

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: SMARTER CHOICES, SMARTER PLACES
Meeting: FALKIRK COUNCIL
Date: 30th APRIL 2008
Author: DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The enclosed report was considered at the Environment and Heritage Committee meeting of 15th April 2008 (extract minute of the meeting also enclosed) and was referred to full Council. During discussion, additional information was requested. This report includes the additional information and provides more detail of the reasons for the recommended funding bid. More information was received from the Scottish Government on 21st April 2008 about the bidding rules and context. It should be noted that the date of the Council meeting (30th April 2008) is the same as the closing date for Stage 1 bids to the Smarter Places, Smarter Choices funding regime.

2. BACKGROUND TO CHOICE OF RECOMMENDED SUBMISSION

- 2.1 Although funding for Year 1 of the Smarter Choices, Smarter Places initiative amounts to some £4 million, it is for the whole of Scotland, and is primarily aimed at “intense activity on sustainable travel interventions, particularly those involving behaviour change”. Of this, Falkirk Council proposes to table a bid of perhaps £450,000 in Year 1 for a variety of measures (see below). This is nearly four times the allocation we would expect to receive pro rata to population.
- 2.2 With respect to the question of public transport incentives and offers, the Council cannot subsidise a discount for passengers, but it can pay for advertising and administrative costs. The intention was to work with public transport operators to ascertain whether a promotion could be run as part of the project.
- 2.3 The funding for this project is mostly aimed at “Hearts and Minds” initiatives which involve publicity, marketing and personal travel planning. It is essential therefore that there is a good public transport network and a local shopping centre to provide incentives and opportunities for sustainable travel for these short distances. Larbert and Stenhousemuir households have a very high level of second and third car ownership compared with the Falkirk Council area average, giving potential for “modal shift”, a change to more sustainable modes of travel.

3. EXAMINATION OF AREAS FOR THE BID PROCESS

- 3.1 A number of areas within the Falkirk Council area were considered as part of the process of identifying a suitable bid area, and these are listed below, along with the reasons for discounting them as a bid location. A key point is that submissions have to be for areas with at least 8,000 people. A bid with probably the greatest chance of success would be

one with high and rising car ownership, high local employment for residents and good public transport links. (See Table 1.1).

- a) Denny & Bonnybridge (population 13,067) - have lower levels of car ownership than those of Larbert and Stenhousemuir and the Falkirk area average, which would mean a change of emphasis in the campaign to a combination of reducing car use (Larbert and Stenhousemuir) and maintaining already lower levels (Denny and Bonnybridge). While this is achievable, it is critical to bear in mind that the bidding for funding is a competitive process, where clear, measurable objectives will be a key component of successful bids. This would necessitate a campaign to increase levels of use of public transport for commuting, as distances involved in travelling even to Falkirk town centre make walking and cycling less feasible options for these types of trips. If the Council were so minded, this would be better achieved as a second, separate bid. There is the regeneration of the Town Centre which is due to complete in 2012, the development of the new Denny High School, to open in 2009, and a number of housing developments, including housing on the present Denny High School site. The High School is already involved in a transition project aimed at developing the school as a “Cycling Champion” school.
- b) Bo’ness (population 14,568) – although car ownership shows a similar pattern to the Falkirk Council average, only 26% of the working population of the Bo’ness area work in the town. The topography of the area could be a challenge for novice or inexperienced cyclists, who would be a main means of achieving modal shift.
- c) The Braes – no settlement within the Braes is large enough to support an individual bid. There is a rail station at Polmont, which does, with the rest of the Braes, have sufficient population to meet the criteria. However it would be difficult to promote a joint bid owing to the challenging topography making a physical barrier to cycling between settlements for novice and inexperienced cyclists. The levels of population working in the area are low, at 20%.
- d) Grangemouth (population 17,153) – had lower levels of car ownership than the Falkirk average, meaning that, like Denny, a campaign would have to have as its central focus an effort to maintain low levels of car ownership at its heart. Although a high proportion (76%) of the working population live and work in the area, the low levels of car ownership means that a large proportion of this population are already travelling by more sustainable means, and modal shift targets would be difficult to set and to achieve.
- e) Falkirk Town (population 33,983) – given that doubts have been expressed elsewhere in this report regarding manageability of larger projects, the population size of the Falkirk area is a concern in these terms. It is difficult however to subdivide Falkirk area in any comprehensible way that would fit with the Smarter Choices, Smarter Places bid criteria. Camelon (population 4,508) for example, although it has a rail link, lacks a sufficient population to meet the criteria. There is also a concern already expressed over the match funding component of any larger bid than the Larbert/Stenhousemuir proposal. In population terms, to bid for Falkirk town centre would effectively double the size of the match funding required.

Table 1.1 – Car ownership: Falkirk average compared potential bid areas

Cars per household	Falkirk Council area (%)	Denny/Bonnybridge (%) *	Larbert/Stenhousemuir (%)*	Bo'ness	Braes	Grangemouth	Falkirk Town
No car	30.8	35.3	22.7	30.6	22.8	37.8	37.9
One car	44	43.1	45.3	42.9	44.2	45.7	43.3
Two cars	20.9	17.5	26.9	21.5	27.2	14	15.8
Three + cars	4.4	3.8	5.3	4.4	5.8	2.5	2.9

*** based on an overall average figure for the combined areas**

- 3.3 Measures taken now and in the immediate future to improve access and information to public transport links, and to provide opportunities for cycling and walking, will promote a more active lifestyle which will reduce the need for a second or third car in both areas under discussion. Stenhousemuir and Larbert have good internal sustainable transport links and options, such as the circular bus route (with recently improved frequencies) and Larbert railway station with its new car parks. They are also geographically discrete within the Falkirk Council area and have a large number of employers located in the area. A high proportion (74%) of employed residents of Larbert and Stenhousemuir work in the area. This contrasts markedly with most of the other areas, e.g. Denny/Bonnybridge (37%) and Bo'ness (26%).
- 3.4 The Larbert/Stenhousemuir area has a large amount of new development. There is the new acute hospital, the first phase of which is due to open May 2010, the regeneration of Stenhousemuir town centre which is already underway and due to complete May 2009, 3,000 new houses at Kinnaird Village in an ongoing development, the construction of a new primary school at Kinnaird and a new denominational school to be located in Antonshill. These developments offer good opportunities to positively influence travel behaviour at an early stage. There are also a number of existing businesses that can be targeted through travel planning, as well as a number of schools that are already engaged in the travel plan process.

4. POSSIBLE ADDITIONAL EXTENDED BID

- 4.1 It has been suggested that a greater area could be covered by the (single) bid. This could, however, have a counterproductive effect as it could dilute the effectiveness of the measures identified as being the prime factors in achieving “modal shift”. The different profiles of Larbert/Stenhousemuir and other potential areas could also lead to a loss of focus on clearly identifiable objectives. If a larger area were to be considered, it would be better if a second bid were submitted for that area, subject to the Council having suitable match funding.
- 4.2 Should two bids be submitted, and both bids be successful, there would be a considerable resource implication for the Council since the Council's budget for walking and cycling is £100,000. It might be possible to obtain some funding by local organisations applying to the Falkirk Environment Trust (FET). There would be a considerable extra burden on staff in Development Services not only in developing the bids but, should both be successful, in delivering the projects. It should be noted also that this project does not exist in isolation from the wider picture in the Falkirk Council area – the successful bid for the Helix project for example will also, at the same time as this proposed initiative, be seeking match funding for a number of projects within its remit.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 While it is clear that there is a strong commitment from some other areas to the principles of the Smarter Choices, Smarter Places initiative, it is not clear that this commitment can be best served by a joint bid with the already proposed bid for Larbert and Stenhousemuir. It may weaken the existing bid, owing to some considerable differences in the transport profiles of different areas. There are a number of issues outstanding with such a joint bid, around existing infrastructure links, the progress of ongoing development and levels of internal travel for commuting. It is therefore recommended that the already proposed bid for Larbert and Stenhousemuir be submitted. The Council could choose to submit a separate bid for another area but there would be implications for match funding and staff time.

6. POLICY, LEGAL AND PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- a. This initiative supports the Council's sustainable policies within the Falkirk Strategic Community Plan, Local Transport Strategy and Sustainable Falkirk Action Plan.
- b. There are no significant legal implications. Existing staff, aided by contractors, can carry out the duties of what will be a labour intensive project for the Larbert/Stenhousemuir bid. It should be noted however that a bid of increased scope or a second bid could have a resource impact in delivery of existing and new workloads, and in the development of the bids themselves.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- a. Falkirk Council, if successful would receive 100% funding in 2008/09, then 50% funding for 2009/10 and 2010/11. The 50% funding could be matched from various budgets including capital, revenue, developer contributions (some already received) and staff time 'in kind'. Stage 2 of the preparation process would, if the Council gets to that stage, confirm the estimated cost of the project.
- b. Present costs for a bid for the Larbert/Stenhousemuir area are based on costs for the English Sustainable Travel Towns projects.
- c. Estimated Costs for a Smarter Choices, Smarter Places campaign for Denny and Bonnybridge are, as above, based on the cost model for the English Sustainable Travel Demonstration Towns projects.

Table 1.2 below shows the estimated contributions for match funding from Council sources required for each bid. Table 1.3 shows the possible sums to be requested from Scottish Government.

Table 1.2: Summary of estimated financial contribution from Falkirk Council required as part of Smarter Choices, Smarter Places bids

Project Area	Year 1 (£)	Year 2 (£)	Year 3 (£)
Larbert/Stenhousemuir	0	150,000	120,000
Denny/Bonnybridge	0	125,500	97,500
Total	0	275,500	217,500

*Assuming match funding available from both Scottish Government and Falkirk Council

Table 1.3: Summary of estimated funding requested from Scottish Government for Smarter Choices, Smarter Places bids

Project Area	Year 1 (£)	Year 2 (£)	Year 3 (£)
Larbert/Stenhousemuir	450,000	150,000	120,000
Denny/Bonnybridge	360,000	125,500	97,500
Total	810,000	275,500	217,500

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1** It is recommended that the Council authorises the Director of Development Services, in consultation with the Director of Finance, to submit a Stage 1 bid for the Larbert and Stenhousemuir area to the Scottish Government for the *Smarter Choices, Smarter Places* project.

.....
DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Date: 17 April 2008
Contact Name: Julie Cole

**ANNEX 1: Director of Development Services Report to Environment and Heritage
Committee of 15th April 2008 on Smarter Places, Smarter Choices**
(To be attached by Law and Administrative Services)

ANNEX 2: Minutes of the Environment and Heritage Committee meeting of 15th April 2008

(To be attached by Law and Administrative Services)