

Memorandum

Hereford City Centre Improvements (HCCI) Response to Consultation: Towards a Coherent Plan

From: Cllr Jeremy Milln, Central Ward

To: Mairead Lane, Head of Infrastructure Delivery

Cc: Sarah Caple, Senior Project Officer; Cllr John Harrington, Cabinet member for Infrastructure and Transport; Paul McKim, Senior Project Manager; Kassandra Polyzoides, Capital Programme Director; Neil Taylor, Director, Economy & Place.

Date: 26th September 2021

Thank you for your consultation paper on Hereford City Centre Improvements sent to me at 13:17 on 21st September with a response required by the 27th.

1. BACKGROUND to HCCI

1.1 Hereford City Centre Improvements are designed to support the local economy and enhance the retail environment. The HCCI refurbishment scheme originates with the [Hereford streetscape design strategy \(herefordshire.gov.uk\)](https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk) (2009) which sets the agenda and design standard for the creation of an attractive, vibrant city centre to help support existing businesses and create new opportunities to encourage more visitors and retailers.

1.2 The 2009 Strategy found that the quality and use of materials for surfaces had declined significantly in recent decades. Paving has evolved incrementally over a number of years, resulting in a muddled, piecemeal and incoherent streetscape. By 2009 there was little evidence in Hereford of continuity or specialist paving skills seen in most historic environments and cathedral cities. In this regard Hereford still compares unfavourably with say Leominster for whose central streets, with the exception of Etnam, consistent and good quality paving has been used.

1.3 Unfortunately there are still few places in central Hereford where the key recommendations of the 2009 strategy have been implemented; namely, to enhance historic character through good design and materials, and to create safe, low traffic speed urban environments, free from unnecessary street clutter, markings and signage.

1.4 In 2011 the Council produced the excellent little [Shopfront Design Guide \(herefordshire.gov.uk\)](https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk) essentially for use as a special planning document (SPD), but which contains much valuable good practice advice on the conservation or restoration of frontages and facades in the city centre.

1.5 On 21 July 2016 Cabinet considered a consultation feedback and authorised the implementation of proposals for the Hereford city centre improvements project. Details of this decision can be viewed using the following link:

<http://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IIId=50017877&Opt=0>

1.6 Hereford was subject of a visit by Historic England's Urban Panel on 4-5 October 2017, having previously assessed progress in the City in 2006 at the start of the Edgar Street and Cattle Market redevelopment. The Panel was particularly interested to understand how, in terms of urban planning, Hereford proposed to reposition itself to become a successful university city. <https://historicengland.org.uk/content/docs/committees-panels/urban-panel-review-paper-hereford-oct17-pdf/> None of the recommendations in the Panel's report have, as yet, been acted upon; those relevant to HCCI are restated and refined in this paper.

1.7 Two phases of the High Town public realm refurbishment scheme have been delivered. These have provided an enhanced streetscape in Widemarsh Street/ High Street (2012) and Commercial Street (2018), improving the environment for visitors and shoppers. These improvements have supported the occupation of empty premises and the conversion of space above retail units to residential accommodation.

1.8 On street parking charging and resident parking elements have also been undertaken. These support the mitigation of traffic impacts in the historic core area (on street parking charging), and the associated impact of displaced city centre parking on surrounding residential areas.

1.9 A Design Guide SDP (draft Jan 2019) was commissioned as a special planning document (SPD) to inform planning decisions in Hereford City centre. [Draft Hereford Design Guide \(herefordshire.gov.uk\)](http://herefordshire.gov.uk) It introduces at page 82 the concept of Hereford as a walking city where, through improvements in public realm design, the focus is shifted from vehicles to pedestrians.

1.10 The proposed St Owen Street contraflow cycleway is intended to provide a direct link from the east of the city and Rotherwas, along St Owen St to the city centre. Formal statutory consultation was undertaken in March and April 2019 for the proposed regulations and measures for the scheme. The scheme was found to require revision in the light of the DfT's LTN 1/20 and is currently subject of peer review. In particular it lacks design logic and connectivity at its junction with Bath Street and Mill Street. [Cycle infrastructure design \(LTN 1/20\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk) The scheme requires reconsideration in the light of proposals for traffic calming in East Street, which have the potential to result in a considerable cost saving, see below.

1.11 A feasibility business case was developed in 2019/2020 to provide justification for continuing the development the HCCI project and to support a capital funding bid for the project. As part of the request for further capital funding for the HCCI project, the extents of the HCCI project have been extended to include an area to the west of High Town. This includes Broad Street, King Street, Bridge Street and other smaller streets in the vicinity referred to as the Cathedral and River Wye Quarter.

1.12 The inclusion of the HCCI project within the Capital Programme 2019/20 was approved by Full Council on 15 February 2019. Details of this decision can be viewed using the link below:

<http://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IIId=50029532>

1.13 The capital request was approved to enable the continuation of the HCCI project including the completion of the High Town public realm element of the project, the development and delivery of public realm improvements in the Cathedral and River Wye Quarter.

1.14 A bid was made to The Marches LEP for funding for the HCCI project in June 2020 from the Getting Building Fund. The bid was selected by the LEP as one of the projects to be funded and was allocated £3m funding, to be matched by £3m from the council's Capital funding.

2. CURRENT POSITION

2.1 Outstanding elements of the current HCCI project were last visited in a cabinet member decision taken on 3 December 2020 which outlined the scope and spend profile. It consists of the following elements:

- **High Town Area**
 - Design Review for the public realm improvements
 - Refurbishment/ Construction
 - improvement to market and event facilities for (HCCI) area
- **Cathedral and River Wye Quarter**
 - Outline design and consultation
 - Detailed design
 - Construction
- **Streetscape and Green Infrastructure**
- **Business Grants**
- **St Owen Street cycle contraflow** (to be delivered through the Accelerated Towns Fund)

2.2 The 3 December 2020 decision authorised the progression of an initial programme of works to be delivered within a budget of £1.652m. This included reviewing the existing design for the High Town area, develop an outline design and undertaken consultation for the Cathedral and River Wye Quarter and to design and deliver streetscape and green infrastructure.

2.3 The project has been reconsidered with cabinet members and the Marches LEP to explore potential changes to the scope of works and expenditure profile. The LEP indicated a willingness to consider alternatives.

3. OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATION for HCCI

To meet the LEP minimum spend requirements for 2021/22 and 2022/23 and to demonstrate a cohesive and coherent programme the following programme elements and expenditure officers are currently recommending:

- High Town existing enhancements
- High Town area minor works
- Market and event infrastructure
- CCTV
- Façade improvement grants / business grants
- Cathedral and River Wye Quarter Design
- St Owen Street cycle contraflow
- Widemarsh Street kerb improvements
- Cathedral and River Wye Quarter planters
- City Link Road planters
- City Greening
- “City Trees”
- City green cycle shelters
- Public art / installations
- Hostile Vehicle Mitigation

Discussions are currently taking place with the Marches LEP to agree the revised scope and spend profile and this decision will follow necessary agreement with the LEP.

4. RELEVANT PLAN POLICIES for HCCI (Core Strategy)

Investment in infrastructure works under HCCI should be mindful to:

SS4 - minimise impact on the transport network and facilitate a genuine choice of modes including walking, cycling and public transport

SS6 – conserve and enhance heritage assets which contribute to the County’s distinctiveness

SS7 – be sustainable from a climate change perspective, eg to have low carbon footprint, minimise waste and drain properly

HD2 – respect and enhance the heritage assets of Hereford City centre, including their setting, character and street pattern

MT1 - encourage active travel behaviour and sustainable travel choices to reduce car use

E4 – recognise the unique historic character of Hereford as a key visitor attraction, including improvements to rights of way while having special regard for the visual amenity of such routes and for the setting of heritage assets in their vicinity

LD1 – ensure that scheme design has been positively influenced by historic setting or scenic beauty so that it integrates properly

LD4 – protect, conserve and, where possible, enhance heritage assets and their setting in a manner appropriate to their significance, improving the understanding of, and public access to, assets of significance

SD1 – maintain local distinctiveness through incorporating local architectural forms, and materials to make a positive contribution to architectural character and diversity while safeguarding residential amenity and energy efficiency

ID1 – provide infrastructure, services and facilities to support the development of sustainable communities

5. HCCI SCHEME DEFINITION

It was observed on 16th September that there was a need to define:

- 1) The overall scope of intention of the scheme
- 2) The geographically applicable area for HCCI eligibility.
- 3) How the various elements relate to the emerging Hereford Masterplan
- 4) How the actions reference Herford City Centre's 2009 Strategy for Streets
- 5) A clear, realistic and deliverable programme for implementation over this and succeeding financial years
- 6) How, and from whom the works will be designed and procured bearing in mind local sourcing
- 7) Arrangements for stakeholder consultation and public comms

6. COMMENTS on OFFICERS' HCCI SCHEME ELEMENTS

Cllr Harrington met the ward member on 17th September when many of the HCCI issues and priorities were discussed on site. These are set out below, following the order given in the officer's consultation report which, because it gives only headings and no detail, begs questions:

6.1 High Town existing enhancements

- 1) What is meant by 'enhancements in the High Town area'? Does this imply repaving High Town or something more ambitious? High Town has already recently received a number of large raised planters; what further 'enhancements' does the officer envisage?
- 2) High Town was subject of a bid to Stronger Towns Fund in November 2020 for a new market house to provide accommodation for retail and hospitality of a standard better than the shanty structures which have sprung up there in recent years. This was a development of an idea put forward some years ago by Owen Hicks Architects [Hereford High Town | Urban Regeneration Concept | OHA - Owen/Hicks Architecture \(oha-architecture.co.uk\)](#). (NB the STF bid didn't make it through to the 2nd round).
- 3) The idea of a new market house on the site of the Tudor original, perhaps coupled with efforts to repair the original (currently in the form of a derelict summerhouse at Holmer) on a new site should be explored. The outline is marked in the current paving and any new paving here needs to perpetuate/ anticipate this.
- 4) The current, still relatively new, High Town paving scheme has suffered from vehicular use but is still serviceable and interesting and should be retained for the time being. The

Hamilton-Baillie scheme for repaving using Forest of Dean Pennant sandstone slabs, Chinese granite curbs and Italian porphyry setts is a good one but we should use local materials in future: FoD Pennant, St Maughan's sandstone from W Herefs, UK granite and Blue Lias from Worcs or Somerset would be appropriate.

6.2 High Town area minor works

- 1) What does the officer have in mind in respect of 'High Town Area minor works'?
- 2) Recommended by way of minor works would be an audit of the existing street furniture, updated mapping of the services and a plan for rationalising the street environment, removing redundant or little used signage and ugly, little used or obstructive cabinets, posts, lighting columns, noticeboards etc. The space as a whole has become very cluttered, oppressively so on market days with gazebos, stalls and A-boards.
- 3) There is a need for localised lifting and levelling of areas of the existing 1980s block paving between High Town and St Peter's Gate along St Peters street which tends to puddle after heavy rain. In the longer term St Peter's Street should be repaved using Pennant sandstone as per the 2009 Streetscape Strategy

6.3 Market and event infrastructure

- 1) The existing poor quality (by default) permanent structures in High Town (coffee cart etc) do not comply with policy and will need to be removed or replaced with appropriate structure(s).
- 2) See comments above in respect of permanent market structure worthy of the High Town space, as previously proposed. This will need to include secure storage space for the gazebos and other pop-up market infrastructure hired by Herefordshire Council.
- 3) This will require time to design and consult and therefore cannot be delivered through HCCI in the near future. No expenditure on this item is therefore recommended until design and consultation is complete

6.4 CCTV

- 1) No comments re CCTV. It is understood funding for extending this is to come from the Home Office through Safer Streets, not through HCCI. Please refer to Charles Naylor of the Police for details.

6.5 Façade improvement grants / business grants

- 1) What is meant by 'façade improvements'? Which facades? How improved?
- 2) There is plenty of scope for repair and improvement of shop fronts, prioritising those which have traditional character, as per the 2011 Hereford Shop Fronts Guide. Please confirm that HCCI moneys can be used in this way, ie like the Leominster Heritage Action Zone grant.
- 3) If so, the first job would be to draw up a list of eligible facades/ shop fronts and consult with owners/ tenants. No expenditure on this item is therefore recommended until design and consultation is complete

6.6 Cathedral and River Wye Quarter Design

- 1) What is meant by this? Has the scope of this been defined? One assumes the 'Category A' streets around the Cathedral, namely Broad Street, King Street, Bridge Street and Castle Street.
- 2) **Broad Street.** Ben Hamilton-Baillie produced a scheme for Broad Street in c.2010 which extends the pavements and divides the parking into long bays introducing quality natural stone and tactile paving and some planting. The idea was to transform Broad Street, which is currently heavily car-dominated and where there are few physical restrictions to vehicle speed, into a shared space engendering safer vehicle speeds for pedestrians and cyclists and providing opportunities for outdoor seating, eg for hospitality venues. It was also intended to address the hazardous junction of Broad Street with East/West Street and the problem caused by coaches negotiating this tight turn en route to the Cathedral drop off. Hamilton-Baillie's schemes are generally successful in resolving all these conflicts provided local authorities back them up with appropriate Traffic Regulation Orders and a preparedness to enforce..
- 3) There is, however, resistance from some of the traders, and from some drivers, who fear a loss of the convenience of premises-adjacent parking spaces. On the other hand, as the modest experiment with barrel planters of the Covid emergency measures showed, there is support for enhancing the public realm in this way, while there seems to be little evidence to support traders' fears the reduction of parking equated to a loss of business.
- 4) **King Street** The TTRO closing the junction of King Street with Aubrey street to cars needs to be made permanent and the pavement relaid to continue the pavement across yet admitting the passage of cycles. There seems to be no reason why this scheme cannot be commenced immediately, following the necessary statutory consultation
- 5) Poor quality concrete pavement materials in King Street to be replaced with good quality materials as per Streetscape Strategy 2009.
- 6) **Bridge Street.** The Covid TTRO measures, in spite of initial protests, had proved generally successful. It provided the opportunity for JJ's and other hospitality to venture their offer to the street which was good for business and community, and it created a much safer environment which noticeably boosted walking and cycling.
- 7) The measures for Bridge Street and the Old Bridge need to be made permanent by widening the pavement, at least on the E side of the street and relaying with Pennant sandstone and curbs. Parking may continue to be allowed both sides, but with a somewhat reduced carriageway in view of the greatly reduced traffic.
- 8) Gloomy Gwynne Street off Bridge Street needs a new and improved street lighting scheme and there seems no reason why HCCI moneys could not be used for this once a design for lamps has been agreed with Conservation.
- 9) **Castle Street.** Renewal of the appalling, ugly and unfit concrete and bitmac pavements to Castle Street (and St Ethelbert Street) has been discussed with members, residents and officers for many years and it has been raised with Cllr Harrington more recently. This is top priority for HCCI.
- 10) The scheme for Castle Street preferred by the Cathedral School and residents is essentially simply one of redoing the pavements as per the Streetscape Strategy 2009, using Pennant sandstone (riven or sawn) with perhaps blue lias or St Maughans setts for the entrances and Pennant or granite for the curbs. There is no request for build-outs, parking bays, trees or planters although there is scope for modest widening of the pavement on the N side of the street, retaining the parking and more than sufficient carriageway width.
- 11) Castle Street currently has a tarmac carriageway which has lifted the level to near the top of the pavement curb which now only protrudes an inch or so like the Widemarsh Street curbs. Addressing this, so it isn't seen as a tripping hazard will require contrasting materials or its elimination altogether.

6.7 St Owen Street cycle (and alternative East Street) contraflow

- 1) This scheme has been under consideration for over 20 years. It has a strong logic, being the manifestation of a desire line from the east, oft already used by cyclists, albeit not safely. It is currently possible for cyclists to access the city centre from the east circuit-uitously via Mill Street, Cantilupe Street, St Ethelbert Street, Castle Street and, though not strictly a cycle route, Cathedral Green.
- 2) The scheme is supportable provided it is LTN 1/20 compliant, relates properly to the rest of St Owen Street and to Bath Street through redesign of the currently unsafe traffic light junction there and isn't over-engineered and therefore over-expensive.
- 3) The very much cheaper alternative to the St Owen Street cycle contraflow scheme is the East Street scheme, see below, which also has significant additional advantages for the regeneration of East Street and for addressing East street's hazardous crossing of Church Street.
- 4) The alternative East Street Scheme works by physical enforcement of the continually breached access only order by making the street bike, pedestrian and buggy permeable only immediately W of its junction with Offa street, so that the street is no longer used as a rat run, and by a localised reversal of the direction of access to Church Street. This would make it possible for cyclists to safely use East street from the East (indeed much of it in both directions). The scheme would necessitate turning Offa street back to two-way, and would be enhanced by implementation of the St Peter's Square Scheme explained on pages 108-9 of the Design Guide (2019)
- 5) The traffic-light controlled St Owen Street junction with Bath and Mill Street is a particular challenge, even for the confident cyclist and should be addressed in any event. A small roundabout junction with a somewhat tighter geometry and in good materials designed to facilitate a continuous slow speed traffic environment with segregated cycle lanes is likely to be more successful. This should be prioritised ahead of delivery of the cycle contraflow (or East Street alternative).

6.8 Widemarsh Street kerb improvements

- 6) What is meant by Widemarsh Street improvements? I assume we are referring to the infamous kerb, considered a trip hazard.
- 7) The options considered for addressing the kerb include: a) do nothing; b) digging it up and dropping the level which would entail localised relaying of the pavement resulting in a very slight slope across the pavement; c) chamfering the curb in situ which would result in a slightly more abrupt slope; d) filling into the curb using a resin-bound compo in matching colour and texture which would result in a very slight slope into the carriageway/ side drain.
- 8) Options b), c) and d) will all marr the appearance of the Widemarsh Street Scheme. However option d) is the only one which is reversible and is also likely to be far the cheapest. My recommendation is for option d), subject to agreement of suitable samples/ tests.

6.9 Cathedral and River Wye Quarter planters

- 1) We are at saturation with the big planters in the City Centre with enough in High Town and slightly too many in Eign Gate and I would not be keen to see any more. Where we plant street trees, they need to be earth-fast not in planters. They may all need to be moved for the May Fair and in practical terms the more there are, the greater the logistical challenge and the higher the maintenance for them all.

- 2) On the other hand the barrel planters are a success, being relatively portable, they have the capacity to deliver instant effect at little cost.

6.10 City Link Road planters

The City Link Road is outside the HCCI scheme area. This falls within the HCCTP area. We should consider this separately with the Transport Hub and public realm improvements on Commercial Road. We should not be using moneys from one project to make up for overspends on another.

6.11 City Greening

- 1) Please provide details what this entails beyond the proposals for planters above.
- 2) I assume this is for city centre trees? If so I have a specific request for funding help with a planting on Castle Green for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee on 15th October if that might qualify? (£2000 sought)

6.12 "City Trees"

- 1) Comment as per 'City Greening'

6.13 City green cycle shelters

- 1) What and where 'green cycle infrastructure'? So far as I am aware the only call we have for specific cycle infrastructure in the city centre apart from please more Sheffield stands here and there, would be St Owen contra, see 6.7 above

6.14 Public art installations

- 1) What and where 'public art'?
- 2) Lots of locations and ideas for murals, some of which have been discussed with Cllr Harrington already. This includes Greyfriars car-park underpass (subject to Highways England) and the Sensory & Rye wall overlooking Commercial Road (subject to James Manning).

6.15 Hostile Vehicle Mitigation

- 1) **East Street**. Suffers from 'rat-running' as drivers short-cut across the heart of the medieval City between South Wye and the Hampton and Ledbury Roads without using either the ring road (Newmarket/ Blue School/ Bath St) or the A465 (Station Approach) and Folly Lane. The action is in breach of the Access Only order on the section of East Street between Broad Street and Offa Street which the Police decline to enforce, insisting that it is up to Herefordshire Council to design the street environment to make it enforceable.

- 2) A number of ideas have been advanced to address this including introducing a 'table' where East Street crosses Church Street, but the only solution which is likely to work and which has significant additional benefits, is to close East Street to through traffic (apart from pedestrians, buggies and cycles) immediately east of its junction with Offa Street and reverse the direction of access from E to W approaching via Offa Street (which becomes 2-way), see 6.7.
- 3) The chief additional benefit of this scheme is that – at very little cost - it provides a safe cycle route to the City Centre from the east negating the need for the St Owen Street cycle contraflow.

- 4) **High Town and Commercial Street**. The pedestrianised area experiences problems of drivers using this area in the evenings to access the fast food outlets, an issue which neither the police (for the moving traffic offences) nor Herefordshire Council's parking enforcement appear to be able to control effectively.
- 5) The suggestion here is that HCCI funding is used to adapt St Peter's Gate to electronic control so that it may be kept closed to general traffic in the evenings yet remain accessible to authorised vehicles.

- 6) **Widemarsh Street**. In spite of the considerable HCCI investment in the redesign of Widemarsh Street, suffers from speeding traffic using it as a rat run after 4.30pm and before 10.30am. During Covid this was ameliorated somewhat by TTRO extension of the traffic-free period by one hour in the afternoons to allow for social distancing and economic recovery.
- 7) The suggestion here would be to re-extend the traffic-free period to 10.00am – 5.30pm and to make the area subject to the HCCI repaving investment (Widemarsh Street and High Street) 'access only', together with the adjacent section of Bewell Street.

- 8) **St Peter's Square** This is the key landmark civic space in the City, dominated by the Shire Hall and St Peter's church and surrounded by listed buildings, but its current public realm elements do it disservice as both the Urban Panel report (2017) and Design Guide (2019) found.
- 9) The space is dominated by motor vehicles and a tawdry collection of shelters and steel 'sheep hurdle' type fencing. It would be entirely appropriate to use HCCI moneys to implement the scheme illustrated on pages 112-3 of the Design Guide.
- 10) This would result in the very short section of road on the south side of St Peter's Square (by Tanners) becoming two-way traffic