


Agenda Item No:	7	
Committee:	Council	
Date:	17 July 2023	
Report Title:	Petition – The Fountain, March Future High Street Scheme	

1. Purpose / Summary

- 1.1 To inform Members that a petition has been received with the requisite number of signatures to be considered by Full Council in relation to the relocation of the fountain on Broad Street, March as a part of the March Future High Streets Fund project.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 A petition has been received by the Council with 3,587 valid signatures against the following petition statement:

“As part of the March Regeneration project, Fenland District Council have approved the moving of The Fountain. The intended location is in front of Malletts, without any consultation with the proprietors or their near neighbours.

It is unacceptable to place The Fountain in front of a retail unit with a shop window for display and this petition is to ask for your support with the appeal to have it at another location.”

- 2.2 In regard to how this petition will be considered at the Council meeting;

- The petitioner will be given 5 minutes to present their petition.
- Members will have a period of 15 minutes to debate the petition.
- The Council can then take one of the following decisions:
 - Take the action the petition requests;
 - Not take the action requested for the reasons put forward in the debate;
 - To commission a further investigation into the matter e.g. by a relevant committee; or
 - where it is a matter in respect of which the Council’s Executive are required to make a decision, the Council will decide whether to make recommendations to the Cabinet to inform that decision.

- 2.3 On this occasion it would not be appropriate for Council to take the action the petition requests without a full understanding of the risks/issues/costs and implications of taking such action therefore Members should only consider whether to not take the action requested or refer to Cabinet with recommendations.

- 2.4 Some information on the March Future High Streets fund can be found at Appendix 1.

3 Recommendations

3.1 For Members to debate the petition and decide whether to:

Not take the action requested or refer the matter to Cabinet and make recommendations to inform Cabinet's decision.

Wards Affected	March wards
Portfolio Holder(s)	Councillor Chris Seaton, Portfolio Holder for Transport, Heritage and Culture
Report Originator(s)	Carol Pilson, Corporate Director Phil Hughes, Head of Leisure and Open Spaces Matt Wright, Future High Streets Project Officer
Contact Officer(s)	Carol Pilson, Corporate Director Phil Hughes, Head of Leisure and Open Spaces Matt Wright, Future High Streets Project Officer
Background Papers	Cabinet reports – March Future High Street Project

Appendix 1 - March Future High Streets Fund Information Note

Purpose:

This note will provide Members with information on work to date undertaken for The Broad Street Regeneration Project covering the following:

1. Background to the project
2. The Fountain
3. Process followed including consultation.
4. Planning process – process and length of time

Introduction

Government outlines their aims for the Future High Street fund as:

“The aim of the Future High Streets Fund is to renew and reshape town centres and high streets in a way that drives growth, improves experience, and ensures future sustainability. It will do this by providing co-funding to successful applicants to support transformative and structural changes to overcome challenges in their area.”

The project is about ensuring that the town centre has a sustainable future and is best placed to respond to the planned housing growth for the town, the need to attract new visitors to support both existing and new businesses, and that it can successfully compete against other towns as a retail and leisure centre. This is particularly important following the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact this has had on town centres.

Background

March secured a range of investment to help support a once-in-a-generation regeneration of the town centre worth 8.4m.

Fenland District Council has secured funding of from the Government's Future High Streets Fund (£6.4million) and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (£2million).

The main project within the programme consists of the Broad Street Regeneration scheme, a partnership project between the Cambridgeshire County Council March Area Transport Strategy, the Department for Levelling Up Future High Streets Fund, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and Fenland District Council.

This project will help the town centre to become fit for the future, ensuring it can evolve and adapt to changes in consumer demands and meet the needs of future generations as the town continues to grow.

The Broad Street scheme will implement changes to the Broad Street road layout, being delivered and funded through Cambridgeshire County Council's **March Area Transport Study** (MATS). The scheme includes the relocation of the historic fountain at the top of Broad Street to an accessible public space, within the newly created pedestrianised area.

There will also be new paving throughout the area, and new and improved facilities including bike racks, seating, planters, and trees to improve the aesthetic of the area, encouraging users to relax, spend time and use local businesses whilst reducing the prevalence of traffic in the area.

Fundamentally the scheme will pedestrianise the Northbound carriageway whilst retaining the southbound carriageway. The traffic lights at the northern end of Broad Street are set to be replaced with a mini roundabout, increasing the flow, and reducing pollution caused by standing traffic.

Fountain Relocation:

For the investment in the town to be realised and the new road layout to be implemented, the Historic Fountain must be relocated. Having reviewed several design options during the design phase, the only option that achieves all the committed output to both the MATS and the Future Highstreet Fund, is affordable and deliverable within the timeframe is the implementation of a mini roundabout.

It is not physically possible to create a mini roundabout at the northern end of Broad Street without relocation of the fountain as there is not enough road space to allow a mini roundabout to function properly.

Consultation:

Consultation with the wider public and stakeholders was undertaken both prior to the initial bid for funding to central government being submitted, and to inform the Growing Fenland Report and March Transport Strategy work, as well as following the success of this bid during the project development phase.

The 2019 Growing Fenland Report can be accessed here:

[Background Information - Fenland District Council](#)

This work was undertaken to form a high level, strategic picture of the issues facing the town and where the public felt the priorities for future funding bids should lie. The findings of the report were clear and highlighted the following problem areas for resolution within the town (page 10) specifically:

“When asked to identify their preferred plans for the town, respondents expressed some very clear preferences:

- *Improvements along the High Street (91% respondents)*
- *Reducing traffic flow through the centre of town (68% respondents)*
- *Riverbank platform seating (65% respondents)*

The March Area Transport project is separate to the High Street project and consulted local people in July 2020. This had to be online due to the Covid 19. Results can be found on the County Council website but generally align with the findings above regarding Broad Street. Further consultation was then undertaken in September 2022.

Additionally, and due to Covid 19, an online survey was undertaken by the High Street project prior to submitting the High Street project's proposals to Government in April 2020. This resulted in:

- The article regarding the project reaching 25,000 people.
- 16,000 engagements with the article that comprised a video of proposals.
- 700 people clicked through to the survey link.
- This resulted in 102 comments.

Following feedback from local elected Members, and local people in the consultation for Growing Fenland and the High Street project, the Council's bid to Government was submitted. Following assessment and the award from Government for the High Street project, the regeneration scheme moved forwards to the design stage. The scheme is to be delivered in two parts with two clear objectives:

1. March Area Transport Strategy (MATS) – This element of the scheme is a highway scheme aimed at reducing congestion in the town through the installation of new highway and roundabout. The design of this element (i.e., the roadway and kerb alignments) is predominantly dictated through highway engineering requirements and Road Safety Assessments. These led to the road layout being designed as published.

2. The second area that did have a higher degree of flexibility was the Future High Street funded public realm (i.e., the pedestrianised area, riverside, relocation of toilets and fountain, street furniture etc). This area was designed and then amended following those consultation events held at the library and on the marketplace last summer. Feedback was considered by the Member Steering Group with elements of the design amended in line with comments received.

During the design phase, several information gathering visits were made to the shops in Broad Street to research specifics required for the design:

Visit 1 – November 2021: Investigation into rear access for retailers and businesses.

Visit 2 – February 2022: investigation into sub-terranean basements (for drainage)

At each visit, businesses were informed why FDC was visiting and often had questions which were answered, Officers also visited with design materials on hand to discuss with workers and owners.

Following design, Library events were held on weekdays, extending into the early evening, to allow maximum exposure to the public and to enable people to attend that may otherwise have been at work. The marketplace event took place on a busy Saturday market. The events were publicised by Fenland District Council through external channels and news of the designs being released was also covered in local newspapers and on BBC radio several times.

Planning:

The planning process for this project relating to the fountain ran between submission of application on 22nd November 2022 and approval on the 9th of February 2023 taking approximately 10 weeks.

In February 2023, planning approval and listed building consent were granted to relocate the fountain. This followed a formal planning process over the course of which was open to objection from the public. The process regarding publicity of this application was as follows:

Listed Building Application

- Press Notice – published 7/12/22.
- Site Notice – put up 11/12/22.
- Neighbours - informed via post.

Full Application

- Press Notice - published 7/12/22.
- Site Notice – put up 11/12/22.
- Neighbours - informed via post.