

Loughborough Town Centre Bus Trial

To: Members of the Environment and Transport Scrutiny Committee

We are writing to you as local members who have all received considerable correspondence on this issue.

We would urge the committee to be mindful of the following:

1. Option C delivering a bus-free Market Place is supported by Loughborough BID, the Town Team, the Chamber of Commerce, Charnwood Borough Council, Nicky Morgan MP, Loughborough Churches and the majority of local residents. Over 1300 people shared their views on traffic options, more than responded from the whole of Charnwood Borough to the recent County Council budget consultation.
2. Support for Option C remains as strong as during 2005 when a previous consultation was conducted and in spite of a strong publicity campaign by the bus companies ('save our stops') and a rather misleading consultation document which implied that all bus stops would remain under Option A ('using existing bus stops') when this is not the case with the most popular bus stops in the Market Place/Swan Street being moved to the edge of the Town Centre in all Options.
3. Pedestrian First, a group of local residents in support of Option C, has submitted evidence of substantial numbers of people choosing to cross the road between the Market Place and the new shopping centre. They rightly surmise that such pedestrian movements suggest that buses will be impeded and that the safety of pedestrians will be put at risk. People who move slowly or with difficulty and those looking after young children will not be care-free, but anxious.
4. Retail experts, Mary Portas (advisor to the Government on Town Centre regeneration) and Bill Grimsey (who has run Wickes and Iceland) have both publically declared their support for Option C. Indeed, Bill Grimsey stated that if you are concerned at all about regenerating Loughborough then Option C is a 'no-brainer.' He went on to say 'If you allow buses you defeat the purpose. You should utilise the space and make it a place where you can have daytime, evening and night time cultures.'
5. Loughborough BID has submitted a detailed plan of activities that could improve the footfall in Loughborough Town but conclude this is only possible under Option C. This view is shared by 95% of the local businesses represented on the BID Board. They have stated that Option C 'has the potential to significantly increase footfall, which is desperately needed to combat the growth in online retail activity.' A trial of Option C, they state, 'would allow hard evidence to be gathered over the trial period' supported by new automated footfall counters recently purchased by the BID. This position is supported by Mary Portas who has overseen a Government grant to the Town Centre to aid regeneration.

6. Charnwood Borough Council's Planning and Regeneration Services responded to the consultation in support of Option C, stating that it 'performs best in terms of creating a safe and attractive environment in the Market Place and Swan Street, a prosperous and busy part of the town centre that would benefit from full pedestrianisation' (see attached.)
7. We note the bus companies concern that if buses are removed from the Town Centre they will never return but do not share that view. Any decision emanating from a trial must be lead by the evidence. We support the use of independent assessment of the impacts so that the 'evidence' collected can be universally accepted.
8. We share the bus companies view that a key component of any trial is to ensure there is no detrimental impact upon bus passenger numbers. Whilst being minded to support the view of the Loughborough BID that Option C will provide greater not fewer visitors to the Town Centre, we again support the use of independent assessment of the impacts so that the 'evidence' collected can be universally accepted by all stakeholders when assessing the 'success' of the trial.
9. It is suggested that the elderly and disabled will be disadvantaged by Option C but the response to the consultation suggests that over 45's were strongly in favour of Option C and disabled respondents split evenly between Options A and C. Such feedback dispels such concerns.

In conclusion, we believe that the overwhelming desire of all local stakeholders is for a trial of Option C as a means of regenerating and transforming the heart of Loughborough and this is a position we endorse.

It is vital that the trial clearly and transparently gathers evidence to ensure that benefits to the Town Centre are accrued and that there is no detrimental impact to bus users. To that end we would urge the committee to **endorse Option C** supported by independent assessment of the impact on bus users.

Max Hunt CC (Loughborough North West)
Jewel Miah CC (Loughborough East)
Betty Newton CC (Loughborough North)
Robert Sharp CC (Loughborough South)