

WIDEMARSH STREET, HEREFORD

REVIEW OF EXPERIMENTAL PEDESTRIANISATION SCHEME

PROGRAMME AREA RESPONSIBILITY: HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORTATION

CABINET

26 JANUARY 2006

Wards Affected

Central

Purpose

To consider the results of the experimental pedestrianisation scheme in Widemarsh Street and High Street, Hereford.

Key Decision

This is a Key Decision because it is significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising one or more wards. It was included in the Forward Plan .

RECOMMENDATIONS

- THAT (a) the Experimental Traffic Regulation Orders prohibiting traffic in Widemarsh Street and High Street, Hereford, between 10.30am and 4.30pm each day and imposing a 20mph speed limit on these roads be made permanent;
- (b) further consideration be given to the provision of additional facilities, including minor highway adjustments, to support access and parking by coaches, taxis and disabled vehicles;
- (c) subject to detailed design, revised traffic signal control at the Newmarket Street/Blueschool Street/Widemarsh Street/Maylord Orchard junction be implemented to improve conditions for pedestrians and to provide greater automation of the traffic control measures in Widemarsh Street;
- (d) a programme of targeted action be developed to promote visits to Hereford by more sustainable means of travel, including additional promotional activity and a study of coach accessibility identifying improvements to signing, coach stopping and coach waiting facilities;
- (e) subject to necessary consultation, an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order be made prohibiting the driving of vehicles in Bewell Street between the hours of 10.30am and 4.30pm each day from its junction with Widemarsh Street to a point 3 metres west of that point; and

- (f) **the funding of associated streetscape improvements be addressed within the preparation of the Council's capital programmes for 2006/07.**

Reasons

Consultation and monitoring carried out between July and December 2005 indicates that the experimental pedestrianisation of Widemarsh Street (south of Blueschool Street) and High Street has received widespread support from the community and has not had a significant adverse impact on strategic traffic routes in Hereford.

On the basis of the monitoring information, the experimental provisions appear to have improved shopping conditions in Hereford. Several matters of concern have been raised which could be addressed through separate studies.

Considerations

1. The experimental pedestrianisation of Widemarsh Street and High Street, Hereford, came into effect on 8 June 2005 and was monitored until 31 December 2005. The scheme is currently suspended while repaving work is carried out in High Street.
2. 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. Public consultation during and after those works demonstrated strong public support for the introduction of a pedestrianisation scheme. Of those surveyed during the Transco works, 72% of pedestrians and 59% of retailers surveyed favoured some form of pedestrianisation for Widemarsh Street.
3. During a subsequent, more comprehensive public consultation in February 2005, 81% of responses 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).
4. Cabinet considered these results on 28 April 2005. Cabinet agreed to implement an experimental pedestrianisation prohibiting traffic from Widemarsh Street and High Street between 10.30am and 4.30pm each day until at least 31 December 2005.
5. Extensive consultation and monitoring was carried out during the experiment, covering the following:
 - a. Face to face interviews with the public in the city centre
 - b. Questionnaires to city centre retail/business premises (750 copies distributed)
 - c. Public questionnaires, including an insert in the November edition of Herefordshire Matters and an on-line questionnaire
 - d. Consultation with stakeholder groups and statutory bodies
 - e. A retail assessment by specialist consultants
 - f. Traffic surveys

- g. Monitoring of car park income
 - h. Monitoring of public “foot fall” in a central shopping location, Shopmobility usage and visitor numbers to the Museum and the Old House
 - i. Air Quality Monitoring
 - j. Review of accident data
6. Full details of the results of this research are available in the background papers. Some summary extracts of data are provided in Appendix 1. Stakeholder comments are shown in Appendix 2. In outline, the results indicate:
- 71% of 2,413 respondents to public questionnaires felt that the pedestrianisation made the overall experience of visiting Hereford better and 66% were in favour of making the experimental scheme permanent. A total of 75% support pedestrianisation in some form.
 - In face to face interviews, 72% of 373 people interviewed said they would like the pedestrianisation experiment to be made permanent.
 - 55% of 227 responses from retailers/businesses within the area directly affected expressed support for making the experiment permanent.
 - Opinion from stakeholder groups is evenly balanced in favour and against making the scheme permanent.
 - Public transport (bus) operators indicated that the experimental scheme could detract from the attractiveness of their services.
 - Coach and tour operators, including the Association of Group Tour Operators, generally supported the scheme.
 - Shopping footfall has shown an overall increase compared with 2004.
 - Use of council car parks in Hereford has declined slightly during the experimental period but to a lesser extent than across the county as a whole.
 - Traffic counts undertaken at Greyfriars Bridge, Broad Street, Widemarsh Gate and Bridge Street show that there has been some diversion of traffic from Widemarsh Street to the strategic road network but the impact is very small. Although Victoria Street (A49) has shown a small increase, there is little change in Newmarket Street or Greyfriars Bridge (A49). The Highways Agency has not raised an objection to continuation of the pedestrianisation scheme.
 - 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, continuing a trend from 2004 but at a slightly slower rate.

- The retail consultant's report concludes that there is no evidence from their survey that the permanent pedestrianisation of Widemarsh Street would impact directly on the retail economy of Hereford and highlights the potential of a pedestrianised Widemarsh Street to improve shopper flows through the city as whole. Of 50 retailers consulted for this report, only 7 responded with feedback, with only one reporting weaker trading performance since June 2005. The report highlights that Hereford enjoys a dominant position of its shopping catchment, performing better than other towns and cities within its benchmarking category, and commands around two-thirds of the retail market of Herefordshire.
 - Road casualties have been monitored within an area bounded by the A49, Ring Road, Widemarsh St/Broad St/Bridge St and St Martins St. There is no evidence of any detrimental effect on casualties within the relatively short monitoring period.
7. Through the course of the experiment, some specific issues have emerged as of particular concern to various groups/stakeholders. Apart from objections to the principle of restricting the use of Widemarsh Street and High Street as through routes, some of the specific concerns are tabulated below:

Issue	Comment
Lack of access for public transport	<p>First Bus had ceased using Widemarsh Street for their commercial services before the implementation of the pedestrianisation scheme. Only subsidised rural routes contracted to the Council had continued to use Widemarsh Street, as required by the contract specifications.</p> <p>Significant complaints had been made to the Council about congestion problems at the stop in Widemarsh Street when First had been routing their commercial services through the city centre.</p> <p>First Bus has now expressed the view that their services on the alternative routes may be delayed by increased congestion as a result of the Widemarsh Street closure.</p> <p>Delays when leaving the Maylord Service Road have also been cited as a problem. Significant delays were certainly evident during the initial months of the experimental scheme but some of these were associated with repeated failures of Hereford's central traffic signal control system (SCOOT). That system was replaced and upgraded in October/November 2005 since when the reliability has substantially increased.</p> <p>Stagecoach did use Widemarsh Street, High Street and Broad Street for their services before the experimental pedestrianisation scheme. The frequency of services was approximately one each hour. These services have now been re-routed to the Maylord Service Road, the Ring Road and the A49. Stagecoach comments that the diverted services are likely to be less attractive to customers but do not confirm any continuing reduction in patronage.</p> <p>The public consultation did ask for views on how the scheme had affected the ease of getting to/from a bus stop. Across all the questionnaires, 24% of respondents found no difference, 10% found it to be better or much better and 10% found it to be worse or much worse.</p> <p>So, whilst the scheme has affected local bus services, it does not appear that these effects are substantial and would not appear to justify any change to the scheme.</p>
Lack of access for taxis	<p>Widemarsh Street contains a rank for 8 taxis. This cannot be accessed during the restricted hours of the scheme. Shortly after the introduction of the experiment, the new rank in St Peters Square (2 spaces) became operational and a rank in Maylord</p>

	<p>Orchard Service Road (2 spaces) was re-introduced.</p> <p>Taxi operators have objected strongly to the loss of the Widemarsh Street facility. The public consultation did ask, "How easy is it to get a taxi?" Across all responses, 12% of respondents found getting a taxi to be worse or much worse, compared to 6% who found it better or much better.</p> <p>To provide an exemption for taxis from the pedestrianisation scheme would represent a fundamental change, providing the potential for significant volumes of traffic to be re-introduced into the pedestrian area.</p> <p>If the scheme is retained, there may be the opportunity to revise the facilities in Broad Street, where there is an existing rank. This would need to be the subject of a separate traffic order and associated consultation.</p>
<p>Lack of access for the disabled</p>	<p>The prohibition of vehicles during pedestrianised hours does not provide an exemption for disabled badge holders. It has been suggested that this may disadvantage disabled passengers wishing to be dropped off/picked up outside Marks and Spencer. Comments have also been made that the exclusion of traffic provides improved conditions for use of the street by disabled/less able persons.</p> <p>Any exemption for disabled badge holders would require the removal of physical access restrictions such as the gates. Experience elsewhere demonstrates that, without physical restriction, access controls would be compromised.</p> <p>As with taxis, a review of the provision for specialist parking provision in Broad Street could be undertaken if the pedestrianisation scheme is retained. The council does support the Hereford Shopmobility scheme, in conjunction with Hereford Access for All who are generally in support of the pedestrianisation scheme.</p>
<p>Cycling in Widemarsh Street</p>	<p>Several respondents have raised cycling as an issue. Some object to the lack of access for cyclists during the restricted hours, others are concerned by illegal cycling in Widemarsh Street during the pedestrianised period.</p> <p>Widemarsh Street has previously been identified for the development of improved cycle access and a contra-flow cycle lane scheme has been prepared. However, promoting cycling during the pedestrianised hours would represent a significant detraction from the aim of improving the pedestrian environment and the level of complaints of cycle intrusion supports this.</p> <p>The recent revision to the High Town traffic orders has permitted cycle access in that area before 10.30am and after 4.30pm. There remains the possibility of improving access for cyclists in Widemarsh Street during similar periods if it can be safely designed into any future streetscape options. No access during the restricted hours is recommended.</p> <p>In consultation, Cycle Hereford has expressed support for the pedestrianisation scheme because of the benefits for vulnerable road users. However, they do ask that the needs of cyclists be more appropriately reflected.</p>
<p>Pedestrian/vehicle conflict at the Newmarket St/Bluschool St junction</p>	<p>The pedestrian crossings of the Ring Road between the north and south sections of Widemarsh Street are key routes for pedestrian access to the city centre. The pedestrianisation of Widemarsh Street has not physically altered these crossing points but has changed the traffic patterns at the junction. Traffic that normally turns left into Widemarsh Street continues straight on to the Edgar Street roundabout.</p> <p>Several comments have been received from pedestrians that motorists ignore the pedestrian priority at the signals when exiting the yellow box eastbound toward Edgar Street. This happens because the junction exit across the pedestrian crossing is not signalled once vehicles have entered the yellow box. A study by consultants has been commissioned into options for reconfiguring pedestrian/signal arrangements at this junction if the scheme is made permanent. Some improvements do appear viable but are restricted because of the need to retain full operation of the junction before 10.30am and after 4.30pm. Funding would be available from the Local Transport Plan</p>

	<p>programme.</p> <p>Modifications to the signals would include timed controls on filter lights to indicate the prohibition in Widemarsh Street during pedestrianised hours.</p> <p>There may also be the potential to link the signals to automated rising bollards in Widemarsh Street, replacing the manually operated gates. The design of a rising bollard facility would need to be undertaken in conjunction with the suppliers and would need to incorporate access control for emergency services.</p>
<p>Difficulty of accessing Broad Street from West Street</p>	<p>When Widemarsh Street and High Street are closed, the alternative route to Broad Street is via West Street. Some consultees refer to difficulty in negotiating the West Street/Broad Street junction with buses and coaches and suggest that this is a deterrent to access.</p> <p>The geometry of the junction does permit large vehicles to make the turn into Broad Street, although obstruction can be caused if double parking takes place close the junction. Very few incidents of actual obstruction have been identified. There is scope for minor junction alterations to address this problem but the experiment has not provided evidence that there is a need for such an improvement. The conditions could continue to be monitored.</p>
<p>Traffic entering Widemarsh Street from Bewell Street</p>	<p>The experimental pedestrianisation traffic order does provide an exemption for traffic to enter Widemarsh Street/High Street from Bewell Street if the traffic has legitimately entered Bewell Street. Bewell Street is controlled by a "No Entry Except for Access" order.</p> <p>This exemption was provided because of the lack of alternative egress from Bewell Street (the Tesco Bus Station is not an adopted public highway). Because of the exemption, Bewell Street has not been gated.</p> <p>Traffic surveys have confirmed that very low levels of traffic do use the Bewell St/Widemarsh St/High Street route with the maximum recorded traffic flow 26 vehicles in the 6 hour period of pedestrianisation on 12 December 2005. However, complaints from the public and the Police have continued throughout the experiment expressing concern for the safety of pedestrians.</p> <p>The Ambulance Service used Bewell Street on one reported occasion during the experiment when their personnel could not open the Widemarsh Street gates. The Ambulance Service has highlighted the occasional problems at the Widemarsh Street gates but supports the pedestrianisation scheme itself on the basis that it seems to offer a safer environment for pedestrians.</p> <p>In view of the level of complaint, a separate traffic order could be introduced for an experimental period banning traffic from exiting Bewell Street on to Widemarsh Street during the pedestrianised hours. Any problems for local access traffic could then be assessed during the experimental period. A short length of prohibited street could be enforced by the installation of a single, removable bollard for the experimental period. If retained permanently, consideration could be given to an automated rising bollard.</p>
<p>Adverse retail impact in the Broad Street/King Street/Bridge St areas</p>	<p>Both during and prior to the introduction of the experiment, traders in the Broad St/King St/Bridge St areas expressed considerable opposition. The basis of the objections is generally that the traffic restrictions will deter passing trade and reduce the opportunity for vehicle users to identify shopping opportunities.</p> <p>These issues are frequently raised when pedestrianisation schemes are proposed, as confirmed by the report from the retail consultants, Experian. Little objective evidence is available to confirm the impact on retail activity and only 7 out of 50 retailers responded to the detailed inquiries undertaken by Experian.</p> <p>However, it is inevitable that shopping patterns will change with the introduction of pedestrianisation. That is the key purpose of the scheme. In most cases the changes are beneficial and the public and commercial reaction to the Widemarsh Street scheme certainly indicates that this should be expected in Hereford. The experimental period is</p>

	not sufficient to provide a firm long-term picture of the likely changes but, despite the level of initial objection, there remains little evidence to support a view that the scheme is having any overall negative impact on trade.
Effect on visitors to Hereford Cathedral	<p>The Cathedral has commented on the risk of a decline in visitors to the Cathedral, exacerbated by the possibility that coach operators would be deterred from using the West Street/Broad Street route for access. Visitor numbers did suffer a decline in 2004 but following more marketing by the Cathedral, numbers recovered slightly in 2005 although remaining depressed.</p> <p>In discussion, it appears that coach visits to the Cathedral have been reducing for some years. It has been suggested that this may be because coach operators are deterred by general traffic conditions in Hereford and/or a relative lack of quality waiting areas for coaches.</p> <p>In response to the stakeholder survey, the Association of Group tour operators, together with some independent tour operators, have supported the pedestrianisation scheme, suggesting that improved pedestrian conditions make conditions more attractive for tourists.</p> <p>There is scope to develop a plan to improve the attractiveness of Hereford for tour operators, both through physical improvements to signing/waiting facilities and through promotion. Local Transport Plan funding could support such a project as part of the accessibility improvement programme.</p>

Petitions

8. Four petitions/independent opinion surveys have been submitted during the experiment. These have come from:
 - a. The Hereford City Partnership. A survey of 319 city businesses carried out as the scheme became operational asking “Do you agree with the closure of Widemarsh Street?” The results indicated 63 agreed and 241 disagreed. Some supplementary information was subsequently received from traders in the area around the northern section of Widemarsh Street (not the City Partnership) adding 39 names disagreeing with the scheme.
 - b. The Herefordshire Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Association submitted petitions from members and passengers stating “The following names and signatures are members of the HHCPHA/members of the general public who are opposed to the pedestrianisation of Widemarsh Street and High Street in the Hereford City. 72 HHCPHA members and 27 members of the public signed the petitions. 21 of these signatures were prefixed with the phrase “As long as the rank is in place”
 - c. On behalf of local of local traders, ‘Pleasance and Harper’ presented a petition to the Chairman of the Council showing 36 (out of 39) traders in the Widemarsh Street area and over 1200 customers supported the scheme.
 - d. ‘Beads –in-Abundance’ of Capuchin Yard, Hereford submitted a petition signed by 108 members of the public stating “We the undersigned wish to keep the pedestrian scheme subject to a review of access”.

Community Services Scrutiny Community

9. The Community Services Scrutiny Committee held a meeting in the Green Dragon Hotel on 11 January 2005 at which several witnesses were asked to give views on the operation of the experimental pedestrianisation scheme.
10. A further meeting of the Committee took place on 13 January at which the views of the Committee on the experiment were agreed for the further information of Cabinet. A summary of the Committee's considerations is shown in Appendix 4. The Committee resolved:

That the Cabinet Member (Highways and 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;

and;

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

Financial Considerations

11. The experimental scheme has cost approximately £45,000, funded by the Local Transport Plan programme. The works were deliberately designed to be of a temporary nature and, if the scheme were not continued, removal costs would be very low.
12. If the scheme is made permanent, several packages of work are proposed:
 - a. The traffic signals at the Widemarsh Street/Ring Road junction would be revised and pedestrian crossing facilities improved. If viable, the gates would be replaced with automated rising bollards. At this stage no detailed cost estimates for this work have been prepared but a budget figure of £100,000 should be allowed.
 - b. A study would be commissioned to identify improvements for access and waiting by taxis, coaches and disabled vehicles in the city centre. In addition a programme of targeted action would be developed in conjunction with Hereford Cathedral and the Hereford City Partnership to promote visits to Hereford by coach and other sustainable travel modes. This would include additional promotional activity and measures to improve coach accessibility, including a review of signing, coach stopping and coach waiting facilities. A contribution of £50,000 could be made available from the Local Transport Plan programme to support these projects.
 - c. Streetscape (paving) improvements would be possible to reinforce the pedestrian priorities around the gated area of Widemarsh Street, the eastern end of Bewell Street and the northern end of Broad Street. Some of these works might be included in the scheme to refurbish High Town and the

surrounding area but a minimum sum of £100,000 should also be identified for specific works to reinforce the pedestrianisation scheme.

- d. To further improve the pedestrian environment, traffic should be prohibited in the eastern end of Bewell Street between 10.30am and 4.30pm each day to prevent vehicles entering Widemarsh Street. This restriction would be introduced by means of an experimental traffic order and would be retained permanently subject to the consideration of any representations received during the first 6 months of the experimental period. The estimated cost of £5,000 to be funded from the Local Transport Plan.
13. The actions above identify a total of £155,000 to be funded from the LTP programme. This could be made available from the indicative budget allocation of £195,000 in the Provisional LTP programme for City Centre Pedestrian Enhancement in 2006/07. Since publication of the Provisional LTP the Government announced a reduced level of LTP funding for 2006/07, some £65,000 less than originally anticipated.
14. The LTP programme does not currently include identified provision to cover the streetscape improvement works at an estimated cost of £100,000. If this were to be funded from LTP resources, there would need to be adjustments to other parts of the transport programme. The Council's capital programme (included elsewhere in the Agenda) does not identify funding for the Widemarsh Street scheme within the prudential borrowing proposals.

Next Steps

15. An experimental traffic regulation order can remain in force for a maximum of 18 months unless extended by agreement of the Secretary of State. Following consideration of any representation received during the first 6 months of the experimental period, the council may decide to abandon, modify or retain the scheme on a permanent basis. If modified, a further 6 month period would be required for representations.
16. If Cabinet were to decide to abandon the scheme, the streets (Widemarsh Street and High Street) would revert to their former status as through routes once the current refurbishment works in High Street have been completed (expected late February/early March 2006).
17. If modifying or retaining the scheme, the 10.30am to 4.30pm pedestrianisation controls would be reintroduced on completion of the High Street works. Any proposed modification to the traffic order would require some consultation/notification to specified bodies prior to implementation.

Summary

18. The experimental pedestrianisation scheme has provided the opportunity to monitor and consult widely on the benefits and disbenefits of restricting vehicular traffic in these city centre streets. The very clear majority of the public response supports retention of the scheme on a permanent basis.
19. Although many issues have been raised during consultation as disadvantages of the scheme, none of these in itself appears sufficient to justify abandoning the scheme. Several of the specific concerns could be addressed through

subsequent studies and actions, such as the introduction of an experimental ban on traffic exiting Bewell Street into Widemarsh Street.

20. Cabinet will wish to consider whether the combination of the range of concerns is sufficient to negate the clear public support for retaining the scheme. Some of these concerns are summarised above and are reported in detail in the background papers.
21. On the evidence available, the advantages of the scheme appear to be significant in terms of improving the pedestrian and shopping environment. Improvements to pedestrian access to the city centre are a priority in the Local Transport Plan and the scheme itself is consistent with the recommendations of the Hereford Transport Review.

Risk Management

From the evaluation of the experimental period, the partial pedestrianisation of Widemarsh Street and High Street has improved conditions for shoppers in the city centre and significantly reduced conflict between vehicles and pedestrians. No evidence has been found of increased risk to safety on the alternative routes but the evaluation period is too short to provide the normal level of statistical reliability adopted for road safety measures.

If the scheme is retained on a permanent basis, there appears from consultation responses to be some small risk of adverse impact on a part of the local retail sector. Overall, the high level of public satisfaction provides confidence that there could be long-term retail benefits for the area.

Consultees

Details of stakeholder consultations are set out in Appendix 2.

Detailed analyses of the public consultations are available in the background papers and will be available in the Members Room.

The local member, Cllr David Fleet, comments that whilst supporting the principal of pedestrianisation of Widemarsh Street he has the following reservations:

- Traffic continuing to use Bewell Street at all times confusing pedestrians
- Poor traffic control at Blueschool crossing, traffic stopping on box crossing and blocking access across Blueschool Street from Widemarsh Street North to Widemarsh Street South as traffic lights and density of traffic make these lights unworkable for vehicles and dangerous for pedestrians. Traffic unable to access Widemarsh Street then blocks Widemarsh Street North traffic wishing to turn left onto Blueschool Street
- A safe solution needs to be found for the disabled parking area at All Saints end of Broad Street

- It is believed that with minor realignment of the kerbs and parking bays, the right turn from West Street into Broad Street for coaches can be achieved.

Hereford City Council has expressed support for retention of the scheme but have expressed some concern that the positioning of the gates allows vehicles to stop in the entrance to Widemarsh Street and for unloading.

The Member of Parliament, Paul Keetch MP, comments that he believes the pedestrianisation could be advantageous as long as access for the disabled, vehicular and other modes of transport inclusive, taxi and bus/coach access can be included in the final scheme. He would also wish to see swifter emergency access incorporated to allow the ambulance and fire services in particular immediate entry through the gates and not losing valuable, potential lifesaving moments waiting for the gates to be unlocked.

Alternative Options

The experimental traffic regulation orders could be revoked or modified.

Background Papers

- Reports of consultation, Widemarsh Street Pedestrianisation
- Retail Impact Study, Widemarsh Street Pedestrianisation – Experian Business Strategies.