval, it is considered that the alteration to the access arrangements for Back Lane car park might be implemented and then a review carried out to assess the requirement for further traffic management measures in the future.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The reallocation of funds from Rochford traffic management schemes to progress the enhancement schemes in Hockley and Hullbridge would have no direct financial implications for the Council.

6 RECOMMENDATION

It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

Whether to support the proposal from Essex County Council Highways that £85,000 of the Rochford town centre Traffic Management budget be reallocated and if so, to determine the proportion of the funds to be used in Hockley and Hullbridge. (HPS)

Shaun Scrutton

Head of Planning Services

Background Papers:

Letter from Essex County Council Highways dated 17 September 2002.

For further information please contact Shaun Scrutton on:-

Tel:- 01702 318100

E-Mail:- shaun.scrutton@rochford .gov.uk

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ARRANGEMENTS**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Services on a proposal from Essex County Council Highways to re-allocate traffic management funds currently earmarked for schemes in Rochford Town Centre to assist the completion of the enhancement schemes in Hockley and Hullbridge.

Responding to Member questions, the Area Manager, County Highways, advised that-

- The County Council was aware that there was disappointment on the lack of progress and high costings associated with Town Centre schemes. The Schemes had been included within the County Council's Contract 2000, which had seen some teething problems both locally and Countywide. The contract was subject to full audit checks. An investigation of concerns associated with Contract 2000 was under way.
- The Public Utility, 24 Seven, was responsible for electrical connections and are outside the overall control of the County Council. County Officers would continue to work with the company on outstanding electrical matters, including the zebra crossing beacons at Hullbridge. County Officer's were also addressing some snagging work at Hullbridge and liaising with District Officers on planting.
- Notwithstanding further investigation of a land aspect, there was a clear indication that progress could be made on work to create a new access to the Rochford Back Lane Car Park.

During debate, Members referred to specific examples of concern on the timing/costings associated with the Town Centre Schemes. Reference was also made to contributions that had been made in good faith by the Business Community. It was observed that overspend concerns had been raised over a long period of time, including by the Council's former Town Centre Working Groups.

Following a motion relating to budget re-allocation and the provision of information on current investigations, moved by Councillor T G Cutmore and seconded by Councillor J E Grey, it was:-

Resolved

- (1) That £15,000 of the £100,000 made available for the enhancement of Rochford Town Centre be allocated to the creation of a new access (in-only) to the Rochford Back Lane car Park at the end of Locks Hill, with the existing entrance becoming an exit only into Back Lane.
- (2) That the remaining £85,000, together with any underspend from Rochford, be re-allocated to the enhancement schemes in Hullbridge and Hockley, with up to £25,000 being used to construct phase 2 of the Hullbridge scheme and £60,000, plus any unused funds from Hullbridge, being utilised for the Hockley scheme.
- (3) That the Area Manager, County Highways, report back to this Council on the outcome of the current investigation into the various concerns associated with Contract 2000 as they relate to the Town Centre Enhancement Schemes within the District. (County Highways/HPS)