

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

INTERIM UPDATE

10 December 2020

Purpose of report: For information

Taxis

Taxi rank relocation- This has been put on hold in lieu of the pedestrianisation of the town centre as a result of Covid restrictions. As such any ultimate changes will need to be agreed. Highways will need to advise where would be the best location and feel it would need to fit in with wider transport and town centre plans.

Engine idling- this is something we are exploring in terms of taking enforcement action. We've been advised by the Department of Transport that this is something we can authorise our staff to deal with and we're looking at the legal process for doing so.

Pedestrianisation

Pedestrianisation was introduced to help shoppers maintain social distancing during the pandemic and implementation of lockdown and national restriction. If retailers want to put up tables and chairs or even stalls outside they can email traffic.consultation@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk with photos of what they wanted to do.

The objectives of the trial pedestrianisation were to help secure the economic health and vitality of the High Street during a period where Covid-19 restrictions apply and people are nervous about visiting shops and businesses. The three aims being:

- To facilitate the return of the town's twice weekly street market to the High Street
- To create space such that businesses can continue to trade, especially those whose premises place constraints on the number of people who can safely and simultaneously enter
- To give people confidence that they can safely socially distance when visiting the High Street

The success will be judged in response to feedback received from all stakeholders over the trial period. The key metric will be levels of footfall in the High Street measures though benchmarking surveys and Wi-Fi data. CBC will also look to incorporate specific question(s) for businesses and High Street visitors as part of the town centre benchmarking, for which the next round will be in November, Covid circumstances permitting. We would wish for engagement with businesses to be planned and coordinated through the town's Joint Committee.

The timeline will be part be driven by the trajectory of the Covid-19 pandemic as this will dictate how long it is necessary for people to maintain a safe social distance in order to control the transmission of the virus, accepting that a decision will need to be taken on the experimental traffic regulation order within 18 months of its implementation in June 2020.

It is worth noting that Covid-19 has changed the baseline for judging 'success'. It will take time to assess and interpret the impact of changes in peoples' behaviours and economic circumstances. This is further complicated by the implementation of new restrictions in response to successive waves affecting business and trade.

COVID -19 Business Support

Business rates relief

The government has extended the business rates holiday , granted for 2020/21 (100% business rates relief) to all [retail, leisure, hospitality](#) and [nursery](#) businesses irrespective of rateable value.

For Leighton Buzzard we awarded 486 small business/retail hospitality grants amounting to £6.3m during the spring/summer and have also awarded expanded retail rate relief to 229 businesses in the town amounting to £4.7m

Business support grants

CBC Revenues and Benefits team are administering the governments new business grant schemes to help businesses that will have to close or will be badly affected by the new restrictions.

For businesses that have had to close between Thursday 5 November until Wednesday 2 December, a new scheme (known as Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed) Addendum) has been announced.

To qualify for this grant, the business must have been:

- open as usual before the restrictions
- required to close due to new national restrictions
- liable to business rates for the premises

Eligible businesses will also need to have a business rates account with CBC.

The value of grants awarded under the first new scheme will depend on the rateable value of the business premises.

Businesses with a rateable value of:

- exactly £15,000 or under will receive a payment of £1,334 per 28-day qualifying period
- over £15,000 and less than £51,000 will receive a payment of £2,000 per 28-day qualifying period
- exactly £51,000 or above, will receive £3,000 per 28-day qualifying period

Businesses not eligible for the Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed) Addendum are:

- those which can continue to trade and have chosen to close but not been required to do so
- or have already received grant payments that equal the maximum levels of state aid permitted under the de minimis and the COVID-19 Temporary State Aid Framework
- or were in administration, are insolvent or where a striking-off notice has been made on the date of the first full day of the restrictions
- or pay business rates as part of their rent and so do not have a business rates bill reference number with us

Additional Restrictions Grant

Our Executive has voted unanimously to accept the recommended policy over the new discretionary business support scheme (the Additional Restrictions Grant).

The policy can be found on our [website](#).

Members approved a policy, tailored to our local economy, to support businesses forced to close but who do not pay their business rates directly to us or businesses which, while not legally forced to close, are severely impacted by the restrictions put in place to control the spread of COVID-19.

Online applications to the new scheme will open at midday on Wednesday 2 December and the scheme will be open for four weeks. Grants of up to £9000 will be available.

For example, we will support those in the retail, hospitality and leisure supply chains and those in the events sector as well as businesses previously supported through the Discretionary Business Grant funding, including childcare as well as market traders selling non-essential goods.