

LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**TRAFFIC REGULATION ORDERS
SUMMARY PROOF OF EVIDENCE**

The Leicestershire County Council (Various Roads, Loughborough, Borough of Charnwood) (Imposition of Waiting and Loading Restrictions) Experimental Order
2014

The Leicestershire County Council (Various Roads in Loughborough, Borough of Charnwood) (Various Restrictions of Movement and Contraflow Cycle Lane)
Experimental Order 2014

Public inquiry – 12th January 2016

1.0 Witness details

- 1.1 My name is Aimi Ducker. I am a Senior Engineer within the Design and Delivery section of Leicestershire County Council. I set out my experience and qualifications in my full proof.

2.0 Introduction and Context

- 2.1 Three Experimental Traffic Regulation Orders were implemented on 31st October 2014, allowing parts of Loughborough town centre to become pedestrianised following the completion of an Inner Relief Road.
- 2.2 The construction of the Inner Relief Road and the pedestrianisation of Swan Street and Market Place has been a long term aspiration of Charnwood Borough Council and Leicestershire County Council. At the end of 2011, the Department for Transport allocated £14.76 million to enable the delivery of this scheme. This was intended to bring about health and safety benefits for pedestrians in the town centre, reduced congestion and improved public transport facilities and to remove severance caused by the presence of a principal route through the heart of the town so as to stimulate regeneration of the town centre, leading to economic growth and inward investment.
- 2.3 Initially, consideration was given to allowing buses through the pedestrianised part of the town. However, there was considerable local support for complete pedestrianisation.

3.0 Loughborough Pre-Pedestrianisation

- 3.1 Prior to the pedestrianisation of Swan Street and Market Place, some 12,000 vehicles and 20,000 pedestrians travelled along or across these roads on a daily basis. These roads constituted the A6 and separated the two main shopping districts within the town, and created a hostile, unsafe and unhealthy environment for pedestrians.
- 3.2 A partial Inner Relief Road existed to the east of the town centre but this was unsuitable as an alternative through route.
- 3.3 Although a number of bus routes operated within the town centre, town centre access was dominated by the car. In addition, poor quality waiting facilities and passenger information did little to encourage private car users to switch to public transport.
- 3.4 The lack of adequate footway width also caused overcrowding at the town centre bus stops. Cyclists had limited route options to take and were often in conflict with both the general traffic and pedestrians.
- 3.5 Several pedestrianised spaces existed within the town. In addition two shopping precincts - on either side of the A6 - were fully pedestrianised.

4.0 History of Present Scheme

- 4.1 The completion of the Loughborough Inner Relief Road has been an aspiration since the 1970s, when it first appeared in the Charnwood Local Plan as part of an inner circulatory road. Land for the Inner Relief Road (IRR) was protected in the Borough of Charnwood Local Plan adopted in 2004, and it was identified in the County Council's Local Transport Plan for the period 2006 to 2011.
- 4.2 Consultation carried out in 2005 revealed a strong level of public support for an IRR. Furthermore, the full pedestrianisation of the town centre was

favoured amongst the majority of respondents, albeit with a new bus station located conveniently for the town centre.

- 4.3 A bus station in Loughborough was effectively ruled out at the end of 2005.
- 4.4 The Inner Relief Road was completed in 2014. This meant that it became possible to contemplate pedestrianisation of the town centre.
- 4.5 A round of consultation took place at the end of 2013 (in fact the third such consultation) on three possible options for pedestrianisation and bus access within the town centre – two-way buses, one-way buses and no buses. The majority of respondents, or 57.5%, supported complete pedestrianisation.
- 4.6 Although officers were concerned that complete pedestrianisation might threaten the future of bus services, the Council's Cabinet were willing to accept the risk in light of the potential economic benefits brought about by full pedestrianisation.
- 4.7 The trial of full pedestrianisation came into effect on 31st October 2014.

5.0 Experimental Traffic Regulation Orders

- 5.1 Full pedestrianisation and associated measures are delivered by three experimental Traffic Regulation Orders. One provides for a new bus lane on Ashby Square. A second prohibits all vehicles from proceeding along parts of Swan Street and the Market Place between 10am and 4pm, and allows access for loading and unloading, for cyclists and for servicing outside of these times. This Order also restricts car use of High Street and Baxter Gate, enabling buses to make use of the enhanced bus stop facilities with minimal conflict from general traffic, and also provides a contraflow cycle lane on Baxter Gate. The third experimental Order provides for a series of waiting restrictions and parking places in order to maintain the effective movement of traffic within the town centre whilst providing appropriate parking and loading facilities at convenient locations.

6.0 Performance Criteria and Independent Review

- 6.1 In 2014 a consultant was appointed to review the success of the pedestrianisation, looking specifically at the five key areas of safety, public realm, bus services, the environment and the economy.
- 6.2 The results showed a marked improvement in the public realm and the local environment, in addition to a reduction in traffic accidents on Swan Street and the Market Place. Benefits to the economy were more difficult to quantify and whilst there appears to be an improvement in the retail vacancy rates, there was a feeling amongst some retailers that footfall was lower following the introduction of pedestrianisation. However, there is clear evidence of inward investment in the town, with the current construction of a new Cinema and Restaurant complex on Baxter Gate.
- 6.3 Whilst there has been a significant investment in improved bus stops and facilities for bus passengers, the removal of buses from Swan Street and the Market Place generated a number of negative comments from the bus operators and passengers. The removal of the Swan Street southbound and the Market Place northbound bus stops has resulted in an increased walking distance to some of the town centre shops and facilities for some passengers. The use of the new southbound stop on Lemyngton Street is of particular concern. Likewise, the bus operators claim that the increased journey time arising from the new town centre routes has reduced punctuality.

7.0 Representations and objections

- 7.1 During the 6 month period allowed for objections (31st October 2014 to 1st April 2015), 147 responses were received, with 98 (or 67%) in favour of permanent full pedestrianisation. Support was received from Charnwood

Borough Council and the Loughborough Business Improvement District, in addition to Nicky Morgan MP, County Councillors and a local Residents Association.

- 7.2 48 objections were received, with 31 of these citing problems with the new bus stops being further away from the town centre. Other objectors complained about the impact on bus services and its effect on town centre trade, and the prohibition of cyclists from the pedestrianised area between the hours of 10am and 4pm.

8.0 R9(3) objections

- 8.1 R9(3) objections were received from two bus operators, Kinchbus and Arriva, and HMS Pharmacy, a business on Baxter Gate.
- 8.2 The two bus operators wished to retain one-way access for buses within the pedestrianised streets and objected to full pedestrianisation on the basis that service delivery was suffering as a consequence. There was also a dislike of the Lemyngton Street bus stop.
- 8.3 Following the Council's decision to propose to make permanent orders, negotiations have taken place with the two bus companies. As a result, both companies have now indicated that they wish to withdraw their objections, upon presentation of a package of acceptable mitigation measures for the town.
- 8.4 Unfortunately, no resolution has been achieved with the owner of HMS Pharmacy. However a loading bay has been provided at the front of the pharmacy on Baxter Gate to address the need for daytime loading and unloading facilities.
- 8.5 The Council gave Notice of the Public Inquiry on 25th November 2015. In response, a further 22 representations have been submitted. Of these 13 are

in favour of the permanent continuation of full pedestrianisation and 9 are against.

9.0 Enabling Legislation

- 9.1 The proof explains how the three ETROs achieve objectives authorised by s1 and s122 of the RTRA 1984.
- 9.2 The Council has also considered its duties under the Equalities Act 2010. A complaint was made to the Local Government Ombudsman claiming that the Council had failed to discharge its duties under the Act in relation to the full removal of buses from the town centre. Upon investigation however, the Ombudsman found no fault in the Council's actions.

10.0 Conclusions

- 10.1 Over the years, there has been continued and increased support for the full pedestrianisation of Loughborough Town Centre. The introduction of a trial basis has taken years of hard work and dedication and has been made possible by the availability of government funds.
- 10.2 The trial has led to a significant improvement in the environment of the town centre and has received very widespread support. There is no evidence that any material harm has been caused by full pedestrianisation. The town centre continues to be well served by bus services.
- 10.3 Two r9(3) objections from bus operators have been withdrawn following an offer of proposed mitigation measures.

APPENDIX C

- 10.4 The one remaining statutory objector, whilst inconvenienced by pedestrianisation of the Market Place, is able to continue loading and unloading immediately outside its business premises.
- 10.5 The independent evaluation of the pedestrianisation trial noted the positive effects of pedestrianisation in terms of the health and safety of pedestrians in the town centre, in addition to significant public realm enhancements. The full measure of these benefits can only be achieved by full pedestrianisation: the reintroduction of buses along Swan Street and Market Place would be detrimental to each of these factors.
- 10.6 The County Council decided to propose that full pedestrianisation be made permanent because it considered that the benefits of full pedestrianisation substantially outweigh the inevitable inconvenience to bus traffic (and to Mr Modi) and cannot be achieved in any other way.
- 10.7 The Council therefore asks the Inspector to recommend that the provisions of the three Experimental Traffic Regulation Orders be made permanent.