

LEIGHTON BUZZARD HIGH STREET TRIAL PEDESTRIANISATION

1. IS THE CURRENT “TRIAL” TEMPORARY?

- 1.1 In early June 2020 CBC approved (and LLTC supported) an ETRO (Experimental Traffic Regulation Order) for Leighton Buzzard High Street. An ETRO is normally used to trial a traffic change with a view to the change later being made permanent.
- 1.2 However the objectives of the ETRO were not a permanent change. They were, according to CBC in a message to LLTC dated 13 November 2020, to
- 1.3 Help secure the economic health and vitality of the High Street during a period when 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.
- 1.4 It is worth re-stating these aims because they explicitly related to the current Covid pandemic and were temporary in nature. All being well, the pandemic will reduce and we will move back towards normality in the High Street.
- 1.5 So on the face of it, the June 2020 TRO could have been termed a Temporary Order (TTRO). Temporary changes are what TTROs are for.

2. OR IS IT INTENDED TO BE PERMANENT?

- 2.1 However the TRO currently in force is an Experimental Order (ETRO) and some CBC representatives have spoken about the possibility of permanent pedestrianisation of the High Street at the end of the 18 month trial period.
- 2.2 CBC have not publicly stated any Objectives for a TRO intended to lead to permanent pedestrianisation. It is important to recognise that the temporary Covid-related short-term Objectives identified at 1.3 above do not relate to a permanent pedestrianisation. CBC may well have Objectives and benefits that could arise from a permanent pedestrianisation, but have not produced them.

3. CONSULTATION? ON WHAT?

- 3.1 Consultation has been mentioned. Consultation will be needed if permanent pedestrianisation is being considered. That consultation would require the aims and benefits of the permanent change to be clearly identified.
- 3.2 CBC representatives offered two differing views of consultation at the 10.12.2020 Partnership Committee meeting. One said the process was happening now and would continue until the end of the 18 month ETRO period – therefore no special set-piece consultation would be necessary. The other said the consultation would be a specific activity towards or at the end of the 18 month

period. But consultation on what, if there is no explicit proposal for permanent change and no accompanying justifying case for stakeholders to consider?

3.3 Stakeholders for consultation have not been identified. There are many possibilities: businesses; the shopping public: the disabled including Blue Badge holders; bus operators and passengers; the emergency services; deliverers and couriers; and many more.

3.4 CBC stated that on 13.11.2020 that “engagement with businesses” on the ETRO will be the responsibility of this Partnership Committee. Partnership Committee minutes carry no mention of that task And why would we “engage with businesses” but not other stakeholder groups? (And again, what would we consult them about?)

4. IN CONCLUSION

For over a thousand years Leighton Buzzard High Street has been used by wheeled traffic. If, in the 2020s, that wheeled traffic is to be excluded, there must be a proper consultation with all stakeholder groups. CBC and LLTC have a joint responsibility to undertake and organise that consultation and not allow the present Covid-related temporary arrangements to sleepwalk into a permanent change that the town has had no voice in.

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