

LEIGHTON-LINSLADE TOWN COUNCIL 31 JANUARY 2022

Discussion paper to accompany late item on High Street Traffic Orders

LEIGHTON BUZZARD HIGH STREET – FIVE MAJOR ISSUES

ISSUE 1 : Access to/use of High Street by shoppers, bank customers, people wishing to socialise with friends, eat, drink coffee, and many other purposes. Access by 4, 3 or 2 wheels or on foot.

ISSUE 2: Access by bus passengers for similar purposes.

ISSUE 3: The Leighton Buzzard High Street of the Future – the mix of shops, banks, eating / drinking (inside and outside), parking, leisure, residential development, civic, arts/culture.

ISSUE 4: Developing the Land on the South Side of the High Street.

ISSUE 5: Investment resources, including money and specialist person-power capacity for planning and implementing major changes.

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ISSUE 2: An officer Report is going to CBC's Traffic Management Committee on 1 February 2022 - it has not been shared with the Town Council.

It recommends the return of buses to the High Street on 4 days out of 7 (on a 6 month trial basis). This recommendation is probably driven by the quoted warning from Arriva Buses of their imminent abandonment of a substantial number of local bus services if the present use of West Street as the principal bus stop continues. Such an abandonment would clearly be as intolerable for CBC as it would for LLTC. (This problem was foreseeable in June 2020 when the ETRO was introduced.)

The return of buses to the High Street along with the Report's suggested attention to the adequacy of bus shelters and seating will probably encourage bus ridership and usage of the town centre, and will also improve accessibility to shops, banks etc for those bus passengers with mobility issues. It is therefore to be welcomed.

The Report appears to recommend continuing the use of the (temporary) West Street bus stops for through bus services. This will maintain the hostile West Street environment for passengers waiting for those services and produce a disconnect for passengers wishing to transfer from a local bus service to a through one – again, some of these passengers will have mobility issues in transferring between the West Street stops to the High Street stops.

ISSUE 1:

1. The CBC Report recommends that delivery vehicles be "controlled" (but does not say how). It comments that the widespread flouting by private vehicles of the ETRO prohibition on access to the High Street has been a major problem, but is silent on how policing can be improved if the physical access at each end of the High Street is to be kept permanently open to allow buses and delivery vehicles to access.

The Report includes a Hatch consultancy report that relies on reportage of pedestrianisation schemes elsewhere and on a Government predilection for piazza-isation schemes. The re-introduction of buses to the High Street, alongside the level of incursion into the High Street of delivery vans and courier vehicles (which the Report concedes took CBC officers unawares) effectively puts on ice the suggested piazza-isation of the High Street. This change was not part

of the rationale for the June 2020 ETRO but has been floated since then by various CBC officers and members.

2. The Report cites 53% of local residents as wanting pedestrianisation to continue but ignores a substantial % who do not. The Report does not say how those questions were administered, or to whom – presumably not those who don't use the High Street either because of access problems or because they shop etc elsewhere. It doesn't provide information on what High Street businesses think of continuing pedestrianisation (and the ETRO was after all implemented precisely to help those businesses cope with the pandemic, along with the market).
3. CBC have not attempted to do what the Town Council has repeatedly called on them to do: formulate options for future High Street usage, assess pros and cons, and then share those options with the public, businesses and other significant groups such as the disabled, bus operators, taximen, blue light services, Buzzcycles etc). There has been no proper considered consultation. Half-hour visits to whoever CBC officers could find walking in the High Street do not amount to consultation. Their report states that there was no time to consult, but the Town Council has been asking for them to plan and carry proper consultation for almost a year.
4. The Report records that some local residents asked for better disabled parking provision, improved public realm provision, better car parking, better enforcement – on all of which the CBC report is silent.
5. The recommendation to the CBC Portfolio Holder for another ETRO for 6 more months is therefore, on its own, inadequate. The Town Council should
 - support the recommendation to return buses and bus-stops to the High Street, along with the resulting move of the taxis back to Market Square
 - call for the restoration of through bus services to the High Street
 - propose to CBC for the two councils work together during the 6 month ETRO trial period to formulate some strategic options that can then be consulted upon with local residents and businesses, and the other interest groups referred to above
 - recommend to CBC the permissioning of blue badge holders to use all the High Street parking places for the same 6 month trial period
 - ask CBC to commit to manage and police effectively the public compliance with the new ETRO to end the abuse of the past year.

ISSUE 3 :

Is here because of its inter-dependence with Issue 1. The Town Council ran its 8 November 2021 Workshop, then at P&F on 22 November 2021 resolved to hand the issue to CBC to make progress. The Town Council cannot logically call on CBC for greater consultation on the pedestrianisation issue whilst opting out of responsibility for shaping the future offer and ambiance of the High Street. Once the Town Clerk's upcoming meeting with CBC's Place Director has been held, LLTC must surely do better than opting out of the planning of Leighton Buzzard's future High Street.

ISSUE 4 :

The Land on the South Side of the High Street development is interactive with the other future High Street issues. If delivery vehicles wanting to front-access High Street businesses are preventing piazza-isation, and if the Town Council wants to facilitate and plan for piazza-isation, then the LSSH development access arrangements could present a permanent solution to that problem.

ISSUE 5:

Where is the funding to come from for these strategic planning changes? And do both CBC and LLTC currently employ the specialist planning and development officers needed to have a realistic chance of making the changes happen?

Cllr Steve Owen

27 January 2022