

Agenda Item No: 7

Report To: **Joint Transportation Board**

Date: 7 December 2010

Report Title: Victoria Way improvement scheme, Ashford

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Summary:	To inform Members of the progress of the Victoria Way scheme,
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Key Decision: NO

Affected Wards: Stour

Recommendations: **The Board are asked to:-**
i) Note the progress of the scheme,

Policy Overview: The new Victoria Way route is a key driver to enable the expansion of the town centre to the south of the main railway lines.
The scheme is consistent with policy CS15 of the adopted Local Development Framework Core Strategy and the Ashford Transport Strategy.

Financial Implications: Victoria Way is funded by a Community Infrastructure Fund (CIF2).

Risk Assessment Yes - A full risk assessment has been carried out and maintained for the scheme.

Equalities Impact Assessment No

Other Material Implications: No

Exemption Clauses: No

Background Papers:

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Purpose of the Report

1. A comprehensive Report was made to the meeting of the Board on 15 June 2010 following the award of construction contract for the scheme. This report updates the Board on progress with the delivery of the scheme that will be supplemented by a verbal update at the meeting on the intended parking restrictions along the new route and alterations to the design of John Wallis Square.

Issues to be Decided

2. None; this Report is for Members information.

Victoria Way

Progress Overview

3. The site offices were established in July. The construction of the scheme is by its nature fragmented and progress has improved since the last report in September 2010.
4. At the Leacon Road/Brookfield Road junction improvement, progress has been slower than planned because there are services to be diverted and until recently the utility firms had not been very responsive. The works unfortunately require traffic management under traffic signal control and being a junction with long working areas and close to the Matalan roundabout there has been unavoidable traffic disruption.
5. At Victoria Road, Cherry Court and Victoria House have been demolished and trial holes excavated along the length of the road to help give certainty by confirming the location and depth of utility services. The installation of the surface water attenuation tanks have commenced and are progressing well with completion of these significant engineering elements due by the end of December.
6. The main difficulty and delays to date has been over the middle section between Leacon Road and Victoria Road. Many underground services have to be diverted with particular problems around Gasworks lane.
7. Archaeologists also took the view that the area had more potential than originally envisaged however to date there have been no finds of any note.
8. The demolition of the abattoir building exposed a large volume of significantly contaminated land. It was so severe that it was regarded as a source of contamination and required full removal and disposal to a specialist waste site rather than the general principle agreed with the Environment Agency for this scheme of leaving contaminated ground in place.

9. However, the main difficulty has been with utilities bearing in mind that a key objective of the scheme is to divert existing services into the road corridor as well as upgrading and providing new services to serve and future proof the adjacent development sites. Until recently it has proved difficult to find a complete solution to accommodate all the services in the position both longitudinally and at a depth that they require to satisfy their operational requirements. Other services have also been found out of position and in a poor state that also require replacement and diversion together with other uncharted services that also require diversion. This has now all largely been resolved but construction still remains difficult in that services need to be installed sequentially in parallel with the build up of the earthworks before the roadworks can be started and this puts pressure on the programme.

Programme

10. Progress over the summer has been less than planned particularly over the critical middle section between Leacon Road and Victoria Road. However, there is now greater clarity and the focus can revert to making progress in the most effective way possible to achieving completion by spring 2011.

Maintenance Strategy

11. The September 2010 Board meeting agreed to recommend acceptance of a maintenance schedule for the scheme and in particular for John Wallis Square. Further design alterations have been necessary within the proposed Square to bring the costs of the Square within the allocated budget. This has included the removal of the pavilion base and part of the architectural screening along the Learning Link edge with the school. A verbal update with the detail of the changes will be given at the meeting.
12. The architectural screens are an expensive element of the Square but they are intended to frame the Square, give visual protection to the school playground from the Square and to hide the unattractive sub-station buildings. The maintenance schedule giving the estimated capital cost, standard and enhanced maintenance costs over 15 years will be amended accordingly following the deletion of certain elements within the Square. As a reminder and in summary, the costs of enhanced maintenance of the whole scheme where required are £400,000 split £170,000 for those hard and soft assets that will be the responsibility of the Borough Council and £230,000 for those that will be the responsibility of the County Council. The full sum will be claimed by the County Council as accountable body for CIF2 and then the appropriate proportion transferred to the Borough Council.

Proposed Traffic and Parking restrictions

13. In March 2010, the Board was asked to approve Traffic Orders that allowed the introduction of residents permit parking in Victoria Crescent and limited waiting in Jemmett Road and Bowens Field and this is now operational. It is now necessary to develop proposals that will control traffic movements and parking along the main route of the new Victoria Way and into adjacent roads.
14. There is also the need to include several minor alterations to the original parking controls agreed by the Board in March.

15. The new transport link will have several distinct sections to it, including two areas at either end which are predominantly Industrial and between them, a busy John Wallis Square with its pedestrian friendly layout.
16. The Square will be further highlighted by high quality paving construction creating an environmentally sensitive appearance.
17. Although the majority of the road will be subject to a 30mph speed limit, it is proposed to introduce a 20mph zone around the Square and outside Victoria Road Primary School. In addition to the 20mph Zone, there is a need to maintain a clear area outside the school during school times via the use of 'school keep clear' markings and a Traffic Order.
18. A 'no left turn' restriction is proposed when exiting Victoria Crescent at its junction with Victoria Road to prevent possible traffic conflicts.
19. Although the entire length of the new road is required to be 'no waiting at any time' to allow free movement of traffic and for safety reasons, it is desirable that these restrictions are implemented in a visually unobtrusive way around the Square area. To facilitate this, a restricted zone is proposed to coincide with the 20mph zone. The restricted zone will avoid the need for double yellow lines around the square with the restrictions being indicated by zone entry/exit signs, and repeater signs.
20. The existing shared footway/cycleway link between Victoria Park and the town centre is to be crossed by the new road and in order to maintain this link in a safe and appropriate manner, a Toucan controlled crossing is proposed.
21. The formal consultation is to commence shortly for the above Traffic Regulation Orders and it is intended that should there be any responses, these will be reported, with appropriate recommendations, back to the Board at the March 2011 meeting for decision.
22. A plan will be available for inspection at this December Board meeting.

Overall Communications Strategy and Publicity

23. Scheme sign boards with telephone contact details have been erected so that the local community and travelling public are clear on how to make contact if they have any queries. Further boards are about to be erected emphasising that the scheme is a key component in support of the growth of Ashford and encouragement for inward investment.
24. Ashford's Future provide the overarching strategy for the wider publicity. The intention is to produce a newsletter for local residents and businesses in December to keep them updated with the progress of the project.
25. A workshop took place in October between the School and the design team to emphasise the connection between the features of the Square and how they relate to John Wallis. John Wallis contributed substantially to the origins of calculus and was the most influential mathematician before Newton and was born in Ashford.

Portfolio Holder's Views

26. Updates on all Ashford's Future led projects and the Growth Area Funding programme are also regularly reviewed at Ashford's Future Company Board meetings, and at Ashford's Future Partnership Board meetings chaired by Councillor Paul Clokie.

27. Members of the Boards have expressed continued support for the project.

Finance

28. The overall project remains within the total funding available. However, the difficulties to date particularly with utilities over the middle section have put pressure on the programme. The site team working in partnership with the contractor are following a programme that should still see the core of the scheme completed by the 31 March 2011. However there is a risk that some associated elements of the scheme such as the Square and works at Gasworks Lane may take a little longer to complete. Discussion have been held with the Homes and Communities Agency as funders who have agreed the principle to some reallocation of funding such that there will be cover for the residual expenditure that may be incurred beyond the formal funding end date of 31 March 2011.

Conclusions

29. The Board are asked to note the progress made on this key project that supports the growth programme for Ashford.

30. Victoria Way has encountered a difficult start, particularly in accommodating and securing advance works to the many utilities involved but these matters are largely resolved.

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Attachments:

None