



Cabinet report

Date	14 JULY 2022
Title	NEWPORT TOWN CENTRE PEDESTRIAN IMPROVEMENTS
Report of	CABINET MEMBER FOR LEVELLING UP, REGENERATION, BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM AND CABINET MEMBER FOR INFRASTRUCTURE, HIGHWAYS PFI AND TRANSPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. As part of the Newport High Street Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) programme, plans have been developed to make improvements to the pedestrian environment in High Street and St James' Square.
2. Plans include reallocation of street space from space for motor vehicles to space for pedestrians, with wider footways, narrowed carriageways and reduced on-street parking.
3. In addition, improvements will be made to the accessibility, utility and appearance of the street and square, with improved paving, new areas of planting, additional seating, additional cycle parking and clearly defined street furniture zones leaving clear, unobstructed walking routes.
4. The setting of key heritage assets, particularly the Victoria Memorial, will be improved, helping showcase the town's rich history.
5. The additional space provided will create new opportunities for social interaction, more space for browsing in shop windows and make local walking journeys easier and more comfortable.
6. Delivery of works will be phased based on availability of resources, with an initial section of work delivered using existing HAZ budget approved for delivery of this project. Later sections of work will be delivered as resources can be identified, but design work funded by the HAZ programme will help demonstrate these projects are funding-ready, helping attract external funding.
7. The changes are expected to significantly improve these key town-centre streets, and it is anticipated they will help stimulate further private investment from building owners and local businesses, further enhancing the street scene.

8. The plans also address accessibility shortcomings in the current street layout, significantly improving movement options around the town for disabled people in particular.
9. These plans form part of a package of measures being delivered by the HAZ which complement each other and will collectively help regenerate the town centre.

RECOMMENDATION

10. That cabinet approves planned changes to the High Street and St James' Square to widen footways, improve the public realm and reallocate space from the carriageway and on-street parking to facilitate this.
11. In doing so, cabinet authorises the Cabinet Member for Levelling Up, Regeneration, Business Development and Tourism and the Cabinet Member for Infrastructure, Highways PFI and Transport in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and the Director of Neighbourhoods to use available resources to develop and deliver whichever aspects of the plans prove to be technically and financially viable within the timeframe of the HAZ scheme, and to seek additional resource to develop and deliver the remaining viable elements in due course.
12. Furthermore, cabinet authorises the Director of Regeneration and the Director of Neighbourhoods to prioritise and work towards measures to reduce the volume and size of vehicles moving through the High Street by developing alternative routes and arrangement around the town centre.

BACKGROUND

13. In 2020 Newport, along with Ryde, was designated a High Street Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) by Historic England, in an effort to help regenerate the town centre and improve the condition of the town centre conservation area.
14. The HAZ is a partnership between Isle of Wight Council (IWC), Historic England (HE) and Newport and Carisbrooke Community Council (NCCC). HE provides half of the funding for the programme, with partner contributions from IWC and NCCC making up the rest. The HAZ aims to regenerate the historic town centre and maximize the opportunity for the town centre to adapt and thrive. IWC has committed to support the programmes' objectives both financially and through other support from across the council. The HAZ programme is funded for four years from April 2020 until March 2024.
15. A key part of the programme agreed with Historic England is investment in improvements to the public realm in the High Street and St James' Square, which aims to address risks to the Conservation Area through improving the setting of key buildings and reducing the impact of motor vehicles alongside providing an improved pedestrian environment to enable the town centre to evolve and provide a higher quality offer to visitors.
16. A concept plan has been developed through a community codesign process and community consultation and have been agreed by the HAZ Steering group and a decision by the Council is now sought to deliver the scheme.
17. Concept plans for the proposed changes can be found in Appendix 1. Proposed changes consist of a number of key elements:

Phase 1:

- (a) Widening of footways on both sides of the High Street to improve accessibility, allow more space for people walking or browsing in shop windows, and to enable greater social interaction.
- (b) Narrowing the carriageway to encourage lower speeds and create a visual appearance that cars are guests in a people-first environment.
- (c) Removing or relocating street furniture (posts, parking meters, planters etc) that can clutter the street and make moving around more difficult.
- (d) Providing three new dedicated parking bays for disabled people on the High Street.
- (e) Retaining and extending the existing High Street loading bay.
- (f) Removing other on-street parking on the High Street between St James' Street and Holyrood Street to create more space for pedestrians and reduce risk from manoeuvring vehicles. Alternative parking provision exists nearby in Quay Street, further along the High St and in nearby car parks (several lie within 3 minutes' walk).
- (g) Improving pedestrian crossings through widening them, making them level with footways to improve accessibility, and increasing waiting space.
- (h) Addition of new planters, seating and cycle racks, installed in clusters to minimise clutter.
- (i) Repaving the pavements and pedestrian square across the whole area in consistent materials to improve the look of the High Street and St James' Square.

Phase 2:

- (j) Widening footways and crossings at the St James' St/High St junction where possible, considering constraints imposed by the need to turn buses and large delivery vehicles.
- (k) Widening the footway on the west side of St James' Square to provide easier movement and space to browse, narrowing the carriageway to enable this and also reduce crossing distance.
- (l) Extending St James' Square to the north to provide new public space around the Victoria Memorial
- (m) Modifying the layout of St James' Square to create a more useable, flexible and accessible public space
- (n) Improving pedestrian crossings through widening them, making them level with footways to improve accessibility, and increasing waiting space.
- (o) Addition of new planters, seating and cycle racks, installed in clusters to minimise clutter.
- (p) Repaving the pavements and pedestrian square across the whole area in consistent materials to improve the look of the High Street and St James' Square.

- 18. Implementation will be staged, to enable incremental delivery as resources allow, with the first stage of delivery utilising existing High Street Heritage Action Zone funding specifically allocated for this purpose. This will include all, or part, of phase 1, depending on final costs. Later stages will require additional funding and the HAZ team are actively seeking additional external funding.
- 19. The changes are expected to make a large difference to the pedestrian environment, complement other measures being taken through the HAZ project,

such as shopfront improvement works, and contribute to the regeneration of Newport Town Centre.

20. The scheme is designed to allow for current levels of traffic on the High Street, but also to function well with reduced traffic levels. The nature and volume of traffic in the High Street remains a concern and has been highlighted as an issue which needs to be addressed in a Historic Places Panel visit made by Historic England before the HAZ project commenced.
21. The wider traffic management measures required to achieve a large reduction in traffic in the High Street require longer term action and it is recommended that staff continue to develop plans for alternative traffic routing in the area to address this issue, working with the HAZ team to achieve additional medium-term gains for the regeneration of the town centre. While this is a long-term objective it is important that work commences imminently due to the timescales involved.
22. The concept plans in appendix 1 are indicative at this stage, and subject to ongoing work to refine designs to maximise the benefit of the scheme and ensure financial and technical viability at each stage of design development. It is anticipated that details of the High Street layout will change as design work progresses, including the exact location of items and the final alignment of the carriageway.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Responding to climate change and enhancing the biosphere

23. The improvements recommended form a key part of broader efforts to reduce reliance on the private car and provide high quality alternative travel options and reduced need for travel. It explicitly delivers against objective 029 "Introduce a 'people first' approach to traffic flows in urban centres". It supports active travel through providing an improved environment for walking, but also forms a key part of actions designed to sustain and enhance a key town centre, enabling provision of key services within walking and cycling distance of a large catchment population, and at the centre of the Island's bus network.
24. Arc Consulting have undertaken a biosphere review of the project and made various recommendations which will be integrated as detailed design work is undertaken.
25. At the heart of the Biosphere designation is its twin focus on cultural and biological diversity. This project seeks to enhance the cultural diversity through a focus on local distinctiveness, implementing various measures to embed locally distinct features in the public realm. Biological diversity will be enhanced through carefully selected planting and micro-habitat creation work embedded in the scheme design.

Economic Recovery and Reducing Poverty

26. Town centre regeneration forms a critical part of economic recovery efforts, especially post COVID-19. Thriving town centres support an active range of uses in a location accessible to most people, not reliant on car access. Newport town centre supports a large walking catchment, and the facilities in the town are particularly important for lower income households who are much more likely to rely on active travel as the lowest-cost transport option available.

27. High Streets across the country have been hit by changes in retail patterns, and the ability for town centres to diversify is critical. For many people options of online and out of town retail means less dependence on town centre retail, and so increasing use of town centres again relies on creating an environment people want to visit and spend time. Public realm enhancements provide a key part of efforts to enhance the sense of place in Newport and create a town centre environment people want to spend time in, creating the right conditions for existing businesses to thrive and new types of business to establish in the units vacated by declining national chains in recent years.
28. Creating a vibrant town centre will lead to more jobs being created, and in a highly accessible location. Creating stable employment opportunities is a key requirement for enabling more people to move out of poverty.

Impact on Young People and Future Generations

29. The changes sought through the HAZ programme are long-term ones, with a clear focus on future generations. The High Street has evolved over time, and these proposals form part of that evolution, with a greater focus on quality of place, flexibility of use, and use of active travel modes both to/from the town and for journeys within the town centre. This will provide short-term gains, but also provide a more sustainable town for the future.
30. Young people have been consulted specifically during the HAZ programme through engagement with the youth council and via Newport Youth Café and their input has helped shape elements of the plans.
31. Active travel is critically important for independent travel for children and young people, so improvements to walking facilities will particularly benefit younger people, as will enhancements to town centre facilities which are accessible without needing a car. Young adults are less likely to drive than previous generations, again underlining the need for good active travel links and town centre facilities.

Corporate Aims

32. The [Corporate Plan 2021 – 2025](#) specifically identifies delivery of the identified HAZ programmes as a key part of the administration's aspiration 39, "Focus on Regenerating our High Street and visitor economy to assist post-COVID-19 recovery and growth". Town centres are changing, with a reversion to their historic role as multi-functional places, hosting a range of services, social activities, homes as well as retail activity. Improvements to the public realm form an important part of work to enable the town to adapt to these changes and maximise the opportunities for the town.
33. Aspiration 40, "Promote people-oriented place planning for town centres" is also supported by this work, which delivers the first part of a "People First Zone", a key action arising from the Shaping Newport place-plan.
34. The work also supports a move towards active travel, with a focus on reallocating street space from moving and parked vehicles to people walking, contributing to aspiration 43 "Commit to develop sustainable transport options with a focus on infrastructure to encourage active travel". The plans deliver elements of the

improvements identified in the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan's core walking zone for Newport.

CONSULTATION

35. The HAZ programme is built around community engagement, with meaningful engagement and consultation forming a key part of all project work, aiming to ensure the outcomes of the programme genuinely meet local needs and aspirations.
36. The HAZ forms part of Shaping Newport's delivery programme, responding to the results of the 2018 place plan survey and report. This identified a lack of pride in the town, concerns about pedestrian safety and a need for enhancements to the public realm as key issues. This formed a key part of the rationale for inclusion of this project in the HAZ programme.
37. Early community engagement took place through an online activity testing some of the key concepts around changing the balance of space between cars and people. This showed strong support for creating more space for people and identified key themes from general comments made by respondents, the most important of which were the need for wider footways/more space for pedestrians; pedestrianisation of either specific areas or the whole town centre; visual improvements to buildings or the street scene generally; and improvements to street furniture, more seating, trees or greenery.
38. Following early community engagement and support, Hampshire County Council were contracted to deliver initial design work, using a community-led design process. Their work started with workshops with both internal (IWC/Island Roads) and external stakeholders. They then used a community codesign process, with a community design panel formed from local residents, businesses, advocacy groups and the professional design team. This group collectively led the evolution of designs from concept to masterplan design.
39. In addition, survey work was undertaken to establish in more detail how people visit the town centre.
40. Once the concept masterplan had been developed, a 6-week consultation exercise was carried out. This was widely publicised with good mainstream and social media coverage. An online, map-based tool was used to allow full presentation of the concepts and the ability for people to respond to individual elements of the proposals as well as the scheme as a whole. A paper-based version was also made available.
41. Responses were received from 182 people, though response numbers varied to individual questions.
 - (a) Overall, 63% of respondents supported the plans, 32% opposed them. Support increased to 71% if plans were modified to take account of specific issues respondents had raised.
 - (b) 67 per cent of respondents indicated that current traffic arrangements negatively impact their experience of the town. Only 6 per cent indicated a positive impact on their experience.

- (c) 69 per cent of respondents thought more pedestrian space would make their experience of the town better, 15 per cent thought it would make it worse.
- (d) When examining responses based on the usual mode of travel to access the town centre, there is a notable difference between those who usually travel by car and those who use public transport, walk or cycle. People who usually travel by car are much more likely to strongly oppose the plans (31 per cent compared with 5 per cent for other modes) and much less likely to strongly support the plans (31 per cent compared with 53 per cent for other modes).
- (e) Women showed stronger support for the plan than men, with 76 per cent of women expressing support (50 per cent strongly) compared to 60 per cent of men (35 per cent strongly supportive).

42. The consultation report is available in Appendix 2.

43. Consultation was undertaken for three phases of work, though at this stage a decision is only sought on the first two phases, the third (around The Guildhall) requiring further development work considering community feedback and technical issues.

FINANCIAL / BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

44. Detailed design work and an initial phase of capital works will be funded from the existing approved HAZ budget for this project, with the extent of works delivered determined after detailed design work has been completed, based on available budget.

45. The remaining HAZ budget for this project is £590,000, to cover detailed design, construction work and commuted sums for ongoing maintenance. Completion of phases 1 and 2 in full is currently estimated to cost in the region of £3m. Additional funds are being sought to advance as much of the scheme as possible within the lifetime of the HAZ.

46. Later stages of work requiring funding beyond the identified HAZ budget will only proceed when this funding can be secured.

47. The works will be accrued onto the PFI network, with associated costs forming part of the overall project costs initially funded from the HAZ budget.

48. If implemented in full, phase one will lead to the removal of 22 pay and display parking bays. 3 of these will be replaced with disabled parking bays to accommodate blue-badge holders who already park in the High Street, giving a net loss of 19 spaces. It is anticipated that most of this parking will be displaced to immediately adjacent locations, principally Quay Street and lower High Street, with little or no revenue loss to the council. Some parking may displace to non-council-controlled car parks such as Little London, though the majority of displaced parking is anticipated to move to other council pay and display locations.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

49. Newport and Carisbrooke Community Council (NCCC) is the accountable body for the Historic England grant and the relationship between IWC and NCCC regarding that funding is set out in a Memorandum of Understanding.
50. Any proposed changes that arise as part of this scheme may require separate regulatory consent and will be subject to separate approval.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

51. The proposals are expected to bring significant accessibility benefits, particularly to disabled people. The needs of disabled people have been carefully considered throughout the community codesign process and the proposals will remove a number of impediments to accessibility of the town centre. The impact of parking provision has been carefully considered, with introduction of dedicated disabled bays which are not currently available in this section of the High Street. These bays have been specified to a larger size than normal in response to comments from disabled users that some combinations of vehicle/mobility aid require more space than is provided elsewhere. Blue badge holders will no longer have to contend with other drivers for parking space in this section of the High Street. Some disabled people may not be eligible for a blue badge and may be disadvantaged to some degree by the loss of general pay and display parking on the street. However, alternatives are available nearby, and this potential loss must be weighed against the significant accessible gains to disabled people moving around the town as pedestrians, including those who arrived by car.

PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

52. All the identified improvements are on land designated as public highway and under the local authority's control.

OPTIONS

53. The options considered by the cabinet are:

Option 1 – That cabinet approves planned changes to the High Street and St James' Square to widen footways, improve the public realm and reallocate space from the carriageway and on-street parking to facilitate this.

for In doing so, cabinet authorises the Cabinet Member for Levelling Up, Regeneration, Business Development and Tourism, and Cabinet Member Infrastructure, Highways PFI and Transport in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and the Director of Neighbourhoods to use available resources to develop and deliver whichever aspects of the plans prove to be technically and financially viable within the timeframe of the HAZ scheme, and to seek additional resource to develop and deliver the remaining viable elements in due course.

Furthermore, cabinet authorises the Director of Regeneration and the Director of Neighbourhoods to prioritise and work towards measures to reduce the volume and size of vehicles moving through the High Street by developing alternative routes and arrangement around the town centre.

Option 2 – That cabinet approves the long-term concept for an improved pedestrian environment with more space for walking but authorises that only some areas or elements of the plans provided are developed further by IWC, as defined by cabinet.

Option 3 – That cabinet does not approve the long-term concept or the planned changes.

RISK MANAGEMENT

54. This project will be overseen by the major highway improvements project board comprising the portfolio holder, director and senior officer in relevant services. That project board meets monthly, receives progress reports from the project manager and reviews progress against programme, spend against budget projection and the established risk log making interventions when necessary to manage and minimise risk.
55. Risk of not proceeding with the changes include loss of funding from Historic England and reputational damage among partner organisations as well as the community, who have expressed support for the proposals. There are also risks to wider regeneration work, for example encouraging property owners to invest in their buildings is more difficult if the council is not seen to be investing in enhancing the public realm.

EVALUATION

56. Option 1 is recommended. This project has been developed as part of planned package of measures to regenerate the High Street Heritage Action Zone in Newport and forms a key part of works to transform the future of the town centre. It is expected to deliver significant accessibility benefits, make the town a more attractive place to spend time and show the council's commitment to active and sustainable travel, including appropriate reallocation of road space to support active travel modes. It has been developed in close collaboration with the local community and received a high level of support during the consultation, despite highway changes normally attracting significant negative commentary, especially when parking removal is involved, even when post-implementation support turns out to be high.
57. Option 2 is not recommended as the planned measures have been designed as a coherent package based on extensive community engagement and changing one element is likely to have significant consequences for other parts. Extensive redesign work would create significant risk to deliverability within the timescale required as part of funding agreements.
58. Option 3 is not recommended as it would not realise the identified benefits to the regeneration of Newport town centre.

APPENDICES ATTACHED

- Appendix 1 - Concept plans
- Appendix 2 - Consultation report

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