

BID Loughborough

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Good for Loughborough.**



Loughborough Town Centre Bus Consultation

Response by Loughborough Business Improvement District (BID) and the Love Loughborough Partnership

The BID believes that there are huge advantages in having a fully pedestrianised link across the Market Place, with no buses running through it, when the Inner Relief Road is completed. We therefore support the County Council's Option C - No buses allowed through Market Place. However, the BID feels that these advantages are not fully recognised in the County's impact assessment of Option C. They are:

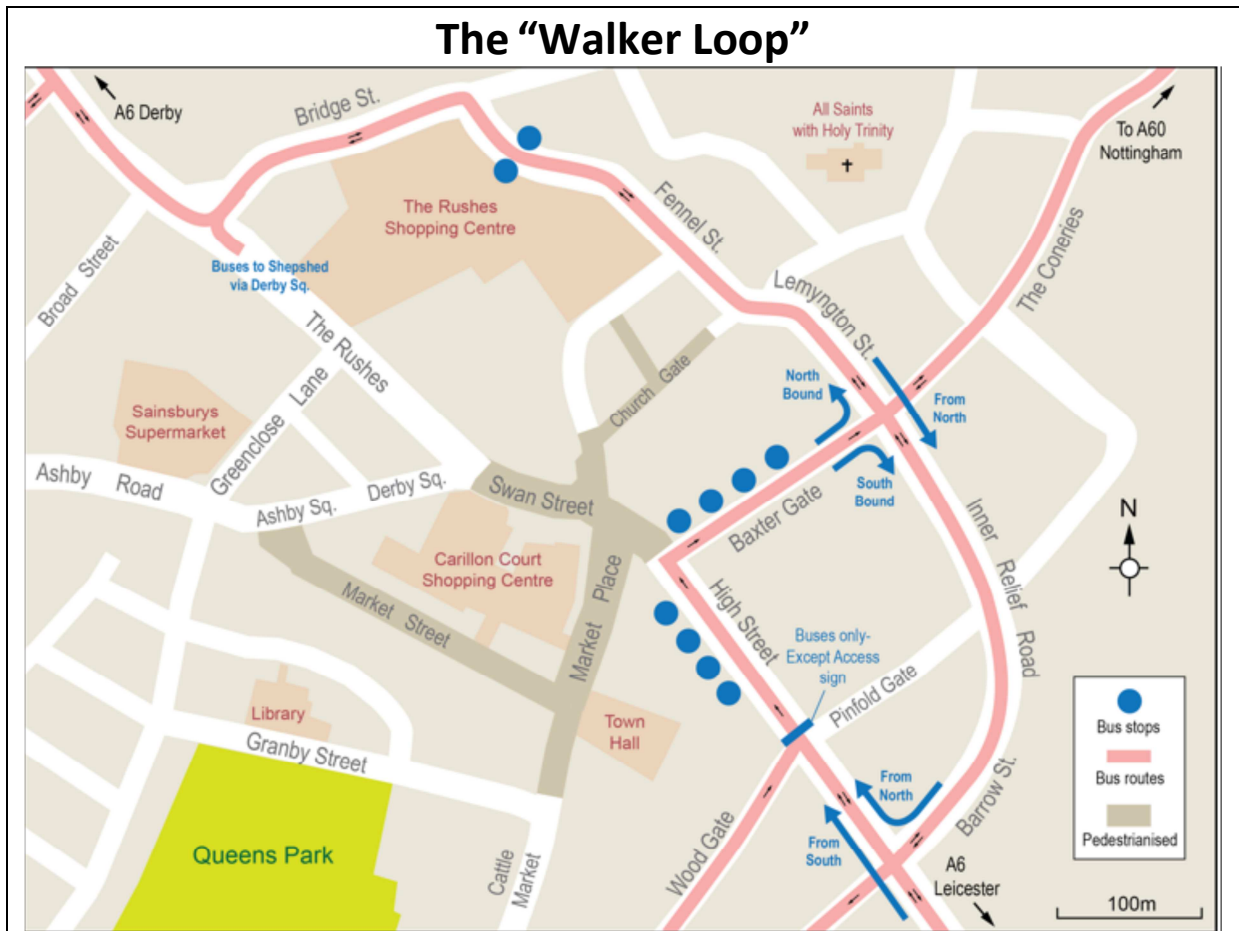
1. It will fulfil the original vision of the Town Centre Masterplan to join together the two halves of the town centre, currently split in two by A6 traffic
2. It will enable an extended area of public realm which can be used for events, performances and extended Markets and will operate on the same basis as the existing pedestrian areas
3. It will provide certainty for pedestrians and greater safety for less able people

The BID also recognises that good bus access and convenient stops for bus users are vitally important for the success of the Town Centre. Again, we do not believe the arrangements put forward by the County under Option C are the best ones. We favour the so called "Walker Loop" – using Baxter Gate and High Street for both northbound and southbound services and leaving the Market Place free of buses – which fulfils both these objectives.

- a) Bus journey times will not be significantly longer and we do not think bus users will see this as a disadvantage
- b) Bus stops at Derby Square, Swan Street and Market Place will go under all three County options. The "Walker Loop" will provide convenient stops in High Street and

Baxter Gate for all services only a short distance from the current Market Place and Swan Street stops, giving access to key areas without having to cross a road

- c) It will create a “virtual bus station” with stops for both southbound and northbound town services and for through services within easy walking distance of each other, allowing easy interchange between services without having to cross a road



We are aware that the Cabinet Lead member for Highways and Transport has emphasised the need for evidence in support of the preferred Option. We address that issue in the comments below.

The Economic Benefits

It is clear from the original submission document that the basic purpose of the scheme is an economic and regeneration one:

“Overall Aim & Scheme Objectives

2.2 The proposed scheme will integrate a number of measures designed to reduce the traffic related problems, and to help Loughborough town centre retain its competitive economic position within the East Midlands Three Cities Sub Area.

2.3 To fully realise the overall aim, the following scheme objectives must be achieved:-

- Reduce severance, accidents, noise and air pollution by removing vehicles from A6 Market

Place/Swan Street and other town centre streets.

- Provide limited congestion relief and manage the impact of diverted traffic by completing a purpose built relief road and related key junction improvements on the A6004 Ring Road.
- Improve accessibility for pedestrians, cyclists and people with disabilities by upgrading the townscape environment and by providing new high quality bus infrastructure facilities”.

Major Scheme Business Case August 2007

The BID believes that the amended Option C fully meets these objectives. We have consulted every one of the 570 business in the BID area and the vast majority of them support our amended Option C. We hope that will be reflected in the individual responses you receive.

The Charnwood Local Plan adopted in 2004 also recognised the economic imperative. It said “To survive and prosper the town centre must emerge as the area where people want to shop rather than remain the area where they have to shop. Further improvements to the pedestrian environment will go some considerable way towards achieving that objective.....Ultimately the provision of the Inner Relief Road will deliver the prospect of closing the existing A6 to traffic to bring together the two halves of the town centre opening up at one and the same time the commercial potential of the land currently lying on the less favoured side of the A6 corridor”

Similarly, the Loughborough Town Centre Masterplan (2007) said:

“The Vision for Loughborough Town Centre can only be realised fully if the inner relief road is completed allowing traffic to be removed from the A6. This will facilitate medium term development of the Town Centre, paving the way for longer term development and regeneration. The scheme will allow Loughborough to maintain its competitive role at the centre of the Three Cities sub region as major transport and other infrastructure investment takes place in Derby, Leicester and Nottingham. Furthermore, improved bus interchange facilities in the Town Centre will enhance public transport services between Loughborough railway station, the Town Centre, East Midlands Airport and other destinations”.

The BID believes that for this vision to be realised, the Market Place between Biggin Street and Baxter Gate must be fully pedestrianized - as the rest of the Market Place is. Only then can the space be used as part of the wider pedestrianized area which is such an asset and attraction to the town. Events, performance, extended markets which have proved such a success could be accommodated in the new space in a way that will fully integrate it into the operation of the town centre and truly link the two sides of the Town Centre.

The effect of the Town Centre Strategy and Local Plan policies has been to shift the focus of the Town Centre eastward towards the A6 and the Rushes, to the point where the bottom of the Market Place between Biggin Street and Baxter Gate will become the new centre point. 20,000 pedestrians a day pass through this point and to have buses using the space too just doesn't make sense.

Research carried out by Loughborough University on consumer behaviour in Loughborough shows a clear new axis of peak activity from Primark/Top Shop in Market Place to

Argos/Next in the Rushes Centre. This is the new reality, and that axis needs to be reinforced and supported if the town is to prosper and attract new visitors. A fully pedestrianised Market Place will facilitate that.

The BID's analysis of rental values and vacancy rates underlines this shift and identifies that the area to the east of the A6 faces considerable challenges. Two thirds of BID businesses are east of the A6. Vacancy rates are higher than average on High Street, Baxter Gate and in the Rushes Centre. Vacancy Rates in Wards End, Devonshire Square and Cattle Market are also well above average and confirm the shift in focus. With the bottom of Market Place now representing the heart of the Town Centre every effort must be made to use it and promote it as the key hub and link between the two parts of the town centre.

Impact on Bus Services

The BID is a strong supporter of bus travel into the town centre as well as cycling and walking. We are members of the Smarter Travel Network. We have worked closely with the bus companies to promote bus use in association with all our major events at Christmas and in the Summer, and to promote bus travel to students. Accessible, convenient and high quality bus stops and facilities are key to this. We believe that the amended Option C, with a virtual bus station allowing easy interchange between services, is a real bonus for bus users.

The new arrangements will give buses, cyclists and pedestrians an advantage over car users, who will have to use the new Inner Relief Road and therefore incur longer journeys. Buses will be at the heart of the solution as the Master Plan envisaged and will be able to use dedicated facilities in traffic-reduced High Street, Baxter gate and The Rushes.

The use of the Market Place by buses is not a necessary objective in itself because the existing stops will be removed. Under all three Options the bus stops will be in Baxter Gate/High Street and the Rushes and Derby/Ashby Square. The only issue in our view, therefore, is the additional time it would take for the buses to use the "Walker Loop" or the Rushes loop. Taking the Kinch 11/12 service to Dishley/Thorpe Acre as an example and applying an average bus speed of 10.4 mph (based on the Kinch timetable), we calculate that the additional time would be 1minute 27 seconds on the outward journey and 1 minute 44 seconds on the inward journey. This does not seem to be a significant delay, and it may be that the greater ease of using High Street, Baxter Gate and the Rushes with the through traffic removed will reduce these times.

Similar considerations would apply to service 5. Service 4 could use The Rushes, Bridge Street and the Inner Relief Road to get to Nottingham Road and the Station and back. Service 3 could use Wood Gate, High Street and Baxter Gate as it does now to get into town and the Inner Relief Road, Southfield Road and Forest Road to get out, or it could use a Rushes Loop. Service 13 could simply use High Street/Baxter Gate for both journeys.

We do not believe that the Sprint, Sky, Arriva and National Express services or service 9 will be adversely affected. All of these could use the Inner Relief Road and the Walker Loop. Additional stops on Lemyngton Street for southbound services would help and the existing stops at the rear of the Rushes Centre could be used by northbound services.

We appreciate that this will require re-timetabling but in our view an equivalent service could be maintained using the existing fleet. We believe that the bus interchange will make bus services more convenient and attractive to use, increasing bus use. We also believe that the advantages of a fully pedestrianised Market Place will attract more people into town and also increase bus use. There are numerous examples of increased footfall following full pedestrianisation, including in Loughborough itself.

Pedestrian Safety

Pedestrian safety is obviously an important consideration. We assume that County officers will be able to supply evidence from other schemes where buses and pedestrians are in conflict. Our case is not principally one of pedestrian safety but it is nonetheless evident that an environment where 20,000 pedestrians and 500 buses a day have to share a space will be inherently less safe than one where only pedestrians are allowed. Our point is more about how the area will operate. Without buses, pedestrians will be free to move between the two parts of the town unhindered and at any point in the new area. With buses there, people will need to be on their guard and it will not be possible to hold events, markets, promotions or performances which use the whole space. Nor will it be possible to introduce street furniture or artwork to enhance the space.

We are aware of other examples where decisions such as the one we are recommending have been taken and for similar reasons. The link below gives information on a similar situation in Windsor:

<http://www.windsorexpress.co.uk/News/Areas/Windsor/Pilot-pedestrianisation-of-Peascod-Street-to-become-permanent-31052013.htm>

Conclusions

We believe there is an excellent and unique opportunity to re-launch Loughborough Town Centre, after a long period of disruption and challenging economic conditions, on the strength of a united town centre with a fully pedestrianised Market Place and state of the art bus facilities and interchange. We believe this re-launch will attract new visitors and footfall to the benefit of businesses in the town and that the bus companies will share in that increased prosperity through increased bus use. A joint marketing campaign between the BID, the two Councils and the bus companies could have a major impact with the new pedestrianised area and the improved bus facilities being at the heart of the campaign.

The BID Board consists of 18 business owners, three co-opted members (The Students' Union, the Loughborough Chamber of Trade and Commerce and the Showmans' Guild) and three Councillors. All the business representatives with the exception of 1, and the co-opted members have indicated that they are in favour of option C, with the addition of the Walker Loop. The BID Board strongly believes that this option is the most likely to increase footfall, which must be an urgent priority given the increased competition from online operators, particularly as high speed broadband is being extended across the County.

Option C has the support of the Town Team and the majority of the other business and community organisations in the town and we believe that it will gain strong support from the public too. We urge the Councils and the Bus companies to work with us to achieve it.

Loughborough Business Improvement District
December 6th 2013