

**ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE –
20 MARCH 2014**

LOUGHBOROUGH TOWN CENTRE – BUS TRIAL CONSULTATION

MINUTE EXTRACT

50. The Committee received a report of the Director of Environment and Transport outlining consultation responses to the bus trial in Loughborough town centre and detailing the three options and impacts of the options consulted on. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 11' is filed with these minutes.

Mr P C Osborne CC advised the Committee that both as local member and the Cabinet Lead Member he would take in to consideration all consultation responses, views of stakeholders and the views of this Committee, before coming to a view on the matter.

The Chairman noted that the Committee had received written representations from a number of stakeholders regarding the bus trial. Copies of these representations having been circulated to members of the Committee from stakeholders are appended to these minutes, as follows:-

- Loughborough BID (marked 50A);
- Pedestrians First [previously attached as Appendix F to the report] (marked 50B);
- Arriva and Kinchbus (marked 50C);
- Representations from Mr R Sharp CC on behalf of County Councillors representing the central Loughborough area (marked 50D);
- Charnwood Borough Council Planning and Regeneration Services (marked 50E);
- Email exchange between Mary Portas and Jeff Counsell, Managing Director of Kinchbus (marked 50F);

With the consent of the Chairman, each stakeholder group wishing to speak had been given three minutes to provide a brief summary of case.

David Walker – Option C+, The Walker Loop

The 'Walker Loop', put forward by David Walker, was proposed as a reworking of option C, requiring southbound buses to loop back on themselves and some vehicles to divert from the opposite side of the town centre.

David Walker outlined the rationale for a reworked option C as he considered it would create a fully pedestrianised public space, would ensure that there was no danger to pedestrians from buses or other vehicles and would positively change the character

of the area. A fully pedestrianised town centre would also create economic benefits for the economy of Loughborough.

Roger Perrett – Loughborough Business Improvement District (BID)

Loughborough BID represented local businesses in the area, that each paid an annual levy to fund improvements to the town centre for businesses, residents and visitors. A Board of Directors made up of BID Businesses oversaw the delivery and management of the BID scheme.

The BID support for option C was on the basis that it provided a unique opportunity to regenerate the town centre and have it fully pedestrianised with a traffic free space. Option C was also the preferred option for 55% of the people who responded to the consultation. If option C was approved it would only be for a trial, a final decision could be made in due course once evidence from the trial was gathered.

John Richardson – Pedestrians First

Pedestrians First was an action group comprising of local people with the aim of achieving a bus free Loughborough Town Centre.

Pedestrians First outlined support for option C as it would create a new, safe, public space by joining the Market Place and the Rushes. Local stakeholder groups and people were united in support of option C. Mr Richardson asked the County Council to take account of the numbers of people who supported the option when considering the matter. Independent measures should be used to evaluate the claims of interested parties.

Steve Smith – Arriva

Arriva was a bus operator that provided bus services in the Loughborough town centre area.

Arriva supported Option A. The bus services operated by Arriva were run on a commercial basis. If option C were to be implemented this would have a detrimental effect on bus users based on evidence of similar schemes in the UK which showed a 30% reduction in bus patronage. Alternative tops would have to be used in order to continue to provide a service and this could put some people off using local bus services as they would have further to walk to reach the town centre. Option C would also require that buses find alternative routes around the town centre and this would require additional journey time and would mean that bus companies would incur additional costs to maintain the current level of service. As a result, any future bus service provided would be very different from the service currently in operation.

Tom Morgan – Kinchbus

Kinchbus was a bus operator that provided bus services in the Loughborough town centre area.

Kinchbus supported Option A. Kinchbus carried approximately 60,000 people per week in to Loughborough town centre. On average each person who came in to the town centre by bus contributed £41 to the local economy per trip. Implementation of option A would remove 95% of traffic from the town centre whilst still allowing provision for people to be able to travel in to the town centre by bus. If buses were removed people would be more likely to travel to other areas such as Leicester, Derby and Nottingham, this would be detrimental to the economy of Loughborough. By allowing buses to run through the town centre this would also reduce congestion on the new inner relief road.

Mr R Sharp CC – Local Member

Mr Sharp CC, County Councillor for the Loughborough South electoral division, represented himself and also spoke on behalf of his fellow three County Councillors (Messrs Hunt, Miah and Newton) also representing the central Loughborough area.

Mr Sharp CC supported option C. He advised the Committee that a majority of local people favoured option C rather than Options A or B. Option C was also supported by the BID, Pedestrians First and Charnwood Borough Council's Planning and Regeneration Services and he was of the view that the bus companies needed to be better engaged with to find solutions going forward. He urged the Committee to:-

- Accept the desire of local stakeholders and people in support for option C;
- Support an independent trial of option C;
- Encourage bus companies to engage fully with the people of Loughborough on option C.

Arising from discussion the following points were raised:-

General

- (i) In making any recommendations for a bus trial the County Council needed to be mindful of three key areas:
 - Safety for the people in the town centre;
 - The economic benefits for Loughborough;
 - The potential disbenefits for bus users.

The officers professional view was that a trial of option A should be pursued given the risk and relative benefits outlined in the report. The Committee would need to come to a view as to whether the potential additional economic benefits to Loughborough outweighed the risk of the potential dis-benefits to bus users in making its recommendation to the Cabinet;

- (ii) The Committee welcomed the completion of the inner relief road and hoped that this would be the first step in regenerating the town centre;
- (iii) The creation of a completely traffic free public square through the implementation of option C had not formed part of the original proposals for the Scheme in 2006. The Committee was advised that under option C the

public square would only be traffic free between 10am and 4pm on a daily basis due to the need to provide vehicular access for loading and supplies to shops and local businesses. If events were to be undertaken in Loughborough Town Centre outside this period then the relevant Traffic Regulation Orders would need to be applied for;

- (iv) Option C+, the 'Walker Loop', put forward by David Walker, was proposed as a reworking of option C. Option C+ would require all buses to serve an expanded hub on the High Street and Baxter Gate in Loughborough town centre. This would require southbound buses to loop back on themselves and some vehicles to divert from the opposite side of the town centre. This option was promoted as only taking two minutes longer than the bus route suggested as part of Option A. However, Arriva had estimated that the additional time was approximately 8 – 12 minutes for buses to loop around the inner relief road;
- (v) The Committee noted correspondence between Mary Portas and Jeff Counsell, Managing Director of Kinchbus, concerning the economic benefit to Loughborough town centre by bus users;

Option A

- (vi) Option A would remove 95% of traffic from the town centre reducing existing conflict between vehicles and pedestrians and removing almost all current through traffic to the inner relief road. 49 buses per hour would continue to pass through the Market Place, which equated to less than one bus per minute;
- (vii) Bus journeys would be free from delay caused by a longer diverted bus route and would continue to provide the same level of service for passengers needing to access the town centre;
- (viii) The Committee questioned whether option A would adequately provide a safe pedestrianised space for people using the town centre as buses would still be allowed to travel at frequent intervals through the Market Place;

Option C

- (ix) The Committee acknowledged that local stakeholders in Loughborough were united in indicating overwhelming support for option C. The views of local people needed to be recognised in any decision made on the bus trial;
- (x) It was explained that if option C was to be implemented this would have a negative impact on the bus network in Loughborough town centre. Bus providers might withdraw services if they felt the additional cost of maintaining a similar level of service provision was uneconomic. The County Council had no jurisdiction over commercial services;
- (xi) It was noted that many bus services across the County which travelled in to pedestrianised town centres often dropped passengers off on the outskirts of

the town centre. This required passengers to walk a small distance to their destination with little inconvenience;

- (xii) The Committee queried whether buses would be allowed to return the town centre, if requested, after a trial of option C was completed. It was explained that as commercially operated services, the County Council could not require bus companies to run services or for them to return to the town centre;
- (xiii) If there was objection to a traffic regulation order giving permanent effect to option C, a public enquiry would automatically be triggered. Resulting from this, an inspector might require that buses be allowed back through Loughborough Town Centre. This meant that design of the town centre would require consideration for the passage of buses whichever trial option was adopted;

Having considered the evidence before it, It was moved by Mr Kershaw CC and seconded by Mr Bill CC:-

“That the Cabinet be advised that this Committee recommends that the Cabinet supports the implementation of the Loughborough Town Centre bus trial on the basis of option C (no buses) as it considers that the potential additional economic benefits to Loughborough outweigh the risk of the potential dis-benefits to bus users.”

The motion was put and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet be advised that this Committee supports the implementation of the Loughborough Town Centre bus trial on the basis of option C (no buses) as it considers that the potential additional economic benefits to Loughborough outweigh the risk of the potential dis-benefits to bus users.