

## Introduction

Melrose community through its local Councillor and its Community Council had long campaigned for relief from the congested, two-way flow along its High Street. The possibility of introducing a one-way traffic system was investigated by Scottish Borders Council. After further lobbying and submissions by the community, the project was included in the Council's capital programme to be constructed in 2006.

Officers in Technical Services, recognising the potential for opposition from some sectors of the local community to the project as a whole and certainly the potential for varying opinions on specific aspects of the project, proposed that the project should continue to be community led and that a trial period for operating the one-way system should be set up. This trial period was used to consult with the wider community, identify and address operational problems and devise and propose alternative layouts for Market Square, which is the focal point of the town and lies within a Conservation Area.

The final scheme has transformed Melrose, in particular Market Square, which was once dominated by traffic and parking and now provides amenity space for general public use and also specific, civic functions. The community satisfaction is difficult to overstate.

## The One-Way System Trial

In an effort to involve the community and to continue to have the community lead the project, a Stakeholders Group was formed. A chairperson, who was clearly independent of any lobby and whose integrity was beyond question, was identified and appointed. The group comprised representatives from all sectors of the community including traders, businessmen, the general public, the Community Council as well as public bodies and services such as the police, Fire and Rescue, bus companies, disabled groups and taxi representatives. To ensure fair representation the composition of the group was impact assessed.

Meetings were held regularly throughout the 9 month trial period to discuss feedback from the initial public exhibition, e-mails, the website, letters and direct to group members. Acting on technical advice from Technical Services staff, decisions were made on alternative layouts, solutions to problems arising and finally on the success of the trial itself. This final decision was based on before and after measurements of traffic congestion, speeds, noise, air pollution and all feedback from the community culminating a questionnaire survey.

The one-way trial proved to be successful. Congestion was eliminated and the new pedestrian crossings, introduced as part of the scheme, in conjunction with the one-way traffic flow, provided a much more pedestrian friendly environment. The public response in the questionnaire as to how the historic Market Square should be developed was surprising in that it was not what the Stakeholder Group had anticipated. The group had thought that the demand for parking provision would hold sway, but an overwhelming vote in favour of creating amenity space won the day.

The Market Square is the focal point of Melrose and lies within a Conservation Area, so the complete scheme required to be of high specification and sympathetic to the historic town to meet the requirements of Historic Scotland as well as the local community. The design team liaised with in-house landscape architects and planning representatives and produced a design of tiered platforms following the natural fall of the ground with masonry walls and planters. Access to the platforms is gained by both ramps and steps. The stone selected to construct the walling was a direct match to the locally quarried stone in colour, but has a lower porosity value and as such should ensure the longevity of the features. Natural stone flagging and a decorative roundel on the lowest tier have been incorporated to complement the walling and historic features within the town and the ancient Market Cross has been incorporated in the development. There was a desire in the community to avoid lighting columns within the Market Square and after the investigating of several possibilities; fibre optic lighting was designed to illuminate the steps in accordance with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act. This lighting also introduced a modern element to the design that is only apparent in the evenings and adds to the attraction of the square.

### Overall Council Objectives

Melrose lies at the heart of the Borders and is an important tourist destination. Apart from ancient Melrose Abbey, where Robert the Bruce's heart is buried, the town is the birth place of seven-a-side rugby and hosts an annual, internationally renowned tournament. Scottish Borders Council's Corporate Plan recognises that "Tourism makes a significant contribution to the Borders economy." Sustaining and developing tourism provides a major challenge, which influences the Council's vision and values and shapes the Council's priorities as set out in the plan. The current Local Transport Strategy also recognises that tourism is an important part of the Borders economy and that the built environment and townscapes in particular played a vital role in attracting visitors. It acknowledges the pressures on town centres from increased car use and parking demand and advocates town centre enhancement to relieve these pressures, to encourage walking or cycling by providing more space and to improve the sense of community.

The one-way system was designed to make the town more pedestrian and traffic friendly and thus more attractive to locals and tourists alike. The focal point of community gatherings, Market Square, has been transformed from what effectively was a car park into a gathering place for informal and formal events such as the town's Civic Week and Christmas and New Year celebrations.