

Loughborough Town Team

ANNEX E5

108 Warwick Avenue
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Loughborough
LE12 8HE

2 December 2013

Loughborough Bus Trial (Room 700)
Have Your Say
FREEPOST NAT18685
Leicester
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Dear Sirs

Loughborough Bus Trial Consultation

Loughborough Town Team was assembled in 2004 by Charnwood Borough Council to act as a representative consultative forum on matters of relevance to the development and management of Loughborough Town Centre. Members, drawn from 25 organisations and community interest groups, were closely engaged in the development of the Loughborough Town Centre Masterplan, adopted by the Borough Council in April 2007. The Team is now charged with overseeing its delivery.

The Town Team convened on 20 November 2013 to consider its response to the bus trial consultation, taking the opportunity first to hear from representatives of Kinchbus and Arriva. I set out below The Town Team's comments in the format employed by the questionnaire.

Q1a Do you agree or disagree with our impact assessment of option A?

Strongly disagree

Q1b If you disagree, please specify why.

The issue here is whether bus journey times will be delayed to the extent that existing schedules can no longer be delivered with consequent material injury to timetables and bus passenger satisfaction levels. It is the view of the Town Team that existing services are so heavily delayed by the four traffic light controlled pedestrian crossings currently operating between Baxter Gate and Swan Street that the alternative route via the Inner Relief Road has the capacity to offer quicker journey times. The Team is aware that the operators believe that the alternative route will add 6-8 minutes to the journey time, but no convincing evidence has been produced to support that opinion.

The inference is that any alternative option will deliver less attractive services by reason of the loss of close access to the town centre. It is appreciated that bus passengers will value close access to the town centre but an option has been tabled (Option C+) which can still deliver that convenience.

Overall Loughborough town centre is not of such a scale that alternative bus stands need be located an unacceptable distance from the centre of commercial activity. Any inconvenience arising from comparison with the present distribution of bus stands must be balanced against the advantages of delivering a genuinely traffic free town centre and the risks of allowing continued bus access into a primarily pedestrian thoroughfare.

Evidently most through traffic would be removed to the Inner Relief Road leaving 49 buses per hour based on current service schedules passing through the Market Place. That introduces its own risks as pedestrian awareness may be compromised. Children and vulnerable adults in particular may be exposed to greater risk and the public in general certainly could not enjoy the freedom to walk without restraint, as has been encouraged by the pedestrianisation of the remainder of the Market Place. It is understood that buses are to proceed at walking pace with their lights on which might reduce the risk of accident; it cannot remove that risk entirely.

The impact assessment makes no reference to urban design and the creation of a pedestrian friendly high quality town scape. That was one of the primary objectives of the Loughborough Town Centre Master Plan, adopted by Charnwood Borough Council in 2006, for which the Town Team is charged with an overview for implementation. With the expenditure of £15 million on the Loughborough Town Centre Transport Scheme the expectation was that the road space released by the construction of the Inner Relief Road would enable the delivery of an enhanced public realm. The regular passage of buses through the Market Place will deny the use of that space for events and activities. As demonstrated by the video evidence from Exeter and Newcastle pedestrian behaviour will be dictated by the need to give deference to buses. Pedestrians will treat the single carriageway area with caution (as indeed they should) and remain within the notional pavement zones; there will be no opportunity for businesses, cafes and events to spill over into the street to contribute to a lively and active pedestrian environment.

The once in a generation opportunity to test the vision of a genuinely traffic free, pedestrianised connection between the historically severed halves of Loughborough Town Centre will be lost.

Q2a Do you agree or disagree with our impact assessment of option B?

Strongly Disagree

Q2b If you disagree, please specify why.

Many of the reasons for disagreeing with the impact assessment for this option are common to those for Option A above. The lost opportunity to secure a genuinely traffic free civic space at the heart of the town centre is equally relevant, as are the concerns for pedestrian safety and comfort as a consequence of permitting buses, albeit southbound services only, to pass through the Market Place.

The diversion of northbound services via Baxter Gate and the Inner Relief Road is welcomed in principle. However, as previously stated, the Town Team has seen no evidence to demonstrate that the claimed delays arising

from the diversion would materialise. Nor has there been any evidence to justify the rather alarmist suggestions that the viability of the current network may be affected and services might reduce in frequency; that fares might increase or that routes may be cut back.

The Town Team maintains the view that the diversion of services via Baxter Gate and the Inner Relief Road will actually deliver a saving in journey time in comparison with the existing congested route allowing the retention of current service schedules such that is premature and alarmist to suggest that northbound bus stands on the Rushes and Derby Square could no longer be serviced.

Q3a Do you agree or disagree with our impact assessment of option C?

Disagree

Q3b If you disagree, please specify why.

While disagreeing with the impact assessment this is the option that is favoured by the Town Team.

The avoidance of conflict between buses and pedestrians through Market Place is of course welcomed and strongly supported.

However, the assessment presents a very bleak outlook for the delivery of bus services to the town. Experience from around the country suggests that town centres can successfully be pedestrianised; that would suggest that some adjustment to pre-existing bus services must have been achieved without the dire consequences implied in the impact assessment. No evidence has been presented to suggest that any effort has been made to adjust and adapt services to cope with a different highway configuration within Loughborough; it has simply been claimed that present time tables cannot be delivered therefore the scheme cannot sustain viable and attractive bus services. Unless the regime is trialled there will be no evidence to support or reject that hypothesis.

As previously stated the Town Team is not persuaded that the anticipated delays by reason of diverting buses onto the Inner Relief Road have been effectively evidenced; they are assumed to be the case by the operators who, understandably, may be disinclined to review their timetables and operational procedures. Town Team adheres to the view that diversion of services via Baxter Gate and the Inner Relief Road will deliver faster journey times than the present route.

The disposition of bus stands, for southbound services (Fennel Street / Lemyngton Street) and the consequent need for customers to negotiate the crossing of the Inner Relief Road, appears to be designed to condemn the option.

Town Team is persuaded that there is a variant on Option C which utilises a loop via the Inner Relief Road, High Street and Baxter Gate whereby all services, north and south bound, would be channelled through a one way High Street and Baxter Gate where all bus stands serving the town centre

would be accommodated; there would appear to be sufficient capacity for 10 stands in all. That solution would bring all bus stops within 170 metres of the current Market Place bus stop and within a maximum of 300 metres of one another. It would deliver an on street bus station with easy access to the town centre and opportunities to easily transfer between services making effective use of the road space freed up by the construction of the Inner Relief Road.

Q4a Which if any of the options would you support?

Option C

Q4b Which is your preferred option?

An enhanced Option C incorporating a bus loop to deliver a fully integrated bus hub / station on High Street / Baxter Gate. (as represented by option C+ attached).

Q4c Why do you say this?

The Town Team is unanimous in its support for a fully pedestrianised town centre in the interests of delivering a high quality, safe and attractive public space at the heart town. The principle is considered to have practical and perceptual significance in bringing together the two halves of the centre, particularly in view of its recent expansion into The Rushes and the prospects for regenerating the former Baxter Gate General Hospital site.

The Town Team is supportive too of effective and efficient public transport in order to improve access to the town centre and to encourage sustainable modes. However, Town Team is not persuaded that the implied delays as a consequence of rerouting services away from the Market Place will be as harmful as is suggested in the consultation. In particular Town Team has seen no evidence to support the contention that delays will be materially significant and is persuaded that the diversion of services via Baxter Gate and the Inner Relief Road will actually deliver savings in journey time when compared with performance along the currently congested route.

Q5 Do you have any other comments or suggestions?

No further comments.

Yours faithfully

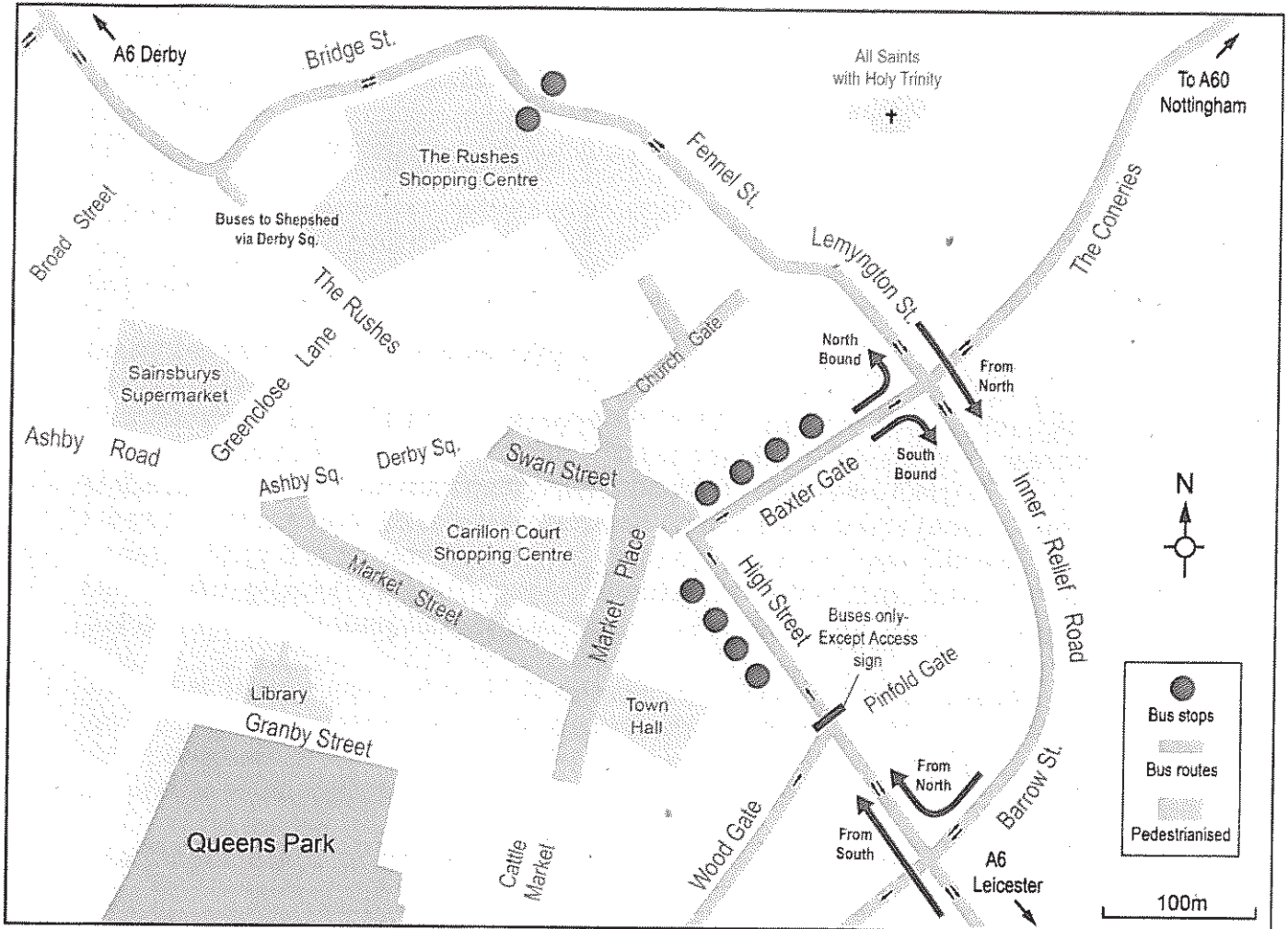


Don Wix
Chairman, Loughborough Town Team.

Enc: Plan illustrating the variant on Option C (Option C+)

Option C+ The Obvious Solution

No buses allowed through Market Place, but use the new Inner Relief Road instead.



Bus routes with this option

- All buses use the one-way High Street Baxter Gate bus stop zone.
- Buses from the south go straight to their stop, and turn left at Baxter Gate Lemington Street junction
- Buses from the north use the Inner Relief Road to access the High Street and stop. Then turn right at the Baxter Gate- Inner Ring Road junction.
- All local bus stops would be adjacent to the Market Place where the High Street meets Baxter Gate. Much more accessible than the locations proposed in Options A, B or C.

Advantages of this option

- No need to break any of the existing routes
- Huge uninterrupted pedestrian zone.
- Easy, convenient bus access to the this zone for all routes, better than at present and closer than all the car parks.
- Bus timings improved by use of new widened ring road compared with congested Rushes, Swan Street, Market Place route which has three traffic lights and four busy pedestrian crossings.
- Allows easy transfer from local to regional and national routes encouraging wider bus use.
- C+ is the best option

