

WISBECH MARKET PLACE – CONSULTATION ON OPTIONS

To: Fenland Traffic Management Area Joint Committee

Date: 22nd January 2010

From: Service Director: Highways & Access, Environment Services

County electoral division(s): Wisbech South

District electoral ward(s): Medworth

Purpose: To inform Area Joint Committee of public consultation responses on two options to better manage access in Wisbech Market Place, in order to inform a decision on the way forward.

Recommendation: That Area Joint Committee selects a scheme to move forward to detailed development stage.

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1. **BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 Options to improve access to Wisbech Market Place have been under examination for some time as part of the Wisbech Transport Strategy. The strategy aims to encourage more sustainable modes of transport, such as walking, cycling and public transport use, and to encourage the economic vitality of Wisbech. The Market Place area is currently subject to restrictions on vehicular access, but the lack of effective enforcement results in little practical control.
- 1.2 Both the current difficulties, and various options for improvement, have been considered and debated via the Area Joint Committee, Fenland District Council Cabinet, and Overview & Scrutiny Panel. The sensitivity of the issue and divided local opinions are such that it has proved very difficult for Members to determine the best way forward.
- 1.3 Following receipt of a petition from local traders in early 2009 both Area Joint Committee and Fenland District Council's Cabinet supported moving forward with public consultation on two options to improve the area:
 - More restricted vehicular access: Option 1
 - Less restricted vehicular access (FDC Overview and Scrutiny recommended option): Option 2
- 1.4 The consultation proposals have been jointly developed via a steering group comprising officers and members of Cambridgeshire County Council and Fenland District Council as previously agreed by the Area Joint Committee. Lead officers agreed that the County would manage the consultation exercise with appropriate assistance and support from the District Council.
- 1.5 In July 2009 Area Joint Committee supported a timetable for consultation and whilst there has been some minor slippage it was imperative to complete this work and report back in January 2010 in order to inform a decision on the way forward. This will ensure that resources can be committed in the 2010-11 financial year for the introduction of any agreed changes to the management of traffic in the Market Place. County Council funding for any agreed changes in the Market Place will be via the annual Local Transport Plan allocation for market towns projects.

2. **CONSULTATION PACKAGE**

- 2.1 The County Council network management team includes some specialist resource which it has used for consultation work on sensitive issues including traffic restraint proposals in the centre of Cambridge. It was therefore considered advantageous in making full use of this experience in the development of proposals for the centre of Wisbech.
- 2.2 Steering group members were committed to ensuring that the consultation process was as thorough and robust as possible. Given the function that the market place provides over a wide catchment area, it was considered important to canvass opinion from all potential users, businesses and organisations with an interest in the town centre. The survey needed to be both quantitative and qualitative.

2.3 The consultation package was developed with these objectives and targeted in a number of specific areas:

- Printed consultation questionnaire
- Web publicity and on-line questionnaire
- Co-ordinated media coverage
- Permanent exhibition display in Wisbech One-Stop Shop
- Additional staffed exhibitions within the Market Place and elsewhere
- MRUK telephone survey of businesses

2.4 The consultation questionnaire asked respondents 21 questions about how they used and travelled around the market place, how they considered each of the broad options would contribute towards the Wisbech town centre shopping experience, and whether they had specific needs within the area (for example residents, businesses, or blue badge holders).

3. CONSULTATION RESULTS

3.1 The response to the consultation exercise was very encouraging with the exhibitions reasonably well attended and approximately 400 completed returns. The full results are set out in **Appendix B** and summarised in **Appendix A**, with the MRUK report as **Appendix C**. These appendices will be published on the County Council's website and sent to members in advance of the meeting.

3.2 The questionnaire response identified an exact split in the level of support for each option (179 each) which is remarkable. However, once the MRUK telephone survey of business responses was included a relatively narrow preference in favour of Option 2 (58%, compared with 42% who favoured Option 1) emerged.

3.3 In general respondents felt that Option 1 would both improve the shopping experience and make walking around the market place safer (53%, compared with 39%). Furthermore, there was marginally more support for a traffic free environment (except for essential vehicles and deliveries) at all times, than not (54%, compared with 46%).

3.4 Conversely there was marginally more support from blue badge holders for Option 2 (54%) than Option 1 (46%). All respondents were asked to rank their level of satisfaction with each option (ranging from 'very satisfied', to 'very dissatisfied'), with more people expressing marginally stronger feelings about the potential impact of Option 1 than Option 2.

3.5 Perhaps as expected the individualised responses from businesses and business workers demonstrated a preference for Option 2, whilst those from shoppers demonstrated a preference for Option 1.

3.6 Wisbech Town Council has discussed the two options and voted unanimously in favour of Option 2 as its preferred alternative.

4. COMMENTS

- 4.1 The consultation exercise undertaken has ensured a representative response which, not surprisingly, overall appears fairly evenly balanced. It must be recognised that this has been an exercise around principle rather than detail and, that if either of the two very different options is to move forward, then further detailed work and consultation will be required.
- 4.2 The County Council Accessibility Advisor has made a number of suggestions about how blue badge holders might best be accommodated within the market place area and considers that neither of the options currently presented would contravene the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act.
- 4.3 The principle objective of the consultation exercise has been to arrive at the solution most acceptable to most people. In order to move towards some consensus the following issues around how access might best be managed have been identified:

Issue	Comment
Parking on the Market Place on market days	Precluded by market activities, widely accepted and therefore not a difficulty
Over-night parking	Not identified as a particular concern, and therefore likely widespread public support (however, any obstruction of market set-up would need addressing)
Deliveries	Not identified as a particular concern, other than where and when on market days
Day-time parking on non-market days	The key issue to resolve

- 4.4 Given the level of the existing difficulties experienced within Wisbech Market Place doing nothing is not considered an acceptable option.
- 4.5 Discussions are ongoing between the County and District Councils regarding the further extension of Civil Parking Enforcement that, if financially and politically viable, would provide an opportunity to significantly enhance parking enforcement across Cambridgeshire.
- 4.6 Area Joint Committee will be aware that Fenland District Council Cabinet may wish to formally endorse any proposal affecting land within its control.

5. THE WAY FORWARD

- 5.1 The member and officer steering group met in early January to consider the consultation results and Councillor members resolved, by a majority, to support Option 2 in preference to Option 1 as the most appropriate solution.
- 5.2 Area Joint Committee is asked to select an option for the improvement of Wisbech Market Place to take forward to detailed development stage.
- 5.3 The following draft development timetable should ensure the implementation of any agreed and financially viable changes before the end of 2010-11:
- Jan 2010 – AJC selects a scheme for detailed development
 - Jan/Feb 2010 - consideration by Fenland Cabinet
 - Feb/March 2010 – detailed scheme development
 - April 2010 – AJC agrees scheme details
 - May/June 2010 – formal stakeholder consultation
 - July 2010 – AJC considers responses and determines way forward
 - Aug/Sept 2010 – formal advertisement of legislative changes
 - Oct 2010 – AJC determines objections and approves changes for implementation

Source Documents	Location
Correspondence and Agenda and Minutes of Fenland Traffic Area Joint Committee meetings	Box ET3500, North Highways Division, County Road, March, PE15 8NE
Agenda and Minutes of Fenland District Council Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Panel	Fenland Hall, County Road, March PE15 8NQ