

**Report to: Executive Board - Monday 22nd July 2002**

**Cornmarket Environmental Improvements Scheme -  
Options for the way forward**

<p><b>Report of: Business Manager Built Environment Unit</b></p> <p><b>Report Authors: John Hill, Steve Smith</b>  <b>Tel No: 01865 252 241, 01865 252 770</b>  <b>E-mail: jhill@oxford.gov.uk</b>  <b>E-mail swsmith@oxford.gov.uk</b></p> <p><b>Lead Member</b>  <b>Responsible: Cllr. Cook</b></p> <p><b>Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>  <b>Responsibility: Environment</b></p> <p><b>Key Decision: NO</b></p>	<p><b>WARDS AFFECTED</b>  Carfax</p>
<p><b>SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b></p> <p>Following the technical difficulties with the Cornmarket Environmental Improvement Scheme the County Council suspended the works in the highway pending the receipt of reports and assessment from specialists consultants. These reports have been submitted and Landscape Design Associates - the company managing the contract on behalf of the County Council have now made their recommendations to the County and the City Councils. This report summarises the technical options available and seeks the guidance of the Executive Board on those that should be explored further with the County Council.</p> <p>There are financial implications to this report the full extent of which are not yet known. The information available to date on the costs of the various options is set out in section 2 of this report. They will be the subject of a further report following a detailed design and costing analysis of the favoured options. The report has no staffing implications</p> <p>The Executive Board is <b>RECOMMENDED</b> to consider the options set out in Section 2 of this report and select those to negotiate further with the County Council and delegate authority to the Strategic Director with responsibility for the Built Environment Business Unit accordingly.</p> <p>This report supports the Council's strategic aims of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>improving the physical environment</b> by exploring the options available to continue with the proposal to increase use and enjoyment of the City</li> </ul>	

- Centre by implementing an environmental improvement scheme in Cornmarket Street to PRS standard to enhance Oxford's streetscape
- **strengthening local communities** by working with the County Council to find a solution to enable the implementation of a scheme in Cornmarket Street that will improve facilities for visitors to Oxford to ensure that Oxford remains competitive and maintains its position as a leading international visitor destination
  - **sound management** by exploring a number of options and the financial implications of each so that a decision may be taken that seeks a balance between the achievement of the above aims and the financial position of the Authority.

## 1. Background

In September 2000 the Planning Committee endorsed the Public Realm Strategy (PRS) prepared by Gillespies this Council's Environmental Consultants. This Strategy provided the framework for the environmental improvement scheme for Cornmarket which was to be delivered in partnership with the Oxfordshire County Council.

Responsibility for the design and implementation of the Scheme lies with the County Council as the Highway Authority. The City Council's primary role is to make financial and "in kind" (officer time) contributions to the cost of the scheme

A financial contribution agreement was entered into between the City and County Councils. Under the terms of the agreement the City Council agreed to contribute up-to £1,855,000 towards implementing a scheme in line with the PRS in Cornmarket Street. The County Council agreed to fund a scheme in Cornmarket Street, to the cost of a basic highway maintenance scheme, in the minimum sum of £425,000.

Some six weeks after commencement of the works in October 2001 pavement failures began to occur. Derek Fordyce of the Advanced Pavement Technology Centre at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh was asked to investigate and report. His final report on the reasons for the failure was received at the end of January 2002. Following this the County Council commissioned two further reports by consulting engineers Babbie and Sandberg. These were received at the end of March 2002.

Reasons for the failure are complex and it is not the intention of this report to explore this matter. Issues around potential liability are currently being discussed between the contractual parties. The City Council's financial involvement is through the Cornmarket Street Financial Contribution Agreement dated 16<sup>th</sup> May 2001.

## 2. Options

The consultants, Landscape Design Associates (LDA), have tabled for consideration the technical options (i) to (iii) below:-

- (i) New sawn and textured granite blocks. Cement based (polymer modified) jointing mortar in accordance with BS7533-7 and 10. Small aggregate concrete combined profiling and bedding layer. Existing lower road base repaired. This option would cost **£2.94 million**. (Cost savings of around £120,000 are possible if the existing granite could be recovered and re-used).
- (ii) New sawn blocks, reduced length and depth dimensions. Joints filled with crushed aggregate and flooded with polyurethane, top surface to be dusted with fine aggregate to colour match with joint mortar. Proprietary bonding agents used to stick the blocks to the concrete slab. Upper road base of 40Mpa shrinkage compensated concrete. Existing lower road base repaired. This option would cost **£2.95 million**.
- (iii) New sawn blocks of reduced length and depth dimensions. Joints filled with crushed aggregate and flooded with polyurethane, top surface to be dusted with fine aggregate to colour match with joint mortar. Pre mixed polyurethane bedding mortar. Bituminous macadam upper road base layer. Existing lower road base repaired. This option would cost **£3.21 million**.

The above three options would require separate trials to be carried out, the costs of which would be between £130,000 and £200,000. The results of these would not be available until March 2003. The risks involved could not be determined until after the completion of the trials, however, LDA have informed the County Council that given the history of this type of pavement in the UK, the County Council will not be able to obtain a guaranteed design life of 40 years.

Options (i) to (iii) above, are likely to result in extra funds above the £1.85 million previously committed to the scheme being requested from the City. This would need to be the subject of considerable negotiation with the County. The costs stated in the three options above are only the construction costs for commencing afresh. They do not include for contractor's additional cost for delay associated with the existing works, consultants fees or the cost of removing the existing cracked paving.

- (iv) A fourth option would be to use a macadam or asphalt surface enhanced with a coloured aggregate finish or resin bonded surface dressing. This option would not carry the same risks, (although is likely to require more regular maintenance), York stone footway and street

furniture (as in all the above options) would still be used. This would achieve some of the essential aims of the PRS and at a reduced cost over the three granite carriageway options put forward. This option would cost **£2.629 million**.

Currently the City have paid £652,000 of the capped contribution of £1,855,000. Any further contribution above the £652,000 would be the subject of negotiation with the County. If option (iv) is chosen, it is anticipated that work on the street could begin in October 2002 with a break over the Christmas period and be finished by July 2003. With options (i) to (iii) above work on the street could be completed by July 2004 providing all parties come to an early agreement on a way forward.

Options (i) to (iv) above would require either an amended or new financial agreement being entered into with the County Council.

- (v) If the City Council chose to stay with the original agreement (i.e. no variation to cost or the specification), this is likely to lead to termination of the Financial Contribution Agreement with the County. Should Members wish to consider this further, the legal and financial implications of termination/abandonment would need to be investigated and reported to Council. If the Council chose not to enter into a new agreement the County could implement a 'standard' highway scheme involving concrete paving slabs and black tarmac. The scheme would be at no cost to the City Council. Other costs would arise from termination, and the City Council may have to bear a share of them. It is not possible at this stage to assess termination costs to this Council.

### 3. Programme

The County Council's consultants are recommending that extensive on-site and off-site trial of the granite options are undertaken in order to confirm that these pavement designs will perform satisfactorily in the street. The trials are likely to take some time to complete and the permanent work would be unlikely to commence before July 2003. The bitumen macadam option would not require trials. Work could recommence on the street as early as October 2002 - subject to the City reaching a new or revised financial agreement with the County Council.

### 4. Recommendations

The County Council's Environment Scrutiny Committee met on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> July to consider what action should be taken to remedy the problems that have arisen with the granite block paving in Cornmarket Street. The Committee AGREED to recommend the Executive to seek to pursue in partnership with the City Council the option of a asphalt carriageway surface,

as offering the least risk in terms of capital cost, performance, and future maintenance liability' with consideration given to textured surfacing, trees and appropriate street furniture and investigation undertaken for the longer term of the possibility of a weight limit in the street.

The City's Overview and Scrutiny Committee is proposing to review the project at its meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> July. The Committee will make a recommendation to the Executive Board on the 22<sup>nd</sup> July. The view of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will have to be reported verbally at the Executive Board meeting.

The Executive Board is ASKED to consider the options in Section 2, and decide if it wishes to ask the County Council to continue to pursue the granite options put forward by LDA. OR ask the County for alternative proposals at a reduced cost, but within the PRS guidelines.

## **5. The Next Steps**

There is still work that will have to be done before any firm proposals could be put to the Executive Board. The City's legal advisers will have to evaluate the City's options with respect to the existing agreement with the County. Any new contributory sum would have to be negotiated with the County Council. A new or amended Financial agreement will have to be drawn up between the City and the County. The City Conservation officer will be included in discussions about the possible solutions. It is proposed that a joint report be presented to a meeting of the City and County Executive Boards addressing these issues on the 19<sup>th</sup> August.

1. THIS REPORT HAS BEEN SEEN AND APPROVED BY:
2. Isobel Garner - Strategic Director
3. Cllr Colin Cook - Economic Development and Planning portfolio holder

### Background Papers:

1. Oxford Public Realm Strategy document ( by Gillespies)
2. 26<sup>th</sup> June 2002 Presentation Overheads ( By LDA and PBA)

**Minute extracts from Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee**  
**15th July 2002**

**30. CORNMARKE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS SCHEME**

Steve Smith (City Liaison Engineer of Built Environment Business Unit ) and Dariusz Seroczynski (Major Projects Manager, County Council Environmental Services) attended to speak on this item. A number of County Councillors also attended as non-voting participants. Councillor Cook attended as portfolio holder.

The Committee considered:

- the recommendation made by the County Council Environment Committee on 3 July
- the report of the Built Environment Business Manager for the Executive Board of 22 July (previously circulated as urgent business)

The Committee agreed to RECOMMEND the Executive Board to:

- (1) seek to pursue in partnership with the County Council the option of an asphalt carriageway surface, as offering the least risk in terms of capital cost, performance, and future maintenance liability, with consideration given to textured surfacing, trees and appropriate street furniture and investigation undertaken for the longer term of the possibility of a weight limit in the street (which is the motion recommended by the County Council Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee)
- (2) express concern about the intention to use contractors involved in the first scheme;
- (3) express surprise at the cost of the proposed asphalt scheme;
- (4) consider the option of using granite dressing as set out in the public realm Strategy;
- (5) expedite the scheme as soon as possible;
- (6) express support for planting;
- (7) reuse or resell unused and reclaimed materials from the current scheme;
- (8) urge the County council to investigate a suitable weight limit for the street;
- (9) include an area of coloured or textured asphalt to distinguish the pedestrian area of Cornmarket from surrounding streets;

- (10) ensure that the City Council does not abandon its rights under the existing contract.