

Annex I to Appendix C

DRAFT RESPONSE TO PUBLIC CONSULTATION FOR FARNHAM INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAMME (FIP) FARNHAM TOWN CENTRE PROPOSALS (FINAL RESPONSE TO BE SUBMITTED BY REVISED DATE - 2nd OCTOBER 2022)

I INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 When the Farnham Infrastructure Programme was first established it was hoped that measures could be identified that would result in radical changes being implemented that would allow the long desired pedestrianisation of Farnham Town Centre. Whilst FTC still wishes for this objective to be achieved it is clear that this is a longer term aspiration that requires a national change in public behaviour and attitudes. The recommendations below are, therefore, against this background and reflect what can be achieved in the short term with the limited level of funding that is known to be available from SCC. The views set out below are initial suggestions for debate. A final response with any additions can be considered at the September meeting of Council.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **FTC supports extending of 20 mph speed limit to cover entire residential built up area making Farnham a 20 mph town;**
2. **FTC fully supports, in principle, Option A for Downing Street effectively making permanent existing measures to widen footways;**
3. **FTC supports, in principle, Option A proposals for Castle Street that involve narrowing of the road on a permanent basis so long as there is recognition that part of the character and setting of Castle Street is its broad width and that proposals do not inhibit future community events in Castle Street;**
4. **FTC expects the use of high quality materials in pavement widening proposals as befits the conservation area and Farnham's historic Georgian heritage;**
5. **FTC supports use of accumulated financial surplus of SCC Farnham on-street parking account being used to provide high quality materials for use in pavement widening over and above cost of standard materials;**
6. **FTC supports, in principle, Option B proposals to replace the present one way town centre gyratory system with two way traffic flow on most roads. However, FTC is concerned over the effect on the character of the town centre Conservation Area of the consequential significant increase in traffic light controlled junctions. FTC requests that alternative methods of traffic calming and controlling traffic flow at road junctions is implemented as a first priority.**
7. **There are no circumstances under which FTC would support the junction of Castle Street with The Borough becoming traffic light controlled;**
8. **FTC specifically requests that the following changes to the Option B proposal be implemented:**
 - i) **making Downing Street between Waggon Yard car park and Longbridge two way,**
 - ii) **removal of proposed new bus stop on west side of South Street to allow all buses to Farnham Hospital and Aldershot to continue departing from the same stop,**
 - iii) **making Woolmead Road (one of the widest roads in central Farnham) two-way throughout.**
9. **With proposed road narrowing on The Borough, FTC believes that it is essential that any bus stop is located in a pull in lay by to ensure that other**

traffic can continue to flow freely when buses are stopped to allow passengers to alight and board.

10. **FTC proposes the following changes:**
 - i) **East Street between South Street and Dogflud Way to have restricted access with only delivery vehicles, buses, bicycles and taxis being allowed access.**
11. **FTC re-affirms its aspiration for the construction of a Hart Link Road between Castle Hill and Upper Hart car park noting the draft paper dismissing the proposal did not provide costs for this option;**
 - i) **as an essential element of any measures to provide access to reduce town centre vehicle movements accessing a town centre car park for vehicles from the North.**
 - ii) **expecting that a future extension to The Hart and West Street could, should circumstances change, allow consideration to be given to pedestrianisation of Farnham Town Centre.**
12. **Although SCC has not yet been allocated any funds from The Department of Transport to implement its countywide Bus Service Improvement Plan FTC**
 - i) **believes that it is essential that at least the existing level of bus service is maintained and should be enhanced when suitable opportunities arise to encourage use of alternate modes of transport;**
 - ii) **Seeks confirmation that the proposed electric bus route east-west and north-south will still be progressed**
13. **With regard to the A31 proposals FTC is concerned that apart from the Firgrove Hybrid Option, which would present significant engineering challenges if implemented, none of the proposals would resolve the current problems of connectivity between North and South (A287) which was one of the agreed key objectives.**
14. **FTC notes the latest Transport for The South East's current consultation on its draft Strategic Investment Plan and seeks support from SCC for both the Wrecclesham Bypass and Western Relief Road to remain on the priority list for investment. In light of the new near fatality at the railway bridge in July the Wrecclesham Bypass remains a key priority for local people.**

3 Background

- 3.1 The Farnham Infrastructure Programme (FIP) represents the most realistic possible opportunity to improve traffic flow and air quality in Farnham in the current economic climate. Whilst there have been several previous studies by a number of consultancies which have identified the problems, the proposed solutions have, to date, proved unacceptable in some form or other or sufficient funding resources have not been available. All "water under the bridge" and it needs to be accepted that "we are where we are" and the situation needs to be resolved against current economic and social conditions.
- 3.2 Whilst accepting that the current economic climate is not helpful, the establishing of a special Board consisting of representatives of the three tiers of local government (Surrey County Council, Waverley Borough Council and Farnham Town Council) is the first time that all three levels of local government representing Farnham residents have worked together with a sole focus on improving traffic flow and air quality in Farnham.
- 3.3 The traffic and air quality problems in Farnham have continued to deteriorate as traffic levels continue to increase and appear already to be back to pre-COVID pandemic levels. Central Farnham was declared an Area Quality Management Action Area in 2007 and to date there has been little action taken that would allow this designation to be lifted and the general national and local Climate Change objectives to be achieved.

- 3.4 The historic nature of Farnham as a pleasant Georgian town with its considerable number of listed buildings (alleged to number more than Chester with each individual lamp post on Castle Street being listed) prevents the traditional approach to resolving Farnham's problems through new road building from being implemented since it would result in the character of the town which makes it such a desirable place to live, being at best severely comprised or at worst effectively destroyed.
- 3.5 Previous consultancy studies have recommended construction of a Western Relief Road linking the A325 with the A31 and M3 to the West of Farnham to divert a considerable amount of through East / West traffic from traveling through Farnham. Such a new road even reached design stage but has never been built.
- 3.6 Whilst the construction of such a new road could still be built it would have a considerable negative impact on the environment and biodiversity especially since it could probably now only be justified by significant residential development on local greenfield sites which would have further negative impact on the local environment and biodiversity.
- 3.7 Construction of a Western Relief Road or even a more modest and shorter Wrecchesham Bypass are not, therefore, currently listed for even consideration on Central Government's Major Road Network (MRN) Programme, although FTC proposed this in the most recent MRN review.
- 3.8 For the purposes of the FIP it has to be accepted that the traditional approach of resolving Farnham's problems in the short to medium term through new road construction cannot, therefore, be realistically contemplated. This obviously constrains what could be achieved and, in particular, this prevents total pedestrianisation and limits options for restricted shared use of road space in Central Farnham.
- 3.9 Traffic levels have continued their ever relentless growth affecting Central Farnham and increasingly roads in both North and South Farnham such as Upper Hale Road, Alma Lane and Shortheath Road. Farnham can wait no longer - "something has to be done" to preserve Farnham's desirability as a place to live, work and visit.
- 3.10 Evaluation of alternative potential options has not, however, been helped by the requirement to adhere to Department of Transport criteria for the economic assessment of the impact of any new traffic schemes which, despite Central Government Climate Change objectives, are based on continued growth in road traffic. Nevertheless, a number of alternative options have been identified some of which are currently subject to public consultation and to which Farnham Town Council has the following considered comments.

4 Progress to Date

- 4.1 FTC welcomes the action that has already been taken – introduction of HGV weight restrictions, redesignation of certain roads and pending implementation of 20 mph speed limit on certain roads. FTC would like consideration to be given to extending HGV weight restriction to other roads and also extended 20 mph speed limit to other roads and perhaps even making Farnham a 20 mph town on all roads except A31.
- 4.2 Where traffic calming measures are being introduced, FTC would prefer vehicle speeds to be controlled by specific road narrowing pinch points and chicanes rather than through speed humps and cushions which cause difficulties for emergency services and bus operators (with associated increased costs) as well as resulting less comfortable ride for passengers.

5 Comments on SCC consultation options

Option A : Pavement Widening along Castle Street and Downing Street

- 5.1 The COVID pandemic has allowed a traffic flow experiments to be implemented on a trial basis which otherwise would have not have necessarily happened had there been no pandemic. Under these regulations a number of town centre roads (Downing Street, Castle Street and The Borough) were narrowed with wider footways for social distancing and attempts made to encourage active travel modes and, in particular, more walking and cycling. In many areas it became apparent that similar measures were not being very effective and were withdrawn almost as quickly as they were implemented e.g. Fleet High Street.
- 5.2 In Farnham, road narrowing and wider footways have been more successful and the measures continue to be retained in Downing Street and Castle Street. Narrowing road width has obviously reduced available road space for vehicles and could cause occasional longer traffic delays (normally related to issues on the road network elsewhere such as the A31) but these appear to have been accepted and should now be made permanent.
- 5.3 The narrowing of The Borough did not, however, work out and sometimes resulted in significant and more frequent traffic delays particularly when there were road works in the town, causing greater pollution in the town centre and, as a consequence, were withdrawn.
- 5.4 Unlike Downing Street, Castle Street is very wide and can easily be narrowed to only have one carriageway in each direction. FTC does, however, appreciate that there is concern over changing the character of Castle Street at the heart of the Conservation Area, with its view at a distance of Farnham Castle. Photographs which are frequently published in the Farnham Herald reveal, however, that Castle Street has changed within living memory and the present view of Castle Street is in fact marred by the significant number of parked cars. As with the rest of the town, the street scene along Castle Street would continue to change and evolve and rather continue in the present rather haphazard way it would obviously be better to plan change by narrowing road space by widening pavements and encourage the development of a European style café culture with chairs and tables provided for outdoor drinking and eating that would attract more visitors to Farnham.
- 5.5 For the proposed pavement widening measures to be fully effective it is, however, essential that high quality materials are used especially since both Downing Street and Castle Street are located in the Town Centre Conservation Area. It is also important that the clutter of signage should be minimised and whatever signage and street furniture that is provided is high quality. High quality standards for the Town Centre Conservation Area are already defined in the Farnham Town Centre Area Management Plan (FCAMP) to which all 3 tiers of local Government in Farnham contributed and “signed up to”.
- 5.6 It is appreciated that using higher quality materials will inevitably result in higher costs than standard materials. Over the years a significant surplus has built up in the on-street parking account that is held by Surrey County Council and it was agreed (prior to and as part of the implementation of on-street parking) that this surplus would be ring-fenced for use in Farnham. Using this and the future surplus to fund the additional costs of using of higher quality paving materials and the long overdue repair of traditional iron setts particularly in Castle Street, would be an appropriate use of the on-street parking revenues generated.

Option B : Changing Direction of Traffic Flow

- 5.7 To all intents and purposes, the proposals outlined in Option A effectively represent tidying up and making permanent the changes that have already been implemented during the COVID pandemic. These measures alone will not, however, resolve Farnham's traffic and air quality problems.
- 5.8 Option B represents the next stage by changing the direction of traffic flow with the present one way anti-clockwise gyratory system being replaced by the re-introduction of two way traffic flow along South Street, The Borough and Union Road. The transport demand modelling that has been undertaken reveals that this would reduce the level of traffic in the town centre but, unless people's attitudes and behaviour in using cars to make journeys were radically changed, the traffic deterred from travelling into town centre would merely be displaced onto other roads in North and South Farnham.
- 5.9 In addition, the conversion back to two-way traffic flows on certain roads would require a number of road junctions to be controlled by traffic lights e.g. the Longbridge/Downing Street/Union Road and Victoria Road junction; at the top of Downing Street at its junction of The Borough, and possibly (although not included in the consultation) at the bottom of Castle Street at the junction with the Borough. Increasing the number of traffic light controlled junctions in the town centre, which is a conservation area, would change the character of the town centre and it is questionable whether this would be acceptable. The provision of a traffic light controlled junction at the bottom of Castle Street with The Borough would not be acceptable under any circumstances and other means of controlling traffic-flow at this road junction needs to be found.
- 5.10 Even if more traffic light controlled road junctions were acceptable in the town centre there are certain changes to the proposal which have been previously discussed, that FTC believes deserve consideration and implementation : -
- i) The section of Downing Street between the entrance to Waggon Yard car park and Longbridge should also be two way – this would avoid the need for many of the cars departing from Waggon Yard car park having to travel through the town centre.
 - ii) There should be no new bus stop provided on the West side of South Street. The provision of this proposed bus stop would split the departure stop for services operating to Farnham Hospital and Aldershot which at present all depart from The Borough stop outside the Queens Head. All bus services operating to Farnham Hospital and Aldershot should continue to use their current routes and serve the existing stop on The Borough.
 - iii) All bus stops in the town centre need to be lay by pull ins to avoid stationary buses holding up other traffic.
 - iv) Woolmead Road should be two-way in both directions throughout its entire length.

6 Link Road from Castle Hill to Upper Hart Car Park

- 6.1 FTC has consistently requested that a new link road from Castle Hill to the Upper Hart Car Park should be introduced. Indeed, when consulted over the three possible options for Farnham Town Centre, FTC requested that the provision of this link road should be considered as part of the evaluation of the Option B proposals. However, a partial analysis (full grade to West Street only) dismissing the option on grounds of cost was presented in a late report to the recent Farnham Board. FTC continues to support the construction of a link road from Castle Hill to the Upper Hart car park to reduce the level of traffic using Castle Street and the gyratory system. It is, however, accepted that, if constructed, the

Upper Hart car park would have to be split into two sections to prevent such a link road being used as a rat run for through traffic. At the Farnham Board the cost of providing a link road right through to West Street was estimated as £8.1 million with land purchase costs representing a significant proportion of these costs. The cost of constructing a much shorter link road only as far as the Upper Hart car park would be considerably less although it could be constructed in such a way that it would be able to be extended to The Hart and West Street if circumstances change that would allow complete pedestrianisation of Farnham Town Centre in future.

7 Pedestrianisation (former Option C)

- 7.1 Although not part of the current round of public consultation there has been considerable attention and discussion over the possibility for either full or partial shared space (with buses, bicycles and taxis) pedestrianisation of Farnham Town Centre. Previous consultancy studies have concluded that pedestrianisation without construction of a Western Relief Road would only displace traffic to other already heavily used roads in North and South Farnham with consequential unacceptable traffic congestion and deterioration in air quality.
- 7.2 Nevertheless, it is accepted that pedestrianisation is popular amongst a significant proportion of local residents and it is FTC's view that consideration should be given to the following proposal. With the developments at Brightwells and Woolmead the section of East Street between South Street and Dogflud Way should be designated as restricted access for buses, taxis, bicycles and any necessary delivery vehicles as well as emergency service vehicles. Woolmead Road could be a two-way route.

8 A31 Options

- 8.1 The present public consultation also includes three options for the A31 (Farnham Bypass) which is unusual in that it effectively dissects the town in two. The three alternative options are in concept only and are the basis of a bid for Central Government funding – detailed public consultation would only take place if Department of Transport funding is allocated. Without Department of Transport funding there can be no improvements to the A31. The three options represent the “art of the possible” and one has to question whether the time savings that would be gained which would be measured in seconds can justify the cost and inconvenience that would be caused.
- 8.2 All three options involve common proposals for the Coxbridge and Shepherd and Flock roundabouts. It is proposed to modify both roundabouts to increase traffic flow.
- 8.2 The three alternative options relate to Hickley's Corner itself and can be summarised as follows : -
- i) **Adding additional Lanes at Junction** : This is the simplest and probably cheapest option. It involves increasing traffic flow through the junction by creating extra lanes at the approach to the junction from both directions. The benefits are, however, questionable since by creating additional lanes this effectively widens still further the “gap” between North and South Farnham and does not resolve the problems created by the current single eastbound carriageway under Firgrove Hill bridge.
 - ii) **Underpass** : This is a resurrection of the previous scheme and would be very expensive as well as involving a long period of construction which would result in closure of the A31 for a significant period of time which would have a serious effect on Farnham Town Centre. (A possible and more easily constructed alternative not necessarily involving complete closure of the A31 for a significant amount of time would be construction of a

flyover although this would raise concerns of the visual and noise impact of such a flyover).

- iii) **Hybrid Solution** – Of all the three alternative options this is the only alternative that would remove some through traffic from Farnham Town Centre. It would involve the construction of two new roundabouts – one to the south on the railway station approach road and another to the north of the Firgrove Hill bridge on the A287 itself between the present Firgrove Hill bridge and Bridge Square. Each roundabout would be linked by slip roads and from the A31. This proposal could be implemented fairly quickly and would allow the A31 to remain open. The gradient on Firgrove Hill is, however very steep and construction of the slip roads from both roundabouts would present a significant engineering challenge (and be expensive). The roundabout and associated slip roads on the north side of Firgrove Hill bridge would also have serious effects on the lives of residents of a number of roads including Saxon Court, Trafalgar Court, Firgrove Court, Abbey Street and Red Lion Lane. It should be noted that it is understood that Firgrove Hill bridge has structural problems and that there is a weight limit on this bridge. The bridge may require to be rebuilt at some time in the future at which time provision could be made for two eastbound carriageways

- 8.4 Apart from the Firgrove Hybrid proposal none of the alternative options resolve Farnham's main traffic problem – there is a real need to find alternative ways for North / South traffic to avoid passing through Central Farnham.

9 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The traffic and air quality problems of Farnham town centre are not easy to resolve otherwise action would have been taken by now. Nevertheless “something has to be done” given the ever continuing growth in road traffic. Although there have been several previous studies by transport consultants FIP represents the first focused attempt by the three tiers of local government working together to bring forward solutions that are realistic and achievable. There should, however, be no illusion that the proposals will, if implemented, result in many residents having to make some sacrifices by being involved in longer journey times.
- 9.2 Although not a final solution one realistic objective would be to reduce overall traffic to levels currently experienced during school holidays. It is the additional traffic (mostly short distance) generated by home to school movements particularly during the morning peak period that cause most traffic problems.
- 9.3 People's attitudes and behaviour towards using cars for short journeys needs to change – this is a national problem that has wider consequences resulting in Climate Change. Alternative means of transport (cycling, walking, use of public transport) need greater encouragement. FTC supports the measures being taken to encourage walking and cycling but was disappointed that both Surrey and Hampshire County Council's Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIP) were not allocated any funding by the Department of Transport. The lack of any funding from the Department of Transport for Surrey County Council's BSIP will almost certainly mean that there will be no funding available for one of the hoped for improvements in bus service provision which was an electric midibus town service for Farnham.
- 9.4 Finally, but by no means least, should these proposals be implemented it is essential that there are sufficient funds available to maintain an improved town centre environment. FTC, therefore, fully supports SCC in its campaign to revise the allocation of road maintenance funds (e.g. to fix potholes) from Central Government which at present is based on length of

road rather than level of actual road use. As a consequence, Surrey whose roads are heavily used due to nearby locations of London, Heathrow and Gatwick Airports has a relatively unfair low allocation of funds from Central Government for road maintenance when compared with most other local authority areas.

Cllr David Beaman

Joint Leader August 2022