

SWT Executive - 24 February 2021

Present: Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts (Chair)
Councillors Benet Allen, Chris Booth, Ross Henley, Richard Lees, Peter Pilkington, Mike Rigby, Francesca Smith and Sarah Wakefield

Officers: James Hasset, Dawn Adey, James Barra, Alison North, Andrew Pritchard, Tracey Meadows (Democracy and Governance), Amy Tregellas, Clare Rendell, Nick Bryant, Emily Collacott, Rebecca Miller (Principal Planning Specialist), Matthew Parr, Graeme Thompson, Scott Weetch and Joe Wharton

Also Present: Councillors Norman Cavill, John Hassall, Sue Lees, Libby Lisgo, Janet Lloyd, Dave Mansell, Hazel Prior-Sankey, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Anthony Trollope-Bellew, Brenda Weston and Loretta Whetlor

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

98. **Apologies**

An apology was received from Councillor Marcus Kravis.

99. **Minutes of the previous meeting of the Executive**

(Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 20 January 2021 circulated with the agenda)

Resolved that the minutes of the Executive held on 20 January 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

100. **Declarations of Interest**

Members present at the meeting declared the following personal interests in their capacity as a Councillor or Clerk of a County, Town or Parish Council or any other Local Authority:-

Name	Minute No.	Description of Interest	Reason	Action Taken
Cllr C Booth	All Items	Wellington and Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr N Cavill	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke
Cllr R Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke

Cllr J Lloyd	All Items	Wellington & Sampford Arundel	Personal	Spoke
Cllr D Mansell	All Items	Wiveliscombe	Personal	Spoke
Cllr P Pilkington	All Items	Timberscombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Prior-Sankey	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke
Cllr M Rigby	All Items	SCC & Bishops Lydeard	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith-Roberts	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr V Stock-Williams	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke
Cllr B Weston	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke

101. **Public Participation**

Mr P Bisatt spoke on agenda item 8, East Street and St James Street, Taunton:-

1. Why was it proposed to exclude buses from East Street, and force them to use a much longer and at times, heavily congested route via The Crescent and Upper High Street? This seemed completely at odds with the wider aim of encouraging the use of public transport on environmental grounds. Town centre improvements should result in improved conditions for buses, not make them worse. The Report did not address this issue at all.
2. How would the permanent loss of 3 bus stops on The Parade, and 2 stops in East Street, be addressed? Where would they be replaced, and what would be the knock-on effects for the streets in which they had to be located?
3. Why was it proposed to allow general traffic to use East Street one-way during peak periods? This would require cyclists to use a contraflow lane in an unpleasant situation, where there would potentially be heavy vehicles travelling in the opposite direction, and cause East Street to be visually dominated by road markings and other traffic management paraphernalia. It would also prevent or restrict a future redesign of The Parade befitting its historic role as the town's market place, rather than a traffic roundabout.
4. Why was no action apparently being taken to close North Street and Corporation Street to general traffic, even though £20m of taxpayers money was spent 10 years ago on the 'Third Way' to enable traffic to avoid these streets?
5. What was the wider strategy for the future management of traffic in North Street, Bridge Street, Corporation Street, Hammet Street and others within the town centre? Should not the proposals for East Street be considered as part of such a wider strategy with appropriate public consultation, as was the case with the 2008 Town Centre Area Action Plan?

6. Why was the council proposing to permanently exclude buses from East Street when this would be contrary to Policy Tr9 of its adopted Town Centre Area Action Plan?

Yours faithfully, Philip Bisatt, MRTPI (Rtd), CMILT

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation responded:-

1. The closure of East St was a temporary scheme that was initially introduced to allow social distancing as non-essential retail was allowed to reopen in July 2020 following the first national lockdown. This continued throughout the year as social distancing continued and into the busy Christmas period. Once this was over, we entered another lockdown we took the decision to retain the current scheme to enable social distancing essential shopping and click and collect queues.

As we carried out work on a more permanent design for East Street, we continued to engage with SCC to work on further projects that would help to alleviate traffic congestion around the town centre which included how and where the buses operated. Traffic modelling to assess the impact of any permanent scheme for East Street would be undertaken by SCC. However, the design and implementation of such changes were subject to lengthy road safety audit processes and complex design issues, hence we had chosen to extend this temporary scheme throughout the current lockdown whilst our longer term plans were finalised.

These would also be subject to consultation to allow business, community groups, and transport provider's further opportunity to comment.

2. We were not proposing to remove any bus stops on either East Street or The Parade permanently. The current recommendations for the Executive Committee relating to East Street were:

'Officers continued to work with Somerset County Council's Highways team on proposed modifications to vehicular access on East Street in Taunton to increase active travel and enable social distancing. Specifically, instructing them to:

- 1) Limit vehicular access and restrict traffic movement to one direction only (from the Fore Street junction, exiting onto East Reach/Silver Street)*
- 2) Creating cycle lanes in both directions and offering additional cycle parking*
- 3) Create additional Blue Badge parking on Magdalene Street, Billet Street and the Crescent Car Park'*

This was a temporary scheme while the longer term detailed design was underway, including a consultation with bus service providers via SCC.

3. There was no current proposal to allow general traffic to use East Street. As a response to consultation feedback, SWT did consider trialling access through East during peak hours, however in consultation with SCC's road safety team it was not possible to find a safe solution to transition from closed to open or vice versa, particularly in winter months.

With the intention of minimising vehicles on a busy shopping street whilst trying to enable social distancing, it was decided to remove the afternoon slot for general traffic but keep the morning one for Blue Badge holders and deliveries only. This was the temporary scheme which remained in place while we worked on the detailed design of the longer term scheme.

4. Further full or partial pedestrianisation was possible in the future, but as infrastructure changes on this scale took time to both design, implement and

appraise, the closure of further roads without adequate consideration, and the appropriate consultation.

5. With the Future High Streets Fund being awarded to SWT in December 2020, along with Garden Town and the Taunton 2040 Vision, East Street would certainly fit in a wider strategy for transport in Taunton. We were therefore currently seeking to only extend this temporary scheme whilst this strategy was further developed. This would consider traffic patterns using pre-lockdown data, but we were cognisant that working patterns may change as working from home and online shopping had become more prevalent, so any strategy would need to consider the “new normal”.

102. **Executive Forward Plan**

(Copy of the Executive Forward Plan, circulated with the agenda).

Councillors were reminded that if they had an item they wanted to add to the agenda, that they should send their requests to the Governance Team.

Resolved that the Executive Forward Plan be noted.

103. **Approval of Climate Positive Planning: Interim Guidance Statement on planning for the Climate Emergency**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors thanked the officers for their hard work on the report.
- Councillors queried how the document could be used to enforce planning applications.

The Strategy Specialist advised that the document would strengthen advice given to applicants and also guide officers in the advice they gave but it could not be used to enforce, it would be used to compliment other policies that were already in place.

- Councillors advised that it was useful information for the Planning Committee and that they would be keen to have a member briefing on the document.

The Strategy Specialist advised that a session had been arranged for the Planning Committee to attend.

Resolved that the Executive approved:-

2.1 That Climate Positive Planning: Interim Guidance Statement on Planning for the Climate Emergency (the Statement) was approved as additional explanation and guidance to support existing adopted planning policies.

2.2 That approval of future updates to the Statement were delegated as follows:

(a) Minor amendments including textual and visual changes and enhancements to be delegated to the Director for Development and Place in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation.

(b) Updates relating to changes in national Government legislation and guidance, or the need to reference or update reference to other local or

national evidence or strategy documents to be delegated to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation in consultation with other fellow Executive Members.

(c) More significant updates beyond those listed above to be delegated to Executive Committee.

2.3 That Members noted that the Statement was purely to provide additional explanation and guidance to support existing adopted planning policies it was not policy in itself, and that the status of the document for approval would hold no weight in the decision making process on planning applications. Any alterations to existing adopted planning policy, or proposals for new planning policies relating to planning for the Climate Emergency would be brought forward through formal processes associated with Local Plan review and production of the Local Plan to 2040.

104. **Safeguarding Policy**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors highlighted it was an important time to consider the report, especially as the country was about to come out of a national lockdown.
- Councillors were pleased to see this Policy was being updated, especially considering how important the Policy was.
- Councillors thanked officers for their hard work on the Policy and report.
- Councillors highlighted that they wanted updated training sessions on Safeguarding.

The Community Resilience Manager advised that he would arrange some training sessions for councillors.

- Concern was raised on what happened if a councillor needed to discuss a complex safeguarding case with officers and whether they would be able to share data with them.

The Community Resilience Manager advised he would ensure that a process was set up for such complex cases.

- Councillors agreed that it was important that they could provide support for their vulnerable residents.

Resolved that the Executive:-

2.1 Approved the Safeguarding Policy as at Appendix A; and

2.2 Approved delegation be provided to the relevant Corporate Director in consultation with the portfolio holder, to make any subsequent amendments required as a result of legislative or operational changes.

The Safeguarding Policy would be reviewed annually and approved by the Senior Management Team.

105. **East Street and St James Street, Taunton**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors thanked the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation and officers for their work on the scheme.

- Councillors queried whether the work on engaging and consulting with the disability groups would continue.
The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation advised he was in continuous talks with the disability groups to ensure the appropriate support was given.
- Councillors queried whether the timings for blue badge holders was flexible.
The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation advised that the timings would not be rigid, which would allow the blue badge holders to access all the shops they required.
- Councillors were pleased that the parking for blue badge holders would be flexible.
The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation highlighted that Somerset County Council would make additional disabled parking available in the surrounding streets to support the scheme in East Street.
- Councillors queried whether the additional spaces would be permanent.
The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation advised that it would run in line with the temporary closure of East Street.
- Councillors queried why the times of 8-10am were used for blue badge holders.
The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation advised that he did not want parking to encroach into the wider use of the space for pedestrianisation.
- Councillors queried whether the barrier put in place at East Street would be removed at the end of the temporary closure.
The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation advised that there would be a barrier and that he expected by the end of the temporary closure, the traffic layout would have changed. He further advised that traffic modelling would be carried out whilst East Street was closed.
- Concern was raised on how pedestrians would be made aware that East Street would be a shared space with many different users.
The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation explained that it would be a joint responsibility of all the different users, so motorists, cyclists and pedestrians would be safe whilst using East Street. There would also be additional safety signage put in place.
- Councillors were pleased to support the closure of East Street as it provided space for safe social distancing, especially during the Covid Pandemic.
- Councillors were please to support the closure of St James Street as it had supported the creation of the Independent Shopping Quarter which had proved a success.
- Councillors queried the timescale for the additional consultation.
The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation advised that it would not be a one off consultation but that it would be continuous during the closure to keep dialogue open with the different user groups.
- Councillors requested clarity on the terms of engagement.
The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation requested that officers discussed the terms direct with councillors.
- Councillors thanked the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation for his engagement with the disability groups.
- Concern was raised on the connections to active travel and that councillors did not want the inclusion of cyclists and other users to be at the detriment of those with mobility limits.
The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation understood the concern but wanted to open up the street to as many user groups as safely possible.
- Councillors queried where the cycle lanes would be located along East Street.
The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation stated that the cycle lanes would be subject to a road safety audit.

- Concern was raised on the increased traffic along The Crescent.
The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation stated that as part of the scheme, they would look into traffic displacement.
- Councillors queried what work would be done to improve the traffic lights/crossing near St James Street.
The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation advised that work would be carried out to align the crossing with the St James Street turning and the access to Goodland Gardens.
- Councillors were pleased to see the St James Street closure being made permanent, as it has had achieved a positive outcome and created camaraderie between the retailers in the area.

Resolved that the Executive approved:-

- 2.1 Officers continued to work with Somerset County Council's Highways team and representatives of disability interest groups on proposed modifications to vehicular access on East Street in Taunton to increase active travel and enable social distancing. Specifically, instructing them to:
 - 2.1.1 Limit vehicular access and restrict traffic movement to one direction only (from the Fore Street junction, exiting onto East Reach/Silver Street)
 - 2.1.2 Creating cycle lanes in both directions and offering additional cycle parking
 - 2.1.3 Create additional Blue Badge parking on Magdalene Street, Billet Street and the Crescent Car Park
- 2.2 The 12-month trial scheme for St James Street be made permanent.

106. **Local Validation Checklist**

During the discussion, the following point was raised:-

- Councillors thanked officers for their work on the report and were happy to support the recommendations.

Resolved that the Executive:-

- 2.1 Approved the LVC subject to a full public consultation and any comments received being fully considered and we necessary amendments made by the Principal Planning Specialist in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Planning.

(The Meeting ended at 7.45 pm)