

REVIEW OF THE EXPERIMENT TO PEDESTRIANISE WIDEMARSH STREET, HEREFORD

Report By: Head of Highways and Transportation

Wards Affected

Central

Purpose

1. To review the experiment to partially close Widemarsh Street, Hereford to traffic from 8th June 2005 to 31st December 2005.

Financial Implications

2. A budget of £45,000 for 2005/6 was allocated to undertake this trial. The financial implications of the arrangements to be put in place following this trial will be dependent upon the decision regarding the future traffic arrangements for the area.

Background

4. The experiment to pedestrianise Widemarsh Street, Hereford was proposed after public consultation showed support for pedestrianisation after Widemarsh Street and High Street had been closed to traffic to enable Transco to undertake essential maintenance works to gas mains from July to October 2004.
5. Surveys conducted during these works demonstrated strong public support for improved pedestrian conditions. Of those surveyed, 72% of pedestrians and 59% of retailers surveyed favoured some form of pedestrianisation for Widemarsh Street.
6. A consultation exercise was undertaken seeking the views of members of the public and retailers on the prospects of a permanent pedestrianisation scheme being implemented in Widemarsh Street. A presentation was given by the Head of Highways and Transportation at the Hereford City Local Area Forum on 19 January 2005 about the possibility of an experiment to pedestrianise Widemarsh Street. Members of the public present were able to comment on the proposals presented to them and encouraged to take part in the consultation that was taking place at the time. Additionally, details of the proposed available schemes were also displayed in All Saints Church, Hereford where members of the public were again given the opportunity to comment on the proposals put before them by taking part in the consultation process which ended on 18 February 2005.
7. On 26th January 2005 the Widemarsh Street Review Group established by the Social and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee met key stakeholders including the police, retailers, transport operators and others in the Green Dragon Hotel, Hereford to discuss the proposed experiment to pedestrianise Widemarsh Street from May-December 2005. The meeting attracted approximately 50 members of the public who also expressed their views.

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Stephen Oates, Head of Highways and Transportation on (01432) 260780

8. At the conclusion of the consultation in February 2005, 293 completed questionnaires had been returned from the police, retailers and other interested groups of just under 1500 distributed, which equalled a 20% response rate. Of the responses, 81% were in favour of a trial pedestrianisation and 65% were in favour of a trial to continue through to December 2005. On the specific options available for pedestrianisation, 45% of responses were in favour of a 10.30 am – 4.30 pm closure and 38% were in favour of full 24 hour daily closure (with exemptions for service access outside core shopping hours).
9. The decision to experiment with a partial closure of Widemarsh Street, Hereford was taken by Cabinet at its meeting on 28th April 2005. It was resolved that Widemarsh Street be closed to traffic from 10.30 am – 4.30 pm seven days a week for a minimum period until at least 31st December 2005.
10. The pedestrianisation experiment was concluded on 31st December 2005. However, due to a need for works to take place in High Street for several weeks starting on 9th January 2006 the road closure order has remained in place.
11. To enable the experiment to be evaluated statistics on: Car Parking, Tourism, Air Quality, Shopmobility Usage, Footfall and Traffic Flows have been collated.
12. In addition to this the views of Stakeholders, including the Emergency Services, Transport Operators and User Groups have been sought. The Public and City Centre Retailers have also been surveyed, this process has included a two-page consultation document which had been sent to every household in Herefordshire in the November 2005 Edition of 'Herefordshire Matters'. Additionally all comments received on the experiment have been collated as part of the monitoring process.
13. In summary:
 - The closure of Widemarsh Street has had no specific impact on car parking in Hereford City.
 - The air quality in Widemarsh Street shows a marked improvement. The air quality for the Edgar Street roundabout shows little change during the closure.
 - Shopmobility usage has shown a general reduction – although there has been an increase in November compared with October. It is thought that there have been a number of people purchasing their own vehicles, which has resulted in the reduction.
 - Footfall has shown an overall increase compared with 2004, so it would appear that numbers coming into town have not been adversely affected by the closure.
 - Traffic counts have been undertaken at Greyfriars Bridge, Broad Street, Widemarsh Gate and Bridge Street junction with Berrington Street. The amount of traffic using these streets is broadly similar on each occasion.
 - 38% of Retailers (750 surveys were sent out, and 227 replied) said revert to previous situation and 55% said make the closure permanent.
 - 2,413 responses have been received from the general public. 71% of respondents felt that the pedestrianisation made the overall experience of

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Stephen Oates, Head of Highways and Transportation on (01432) 260780

visiting Hereford better, compared to 18% who found it worse. 7% found there to be no difference.

Objectives of this meeting

14. The Community Services Scrutiny Committee will be hearing representations in respect of the community and economic impact of the trial scheme from the following key stakeholders:
 - National Traders
 - Local Traders
 - Taxi Association
 - Police
 - Disabled Groups
 - Hereford Cathedral

Next Steps

15. In view of the large amount of evidence likely to be presented to the Committee on the evening once all the invited witnesses have been interviewed the meeting will adjourn. The meeting will then reconvene at 2.00pm on Friday 13th January 2006 in the Council Chamber at Brockington, Hereford where it will review the evidence and consider whether it wishes to make any recommendations to Cabinet.
16. The meeting on Friday, 13th January 2006 will also be open to members of the public and press.
17. Cabinet is currently scheduled to consider the future of the pedestrianisation of Widemarsh Street on 26 January 2005.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Widemarsh Street, Hereford Proposed Experimental Pedestrianisation Scheme (report to Cabinet 28th April 2005)