

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE & SPORT

TO:	TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT ADVISORY PANEL		
DATE:	24 MARCH 2009	AGENDA ITEM:	3
TITLE:	THE FORBURY AND MARKET PLACE - EXPERIMENTAL CHANGE IN HOURS OF OPERATION OF PEDESTRIAN ZONE - OBJECTIONS		
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report presents 10 objections received to the Borough of Reading (The Forbury) (Prohibition of Vehicles) (Experimental) Order 2008, introduced on 4 July 2008. The order varied the existing 11am - 4pm pedestrianisation hours to 7-11am and 4- 7pm, 7 days a week with the intention of reducing conflict between private cars and public transport, taxis and permit holders in Market Place and the town centre bus loop in general.
- 1.2 It is recommended that the experimental order is made permanent. This will involve minor alteration to the kerbs and bollards at the closure point.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the Panel note the report.
- 2.2 That the following recommendation be made to Cabinet:
- 2.2.1 That in consultation with the Chair of the Advisory Panel, Lead Councillor for Planning and Transport and Ward Councillors and the Head of Legal Services be authorised to make the Borough of Reading (The Forbury) (Prohibition of Vehicles) (Experimental) Order 2008 be made permanent in accordance with the Local Authorities Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations.
- 2.2.2 That engineering works, minor kerbing and permanent bollards, as shown on Drawing No. NM/TM/TF/01/09 to make the closure permanent be agreed.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The proposals are in line with current Transport and Planning Policy. Traffic Management Advisory Panel reports and minutes 28th March 2008 and Cabinet minutes 14th April 2008.

4. THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 The Town Centre Pedestrian Zone historically operates between 11am and 4pm and has been a major contributor to the success of Reading town centre since its introduction in the early nineties. The restriction is currently abused by non permitted vehicles that cause conflict with pedestrians, public transport, hackney carriages, delivery vehicles and permit holders who have a legitimate reason to be in the town centre at those times.
- 4.2 The recent environmental improvements in Market Place and the introduction of the southbound bus lane at the northern end of London Street have served to reduce the volume of private cars that drive through Market Place. However, the remaining numbers of private cars using the town centre loop rather than the IDR are sufficient to cause significant delay to public transport (and delivery vehicles) at critical peak times.
- 4.3 In response to this, an experimental order to change the hours of operation of the pedestrian zone in The Forbury, Market Place and High Street was introduced on 4th July 2009 for a maximum period of 18 months. The order varied the existing 11am - 4pm pedestrianisation hours to 7- 11am and 4- 7pm, 7 days a week. Under the regulations, objections to the order can be accepted for a period of 6 months, after which the order can be modified, withdrawn or made permanent. The 6-month objection period to the experimental order expired on the 4th January 2009. This report highlights the benefits of the closure and summarises the 10 objections which have been received.
- 4.4 Prior to the introduction of the experimental order, 566 cars drove through Market Place in the morning peak and 416 in the evening peak. All this traffic reached Market Place by using the town centre bus loop to some degree, causing congestion and delay to public transport and service vehicles with legitimate business in the loop. Since the experimental closure was introduced, private car through traffic in Market Place has dropped to single figures and delay within the bus loop has reduced considerably, with a corresponding improvement in bus reliability.
- 4.5 The impact of the closure of The Forbury should not be under estimated in providing significant benefits to public transport and creating a more pleasant environment. The use of the town centre loop as a through route for general traffic was significant. North to west traffic was able to cut through from the station area to Market Place, Minster Street and on to Castle Street. Since the closure of The Forbury there has been a significant reduction in delays to public transport not only in Market Place but as far as Castle Street crossing the IDR to

Castle Hill. There has also been a marked reduction in traffic within Friar Street as the west to east movement has also been severed by The Forbury closure. Reduced traffic queues at key points within the town centre loop (Friar Street, Market Place, Gun Street and Castle Street) has resulted in measurable improvement to bus journey times of between 12 and 15 minutes at critical busy periods.

- 4.6 Bus patronage continues to increase (almost 1 million extra journeys within the latest year on year comparison - *source Reading Buses*) and the reduction of delays to public transport improves reliability and increases the attractiveness of bus services. Whilst increases in bus patronage is the result of a combination of factors improving reliability of public transport is essential in proving travelling public real choice. The Forbury closure has significantly improved reliability and journey times of public transport during the busiest travel to work periods. This has created a more attractive and reliable public transport service that is more competitive with private car journey times for many within the greater Reading area.
- 4.7 Alongside reduced congestion and delays within the town centre loop the removal of through traffic within Market Place has improved the perception of pedestrian safety and created a more pleasant environment. Despite The Forbury being open to all traffic between 11am and 4pm the majority of use is by those that need to be in the area for business purposes. The 11am to 4pm period does not attract the through traffic that the peak periods created so the volume of traffic does not exist.
- 4.8 Early indications are that the number of injury accidents within the town centre bus loop has decreased by two thirds since the introduction of the experimental closure. If the trend continues then the closure will have made a significant improvement to road safety in the town centre by reducing the number of vehicles passing through the town centre.
- 4.9 It is recommended that the experimental order is made permanent. This will involve minor alteration to the kerbs and bollards at the closure point.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 To Develop Reading as a Green City with a sustainable environment and economy at the heart of the Thames Valley.

To promote equality, social inclusion and a safe and healthy environment for all.

- 5.2 Sustainable Community Strategy, Transport and Accessible Places.

- To improve bus punctuality and reliability to improve non-car access to all areas.
- Promote cycling and walking for shorter local journeys to improve non-car access to district centres.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 6.1 Statutory consultation will be carried out in accordance with the Local Authorities Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996. Additional local consultation will be carried out as required.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The proposals for the movement and waiting restriction orders will be advertised under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and the Traffic Management Act 2004.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 This proposal will be funded from within existing Transport budgets.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 9.1 Reports and minutes of Traffic Management Panel 28th March 2008
Reports and minutes of Cabinet 14th April 2008