

Meeting: Cabinet

Date: 10th January 2023

Wards Affected: Roundham with Hyde

Report Title: Future High Streets - Torbay Road

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Director/Assistant Director Contact Details: Alan Denby, Divisional Director Economy, Environment & Infrastructure

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 Following the award of Future High Streets Fund grant the Council has been taking forward the development of projects and, with partners at Paignton Picture House Trust, delivering the first Future High Street Fund project. The Future High Street Fund (FHSF) programme is intended to bring about infrastructure improvements, increase town centre living and an enhanced cultural offer in Paignton.
- 1.2 One of the projects is intended to enhance the visitor experience on Torbay Road and encourage investment in and diversification of commercial space along with encouraging active travel. The project was revised earlier in the year to include pedestrianisation which has been trialled over the period from October 2022. This report provides preliminary feedback from traders on Torbay Road and the wider community from the Council's Your Say engagement site.

2. Reason for Proposal and its benefits

We want Torbay and its residents to thrive.

We want Torbay to be a place where we have turned the tide on poverty and tackled inequalities; where our children and older people will have high aspirations and where there are quality jobs, good pay, and affordable housing for our residents.

We want Torbay to be the premier resort in the UK, with a vibrant arts and cultural offer for our residents and visitors to enjoy; where our built and natural environment is celebrated and where we play our part in addressing the climate change emergency.

- 2.1 The proposal in this report helps deliver this ambition by supporting town centre renewal and delivery of the thriving economy theme of the community plan. The project links to a similar public realm improvement project proposed for Station Square which, together, connect the Crossways and Victoria Square sites better.

The FHSF bid identified improvements to the street scene on Torbay Road which were expected to include signage, lighting, seating and other more general improvements. Feedback from community representatives was that Torbay Road should be pedestrianised. In the spring of 2022 there were two consultations held, by the Paignton and Preston Community Partnership and by the Council, which indicated that there was broad support for pedestrianisation.

- 2.2 Following the consultation, the project team revised the plans which were being developed to incorporate pedestrianisation. It was intended to deliver a trial of the pedestrianisation in the summer of 2022 however a variety of challenges prevented this from taking place. The trial could not easily have been delayed until the summer of 2023 without a potentially significant impact to the overall FHSF programme. This is because the FHSF grant is expected to be spent by the summer of 2024 and delaying the trial till 2023 with the consequential impacts on design and procurement for the Torbay Road project and the linked Station Square project meant that the decision was made to trial the works from October 2022.
- 2.3 The Council undertook that it would continually review the feedback on the trial, intended to run till the end of March 2023, to allow for the impact of the pedestrianisation to be considered. The detail of the feedback is set out in the supporting information for this report but in summary the Council has engaged through its Your Say Torbay website with traders on Torbay Road and the wider community alongside meetings with traders, community representatives and use of other data to assess the impact of the scheme thus far.
- 2.4 This report sees that there are four options for the Council which are;
- i. Immediately revert to non-pedestrianisation of the Road
 - ii. Revise the scheme for partial pedestrianisation of Torbay Road (Queens Road to level crossing/Station Square)
 - iii. Revise the scheme for one way traffic west bound from Esplanade
 - iv. Maintain the trial as is till March 2023
- 2.5 It is recommended that the second option, that of a revision to the trial to allow for partial pedestrianisation of Torbay Road from Queens Road to Station Square is pursued.
- 2.6 The reason for this recommendation is to allow for a limited pedestrianisation of Torbay Road which supports the views expressed in the spring 2022 consultation and which continue to be set out through the Your Say feedback. This option also respects feedback received from traders and limits further redesign and delay to the implementation of the Station Square public realm improvements.

3. Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision

- (i) That the Divisional Director Economy, Environment & Infrastructure be instructed to revise the trial of the Torbay Road Future High Street Fund project to allow for a partial pedestrianisation of Torbay Road between Queens Road and Station Square, Paignton.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Your Say Torbay – Pedestrianisation of Torbay Road, Paignton

Appendix 2; Torbay Road Traders survey

Background Documents

Supporting Information

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Torbay Road was identified in the Future High Street Fund (FHSF) bid as a key street in Paignton town centre connecting the beach and Paignton Green to the remainder of the town and, in combination with Station Square, as being important in setting the sense of place for people in the area.
- 1.2 The FHSF bid identified improvements to the street scene which were expected to include signage, lighting, seating and other more general improvements. Feedback from community representatives notably the Paignton and Preston Community Partnership was that Torbay Road should be pedestrianised. There were two consultations held in early 2022 by the Community Partnership and the Council which indicated that there is support for pedestrianisation.
- 1.3 There was an expectation that the required trial would take place over the summer of 2022 but for assorted reasons the trial did not take place until the autumn with the trial beginning at the start of October 2022.
- 1.4 The Council has undertaken to keep the impact of the trial under review through various mechanisms but is being strongly encouraged by some of the traders on Torbay Road to reverse the trial and reintroduce traffic to the space. The calls from the traders have been echoed by some online and through petitions.
- 1.5 There have been some initial teething challenges around health and safety and general access but these appear to have been largely settled in recent weeks as the community has become accustomed to the changes but need to be kept under review. October half term saw a "Spaces to Thrive" event delivered by the Council and 17 December 2022 also saw activity, organised by the traders association, in the road.
- 1.6 All of the comments received via the Council's Your Say Torbay webpages are appended to the report. These show a mixed picture of comments with some commenting very clearly that the trial is working and encouraging its continuance. Others are vehemently against the trial and believe that it will result in the street failing. One comment "The idea to pedestrianize Torbay Road is a good one - if it were supported by better road infrastructure, which it is not." has been supported by several others and may be a good summary of the issues. There were 3000 visits to the Your Say Torbay webpage on Torbay Road. The page included a poll asking "If you have visited Torbay Road since 3rd October have you enjoyed the extra space and traffic free environment?" 70.6% of people answered yes with 323 people voting in that poll.
- 1.7 A separate, traders only, survey received responses from 49 businesses, 22 of whom did not contribute to the February consultation. The survey shows that 13 of the 49 businesses are saying that trade has remained the same, one has reported an improvement with the remaining 33 reporting declining trade. The survey offers some comments from respondents on whether that is driven by wider economic factors. The survey also shows that, before the trial was implemented, 27 of respondents did not typically promote and advertise their business as they relied on footfall and, that since the trial was implemented, 23 of the businesses have made

no to change how they promote and advertise their business. 17 of the businesses responding do not subscribe to the Paignton projects newsletter.

1.8 There is a divide with some traders making stark predictions of closures and job losses and calling for an immediate reopening but one trader commented “I believe the trial has broadly been a success, because of the unusually high numbers of visitors to the region at the end of last year it is not appropriate to make any comparisons to 2021 (not to mention the impact this year of 10%+ inflation.) I can confirm that our revenue is up versus 2019 (the last meaningful comparison.)”.

1.9 The Council’s car parking figures for the town centre off street car parks are:

Car park	2022/23	2019/20
Colin Road	£4,437	£2,589
Crown & Anchor	£12,397	£7,479
Great Western	£48,274	£38,159
Roundham	£3,719	£1,512
Station Lane	£14,673	£7,804
Victoria	£26,795	£33,017
Total	£110,296	£90,559

1.10 On street parking income at Adelphi Road, Eastern Esplanade, Hyde Dendy and Queens Road is also higher than for 2019/20 which is the comparator year in line with the main comparison of car parks given that 2021/22 was exceptional. It appears that only Victoria Centre off street is showing a reduction in parking income. When corroborated by ticket sales the income figures suggest that at least in October and November 2022, there has been a comparable level of visitors and footfall in the town centre. The Council could have assumed a greater role in delivering or facilitating more events but in the absence of a town centre management function or a larger events team there needs to be careful consideration about how an events programme could be delivered and where the resources would come from to be able to deliver this.

1.11 Footfall data for Paignton Town Centre from September through to October and then November 2022 suggests that footfall of circa 210,000 in Paignton town centre in September grew to a year high figure in October of 328,000 before falling to 192,000 for November. The November figure is higher than the footfall figures reported for May, June and July. This suggests that, while there was a significant drop off from October, when the trial began, to November, the footfall experienced in November is not the lowest in the year. As a percentage of all footfall in Paignton town centre, Torbay Road received 47% of all footfall in October falling to 24% in November.

1.12 National footfall data, from Springboard, highlights that footfall continues to sit below pre pandemic levels with footfall down by 12.4% in November 2022 compared to November 2019. Springboard also predicted that December would be quieter following Black Friday. National trends and the cost of living challenges

facing communities are likely to have an impact on disposable economy in a place like Torbay.

- 1.13 We have received comments from a local commercial agent on the pedestrianisation and its impact on interest in units on Torbay Road noting that three operators (all fast food or confectionary) who have withdrawn interest have cited pedestrianisation as the reason. This is partly, though, down to their business models being around drive up and collect/courier delivery which brings problems in respect of parking enforcement. The agent indicated underlying concerns from some existing traders over deliveries and access which the project team has attempted to address in the design of the scheme with additional loading bays.
- 1.14 The pedestrianisation trial has required an experimental traffic order. There is a legal/statutory requirement of a 6-month consultation period where, as the concept of an experimental order is that the outcome is unknown, the scheme must be in place for a minimum six-month period to allow members of the public to submit comments, suggestions, or objections in relation to it.
- 1.15 There are conditions which allow for an order to be modified under Section 10(2) of the "Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984" which confirms that experimental orders may be modified, only after consulting with the police, to preserve or improve the amenities of the area through which any road affected by the order runs.

2. Options under consideration

- 2.1 There are four options open to the Council summarised below;

<u>1. Revert to the original (open up Torbay Road)</u>
<p>We can revert the entire scheme back to its original state with no regulatory requirements needed. This would require placing an advert to revoke the order. There would be abortive costs and disruption of putting the scheme back to its original form and removing the street furniture etc. There would be a requirement to take a stage back on the Station Square public realm scheme which would increase costs and delay that work starting.</p> <p>Option likely to be favoured by some traders but community representatives and some respondents to the survey make clear that this would be seen as the wrong move by some.</p>
<u>2. Partial pedestrianisation (Queens Road to Level crossing)</u>
<p>This would allow traffic onto Torbay Road from the Esplanade and provide options to turn at the Queens Road/Garfield Road junction. The option appears to have support from more traders and some community representatives. If we wanted to amend parts of the scheme, then this would constitute a modification to the experimental traffic order and may restart the clock on the minimum period of six months consultation.</p>
<u>3. One way traffic west bound</u>

This would allow one way traffic onto Torbay Road from the Esplanade along the full length of Torbay Road. It would require a redesign of the Station Square scheme which is predicated on some form of pedestrianisation in that space. Similar comments to the option B would apply in respect on the traffic order.

4. Maintain trial until March 2023

Maintenance of the trial as is would allow for the six month period originally envisaged to conclude and for fuller information to be collected but along with option A seems more likely to prolong and intensify the public debate on this issue.

3. Financial Opportunities and Implications

- 3.1 There are likely to be some abortive costs that will absorb more of the FHSF grant from any of the above other than option 4. This is because option 1 and 3 require redesign of Station Square scheme currently nearing completion of Stage 4 which would increase costs and delay implementation. Option 2 will require expenditure to change the layout of the trial.
- 3.2 Removing the pedestrianisation and allowing traffic back on the length of Torbay Road would protect the Council's off street car parking income in this area.

4. Legal Implications

- 4.1 There are no legal implications from the decision that Cabinet is being asked to make. As the project develops and delivery options become clear there may be legal implications which will be addressed as they arise.

5. Engagement and Consultation

- 5.1 There has been engagement with traders on Torbay Road and the wider community and the Council continues to meet with Community representatives. Details of the findings from the engagement and consultation activity are included within the body of this report.

6. Purchasing or Hiring of Goods and/or Services

- 6.1 No implications.

7. Tackling Climate Change

- 7.1 Pedestrianisation, albeit partial, will support healthier lifestyles through more walking and cycling.

8. Associated Risks

- 8.1 The key risk of not implementing the decision relates to the foregone economic and financial benefits of the projects.

8.2 For the project continued uncertainty over the direction means that there is a risk of delay and cost increase to this project and the wider programme.

Equality Impacts

9.	Identify the potential positive and negative impacts on specific groups		
	Positive Impact	Negative Impact & Mitigating Actions	Neutral Impact
Older or younger people			No differential impact
People with caring Responsibilities			No differential impact
People with a disability	Full or partial pedestrianisation creates more circulation space which can have a positive impact on those who are blind or partially sighted.	Full or partial pedestrianisation can have a negative impact on those with mobility issues if it impacts on the ability to access the space and facilities.	
Women or men			No differential impact
People who are Black or from a minority ethnic background (BME) <i>(Please note Gypsies / Roma are within this community)</i>			No differential impact
Religion or belief (including lack of belief)			No differential impact
People who are lesbian, gay or bisexual			No differential impact
People who are transgendered			No differential impact

	People who are in a marriage or civil partnership			No differential impact
	Women who are pregnant / on maternity leave			No differential impact
	Socio-economic impacts (Including impact on child poverty issues and deprivation)	Delivery of the project is expected to increase the level of investment in Paignton and to reinvigorate the town centre. The Council's adoption of wealth building and social value principles will see the procurement of works contracts used to get the maximum local benefit.		
	Public Health impacts (How will your proposal impact on the general health of the population of Torbay)	One of the aims of the project was to increase the active travel opportunities in Torbay which will have a positive impact on the general health of the population of Torbay.		
10..	Cumulative Council Impact (proposed changes elsewhere which might worsen the impacts identified above)			
11.	Cumulative Community Impacts (proposed changes within the wider community (inc the public sector) which might worsen the impacts identified above)			