
Meeting: Traffic Management Meeting
Date: 21 November 2013
Subject: Biggleswade petition
Report of: Jane Moakes, Assistant Director Environmental Services
Summary: The report has been prepared in response to a three part petition from Biggleswade Chamber of Trade requesting 1) More car parking in the town centre area 2) A long stay area (up to four hours) being provided and 3) reversal of traffic flows on Hitchin Street in Biggleswade town centre.

Contact Officer: David Bowie, Head of Traffic Management
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: Biggleswade town centre
Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

Better infrastructure – improved roads, broadband reach and transport.

Financial:

There are no financial implications relating to this report.

Legal:

There are no legal implications relating to this report.

Risk Management:

There are no risk management issues relating to this report.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

Not Applicable.

Equalities/Human Rights:

This report does not propose any actions that have any implications regarding equalities or human rights issues.

Public Health

There are no public health issues relating to this report.

Community Safety:

Not Applicable.

Sustainability:

Not Applicable.

Procurement:

Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

The Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Services is asked to:

- 1. Advise the lead petitioner that a parking study for Biggleswade town centre is nearing completion. This study will advise on how best to improve car parking availability and capacity in the town centre and will inform the development of a car parking strategy. The proposals from this study will be subject to consultation with the local community in early 2014.**
- 2. Defer consideration of any changes to traffic management on Hitchin Street until the wider impact on adjacent streets and junctions as well as proposals for the Market Square including re-use or redevelopment of Century House can be fully understood and taken into account.**

3. Background

A petition has been received from the Biggleswade Chamber of Trade, 'Biggleswade Town Petition', a copy of which is attached as Appendix A.

The petition states:

"We join the town traders in requiring something to be done about the following:

- 1. More car parking in the town centre area.*
- 2. A long stay area, up to 4 hours is needed to allow more time to be spent in the town.*
- 3. Hitchin Street reversal be allowed back to its original flow back into the town centre allowing access to the Market Square and to help stop continuing traffic problems in the High Street."*

This report sets out the activities and plans currently underway that are relevant and have implications with regard to the issues raised for consideration by the traffic management meeting.

Biggleswade car parking study

4. A study of car parking capacity and management in Biggleswade was started by the Council during July this year. The objective of the study was to better understand how parking is used currently within a 10 minute walk of Biggleswade Rail and how this is likely to change in the long term. A range of parking surveys have been carried out alongside an analysis of current capacity and future needs based on population growth and other factors. A workshop to look at some of these issues was held with Biggleswade Town Council on the 23rd October.
5. The next step of the project is to prepare a parking strategy based on the analysis carried out to date and feedback received that will coordinate how on and off street car parking is managed. The strategy will also seek to ensure sufficient car parking and availability of choice is available for those who visit Biggleswade town centre by car.
6. The objective of the petitioners in increasing the availability of car parking for both short and longer term users will be met through the implementation of this future parking strategy for Biggleswade town centre. It is anticipated that a draft strategy will be taken to local business for consultation early in the new year. Adoption by the Council of the new strategy will follow during Spring time. Implementation and timetabling of any changes to parking management will be subject to agreement with Biggleswade Town Council and allocation of appropriate budget. As the strategy is not yet complete there may be other factors that impact this which are as yet unknown.

Request for Hitchin Street reversal/Biggleswade town centre masterplan

7. The Biggleswade town centre masterplan was adopted as a supplementary planning document in July 2011 and had been developed in close consultation with the local community over a two year period prior to this. The masterplan focuses on several key areas in the town centre proposing a range of different types of improvement or redevelopment. The Hitchin Street area was flagged up as a concern early in the process as an area that had declined significantly in the range and standard of shops available as well as the general poor condition of the highway.
8. Through the consultation process the Council developed a number of suggestions for the Hitchin Street area. This included an option for reversing traffic flows and also the piloting of 'shared space'. At the time of the consultation (2010) reversing traffic flows on Hitchin Street was not supported by the majority of respondents to the consultation. Other options including the piloting of shared space and environmental improvements were supported. Whilst reversal of flows was not explicitly agreed as a masterplan priority the adopted document did however highlight the opportunity for changes in traffic management in this area in relation to wider redevelopment proposals particularly that of the adjacent Bonds Lane/Foundry Lane development site.

9. In January 2013 a major enhancement scheme for the northern end of Hitchin Street was completed. The scheme cost in excess of £400,000 and introduced the concept of shared space. The improvements made have been welcomed by traders and the vast majority of those who use the street for shopping and other purposes. Further improvements for this area are planned as part of the town centre masterplan. This includes redevelopment or reuse of Century House, a property owned by the Council located in the centre of the Market Square and a very short distance from the southern end of Hitchin Street. This scheme is directly related to another masterplan proposal for the creation of a transport interchange at Biggleswade rail station. Completion of this project (expected towards the end of 2015) will facilitate the removal of the bus loop and station function from Century House thereby freeing the building for re-use or redevelopment.
10. Century House is not a well utilised asset either for the Council or the wider community. The majority of the building is currently occupied by the Citizens Advice Bureau which is only open for a limited number of hours and days per week. The reuse or redevelopment of Century House provides a significant opportunity to maximise its very accessible and attractive location for uses which generate more footfall and commercial benefit for the wider area. It may also provide an opportunity to expand the improvements made in Hitchin Street to the wider Market Square which may also in turn enable improvements to the layout of Biggleswade street market.
11. During 2014/15 the Council will undertake an options appraisal that will consider the feasibility of re-use/redevelopment of this site. This appraisal will form the basis for a report to the Council's Executive which will recommend preferred use and timetable for implementation. As the reversal of traffic flows on Hitchin Street will impact on the immediate area around Century House further consideration of this major change is not recommended at this time.

Conclusion and Next Steps

12. The Biggleswade parking study is due to be completed by the end of the calendar year. Recommendations emanating from the study for improving car parking management and capacity will be taken forward subject to Council approval for consultation with the local community by Spring 2014.
13. It is suggested that reversal of traffic flow on Hitchin Street are not considered at the current time due to potential wider changes to the Market Square as a result of the town centre masterplan, and the absence of allocated budget for implementing suggested changes and measuring impact.

Appendices:

Appendix A copy of petition

Background Papers: (open to public inspection)