

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

7 JUNE 2016

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR COMMUNITIES

BRIDGEND TOWN CENTRE ACCESS

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to present to Cabinet the findings of the recent Queen Street, Dunraven Place and Market Street Access Study (April 2016), prepared by Capita Glamorgan, on behalf of the Council, and to seek approval for a wider public consultation, to inform the Equalities Impact Assessment.

2 Connection to Corporate improvement Plan

- 2.1 This proposal will contribute to the Corporate Plan priority of *Supporting a Successful Economy*.

3. Background

- 3.1 Bridgend town centre was pedestrianised in 2002 as part of a sustained programme of investment in physical regeneration measures to address issues related to safety and quality of the environment. The scheme was carried out in two phases:

2002 Phase 1 - the pedestrianisation of Caroline St, Wyndham St, Adare St.

2004 Phase 2, the pedestrianisation of Queen St, Dunraven Place and Market St.

The pedestrianisation zone prohibits vehicle access between 10am – 6pm and restrictions that apply outside of these hours to vehicles loading only.

- 3.2 Although pedestrianisation of town centres can help to create safe and attractive environments for shoppers it can also restrict the ability for car-borne trade, short shopping trips, collection of large goods and make town centres far less visible to potential shoppers.
- 3.3 Footfall and trading figures increased after the implementation of Phase 1. The scheme achieved the objectives of creating a safe and pleasant environment for shoppers and was supported by the town traders. Footfall also increased for a short while after Phase 2, but has declined since then.
- 3.4 The function and purpose of town centres has been changing rapidly over the past seven years with a noticeable effect on smaller regional towns. Increased competition from out of town retail parks, e-commerce, supermarkets, rents and business rates, the economic downturn and the change in consumer shopping habits has contributed to a decline in retail spend and footfall and led to the closing of multiple independent retailers across the UK. Bridgend town centre has experienced these pressures with a documented continual decrease in footfall, an

increase in vacant properties, a decrease in car parking income and a decrease in sales performance.

- 3.5 Many factors responsible for this are outside the Council's control. However, it is very important for the Council to assess any factors that *are* within its control that could positively impact on the success and viability of the town centre. The lack of vehicular access to Queen Street, Dunraven Place and Market Street has been cited by the town centre traders, property agents and developers as a key issue that impacts on trade and lettings. Elsewhere, other Councils have also made the decision to revoke or amend pedestrianisation orders, for example in Ebbw Vale, Paisley, Northampton and Pontypridd, for similar reasons.
- 3.6 Making changes to access arrangements in these streets will require an understanding of the equalities implications, risks, costs and physical constraints and for this reason, an independent report has been commissioned to review methods and assess risks of increasing vehicular access, and in particular, to assess the impact of any changes on vulnerable road users. The full report is attached at Appendix 1.

4. Current Situation/Proposal

4.1 The following scenarios have been assessed in the Access Study:

- Suspending the pedestrianisation in Queen St, Dunraven Place and Market at all times;
- Limiting the pedestrianisation period on these streets to between 11am and 3pm, and allowing full vehicular access at all other times;
- Consideration of reversing the existing one way system on Wyndham Street and Caroline Street.

4.2 If vehicles were to be re-introduced to the streets in question, physical changes would be required. The study considered 4 options, ranging from the most basic and least expensive, to the most complex and expensive, assessing the benefits and risks of each option:

- Signing and lining scheme with no physical changes to the existing street characteristics;
- Increasing the kerb upstand from the existing 0 to 20mm to at least 60mm;
- Provision of tactile paving to demarcate carriageway;
- Provision of bollards and / or pedestrian guardrail to demarcate carriageway.

4.3 The study has been undertaken in consideration of the following key factors:

- Collision data analysis comparing pre and post pedestrianisation information;
- Risk assessments for reintroducing traffic to Queen St, Dunraven Place and Market St, including an assessment of the likely maintenance issues and safety issues, together with implications for each option, utilising pre / post pedestrianisation data.
- The safety assessment gives particular consideration to the needs of vulnerable road users;
- Changes required to existing parking/loading bays;
- Pedestrian crossing locations and type;
- Signing / lining requirements;

- Suitability of existing construction and budget cost estimates of physical changes required to achieve an acceptable level of public safety;
- Town centre traders' request that the times of the pedestrianisation be revisited to mitigate footfall and trade reduction.

Consultants' Findings

- 4.4 The risk of collisions will naturally increase if vehicles are allowed back in the town centre, but it is not possible to predict the number of collisions that are likely to occur (p.30).
- 4.3 Vehicle speed does not appear to have been a major contributory factor to collisions, either before or after pedestrianisation. It is therefore reasonable to assume that most motorists will travel at the appropriate speed, whatever option is selected (p.30).
- 4.4 Pre and post-pedestrianisation collision data strongly indicates that collisions will increase if the streets are reopened to vehicles. Based on this data, the majority of collisions are likely to be minor conflicts resulting in slight injuries. However, more serious injuries cannot be ruled out, as is the case in most streets which mix pedestrians and vehicles (p.19).
- 4.5 It is reasonable to assume the risk of collisions will initially be higher as pedestrians and motorists adjust to the changes. It is not possible to predict with any certainty the period of time over which the risk will reduce to the norm (p.30).
- 4.6 The streets share many of the characteristics of a 'shared space' environment. The carriageway is narrow, and while it is visually distinguishable from footways, there are exceptions at key junctions. There is a low kerb upstand and no conventional physical barrier to pedestrian movement. Low kerbs can indicate to motorists that pedestrians are not confined to the footways and they can expect to encounter them in the carriageways, which in certain environments can help to reduce speed (p.17).
- 4.6 Of the different options assessed, option 1 which involves limiting physical changes to only changes in signage and road markings, is the most cost effective, and shortest to implement. However, this option would have the greatest risk in terms of public safety, and it is not recommended that this option, on its own, is implemented. The cost is estimated at c.£250,000 (p.31).
- 4.7 Option 2 involves installing a system of tactile paving to provide warning to the visually impaired. However, in some areas, the footways are too narrow to accommodate the recommended width of tactile surface. The cost is estimated at c. £350,000 (p.31).
- 4.8 Option 3 proposes the use of bollards to demarcate the carriageway and footway, thereby physically preventing motorists from mounting the footway, but without compromising pedestrian movement across the street. However, it would reduce footway widths and will require frequent maintenance. There would be a risk of visually impaired people walking into the bollards, or unintentionally walking between them into the carriageway. The option is considered by the consultants to be the "most balanced scheme in terms of road safety, implementation cost, impact

on existing infrastructure (subject to utilities liaison) and protecting footways from vehicular damage". Tactile footways in some areas could be considered as a supplementary measure to this option. The cost is estimated at c. £552,000 (p.31).

- 4.9 Option 4 provides a kerb upstand of at least 60mm. It would revert the street to a standard form of segregation of vehicles and pedestrians. It would facilitate installation of 'speed bumps' to achieve low speeds, and motorists would be less likely to park on footways. However, this option would create a trip hazard for the elderly and visually impaired in particular, and create a physical barrier for mobility impaired pedestrians. It would also be the most costly and disruptive to implement. The estimated cost is £855,000 (p.31).
- 4.10 Crossing points will be required for all options. Two puffin crossings are proposed (p.31).
- 4.11 No matter which option is chosen, there will be an increase in the highway maintenance requirements in the town centre (p.21).
- 4.12 The consultant's report suggests that prohibiting vehicles during the peak pedestrian period could reduce the risk of accidents. However, part time prohibition of vehicles will create uncertainty about prohibition times, and increase the risk of "pedestrian stepping out" type accidents (p. 22 and 32).
- 4.13 The existing allocation of parking spaces in the retail core is low for the number of commercial premises served, so increasing the parking would contribute to accessibility and footfall. However, there will be an increased risk of collisions caused by parking vehicles and reduced visibility. Further investigation would be required to understand the feasibility of providing additional short term parking in designated bays (p. 32).
- 4.14 There is insufficient space to have separate loading and parking. The report recommends that loading times of 6pm to 10am remain unchanged, to minimise the number of large vehicles in town during the peak pedestrian period, and to maximise parking for shoppers in the daytime. Consultation with town centre businesses will be required to understand the implications of this (p.32).
- 4.15 Regardless of the scheme chosen, a speed limit of 20mph is advised in the report (p.32).
- 4.16 To help in preventing vehicles entering the inner core of the pedestrianised area (Caroline St, Adare St and Wyndham St), the one way system will need to be reversed in Caroline and Wyndham Street. This would enable no entry signs to be placed at the entrances to these streets from Queen Street / Dunraven Place making the one way system more conspicuous. Only the Police can enforce breaches of this type of traffic order (p. 23).

Key conclusions

- 4.17 Naturally the risk of collisions will increase if vehicles are reintroduced into these town centre streets, and the report rightly acknowledges that if road safety was the only consideration, the safest option is to do nothing. However, it is not possible to predict the number of collisions that could occur because the appearance of the

town centre is significantly different to what it was before pedestrianisation, the appearance and characteristics of the periphery roads have changed significantly, and there is no reliable way to predict the numbers of vehicles that will use the town centre.

- 4.18 In common with many medium sized towns, footfall is lower and the town centre is generally less busy than 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, it would seem unlikely that the town centre will return to the road safety situation that made pedestrianisation a sensible choice at that time.
- 4.19 Suspending the pedestrianisation of Queen St, Dunraven Place and Market St 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, thereby creating an opportunity that currently does not exist to address the economic performance of the town.
- 4.20 Officers concur with the report's findings that options 1 and 2 offer insufficient mitigation for the increased risk presented by re-introduction of vehicles. It is also agreed that option 4 would be costly and very disruptive to town centre operation, due to the time required for construction work. It is recognised that mobility impaired people would have concerns about option 4 due to the proposed upstand of the kerbs. The consultants' view that option 3 appears to present the most balanced scheme in terms of road safety, implementation cost, and impact on highway infrastructure, is supported. However, wider consultation with the public, in particular town centre users and vulnerable groups, is required to reach a conclusion.
- 4.22 The consultants' report acknowledges that a mixed option of part prohibition during peak pedestrian times will create uncertainty and increase the risk of "pedestrian stepping out" type accidents, but nevertheless the opinion of the consultant is that this is safer than opening the streets to traffic at all times. BCBC officers have a different view and regard the uncertainty as presenting the greater risk to pedestrians. Also, from a town centre perspective, reducing the pedestrianisation period may have a more limited impact on the vibrancy of the town centre. Again, public consultation is required to inform the final decision on this.

Implementation Implications

- 4.23 If Cabinet wish to pursue a change to the pedestrianisation order, it must be borne in mind that there are currently no resources to implement this, and therefore external funding would have to be sought. The Business Improvement District (BID) Steering Group have indicated that should a BID be established in Bridgend, part of the bid levy would contribute to the costs. Welsh Government have funded the consultants' report, as part of the Vibrant and Viable Places Regeneration Framework, and a bid could be made in the upcoming funding round.
- 4.24 As part of this Cabinet Report, an EIA screening report was undertaken to identify the need for the type of consultation required. The screening form identified that a full EIA was required and therefore there is a need to undertake a full consultation to enable the EIA to be completed.

- 4.25 The consultation exercise will explain the process that has been undertaken to date and will:
- Ask for views as to whether, taking into account the likely risk and benefits, a change to the pedestrianisation order is supported;
 - Indicate the various options that have been considered as part of the independent risk assessment report;
 - Set out the reasons why option 3 is the Authorities preferred option;
 - Ask for views on retaining some form of pedestrianisation in the town centre at certain times or to open the streets up to vehicular traffic at all times;
 - Ask for views as to whether loading/unloading should be retained in their current form of being restricted to the hours of 6pm and 10 am;
 - Ask for views as to whether the current parking bays should have a limited waiting restriction.
- 4.26 The consultation would be made available to complete online through an interactive survey link on the consultations page of the Council's website or by visiting www.bridgend.gov.uk/consultation. Paper copies of the consultation would also be made available at community engagement events or alternatively, they could be sent directly to the residents upon request in either English or Welsh.
- 4.27 Details of the consultation would also be sent as part of a press release emailed to various stakeholders including Bridgend Business Forum, councillors, town and community councils, members of the Local Service Board (LSB) and the Bridgend Equality Forum (BEF), Facebook and Twitter. The Council would tweet its 6,230 @Bridgend CBC followers and post to its 3,727 Facebook fans about the consultation on several occasions during the consultation period to help raise awareness. In addition, the consultation press release would also be made available on the Council website via the consultation webpages or by visiting www.bridgend.gov.uk/consultation. A notification would also appear in the local press. The release would be sent to a database of local media outlets.
- 4.28 Upon completion of this consultation and engagement process a further report will be presented to Cabinet outlining the results of the consultation and recommendations of a way forward together with the findings of the full EIA.
- 4.29 If Cabinet agree to progress the proposal after considering the findings, the appropriate statutory procedure will need to be undertaken. This will involve a further consultation on the agreed option before the scheme is implemented.

5. Effect Upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules

- 5.1 None

6. Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.1 A full Equalities Impact Assessment, informed by an extensive consultation process would be required as a follow up to the Access Study. The equalities and safety implications of increasing vehicular access have been a key component of the consultant's report, and the primary reason for commissioning the report. The report concludes that "it is unlikely that any of the options will totally satisfy the needs of all disabled groups". Visually impaired people usually prefer vertical

segregation in streets with cars, but mobility impaired would usually favour a flush surface. The proposal will however offer a benefit to some disabled people by allowing them to park closer to amenities.”

- 6.2 The Council’s own records also show that over a number of years, many complaints have been received from elderly and/or mobility impaired people, about the lack of access to the town centre.
- 6.3 It is the duty of the Council to carry out an Equalities Impact Assessment on any proposal. The Authority has a published procedure which ensures the appropriate Protected Characteristics are safeguarded. A full assessment to the Authorities published procedure “Guide to Equalities Impact Assessment” will be undertaken upon the completion of the online engagement exercise.
- 6.4 As part of this Cabinet Report an EIA screening report was undertaken to identify the need for the type of consultation required. The screening form identified that a full EIA was required.
- 6.5 The Equality Act 2010, as amended, requires that the Council must, when exercising its functions, have due regard to the need to:
 - (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
 - (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 There is at present no budget identified for carrying out the works. If it is agreed to proceed, efforts will have to be made to attract additional funding to support the cost of the works.
- 7.2 The consultants’ estimates of costs are not based on any design information, so they should be regarded as very basic assessments. Items such as impact on utilities apparatus could have a significant bearing on the costs. Further refinement of the estimates, based on detailed design work, will be required if the decision is made to proceed.
- 7.3 It should be recognised that there will be an ongoing need for increased maintenance, and that this will place further pressure on the Highways Maintenance budget. If the decision is made to open up the street to traffic on a permanent basis, there will be a small saving arising from the removal of the rising bollards on Queen Street.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 Cabinet is recommended to:
 - 8.1.1 Consider the key findings of the Queen Street, Dunraven Place Market Street Access Study;

- 8.1.2 Note the recommendations contained therein; and if the recommendations are accepted, to:
- 8.1.3 Authorise officers to undertake the necessary consultation outlined in the report;
- 8.1.4 Authorise officers to consider external funding options to meet the implementation costs, in the event that the consultation process indicates a positive response to the proposal to change the pedestrianisation order;
- 8.1.5 Receive a further report upon completion of the consultation exercise together with the findings of the full EIA and any potential external funding options.

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Background documents: None