

**OBAN TOWN CENTRE NORTH ACTIVE TRAVEL PROJECT: CONCEPT
DESIGN AND FUTURE EXTERNAL FUNDING**

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report provides an update to Members on the progress made to date on the Oban Town Centre North Active Travel Project, highlights the next steps and seeks support for the continuation of the project to complete the design process from Members. A further report will be presented to Members prior to any construction stage.
- 1.2. A concept design has been produced for the preferred design option based on the findings of a feasibility study and appraisal that was completed in February 2024.
- 1.3. A business engagement workshop was held on 28th February for businesses within the study area (comprising George St and Esplanade and interlinking side streets between Corran Halls and Stafford St). This workshop was directly promoted to businesses in the study area by the design team who visited and distributed flyers to businesses.
- 1.4. A public consultation on the proposed concept design was held between 14th March and 5th April 2024. The consultation received 104 responses.
- 1.5. The preferred interventions are within the A85 trunk road on George St and The Esplanade. Transport Scotland have confirmed they are happy in principle, but will require to approve the detailed design and technical design drawings which future design stages, if approved to progress by this Committee, will provide before Transport Scotland can sign off on a design.
- 1.6. The funding for the feasibility study, options appraisal and concept design has come from Transport Scotland through the Sustrans administered Places for Everyone programme (PFE) which is a challenge fund that requires designs to adhere to strict design parameters in order for them to be considered by the PFE funding application assessment panels.
- 1.7. If members approve the progression of this project, additional funding for the developed and technical design stages will be required. At present the primary route to access new funding for this project (and other active travel infrastructure projects) would be through the Transport Scotland PFE programme.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Oban, Lorn and the Isles members:

- Acknowledge the progress made to date.
- Support the continuation of the project and the submission of a new PFE funding application for design stages 3 (Developed Design) to complete the design work required.

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AND FUTURE EXTERNAL FUNDING**

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 This report provides an update to Members on the progress made to date on the Oban Town Centre North active travel project, highlights the next steps and seeks support for the project from Members.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 It is recommended that the Oban Lorn and the Isles members:

- Acknowledge the progress made to date.
- Support the continuation of the project and the submission of a new PFE funding application for design stages 3 (Developed Design) to complete the next design stage required.

4.0 DETAIL

4.1 The Council's Active Travel Team, 1.7 FTE (Full Time Equivalent employees), is part of the Strategic Transport Team within the Development and Economic Growth Service. No Council funding is currently received by the Active Travel Team. All project costs, including internal staff costs, have to be funded via successfully securing highly competitive external challenge funds.

4.2 In 2023/24, the Active Travel Team secured £2.56M external funding for the development and delivery of a total of 22 projects across Argyll and Bute, including the Oban Town Centre North Active Travel Project.

4.3 Transport Scotland's Places for Everyone (PFE) programme is structured around 8 project stages with a competitive challenge fund, with the 32 local authorities, 7 regional transport partnerships, two national parks and numerous community groups across Scotland competing against each other to secure the funding each project requires.

4.4 A minimum of three new competitive funding submissions are required to complete a project using PFE funding, with competitive applications required, as a minimum, prior to Stage 0 (Strategic Definition), Stage 3 (Developed Design) and Stage 5 (Construction). The project stages are (0) Strategic Definition, (1)

Preparation and Brief, (2) Concept Design, (3) Developed Design, (4) Technical Design, (5) Construction, (6) Handover & Close Out and (7) In Use.

4.5 **Oban Town Centre North Active Travel project Design Stage 0-2 (work completed to date)**

4.5.1 The project area falls within Area For Action 5/2 as identified in the Argyll and Bute Local Development Plan (2015). The LDP Action Plan included the following actions for this AFA:

- To consider landward and seaward congestion issues which are associated with peaks in the ferry operations.
- To consider traffic management and vehicle parking implications (short and longer-term)
- To consider townscape and waterfront opportunities for enhancement.
- To consider part-pedestrianisation potential in this area of the town.

LDP2 was adopted in February 2024 and now supersedes LDP. LDP2 seeks to deliver High Quality Places through policies and design guidance to promote the creation of safe, inclusive high quality places where people want to live, work, invest and visit and where they are encouraged to lead active lifestyles. The project area fall within A4005 and A4006. LDP2 states that *“These Areas For Action are areas which, subject to resource availability during the plan-period, will be the focus for partnership or community action. Area remits for these AFAs are being worked up in the Action Programme and other Technical Working Notes; these area remits may include investment and funding packages, land assembly and asset management programmes, development and redevelopment proposals, infrastructure provision and environmental enhancement proposals. Depending on circumstances, AFAs may coincide with other categories of sites such as potential development areas.”*

4.5.2 Amongst other development pressures facing Oban LDP 2 notes that traffic management, parking and accessibility in Oban is under severe pressure. LDP2 has committed to the development of the Oban Strategic Development Framework, which *“The Council will take forward in conjunction with key partners to deliver a coordinated approach to the rationalisation of existing land uses, improved traffic management and parking (including potential for park and ride), identification of new development opportunities for housing and economic uses, development of the Strategic Transport Hub, investigation of development potential and improvements to network resilience associated with the strategic road and rail network, including the possibility of the Oban Development Road and the consented Dunbeg Half-Way Roundabout, in order to realise the full potential of this strategically important area.”* (A&BC LDP2)

4.5.3 In November 2022 the Oban Town Centre North project was awarded PFE funding to deliver design Stages 0-2 before the end of financial year 2023/24. In July 2023 LUC were appointed through a competitive tender process as the consultant design team to progress the project through the PFE 0-2 design stages and produce a concept design that adhered to the principles of Cycling

by Design and that provided a route with as a high a level of service as was practicably possible.

Design Stage 1: Feasibility and Options Appraisal (September 2023 – February 2024)

- 4.5.4 A Public consultation event was held in Corran Halls on 28th September 2023; emails about this event were sent out to stakeholders on 22nd August and again on the 14th September. This initial consultation event coincided with the launch of an online public consultation that ran from 28th September until 30th October. This initial consultation was intended to help identify opportunities and constraints within the project area and to help understand how people currently use the space and how they would like to see it improved for active travel.
- 4.5.5 A dedicated workshop was also held with pupils from Oban High School on 6th November 2023 to get their thoughts and views about active travel in Oban and the project area.
- 4.5.6 Based upon the findings from the public consultation, workshops and a range of technical surveys, including parking surveys and automatic traffic counts that were undertaken, four sketch options were developed. The options considered a range of level of intervention from 'light touch' to more extensive works and are summarised below:
- **Approach 1: Light Touch with No Reduction in Parking Provision:**
Formalising and creating minimum 2m footways. Reducing carriageway widths to minimum 4m. Retaining the formal parking throughout and removing the provision for informal yellow line parking. General improvements to surfacing, crossings and street clutter.
 - **Approach 2: Mid-level Intervention with localised reduction in parking provision:**
Builds on Approach 1, with the added introduction of: Significant green infrastructure, space for seating and cycle facilities. To enable these, a localised reduction of parking and a new loading strategy are required.
 - **Approach 3A: High Level Interventions (Maintaining existing traffic management) :**
Builds on Approach 2, with the added introduction of a cantilever/made ground to widen Corran Esplanade, which enables 1-way traffic and 2-way cycle lane on Corran Esplanade.
 - **Approach 3B: High Level Interventions (Pedestrianisation on George Street)**
Builds on Approach 2, with the added introduction of a cantilever/made ground to widen Corran Esplanade, which enables 2-way traffic on Corran Esplanade and pedestrianisation or controlled access to George St.

- 4.5.7 A steering group meeting was held on 14th November to discuss the emerging options. As well as the design team the steering group comprised of Officers from Argyll and Bute Council, Sustrans, HITRANS and Transport Scotland.
- 4.5.8 A second public consultation event was held in Rockfield Centre on 7th December 2023 to present the 4 options; Emails were sent out to stakeholders on 24th October and again on 24th November to promote this event and ask for assistance in promoting the event and the upcoming public consultation. The public consultation on the options was held online and ran between 8th December 2023 and 12th January 2024.
- 4.5.9 The options appraisal, which included a high level benefit-cost analysis, identified Approach 2 to be the preferred option. A copy of the Stage 1 Feasibility and Options Appraisal Report can be provided.

Design Stage 2: Concept Design (February 2024– March 2024)

- 4.5.10 The design team, led by LUC, developed concept design proposals based on the preferred option identified in Stage 1.
- 4.5.11 A dedicated workshop with businesses located within the boundary of the project area was held on 29th February 2024. Businesses were invited to book a set 30-minute 1-2-1 session with a member of the project team, any time between 10am and 9pm. This was advertised by hand delivering leaflets to businesses in the study area on 25th and 26th January 2024. This was followed up with emails to businesses that have public email addresses. Some businesses did not receive a leaflet if they were closed and did not have a visible letterbox or did not have a publicly available email address.
- 4.5.12 A dedicated workshop was held with Oban Access Panel at the Rockfield Centre on 14th March 2024 to present the concept design and receive feedback.
- 4.5.13 A public consultation drop in event was held at the Rockfield Centre on 14th March 2024. This event was to mark the launch of the online public consultation on the concept design which ran between 14th March and 5th April 2024. Approximately 300 people attended the event.
- 4.5.14 Although it is estimated that approximately 300 people attended the consultation drop in event only 104 survey responses to the consultation were received. Although it cannot be substantiated it is believed that the majority of people who attended the event on the 14th March came along based on incorrect information that was given in the local paper and in the local Facebook page.
- 4.5.15 The incorrect information that was given generated a lot of negativity about the project; however when people saw the actual concept design drawings and what was being proposed the majority of people gave verbal feedback that they were neutral-positive about the design and that their initial concerns were alleviated.

- 4.5.16 34% of the 104 survey responses were supportive or very supportive of the concept design proposal. 52 % were opposed or very opposed to the concept design proposals. The objections focused on the principle of the scheme (to encourage people to walk, wheel and cycle more), the cost, the possible loss of parking and the design worsening the levels of congestion currently experienced in the town. Some of the objections felt that the proposed concept design did not do enough to help cyclists and that the designs should be more radical.
- 4.5.17 A pattern was observed during the drop in event that those who continued to hold strong feelings about the scheme completed surveys at the event. It is therefore considered there is a large proportion of event attendees, and Oban residents more broadly, who hold generally neutral or less strong opinions, that did not engage with the survey. A high proportion of the event attendees were engaged through direct conversations with project representatives and this may have impacted the level of survey responses with attendees having been given a face-to-face platform to provide their thoughts.
- 4.5.18 The concept design is not a fixed design and if the project is awarded Places For Everyone funding for design stage 3 a programme of extensive consultation with stakeholders, including, but not limited to, local business owners, Oban Access Panel and school pupils will be undertaken as a priority to help inform and shape the developing design.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 A concept design for active travel improvements to Oban Town Centre North has been produced for consultation. The results from the consultation showed that 34% of respondents to the consultation were supportive of the concept design. However from conversations held at the consultation drop in event it is believed that a large number of people who are supportive of the project did not complete the consultation questionnaire as a result of speaking with members of the design team at the event.
- 5.2 Further targeted consultation will take place if the project progresses.
- 5.3 External funding from PFE has been sought for 2024/25 to progress the concept design through the design stages 3. However, the award of this funding is not guaranteed.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Policy – Completion of this project will support the Council's Local Outcome Improvement Plan (2024-34) outcomes 1: Transport Infrastructure and 3: Community Wellbeing. The project is in keeping with LDP2. The project also supports achievement of the Scottish Government's objectives set out in the Cycling Action Plan for Scotland (CAPS) and Let's Get Scotland Walking - The National Walking Strategy.

- 6.2 Financial – The design and any land purchase will be funded by external competitive funding applications. The Council has not contributed any funding to design costs.
The design currently shows the loss of two on street parking bays which each currently generate approximately £8,000 income per year for the Council. There is strong evidence that people who are more active, for example by walking or cycling, have improved physical and mental health and are less likely to require social care services in later life which could result in a future saving to the Council or HSCP.
- 6.3 Legal – Continued input will be required from Legal Services to support any land purchase.
- 6.4 HR – None.
- 6.5 Fairer Scotland Duty
- 6.5.1 Equalities - Completion of this project will provide enhanced opportunities within the project area for people to travel more sustainably and actively by walking, wheeling and cycling.
The route has been designed to be DDA compliant and will provide a safe and accessible route for those with mobility aids including wheelchairs and parents/guardians with a child’s pram or buggy.
- 6.5.2 Socio-economic Duty – The route will improve access to essential services, retail, leisure and employment opportunities for local residents, with studies demonstrating those who travelled actively had a higher monthly spend in local businesses than those who travel via motorised transport.
The design will also offer opportunities for individuals to travel for leisure, again encouraging spend in local businesses connected by the route.
- 6.5.3 Islands – There are no adverse impacts.
- 6.6 Climate Change – Active Travel is the least carbon intensive mode of travel. Providing the opportunity for residents and visitors to consider an alternative to having to use a private car to travel between these communities will help lower Argyll and Bute’s carbon footprint.
- 6.7 Risk – There is a reputational risk to the Council if the project is not completed within a reasonable timeframe and if community support for the project is not obtained.
- 6.8 Customer Service – None.
- 6.9 The Rights of the Child (UNCRC) – Completion of this project will provide enhanced facilities designed to be suitable for use by an unaccompanied 12 year old.
The route has been designed to be DDA compliant and will provide a safe and accessible route for children with disabilities.

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