

MINUTES of the meeting of Community Services Scrutiny Committee held at Green Dragon Hotel, (Ballroom), Broad Street, Hereford on Wednesday, 11th January, 2006 at 6.00 p.m. and reconvened at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Friday, 13th January, 2006 at 2.00 p.m.

Present on 11th January:

Councillor A.C.R. Chappell (Chairman)
Councillor H. Bramer (Vice Chairman)

Councillors M.R. Cunningham, Mrs. S.P.A. Daniels, J.G.S. Guthrie, B. Hunt, D.C. Taylor and P.G. Turpin

Co-opted Members Ms. B. Heavens (Tourism) and G. Woodman (Chamber of Commerce)

Present on 13th January:

Councillor A.C.R. Chappell (Chairman)
Councillor H. Bramer (Vice Chairman)

Councillors M.R. Cunningham, B. Hunt, Mrs. M.D. Lloyd-Hayes, D.C. Taylor and P.G. Turpin

Co-opted Members Ms. B. Heavens (Tourism) and G. Woodman (Chamber of Commerce)

In attendance on 11th January: Councillors: Mrs. W.U. Attfield, D.J. Fleet, K.G. Grumbley, Ms. G.A. Powell, D.B. Wilcox and R.M. Wilson.

In attendance on 13th January: Councillors: P.J. Edwards, J.H.R. Goodwin, R.I. Matthews, Ms. G.A. Powell, D.B. Wilcox and R.M. Wilson.

34. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor J.G.S. Guthrie, Councillor J.C. Mayson (Cabinet Member – Rural Regeneration and Strategy), Councillor R.V. Stockton (Cabinet Member – Community Services), G. Jones and Ms. C. Jones.

Apologies were received from Councillor Mrs. S.P.A. Daniels for the reconvened meeting on 13th January 2006.

35. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Ms B. Heavens substituted for G. Jones and G. Woodman substituted for Ms. C. Jones.

Councillor Mrs. M.D. Lloyd-Hayes substituted for Councillor Mrs. S.P.A. Daniels at the reconvened meeting on 13th January 2006.

36. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

37. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That, subject to the inclusion of apologies for Councillor Mrs. S.P.A. Daniels, the minutes for the meeting held on 14 December 2005, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

38. SUGGESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON ISSUES FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY

No suggestions from Members of the public on issues for future scrutiny were received.

39. REVIEW OF THE EXPERIMENT TO PEDESTRIANISE WIDEMARSH STREET, HEREFORD

The Chairman welcomed members of the public and the invited witnesses to the meeting and introduced Councillor K.G. Grumbley who was representing the Environment Scrutiny Committee.

The Chairman explained that the purpose of the evenings meeting was to hear all the evidence from the invited witnesses and that once all the evidence had been heard then the meeting would adjourn. He stated that the meeting was scheduled to reconvene on 13 January 2006 and this was when the Committee would review the evidence which it had heard from the invited witnesses and then consider if it wished to make any recommendations to the Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation).

He announced that he had been handed a petition before the start of the meeting signed by 108 people who supported the idea for the scheme to pedestrianise Widemarsh Street subject to a review of access. This was in addition to a number of written submissions received in advance of the meeting which had been circulated to Members before the meeting.

The Committee had received a number of written submissions in advance of the meeting, these included:

- Letter from Cllr Alan Taylor, Hereford City Council, suggesting that new disabled parking spaces could be provided in Norgate Street during the hours Widemarsh Street was closed to traffic.
- Letter from Mr and Mrs Jones, Hereford Residents, who were against pedestrianisation. Also outlined was the additional problems with finding disabled parking spaces since pedestrianisation and a suggestion that if pedestrianisation was to remain in place then access should be allowed to buses, taxis and disabled badge holders.
- Letter from Nick Romans, Manager, Marks and Spencer, discussing taxi access to the store from East Street and a reduction in elderly customers now that taxis could not collect them from High Street.
- Letter from Georgia Smith, Association of Town Centre Management, on issues to consider when considering a pedestrianisation scheme and the retail climate.
- Letter from Steve Zanker, Commercial Director, First Buses, calling for a quality city centre bus stopping area and priority road measures for buses. The letter proposed that Widemarsh Street could be the site of a new bus terminal for Hereford.
- Letter from Paul Keetch MP stating that "pedestrianisation could be

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, 11TH JANUARY, 2006

advantageous as long as access for the disabled, vehicular and other modes of transport inclusive, taxis and bus/coach access can be included in the final scheme.” He also wished to see “swifter access incorporated to allow ambulance and fire services in particular immediate entry through the gates and not losing valuable, potential lifesaving moments waiting for gates to be unlocked.”

The Chairman called the first witness.

West Mercia Police – Sergeant Dave Evans and PC Colin Mears

- Sgt Evans informed the Committee that there had been no significant additional problems with traffic in Hereford at any time during the experiment to pedestrianise Widemarsh Street. However, he did state that there had been some problems with vehicles exiting from Bewell Street and then driving through the pedestrianised area. He felt that this was a safety problem as shoppers were not expecting to encounter vehicles. During the experiment there were no accidents but there were some reports of near misses.
- In response to a question PC Mears clarified that there had been no noticeable increase in traffic on the ring road resulting from the road closure. It was still as congested as it had been since before the introduction of the partial closure.
- The Committee heard that there had been no accidents when Widemarsh St was reopened to traffic at 4.30 p.m. However, PC Mears stated that additional traffic problems were caused by motorists waiting on the ring road in the minutes leading up to the reopening of the gates to Widemarsh Street.
- Members were informed that emergency response times had not been affected by the experiment. Emergency vehicles could access the pedestrianised area during the day by entering a secret number into a keypad attached to gate. Sgt Evans conceded that there had been some problems with accessing Widemarsh Street when the experiment was first introduced but these problems had now been resolved.
- The Police reported that they had heard of coaches and HGV's having difficulty turning from West Street into Broad Street.
- It was explained that in the event of an incident which blocked both lanes on the ring road an operational decision could be taken by senior police officers to request that the pedestrianised area be opened to traffic during the daytime.
- PC Mears informed the Committee that there had been a reduction in crime in the area during the period of the trial pedestrianisation scheme.
- PC Mears reported that problems had been experienced with motorists exiting West Street and reversing into Norgate Street to park within an area that was part of the pedestrianised zone.

Taxi Representatives – Mr Jimmy Clyde and Mr Steve Williams

- Mr Clyde began by stating that he and Mr Williams were representatives of the Taxi Association (TA) and that whilst not every taxi driver in Hereford was a member of the TA a vote taken at a meeting of the TA on 15th August 2005 had revealed that all members of the TA opposed the partial closure of Widemarsh Street.

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, 11TH JANUARY, 2006

- Members were informed that as a result of pedestrianisation e taxi drivers had lost daytime use of the Widemarsh Street (a total of 8 spaces). This had resulted in drivers relocating to alternative ranks which had consequently reduced the number of jobs for the drivers who had previously used the ranks outside of Widemarsh Street as there were now more taxis competing for the same customers in the same areas. For example, before pedestrianisation a taxi working the rank in Broad Street could expect to get a job every 10/15 minutes, but now due to the movement of other taxis to this area and the increased traffic congestion drivers could expect to get a job about once an hour. This was having the greatest impact on independent drivers who not being attached to a parent company relied on rank pick-ups as they did not receive jobs by radio.
- The Committee heard how elderly and disabled people were losing their independence as they could no longer get dropped off or picked up in the city centre. It was asserted that as they were no longer using taxis to visit other places then they were making alternative arrangements to get their shopping done. Mr Clyde cited an example of a fishmongers in the Butter Market who was reporting a drop in sales due to reduced visits from his elderly customers.
- Hi-Town and Rank Taxis both have free phones in Marks and Spencer, the Committee was informed that calls from these phones had dropped by 60%.
- The Committee heard that the 2 new rank spaces provided in St Peters Square had been requested three years ago due to the increased number of taxis in Hereford and they had only recently been provided. They provided no real alternative to the Widemarsh Street rank. The same case stood for the 4 additional rank spaces which had been provided at the rear of the Maylord Orchards. The ranks at the Maylord Orchards were not as flexible as the ranks in Widemarsh Street as they could only be accessed by south moving traffic and buses used the area as well and often obscured the rank. There were now over 250 taxi drivers licensed to work in Hereford therefore the addition of 6 extra rank spaces was required in addition to those that had been available in Widemarsh Street rather than instead of them.
- Mr Clyde reported that he was losing 20% of his takings due to traffic congestion. This was due to reduced customers as taxis were becoming more expensive as journey times had increased because of the traffic; providing discounts to regular customers by reducing fares that had become high due to being stuck in traffic; and increased time in returning to rank because of traffic which reduced the number of jobs a driver could do.
- In response to a question Mr Clyde informed the Committee that, in his opinion, traffic in Hereford had worsened during the pedestrianisation experiment in the first 35 minutes after the gate to enter Widemarsh Street was closed and that the afternoon rush hour now appeared to start around 1.30 p.m. rather than 3.00 p.m. as it had previously. The roads remained busy then until around 6.00 p.m.
- Mr Williams stated that he felt that traffic tailbacks in the City were worse now than before pedestrianisation was introduced. This was evidenced by the increased time it took taxi drivers to return to ranks and by longer tailbacks, for example, on Aylestone Hill. He stated that serious road improvements needed to take place before the opening of the new Asda store otherwise traffic congestion would further reduce the number of visitors to Hereford City Centre and thus damage the economic well-being of the City.

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, 11TH JANUARY, 2006

- Mr Clyde reported that drivers were now having to work an extra 1½-2 hours extra per day to earn the same levels of income as before the introduction of partial pedestrianisation. However, it was conceded that it would be necessary to take into account the increase in the number of taxi drivers in Hereford some of whom were prepared to work long hours for smaller amounts of money than previous drivers existing in Hereford.
- In response to a question Mr Clyde suggested that if the partial pedestrianisation scheme was to become permanent alternative rank capacity could be provided along the whole length of Broad Street. But this would reduce car-parking capacity in the City which would need to be provided elsewhere. He added that private cars increased congestion and pollution in the West Street/Broad Street/King Street areas by circulating around looking for a free parking space. He also added that he felt taxis should be given permission to enter East Street legally, if this was provided then an additional rank could be located in Offa Street pending a traffic order to reverse the flow of traffic so that cars could exit from East Street into Broad Street. However, he felt that Hereford should first deal with its traffic and congestion problems before pedestrianisation was even considered.
- Another solution would be for the pedestrianised area to be open to taxis and buses so that people could access the City Centre.
- The Committee heard that some customers were being picked up at the rear of the Marks and Spencer store in East Street but that this was not a reasonable alternative for those customers who lived south of the river as a long slow and expensive journey around the congested ring road would be necessary. This was in addition to the problems of delivery vehicles causing obstacles.
- The Committee heard that Worcester had two city centre ranks which could both accommodate 11 taxis.
- Mr Clyde was not surprised to hear that business at the Shopmobilty centre was down, he felt that this was due to the reduced number of elderly and infirm people visiting the city centre.
- Members were informed that the taxi rank at Tesco's was chaotic. He added that the police were lenient to taxi drivers who were blocking the road while queuing to get into the rank. This congestion was further compounded by many disabled drivers parking their vehicles in the road and by regular Tesco customers using it as a convenient stop off point to leave their vehicle whilst buying goods. He added that the current Tesco store and its bus station had outgrown itself and that they should both be relocated, possibly within the Edgar Street Grid.
- Finally, Mr Clyde added that the City's taxi drivers were currently fighting for their livelihoods.

Stagecoach Bus Company – Derek White and Clive Elsmore

- Mr White informed the Committee that his company were now using bus stops in Maylord Orchards rather than Widemarsh Street. He explained that this had initially affected passenger numbers but passengers had now returned. He continued by stating that the closure of Widemarsh Street had led to his company re-routing their vehicles permanently which had lengthened journey times and inconvenienced customers. Mr Elsmore added that Stagecoach operated as if there was a complete closure as even when Widemarsh Street was open to

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, 11TH JANUARY, 2006

traffic their services travelled on the ring road.

- Mr White felt that buses should be granted priority measures over cars by being able to access the pedestrianised area as that was the destination of the most of their customers. It was also the best place to collect them. It would also help to reduce journey times as buses would not need to sit in traffic whilst travelling around the ring road.
- The Chairman informed the meeting that the First Bus Company had provided a written statement which had been sent to all Members of the Committee in advance of the meeting. In the statement First had stated that they would like to see a bus terminal in the Widemarsh Street area of the city centre. In reply to this comment Mr White stated that it would be beneficial to any bus company to have a terminal which was in or near to the area where the majority of people were visiting.
- Mr White stated that he would like buses to be able to access the pedestrianised zone and that he would be happy for taxis to share access.
- The Committee was informed that in Gloucester there were bus stops within 100 metres of the centre at several points, however, the level of pedestrianisation in Gloucester was significantly less than in Hereford. In Cheltenham a bizarre ring road system made all navigation very difficult.

General Traders – Morris Jones (Phillip Morris and Son), Luke Conod (Jeans Station) and Nick Romans (Marks and Spencer)

- The Chairman asked the witnesses if they felt the pedestrianisation had had any effect on their takings? Mr Romans stated that his takings were fractionally down when compared with other Marks and Spencer stores of a similar size nationally, however, he did not feel able to attribute this to pedestrianisation. Mr Jones informed the Committee that during the first quarter his takings had been down but in the remaining three quarters targets had either been met or exceeded. Mr Conod felt that trading during the summer had been difficult, however, this was more likely to have been caused by the recent Eign Gate refurbishment. Since the refurbishment had finished income had improved.
- Mr Jones commented that the current success of his shop-based business could be down to pedestrianisation. He recalled that the current pedestrianised street reminded him of an old fashioned Wednesday when vehicles would not be able to enter Widemarsh Street because of the huge number of people visiting the street.
- In terms of deliveries to their respective stores, Mr Romans commented that his store had not been affected as delivery vehicles accessed his store via West Street and East Street. Mr Conod commented that his delivery system had improved as couriers arrived with stock earlier in the day than they had previously. Mr Jones stated that the pedestrianisation deadline had improved the efficiency of internal deliveries to his store. Mr Jones continued by explaining that delivery drivers and companies were aware of the pedestrianisation in Hereford as in other cities around the Country and that he did not feel it was too much of a problem for them. Mr Jones added that his store had no rear access so if the partial scheme was to become a 24 hour scheme then there would be no way for his store to take deliveries and ship out orders.

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, 11TH JANUARY, 2006

- Mr Jones informed the Committee that his store was experiencing a downturn in the sale of large, heavy goods as people were no longer able to quickly pull up outside the store to load their vehicles.
- Mr Romans stated that people shopping in his store had been advised that their goods could be transported into East Street whereby collection in a taxi could be arranged, however, even this was too far for some elderly customers to walk and many others considered it to be too dangerous to walk along the narrow path and cross over the road.
- In response to a question asked about what feedback, if any, customers had provided to the three witnesses, Mr Conod explained that many of his customers were young mothers who were very happy with the scheme as it took away any worries of their children being injured by vehicles. Mr Jones stated that the Widemarsh Street Committee, made up of traders in the area, wanted the Street to remain pedestrianised.
- The witnesses were asked what changes, if any, they would make to the current pedestrianisation scheme if it were to become permanent. Mr Jones stated that he was conscious of the danger to the public upon the reintroduction of traffic at 4.30 p.m., however, his managers were pleased that the street reopened to traffic as it allowed them to process orders and get them out for distribution. Mr Conod's opinion was that 10.30 a.m.- 4.30 p.m. pedestrianisation should remain in place but with access for coaches, buses and taxis, he felt that the risk to the public would be minimal as they were professional drivers who would be keen to minimise any risk to the public. He felt that the gate which closed Widemarsh Street to traffic should become automatic with vehicles that were allowed access to the area given a disc which would raise the gate automatically when within range of the barrier with keypad access available to those without discs. Mr Romans felt that the most important issue was the City's wider traffic problems. He felt that if the pedestrianisation of Widemarsh Street was increasing traffic problems in Hereford then the scheme should be reconsidered. If it was decided that partial pedestrianisation was to remain in place Mr Romans was supportive of access to buses and taxis.
- Finally, Mr Conod, stated that recently he had been reviewing newspaper articles from the 1970's which discussed the then proposed pedestrianisation of Eign Gate. He explained that from these articles he was able to deduce that essentially all the points which the Committee were considering tonight had been considered with regard to the Eign Gate scheme.

Broad Street, King Street and Bridge Street Traders – Ian Shackleton (Chave and Jackson), Bill Jackson (Estate Agent) and John Lewis (Left Bank Village)

- Mr Lewis informed the meeting that his company had experienced a downturn in trade which he felt had been partially caused by the pedestrianisation experiment. Footfall at the Left Bank had reduced during the summer months. Mr Lewis felt that there were fewer people coming to Hereford or that people were visiting less frequently, he believed that this was down to the high levels of congestion in and around the city which discouraged visitors. Mr Lewis explained that during the summer months the Left Bank relied on tourists for trade and he felt that these people were now not coming as a result of coaches not dropping off in Broad Street near the Cathedral.
- Mr Jackson reported that there had been a general decline in retail business in the Broad Street/King Street/Bridge Street area of approximately 5% since the

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, 11TH JANUARY, 2006

introduction of the pedestrianisation experiment, he explained how shops in Broad Street and King Street had remained empty once the occupying business had closed. He also cited the example of Creative Lighting in King Street which was currently closing. The owner of Creative Lighting had stated some time ago that she would close if pedestrianisation was introduced and was now going through with closure. He also stated that a newsagents in the area had closed. Mr Jackson reported that since the experiment was introduced there was a decline in the number of people who were visiting this side of town. This fact was illustrated by the point that letting agents in the city were unable to lease the empty commercial premises in the area. He said that if he was asked as a shopper he would favour pedestrianisation but for traders he could see that the scheme was causing problems. Mr Jackson explained that the biggest impact the scheme had caused on his business was that, due to traffic problems, it was very hard to make and keep viewing times as congestion was so bad. However, he felt that the biggest question was whether or not people were prepared to see the Broad Street/King Street/Bridge Street area of town decimated of retail outlets.

- Mr Shackleton informed the Committee that he had only limited experience of retail conditions in Hereford as he had only acquired his stores 8 weeks ago. However, after viewing previous income figures month on month he believed that they were in line with current retail performance and with his other stores based in Abergavenny. Mr Shackleton was concerned about the traffic situation in the City and commented that it was impossible to predict how long it would take a person to travel from the Tesco Store at Belmont on the A465 into the city centre. He felt that if the pedestrianisation of Widemarsh Street was affecting traffic then perhaps alternative actions should be sought. Mr Shackleton suggested that as there were many loading bays in Broad Street, which were mainly used during the week, that perhaps they could be used for short term parking at weekends.

Disabled Witnesses – Jim Lawes (Access for All) and Anne Rolfe (Royal National College for the Blind)

- Mr Lawes informed the Committee that since pedestrianisation had been introduced many of the Access for All patrons had been pleased with the results. However, there were problems with some vehicles being within the pedestrianised area after the 10.30 a.m. curfew plus additional problems with cyclists in the Widemarsh Street area travelling in all directions. He stated that he knew of some people who were afraid to go into the area because of disrespectful cyclists. But generally people were in favour of the scheme, elderly and disabled people felt that it had improved the atmosphere of the city centre.
- Ms Rolfe, clarified that she was speaking on behalf of the Royal National College for the Blind and visually impaired (VI) people. She felt that the partial pedestrianisation was confusing to people and placed the onus on individuals to be aware of the time and consequently the status of the pedestrianised area. However, due to access from Bewell Street pedestrians were not really safe during this traffic excluded time either as an unexpected vehicle could exit Bewell Street into the pedestrianised zone at any time. These were problems for fully sighted people but for VI people the problems of rogue drivers entering the pedestrianised area from Bewell Street was even worse. Problems for VI people increased as a section of the road between High Street and Eign Gate was now the same height as the pavement which made it difficult for VI people to differentiate between the path and road. Even for those VI people who were not totally blind the colour difference between each surface was so subtle that they would probably not be able to tell the difference either. She also explained how

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, 11TH JANUARY, 2006

there were similar problems with the large seated island at the entrance to Eign gate and with the new lighting poles.

- Mr Lawes supported the earlier statement from the Taxi Association that fewer older people were using taxis to visit the city centre. The reason people were no longer coming to Hereford was because they could no longer be picked up and dropped off in the heart of the city. Mr Lawes stated that he had received a letter from a lady who no longer visited Hereford to shop since the introduction of the pedestrianisation experiment.
- Ms Rolfe explained to Members that the system of taxis dropping off and picking up people from outside Marks and Spencer was a disadvantage to VI people. This was because taxis often mounted the pavement and became an obstacle for VI people to negotiate. Additionally vehicles would mount the pavement outside Boots where there was a marked crossing for VI people with tactile paving slabs. If a vehicle was parked over these paving slabs then a VI person would not be able to find the crossing and be less able to cross the road. VI people would experience further problems if the current works in High Street were going to raise the level of the road to the same as the pavement.
- In relation to the issue of reduced trade at the Shopmobilty centre in Maylord Orchards, Mr Lawes stated that it was true that many people did now own their own mobility vehicles. He also felt that another factor in the reduction in trade could be the difficulty which people experience in accessing the Maylord Orchards car park which had been made more difficult following the increase in traffic congestion.
- Finally, Mr Lawes reported to Members that he felt pedestrian signage within the city centre, especially the Widemarsh Street and High Town areas could be improved.

Hereford Cathedral – *Dominic Harbour and Lt Col Andrew Eames*

- Lt Col Eames and Mr Harbour were asked about the impact the pedestrianisation scheme had had on visitors to the Cathedral.
- Lt Col Eames reported that the Cathedral was currently working in partnership with the Council to secure a major grant for the refurbishment of the Cathedral Close. This had been an effective and fruitful partnership. He suggested that this was in contrast with the schemes for the regeneration of High Town and Widemarsh Street each of which was being carried out by different sections of the Council with an apparent absence of joined up thinking. However, the two schemes affected the City as a whole. The Widemarsh Street Closure was being overseen by the Highways Section but was an Economic Development issue as well as a highways issue. The impact on the number of visitors to the cathedral had an effect on the economic performance of the City as a whole.
- When Widemarsh Street had been closed in 2004 the Cathedral had suffered a reduction of 32% in visitor numbers. Coaches simply would not visit. The Cathedral had been promised that 2005 would be different. There had been a gain of 4.5% on the 2004 figure but this still meant that visitors were down 27.5 % compared with 2003.
- Whilst visitors said that they enjoyed their visit the Coach drivers who brought them said that the route to the Cathedral was awful and that they would not return.

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, 11TH JANUARY, 2006

- There was concern that word would spread within the tourism industry that Hereford was not a good place to visit.
- The Director of Planning of the former Hereford City Council had acknowledged in correspondence to him in the early 90's that buses found it extremely difficult to turn from West Street into Broad Street.
- Mr Harbour commented that the approach via Broad Street to the Cathedral had provided visitors with the opportunity to gain a pleasant impression of the city as they drove through to the Cathedral. This was in contrast to the route along West Street.
- In response to a question Lt Col Eames said that a coach drop off point at the Shire Hall with a signposted route to the Cathedral was not thought to be practical. It was considered that it was likely to be too far to walk for many of the Cathedral's visitors and that their itinerary would also allow them insufficient time.
- Lt Col Eames noted that an assurance had been received that works would not be carried out in High Town during the 2006 Three Choirs Festival this year. He also noted that at the major flower festival held in June 1999 at the Cathedral had attracted 55 coaches in one morning. He had no idea how this would be managed if the present arrangements were in place when the next Flower Festival took place in 2007.
- In response to questions he agreed that the Cathedral was a major attraction, that it had suffered financial detriment as a result of the pedestrianisation scheme and that he wanted the scheme to be removed.
- Responding to a comment Councillor RM Wilson (Cabinet Member Resources) reassured the Committee that the Council's Economic Liaison Group was designed to ensure that the Council did have a joined-up approach to its economic development work and that this was operating effectively.

City Centre Partnership Cynthia Spaul

- Asked about the retail climate Cynthia Spaul commented that 2005 had not been a good year on the whole. December had been quite good but retailers needed to make 40% of their sales during that month to be viable.
- The Cathedral was the biggest tourist attraction in the County generating a quarter of a million visitors and was very important to the City's economic viability. If visitor numbers reduced further the City would see a significant decline. Without the visitors generated by the Cathedral the City economy would be that of a market town.
- She said that there were always plenty of alternative places for tour operators to visit and noted the introduction of buses from Holme Lacy House Hotel to Ross Labels.
- West Street was not a suitable main access route and suffered from congestion. It was almost impossible for buses to turn right from West Street into Broad Street.

Council Officers – Jane Lewis (Acting Head of Cultural Services) and Stephen Oates (Head of Highways and Transportation)

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, 11TH JANUARY, 2006

- **The Acting Cultural Services Manager** was asked to comment on how visitor numbers had been affected by the pedestrianisation experiment and on national trends regarding visitor numbers.
- She provided statistics for Hereford Museum, the Old House and the Tourist Information Centre in Hereford. There had been a decline in attendance at the museum between 2003 and 2005. Between April 2005 and December 2005 there had been a decline of 1,062 compared with the same period for 2004 and a decline of 2,401 compared with the same period for 2003. This was not out of line with the national trend for visitors to museums. Museums at Worcester, Abergavenny and Brecon had also experienced a decline in visitor numbers.
- At the Old House there had been an increase in visitors during 2005 compared with the previous year.
- At the Tourist Information Centres there had been a decline year on year:

2003: 89,500

2004: 80,633

2005 76,433

This was in line with national trends and was attributable in part to the increasing use being made of the internet. In addition in 2005 the Centres had not sold local bus tickets, a service they had previously provided which brought in a considerable number of local visitors. The cathedral at Brecon had also experienced a decline in numbers. In terms of visitors generally she commented that there was a need to increase the number of people staying in the County overnight which would then generate increased visitors to attractions in the region.

- **The Head of Highways and Transportation** set out the background to the pedestrianisation experiment. He reminded the Committee that the Council had identified that Hereford City had been slipping in its ranking as a shopping centre in relation to its competitors and that there was a need to find ways of improving the City's economic vitality. A number of measures had been identified by the Council but it would take time for some of these to have an effect. When Widemarsh Street had been closed to traffic during works by Transco in 2004 many people had said that it had improved the City Centre. Surveys undertaken during the closure had shown strong public support for improved pedestrian conditions. A pedestrianisation experiment had subsequently been authorised and detailed evidence had been gathered to enable an objective assessment of the effects of the scheme to be made. The results were shortly to be presented to Cabinet.
- In response to a suggestion that part of Widemarsh Street was now very quiet and an unused resource the Head of Highways and Transportation pointed out that other parts of the street were now much busier with pedestrians. The final decision on the scheme had to consider the overall performance of the experiment.
- If the pedestrianisation scheme were to be made permanent the streetscape could be enhanced and the junction with the ringroad improved.
- In response to a suggestion that a complex range of additional traffic management measures would follow if the pedestrianisation scheme became

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, 11TH JANUARY, 2006

permanent the Head of Highways and Transportation explained that the Council was continually developing traffic measures in Hereford and that these programmes would continue. He suggested that any judgement on the experiment should be based on the scheme as it stood but that the Council could always consider additional measures if these were felt to be a priority.

- A question was asked as to whether there were any proposals to change the gates at St Peter's Square. The Head of Highways and Transportation explained that the Widemarsh Street gates had been manufactured to the same width as those at St Peter's Street and if the pedestrianisation scheme did not proceed the Council would have a spare set of gates available should those at St Peter's Square ever need to be replaced.
- He confirmed in response to a question raised earlier in the meeting that it was part of the procedure when opening the gates in the evening that a Council vehicle proceeded first along the route to alert pedestrians.
- In relation to income received by the Council's car parks in the City he reported that this had been slightly lower during the pedestrianisation period. However, account had to be taken of the increasing number of private car parks in the City. It also had to be noted that the decline in income from Council car parks outside the City had been proportionately greater.

The Chairman thanked the invited witnesses for attending the meeting and stated that it was essential that everyone's views were taken into account.

The meeting adjourned at 8.28 p.m.

The meeting reconvened at 2.00 p.m. on Friday, 13 January 2006 in the Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford.

The Chairman welcomed Members and members of the public to the meeting and explained that the Committee would be reviewing the evidence it had heard previously. Based on the evidence it would also decide whether or not it wished to make recommendations to the Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) on what the Committee thought was the best way forward for the Widemarsh Street pedestrianisation scheme.

The Chairman informed the Committee that he had received no notification from any of the witnesses interviewed at the previous sitting of the Committee of any wish to present confidential information, for example company accounts, to the Committee to support any statements made before the Committee adjourned.

The Chairman noted that new evidence had been received since Wednesday night's meeting and that Members of the Committee had been supplied with copies of the documents received. The documents included:

- Email from PC Colin Mears.
- Letter from Maurice Jones, summarising the points made at the earlier meeting.
- Copy of the Petition signed by members of the public at *Beads-in-Abundance* as received at the earlier meeting.
- Letter to Jim Lawes from Mrs T Minton highlighting her personal problems experienced since the closure of Widemarsh Street.
- Letter to Jim Lawes from Anne Rolfe, Royal National College for the Blind, highlighting the problems experienced by visually impaired people since pedestrianisation and the refurbishment of Eign Gate.

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, 11TH JANUARY, 2006

- Letter from Widemarsh Street Traders Association, in favour of pedestrianisation also highlighting problems which needed to be addressed to improve the scheme including: introducing measures to prevent cyclists in the pedestrianised area; introducing measures to prevent vehicles entering High Street from Bewell Street; introduction of more dropped kerbs for disabled visitors; consideration be given to altering the time which vehicles re-enter Widemarsh Street in the afternoon; and that pedestrianisation be introduced during Christmas late night shopping.
- Letter to Stephen Oates, outlining visitor trends since pedestrianisation had been introduced in Widemarsh Street and its impact on coach visitors, the Cathedral and Hereford generally.
- Three articles from the local press, one article against pedestrianisation and two in favour.

The Committee took time to read the draft notes which summarised the evidence heard at the previous sitting of the Committee, which had been prepared as an aide memoir for Members. Members approved the draft notes as accurate as a basis for further discussion.

The Committee reviewed the evidence they heard from Sergeant Dave Evans and PC Colin Mears of West Mercia Police. The following are the principal points from the ensuing discussion:

- A Member of the Committee expressed a view that he felt that traffic had increased since the partial closure of Widemarsh Street was introduced. Whilst traffic on the ring road appears to be at similar levels to those pre-closure he felt that tailbacks leading into the city, on feeder roads to the ring road, had increased.
- It was reiterated that the Police had stated that there was no noticeable increase in traffic on the ring road since the introduction of partial pedestrianisation.
- The Tourism Representative stated that she believed the Police could do more to help manage traffic in Hereford.
- The Director of Adult and Community Services read out an email received from PC Colin Mears, which had been distributed to Members at the meeting, reiterating the point that he felt that Widemarsh Street should not be used to relieve traffic from the ring road. This was because the same traffic which exited the ring road into Widemarsh Street would have to re-enter the ring road at either St. Nicholas Street or St. Martins Street which in itself would increase traffic on the ring road as traffic lights were required to stop the traffic on the ring road to let those cars which had exited into Widemarsh Street back onto the ring road. PC Mears also stated that it was the belief of the Police that traffic should be excluded from Widemarsh Street until 18.00 to exclude the potential conflict between pedestrians and vehicles.
- It was stated that Widemarsh Street should not be considered an arterial route through the City.

The Committee reviewed the evidence heard from Mr Jimmy Clyde and Mr Steve Williams of the Taxi Association. The following are the principal points from the ensuing discussion:

- A Member of the Committee stated that he felt the representatives of the Taxi Association made some relevant points to the Committee including how their takings had dropped mainly due to the congestion which had been caused by the partial closure of Widemarsh Street.
- The Chairman explained that the Committee had received no documentary evidence that the takings of taxi drivers were down. He felt that the rise in the

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, 11TH JANUARY, 2006

number of taxi drivers in the city would have had an impact on the takings of taxi drivers in Hereford and that perhaps this was more to blame for the reduction in takings than pedestrianisation.

- The Chamber of Commerce representative stated that whilst there maybe 250 taxi drivers in Hereford it needed to be pointed out that many of these drivers may only work on Friday and Saturday nights as this was the peak time of business for taxi drivers.
- It was suggested that the number of taxi driver licences in Hereford should be capped.
- The taxi rank at Tesco's in Hereford City Centre was considered a hazard that should be investigated further. As should the potential for new ranks outside Barclays Bank in Norgate Street and in Offa Street should pedestrianisation continue.
- It was noted that the taxi rank in St. Peters Square sometimes disrupted funerals taking place at St. Peters Church.
- A view was expressed that it seemed like the police and taxi association representatives were from "a parallel universe". However, the Member felt that the evidence presented by the Taxi Association representatives was compelling and, even though no evidence had been presented to support their statements, their view should be respected. He stated that the Committee should bear in mind the Taxi Association representatives points regarding increased congestion and the reduction in the numbers of elderly customers who could no longer access the city centre.

The Committee reviewed the evidence heard from the Stagecoach bus company. The following are the principal points from the ensuing discussion:

- A Member of the Committee stated that the evidence heard informing that since pedestrianisation had been introduced Stagecoach had suffered from increased journey times and inconvenience for passengers was relevant to the Committee.
- It was stated that an alternative pick up point at the Maylord Orchards was not really too much of an inconvenience for Stagecoach bus passengers as it was only a short distance away from the previous bus stop in Widemarsh Street. It was also better for pedestrians if buses picked up at Maylord Orchards as they would not have to suffer from the pollution omitted from the exhausts of buses travelling through the city centre.
- The Head of Highways and Transportation stated that from the consultation responses 24% of respondents felt there had been no impact on public transport from the closure of Widemarsh Street to traffic, 10% had thought that it had improved and only 10% thought that it was worse or much worse. He also clarified that no bus company's used the bus stop in Broad Street since the experiment to pedestrianise Widemarsh Street had been introduced.
- It was stated that the bus stop in Broad Street had been well used and was convenient to customers.

The Committee reviewed the evidence heard from Maurice Jones (Phillip Morris and Son), Luke Conod (Jeans Station) and John Lewis (Left Bank Village). The following are the principal points from the ensuing discussion:

- With regard to the comment made by Mr Jones that his store had seen a decline in the sale of heavy goods it was considered that a similar situation must have been experienced by other stores affected by the partial pedestrianisation.
- This belief was rejected by some Members of the Committee as they felt that the growth of online shopping and out of town retail parks was a more likely cause of the reduction in sale of larger heavy goods by a city centre retailer. This view was supported by Mr Jones' own company who regularly shipped out 100 orders

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, 11TH JANUARY, 2006

a day which had originated online. Although it was noted that some people may not or could not shop online.

- The Chairman noted that he had received a letter from the Widemarsh Street Traders who were in support of retaining pedestrianisation. A copy of the letter was circulated to Members at the meeting.

The Committee reviewed the evidence received from Ian Shackleton (Chave and Jackson), Bill Jackson (Estate Agent) and John Lewis (Left Bank Village). The following are the principal points from the ensuing discussion:

- A Member expressed the view that he supported the views of the witnesses in so far as: trade had reduced to the Left Bank Village; that a retail decline was being experienced in the Broad Street and King Street area; and that traffic congestion was terrible.
- The Tourism Representative stated the decline in visitor numbers to the Left Bank Village was probably following the national trend of an overall decline in visitor numbers, rather than the pedestrianisation experiment.
- It was stated that some people had difficulty in parking in the southern side of Hereford City Centre. Therefore, as this side of town was considered to be a key site for tourists, consideration should be given to using loading bays in Broad Street for car parking.
- The Chamber of Commerce Representative stated that a sign of good economic prosperity was city centre areas that were occupied by mixed businesses. For example, retail and service companies. Therefore it would be beneficial for the Broad Street and King Street areas to retain some retail outlets.

The Committee reviewed the evidence received from the witnesses for the disabled sector, Jim Lawes (Access for All) and Anne Rolfe (Royal National College for the Blind). The following are the principal points from the ensuing discussion.

- The Committee noted Mr Lawes' points with regard to disrespectful cyclists in Widemarsh Street during the hours when the road was closed to traffic and the problems which were being experienced by visually impaired people due to traffic exiting from Bewell Street and the new road surface on the corner of High Street.
- A Member of the Committee stated that he felt the comments of the disabled users, in his opinion, questioned the validity of the entire pedestrianisation scheme.

The Committee reviewed the evidence received from Lt Col Andrew Eames and Dominic Harbour from Hereford Cathedral, Cynthia Spaul, Hereford City Manager, and Jane Lewis, Acting Cultural Services Manager. The Following are the principal points from the ensuing discussion:

- The Committee noted the Three Choirs Festival was a good income generator for the City and that it should be supported.
- Concern was expressed with regard to coach access to the Cathedral and the complaints of tour operators because of the difficulty of access caused by pedestrianisation.
- The Committee were reminded of the pre-pedestrianisation complaints that coaches would overhang the pavement areas when driving through the city centre and cause a danger to pedestrians when they turned from Widemarsh Street into High Street.
- The Head of Highways and Transportation informed the Committee that Tour Operator Organisations had been consulted and they had indicated that they were in favour of pedestrianisation. He also informed the Committee that there were a number of ways which could improve access to the Cathedral but these

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, 11TH JANUARY, 2006

options were for the consideration of the Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) if it was decided that pedestrianisation should be retained.

- The Chairman referred to a map which had been provided by Cynthia Spaul which illustrated the many congestion points in West Street.
- The Director of Adult and Community Services clarified the information provided by the Acting Head of Cultural Services. The Acting Head of Cultural Services had presented visitor figures for Hereford Museum from April-December which had shown an overall decline in visitor numbers from the previous year. However, if visitor figures for June-December were viewed, being the months when the pedestrianisation experiment was in place then an increase in visitor numbers was shown.

The Chairman and Councillor B. Hunt circulated their proposed recommendations to the Committee.

The Vice-Chairman proposed that, in view of the evidence heard, that the Committee supported some form of pedestrianisation in Widemarsh Street, Hereford. This proposal was supported by a majority of Members present at the meeting.

After a lengthy discussion the Committee adjourned to consider the proposed recommendations circulated by the Chairman and Councillor B. Hunt.

The meeting adjourned at 3.55 p.m. and reconvened at 4.10 p.m.

The Vice-Chairman proposed that, if the Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) approves a form of pedestrianisation in Widemarsh Street, Hereford, as proposed and supported by the Committee, that taxis, buses and coaches should not be granted special access. This proposal was supported by a majority of Members present at the meeting.

The Committee suggested that the Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) take into account the points and concerns which had been raised by Members during the discussion of the experiment to pedestrianise Widemarsh Street, Hereford.

The Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) thanked the Committee for the way that it had looked at the emotive issue of the experiment to pedestrianise Widemarsh Street, Hereford. He explained that the final decision would probably not please everyone but he felt that all means of consultation and debate had been exhausted. His final decision would take these factors into account. He thanked everyone who had taken part in the consultation or who had provided him with comments and stated that the final decision taken would be that which was best for Hereford.

The Chairman reminded the Committee that if they disagreed with the decision of the Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) then they had the power to call-in the decision and review it.

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet Member (Highways & Transportation) consider the range of views expressed by the Community Services Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 11th January 2006 and reconvened on 13th January 2006, and has particular regard to its two principal conclusions, that:

- (a) the Committee supports a form of pedestrianisation in Widemarsh Street, Hereford;**

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, 11TH JANUARY, 2006

and;

- (b) that taxis, buses and coaches should not be granted special access to Widemarsh Street if a form of pedestrianisation is approved.**

The meeting ended at 4.30 p.m.

CHAIRMAN