

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

29 NOVEMBER 2016

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR COMMUNITIES

BRIDGEND TOWN CENTRE ACCESS CONSULTATION

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to present to Cabinet the findings of the recent Bridgend Town Centre Access Study consultation, and the Equalities Impact Assessment, and, subject to a Cabinet agreement on the way forward, to seek approval to commission detailed design work for the scheme.

2 Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan

- 2.1 This report is linked to the Corporate Plan priority of Supporting a Successful Economy.

3 Background

- 3.1 A report presented to Cabinet on the 7th June 2016 'Bridgend Town Centre Access' detailed the results of an independent report undertaken by Capita, to review methods and assess risks of increasing vehicular access to Bridgend town centre.
- 3.2 The previous report made it clear that the risk of collisions will increase if vehicles are reintroduced into Queen Street, Market Street and Dunraven Place. The report rightly acknowledged that if road safety was the only consideration, the safest option would be to do nothing and retain the existing arrangement. Cabinet was advised that it was not possible to predict the number of collisions that could occur because the appearance of the town centre is significantly different to what it had been before pedestrianisation.
- 3.3 Added to this, in common with many medium sized towns, footfall is lower and the town centre generally less busy than when the pedestrianisation scheme was extended to Queen Street, Market Street and Dunraven Place in 2004. Given the ongoing changes in the retail sector, changing shopping habits, and the physical changes that have taken place in the street layout in this area, Cabinet were advised by the independent consultants that it would seem unlikely that the town centre will return to the road safety situation that made pedestrianisation a sensible choice at that time.
- 3.4 Cabinet concluded that a change of this scale would impact differently on town centre users and stakeholders, some of whom would benefit, while others could be at a detriment. Therefore it was essential that the views of

town centre users and stakeholders be ascertained in their totality, in particular the impact on vulnerable groups, and those with protected characteristics, prior to making a decision to proceed.

- 3.5 Officers were instructed to undertake a comprehensive public consultation exercise as recommended by the independent Access Report. The scope, methodology and findings are explained in detail in section 4 below.
- 3.6 Officers were also requested to consider external funding options to meet the implementation costs, in the event that the consultation process indicated a positive response.

4 Current Situation/Proposal

- 4.1 The proposal considered through the public consultation exercise is to reintroduce traffic to Queen Street, Dunraven Place and Market Street. As part of the proposal, a 20 miles per hour speed zone and two pedestrian crossings would be introduced alongside approximately 18 parking/loading bays and street bollards designed to improve safety by separating pedestrians and vehicles.
- 4.2 The public consultation was conducted over a twelve week period between the 8th August and the 24th October 2016.
- 4.3 Details of the consultation were sent as part of a press release emailed to the following stakeholders; Bridgend business forum and business directory, councillors, Bridgend Town Council, members of the Local Service Board (LSB), the Youth Service Council (YSC), Bridgend Equality Forum (BEF), and local media outlets.
- 4.4 Residents who previously stated an interest in receiving key consultations or expressed interest through the Citizens' Panel were sent a link to the survey to complete online.
- 4.5 Facebook and Twitter were used to promote the consultation including a Facebook advert promoting the campaign.
- 4.6 Ten community engagement days were held across three locations in Bridgend County Borough: a three day event at McArthur Glen's designer outlet, a three day event at Bridgend town centre market, followed by a three day event at Tesco Extra (Bridgend). All engagement stands were held between 10:00 – 15:00. A one day event held at Bridgend College's Freshers' Fayre was also attended on 6 September 2016.
- 4.7 The consultation and engagement officer met with Bridgend Equality Forum members on two occasions. On 23 May 2016, the consultation team had a pre-consultation meeting with the members to gather views prior to creating engagement documentation to understand any underlying concerns that needed to be addressed as part of the consultation. A second meeting on 14

September 2016 was attended to promote the launch of the survey and encourage responses.

4.8 On 31 August 2016 the consultation, marketing and engagement assistant attended the Bridgend Youth Cabinet meeting to encourage its members to promote the consultation within their schools and with their peers. Particular focus was drawn to the fact the survey could be completed using smartphones and tablet devices.

4.9 The consultation survey asked for the public's views on the following:-

- whether a change to the pedestrianisation order is supported;
- whether to retain some form of pedestrianisation in the town centre at certain times or to open the streets up to vehicular traffic at all times;
- whether the proposed parking / loading bays should have a limited waiting restriction; and
- whether introducing the proposal would have a beneficial or negative impact on Bridgend town centre.

4.10 The consultation was made available to complete online through an interactive survey (appendix 1) on the consultations page of the Council's website. Paper copies of the consultation were made available at community engagement events, sent directly to residents and distributed to 40 town centre traders for dissemination.

Response Rate

4.11 The response rate has been segregated into several areas: the consultation survey responses, comment cards received during community engagement stands and social media interactions.

4.12 2,480 responses to the consultation were received in total. Of the survey responses received, there were 1,221 online submissions and 803 paper versions of the survey returned, 2,024 in total. There was 1 email, 193 social media interactions and 262 interactions received from the community engagement events.

4.13 During the social media question and answer session there were a total of 22 interactions from Twitter and 171 interactions from Facebook, being seen a total of 8,562 times on Twitter and 12,069 times on Facebook respectively.

4.14 No comments were received by letter or telephone call.

Data Validation

4.15 Data validation measures have been undertaken to ensure that the same respondent could not submit more than one response by cross comparing the consultation response details. A sample of 2,024 is robust and is subject to a maximum standard error of ± 2.16 per cent at the 95 per cent confidence level on an observed statistic of 50 per cent. Thus, we can be 95 per cent confident

that responses are representative of those that would be given by the total adult population, if a census had been conducted, to within ± 2.16 per cent of the percentages reported.

Key Findings

- 4.16 A full report of the consultation has been prepared and is attached in Appendix 2. This sets out the detailed consultation methodology and the responses to each question in the survey.
- 4.17 Approaching eight in ten (77.0%) of respondents agreed with the proposal against one in five (20.1%) respondents who disagreed. Tourists were even more supportive with 86 per cent selecting agree or strongly agree.
- 4.18 Over seven in ten parents of young children supported the proposal (73.2%). Respondents without children were more likely to support the proposal with 79.0 per cent agreeing.
- 4.19 Of those who supported the proposal, three in four (74.1%) would like the roads to be open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Full vehicle access was supported by the following demographic groups:
- residents (58.9%)
 - tourists (73.5%)
 - parents of young children (55.4%)
 - respondents without young children (63.9%)
 - disabled (61.7%)

 - non-disabled (60.5%)
- 4.20 One hour parking was the most popular response overall with over two in five (42.1%) selecting the option followed closely by 40% selecting 30 minute parking bays.
- 4.21 Residents, regular visitors, respondents under 65, parents of young children and the disabled were all more likely to select one hour over 30 minute parking bays. Tourists, non-frequent visitors, the elderly, respondents without children and the non-disabled preferred a 30 minute parking bay.
- 4.22 A response was also received from Guide Dogs Cymru stating: "We do of course support the introduction of dropped kerbs to facilitate access by wheelchair users and other pedestrians, but these must be marked with the appropriate tactile paving." The response falls in line with the outcome of the Capita report referenced in the consultation.
- 4.23 Over seven in ten (75.8%) thought the introduction of the proposal would have a positive impact on the town centre. When analysing further based upon sub-groups (e.g. disabled respondents), all demographic groups believed the proposal will have a positive impact.

Overall conclusions from the consultation

- 4.24 From the consultation report it is reasonable to conclude that the majority of respondents supported the proposal to reintroduce vehicles into Queen Street, Market street and Dunraven Place. The preference is to allow full-time vehicular access (60.8%). There was no significant preference in terms of the duration of parking in parking bays, between one hour and 30 minutes. Given the very limited number of parking bays, the need therefore to maximise their usage, and to ensure consistency with other limited waiting bays within the town centre, it is recommended that, should the scheme proceed to implementation, 30 minute bays are introduced in the first instance, and monitored, during the experimental period.
- 4.25 Suspending the pedestrianisation of Queen Street, Dunraven Place and Market Street with the introduction of parking spaces will enable the town centre to become more accessible to shoppers in the day time and customers during the evening, therefore creating an opportunity that currently does not exist to address the economic performance of the town. The consultation results overall would suggest that there is broad public consensus in favour of the proposals, despite the differential impact on different groups of users and stakeholders.
- 4.26 The changes to the public realm to facilitate this change is likely to include the following:
- bollards and/or street furniture to demarcate the interface between carriageway and footway;
 - 24 hour, seven day vehicular access;
 - two crossing points with tactile paving;
 - 20 miles per hour speed restriction;
 - Changes to parking and loading bays (the number of these is subject to further site investigation);
 - Limited waiting time of 30 minutes; and
 - Traffic signs and road markings.

Next steps

- 4.27 Outlined below are the proposed design and consultation steps which would need to be taken before an Experimental Traffic Order can be implemented:
- A preliminary scheme design is produced by the scheme originator showing the extent of the proposal;
 - A key requirement of the scheme design is to ensure the safety issues highlighted in the Access Study, are resolved through physical design and traffic management measures. If this proves not to be possible, the process may be suspended at this stage;
 - Consultation correspondence must be sent out, including the preliminary design, to the following: appropriate Local Ward members; Chief Constable of Police; Freight Transport Association; Road Haulage Association; appropriate ambulance / NHS bodies; Fire Service; appropriate Bus Operators if affected by

the scheme; other organisations considered likely to be affected by the proposals;

- The responses will then be considered which may result in the original proposals being amended if appropriate; and
- Following the further consultation, a further Cabinet Report will be required, outlining the responses before progressing to the next stage.

4.28 If Cabinet agree to progress the proposal then the following steps will be undertaken:

- Once the final form of Orders are agreed then the detailed design will be completed for the proposal;
- During this design period and in accordance with Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure)(England and Wales) Regulations 1996 – publish formal notice of intention to bring an experimental order into force within 7 days of the date on which the notice is published. Usually the Order will run for up to 18 months. The notice will invite formal objections, setting out the date by which such objections must be received (usually within the first six months of the experiment coming into force);
- The proposal can then be implemented on site on an experimental basis;
- During operation, the scheme will need to be monitored and an evaluation made of the operation and suitability of the scheme in achieving its stated objectives;
- If considered appropriate after an evaluation of the scheme has been completed, and if no objections received within the first six months then a notice could then be published of the intention to make the Experimental Order permanent, as modified if appropriate, in accordance with Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure)(England and Wales) Regulations 1996;
- If objections are received, and if it is considered appropriate to proceed with the scheme at that point, a decision will need to be made by Cabinet whether the matter will be determined by means of a Public Inquiry or by the Appeals Panel.

Legislative Background

4.29 When considering whether to make a traffic order, the Council is under a duty under Section 122 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to secure the expeditious, convenient and safe movement of vehicular and other traffic (including pedestrians) and the provision of suitable and adequate parking facilities on and off the highway having regard to the matters specified in s122(2) being:

- The desirability of securing and maintaining reasonable access to premises;
- The effect on the amenities of any locality affected and (without prejudice to the generality of this paragraph) the importance of regulating and restricting the use of roads by heavy commercial vehicles, so as to preserve or improve the amenities of the area through which the roads run;
- The importance of facilitating the passage of public service vehicles and securing the safety and convenience of persons using such vehicles;

- The strategy prepared under section 80 of the Environment Act 1995 (national air quality strategy);
- Any other matters that appear to the local authority to be relevant.

4.30 Cabinet will be aware that some of the obligations in paragraph 4.29 can be competing. However, in deciding whether to proceed with the proposed order Cabinet must consider and balance the overall objective in s122 (1) and the matters set out in s122 (2).

4.31 The Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 sets out the purposes for which a traffic order may be made. Such an order can only be made if it is considered expedient to make such an order for one or more of the following reasons:

- a) for avoiding danger to persons or other traffic using the road or any other road or for preventing the likelihood of any such danger arising, or
- b) for preventing damage to the road or to any building on or near the road, or
- c) for facilitating the passage on the road or any other road of any class of traffic (including pedestrians), or
- d) for preventing the use of the road by vehicular traffic of a kind which, or its use by vehicular traffic in a manner which, is unsuitable having regard to the existing character of the road or adjoining property, or
- e) (without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (d) above) for preserving the character of the road in a case where it is specially suitable for use by persons on horseback or on foot, or
- f) for preserving or improving the amenities of the area through which the road runs, or
- g) for any of the purposes specified in paragraphs (a) to (c) of subsection (1) of section 87 of the Environment Act 1995 (air quality).

4.32 In this case, implementation of the scheme would be for 'for facilitating the passage on the road or any other road of any class of traffic (including pedestrians)' and 'for preserving or improving the amenities of the area through which the road runs'.

5. Effect Upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules

5.1 None

6. Equalities Impact Assessment

6.1 It is the duty of the Council to carry out an Equalities Impact Assessment on any proposal. As part of this Cabinet Report a full EIA report was undertaken (Appendix 3). The EIA recommends the following mitigation measures, which will be addressed through the design and if agreed, the implementation stages of the project:

- consultation with town centre users, in particular those with protected characteristics, on the design and layout of the road system to ensure all relevant and appropriate road safety measures are put in place;

- site visits for disability groups to ensure the changes made to the road layout are fully understood;
- a robust marketing campaign advising of the changes to the road layout with particular focus on those protected characteristic groups likely to be impacted, including leaflets outlining the changes sent to all nursery, primary and special schools; and
- BCBC to consider employing traffic marshals during the initial phase of opening the road to traffic to inform and advise the public.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 The cost of the Access Study was met by Welsh Government under the Vibrant and Viable Places programme. A funding bid has been submitted to Welsh Government to cover the cost of preliminary scheme design, subject to a decision by Cabinet to proceed to this next stage. The anticipated cost of the detailed design stage is circa £60,000. The council would need to provide £10,000 as match funding, which can be met from the Strategic Studies Fund, part of the Strategic Regeneration Fund which is set aside for this purpose. If the funding bid is approved, the full allocation will have to be expended in the 2016/17 financial year, but as yet, there is no indication from Welsh Government of when a decision will be reached. Based on past experience, this may not be until the New Year, leaving very little time to procure and carry out the design work. Should Cabinet decide to proceed with the preliminary design works it is recommended that the procurement exercise is commenced immediately, and the work funded from the Strategic Regeneration Fund, in anticipation of, but not reliant upon a grant approval.
- 7.2 Cabinet should note that there is no budget provision for the cost of the scheme, which is tentatively estimated at £552,000, within the council's approved capital programme, and that the scheme will not be able to proceed until suitable external funding can be sourced. A funding bid has also been submitted to Welsh Government to cover this cost, but Welsh Government officials have indicated that they are unlikely to be able to consider this until 2017/18. It is not known at this stage whether match funding will be required for this bid. Both the Business Improvement District steering group and Bridgend Town Council have indicated a willingness to provide an element of match funding to assist with the drawdown of external funding.
- 7.3 Cabinet should also note that £552,000 is only a high level estimate of the cost of works; a more accurate cost estimate will emerge as a full scheme design is developed. Ultimately, the actual cost will only be determined through a procurement exercise once any scheme is approved, and the actual costs could vary significantly from the original estimate.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 Cabinet is recommended to:

- 8.1.1 Note the key findings of the Access Study public consultation, which demonstrate strong public support for reintroducing vehicular access to Queen Street, Market Street and Dunraven Place;
- 8.1.2 Note that the majority of town centre users who are more likely to be affected as a result of the changes being consulted upon, for example the elderly, disabled, and people with young children, were also in favour of the proposal;
- 8.1.3 Note the mitigation measures proposed in paragraph 6.1 to address the findings of the Equalities Impact Assessment;
- 8.1.4 Note there are no confirmed resources to undertake preliminary design or the capital works, although funding bids have been made, and that costs could vary from those estimated at this time;
- 8.1.5 Authorise officers to commence the procurement exercise for preliminary design work, as detailed in paragraph 7.1;
- 8.1.6 Authorise officers issue consultation correspondence based on the scheme summarised in paragraph 4.26 of the report to Local Ward members; Chief Constable of Police; Freight Transport Association; Road Haulage Association; appropriate ambulance / NHS bodies; Fire Service; appropriate Bus Operators if affected by the scheme and any other organisations considered likely to be affected by the proposals; and
- 8.1.7 Authorise officers to accept the grant approval (subject to Welsh Government decision) to meet the cost of preliminary design work.

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Background documents: Cabinet Report 7th June Bridgend Town Centre Access