



THORNBURY TOWN COUNCIL

Extraordinary Full Council meeting 25.05.22

Questions posed to Cllr Steve Reade, South Glos Council, and responses provided

- 1. The primary concern and cause of disappointment to the Town Council is the way in which the project has been handled in terms of consultation and communication of the process. Residents, and the Town Council, feel that the decision-making process and evidence on which it was based was not communicated adequately, and is still not understood.**

There has been no meaningful consultation. Consultation should be a two-way process, with responses considered ahead decision making, when comments may be taken into account and concerns allayed or plans amended accordingly. Briefings provided to the Town Council and residents have been very much a one way communication of what is happening.

Please provide an account of the decision-making process and how feedback from residents has subsequently been factored into decision making and the final proposals.

Response: The Town Council and other stakeholders have been engaged throughout the process, as part of the formal consultations and through participation and discussion in the Town Centre Partnership meetings. In addition, within the context of Covid, the project team have delivered a wide range of engagement activity. The includes

- 3 rounds of face-to-face sessions – Sept 21, Nov/Dec 21 and Mar 22.
- Letters
- On-street information
- Webpage
- Social Media
- Printed information
- Visits to local businesses
- Responding to emails, phone calls and letters
- Attending meetings, delivering updates and briefing sessions.
- Face to face engagement in the library and Turnberries
- Attendance at the Town Council meetings to provide updates, as requested by the Town Council.

This is in addition to the 2 formal consultations the experimental and permanent Traffic Regulation

Order where comments received as part of the consultation were taken into consideration before formal decisions were taken.

Should the Town Council require additional information on the decision making or evidence base associated with the scheme, the project team are happy to provide such information.

Information on how the consultation replies have been factored into the decision-making processes are documented in the reports to accompany those decisions. In addition, changes to the scheme have been made in response to feedback which are part of the updates provided to the Town Council to demonstrate the evolution of the scheme.

2. The poor handling of the public engagement on this project has had a significant impact on the Town Council. Residents have remain confused about the procedure and left with unanswered, or inadequately answered, questions. There was initially understandable confusion around the Town Council's responsibility for the project, and the Town Council has had to pick up the slack in terms of organising Town Meetings called by residents. The Town Council as had to prepare for much larger numbers of the public at routine meetings where the High Street is discussed.

The total cost to the Town Council of larger rooms, PA system hire, and security has so far been **£1445.50** which is in turn passed on to residents via the Precept. There is also the cost of the upcoming Parish Poll which will also fall to the Town Council.

Whilst the Town Council is, of course, responsible for the costs of Parish Polls requested by residents and of its Town Council meetings, it is felt that if the engagement around the High Street project had been adequately carried out by South Gloucestershire Council, this would have not been a requirement. Would South Gloucestershire Council be willing to contribute to the costs incurred by the Town Council?

Response not recorded

3. **A Parish Poll has been called by residents regarding the High Street. We know that residents are all keen to know if the result of the Poll will have any bearing or influence on the project's future?**

Response: Whilst the result of the poll is not legally binding for either the Town Council or South Gloucestershire Council, it is an expression of the views of local people and will be considered in very much the same way as others we have received throughout the course of the project.

4. **Castle Court:**

Verity has confirmed in email and Rachael Hunt's letter stated "... we are confident that the parking situation in Castle Court will return to what it once was when the double yellow lines were in place...". That would allow blue badge holders to park outside the Methodist Hall.

However, Castle Court lies within the Restricted Parking Zone. The sign at the entrance to the RPZ declares 'No parking EXCEPT IN SIGNED BAYS'. That would prohibit blue badge holders from parking outside the Methodist Hall.

There appears to be a contradiction – could you please clarify position regarding parking for blue badge holders?

Also concerning the Castle Court Restricted Parking Zone; the new habits of parking here have already bedded in, especially during evening hours when there is clearly no provision for enforcement. Whilst we understand this is now a restricted zone, and that signage may not compulsory, the existing limited signage simply isn't adequate to deter parking and enforcement is not 24/7. The parking in the area is a real issue and current controls are inadequate.

Will additional parking signs be installed?

Response:

- Addition signage is due to be installed w/c 30th May 2022, once this is complete, we will resume the parking enforcement and issue PCNs.

- Parking on Castle Court outside of office hours has been reported to the parking enforcement team.
- Blue badge holders can treat Castle Court as if parking on double yellow lines, parking is authorised for 3 hours, if no obstruction is caused and a blue badge is displayed.
- The council will continue to monitor parking on Castle Court and the embedding of Restricted Parking Zone.

- 5. South Gloucestershire Council has talked about the national situation regarding high streets, but it would be a reasonable expectation that relevant local data would be utilised. Every Town is different, particularly Thornbury as a historic market town.**

What impact studies specific to Thornbury were carried out and what local economic data was gathered to inform the project? Please share details.

Response: The Outline and Full Business Case has been produced in accordance with guidance from the Department for Transport and has been independently reviewed by WECAs assurance team.

The purpose of the Business Case is to demonstrate the Value for Money of the scheme using, qualitative, quantitative and monetised information. The appraisal uses appropriate datasets specific to Thornbury where required. These relate primarily to the transportation impacts of the scheme, these then inform the Benefit Cost Ratio.

The Outline Business Case is available on the councils website and the Full Business Case is due to be published shortly.

- 6. Business waste is currently set out on the high street awaiting collection. This is not conducive to a pleasant pedestrianised area.**

What facility will be made for businesses to store their waste, which is currently left out on the High Street?

Response: While arrangements for commercial waste is not within the scope of the project, the project team will be liaising with Waste Management providers and Street Cleansing to ensure that business waste is stored appropriately.

- 7. There is widespread concern around the lack of a dedicated bus stop bay off of the single carriageway high street. There is concern that this will result in those wishing to use the short stay or drop-off bays will end up queueing down what is supposed to be a pedestrianised street, which not ideal in terms of safety and exhaust emissions. There is also concern that this could also impede emergency vehicles.**

Please explain why a dedicated layby has been discounted?

Response:

- The project team are working to meet the needs of the community while delivering the vision for Thornbury High Street. The scheme seeks to create a pedestrian prioritisation scheme whilst balancing the need for access. The decision was taken therefore not to include a bus layby as this would reduce the area available to pedestrians in an area dedicated to increasing pedestrian use.

- The scheme will significantly reduce the number of vehicles on the High Street, from pre-pandemic levels thus reducing exhaust emissions.
- The High Street bus stop will not be a layover stop; therefore, vehicles will only have to wait for boarding, unloading.
- Emergency services are a statutory consultee and have been consulted on the scheme.
- We will continue to monitor air quality on Thornbury High Street and Rock Street.

8. Since the closure of Thornbury High Street to through traffic has forced nearly all north-south through traffic onto the diversion route of Rock Street and Midland Way, how do your traffic engineers propose to deal in the medium and long term with the increased volume of vehicles along that route, which is causing regular congestion and a reduction in air quality, remembering always that the rural location of Thornbury means that most journeys to and from work require motorised transport; that one of the main bus services (T2) has recently been curtailed; and that we are talking about traffic volume, rather than traffic speed? /

Response:

- Investment in a network improvement scheme
- Investment in active and sustainable travel modes, infrastructure, and behaviour change
- Investment in green infrastructure
- Monitoring of air quality

What are the plans for improving vehicle access around Rock Street and area?

Response: The plans for the network improvement scheme can be found on our webpage under project news. This can be found on our website - [Thornbury High Street | BETA - South Gloucestershire Council \(southglos.gov.uk\)](#)

It was advised by South Gloucestershire Council that lane line marking would be introduced on Rock Street to make it clear to motorists that they could pass buses that had stopped. Please advise when this line marking work will take place?

Response: Summer 2022 as part of the network improvements.

9. does sgc have figures for the whole of south gloucestershire for the effect that the covid19 restrictions had on high street retail and hospitality across the whole are for 2020/21 2022?

Response: South Gloucestershire Council does not have footfall or income generated data for Thornbury High Street but are engaged with all High Streets, where regular meetings and sharing of information takes place with Chambers of Commerce and traders.

10. Given, that the Atkins movement survey in the OBC was carried out at the wrong time of year according to DfT AMAT guidelines, which say that Spring and Autumn surveys should be used, to avoid distorting the figures, especially for cyclists, do you now acknowledge that this element of your Business Plan was incorrect and that the AMAT toolkit calculation of Benefit Value was skewed by this error?

Response: The OBC was produced in accordance with the guidelines and scrutinised as part of the WECA assurance process before a decision was made by the WECA Joint Committee.

11. Can sgc offer any investment to attracting a greater diversity of shops and businesses to encourage more people to the High Street?

Response: Yes we can.

Throughout the pandemic, the Council has provided a significant amount of direct financial support to business through more than £100million in business support grants

In addition, the Council is committed to supporting all its High Streets and has invested to create officer posts dedicated to this aim.

Over the Covid period, the Council introduced the Help us Thrive grants for businesses and organisations based in the high street. Of the £380k grant £93k was directly allocated to help support Thornbury traders.

In 2021, the Council organised two campaigns to encourage footfall – the South Glos Bee Trail in the summer and the Christmas window display competition. As part of the campaign £12k of vouchers were awarded with £3k of those being spent directly in Thornbury High Street.

The Council is working directly with the chamber and traders to provide business support through the Cool Ventures Business programme and the Footfall accelerator programme, designed to help traders to recover and expand their businesses. This in turn, alongside the environmental improvements being made to the High Street encourage investment in the Town.

One of the Council's priorities in 22/23 is to embark on a project to encourage new investment in Thornbury and the other High Streets. This will include reviewing vacant units and encouraging a mix in what the High Street has to offer. At this stage all mechanisms to achieve this aim will be considered.

12. What was the Pass / Fail criteria on which the High Street plan was judged a success and enabled SGC Cabinet members to make it permanent in June, 2021

Response: The Cabinet report of the 7th June 2021 provides a balanced assessment of how the Council approved the implementation of a permanent scheme for Thornbury High Street. This included consideration of feedback received as well as the benefits of investing in Thornbury High Street.

13. If business are still struggling after the proposed development of the High Street has been completed will there be an option to reconsider allowing through traffic?

Response: The council are committed to investing in Thornbury High Street, ongoing support will be available to businesses post implementation through work already underway by the High Streets team.

14. Given that we are now several months into the post pandemic period, could South Gloucestershire Council please define the problem it is attempting to solve through the changes it is seeking to impose on Thornbury High Street? Residents understood and accepted the temporary measures introduced for Covid distancing arrangements in June 2020, but the Government formally rescinded these requirements some months ago. The Experimental and now permanent Traffic Regulation Orders imposed over the last two years has resulted in significant and ongoing negative economic impact for most businesses on the High Street. Why do you continue to seek to potentially drive these businesses to the wall?

Response: The Cabinet report of the 7th June 2021 fully outlines the vision that the Council has for Thornbury High Street. This can be found on the Council's website and the Town Council should be in a position to direct residents to this if needs be.

The objectives of the vision are:

- 1) Supports the town centre regeneration and anchors the High Street at the heart of a thriving community supporting the town's recovery from the pandemic.
- 2) A space that meets the needs of all residents and visitors both in safety, access and experience.
- 3) Providing a range of retail from High Street brands to independent shops, selling both essential and non-essential goods.
- 4) A welcoming space for all ages to meet and spend time together in a range of hospitality and cultural experiences. That supports and embodies the future hybrid working expected from more home working and less commuting.
- 5) will embrace and encourage active travel, through improved safe cycling and walking routes to the High Street and secure parking for cycles including those adapted. Enabling all to enjoy the reduction in traffic and noise when using the High Street. Motorised vehicle access to the High Street should be provided for those supporting the economic activity of a thriving High Street
- 6) Ensuring the Town Centre and High Street remain accessible for those using public transport remains a priority. A review of bus access and accessibility of bus stops will ensure the needs of those using public transport are met.
- 7) The future vision is a digitally enabled High Street, with fast and strong connectivity for businesses and visitors alike. Provides information online about the High Street and maximises the opportunity for on-line retail through click and collect. Making use of shared space for skills and training.

15. can you ensure there is adequate access for both business delivery/shoppers whilst work is carried out, particularly over the most important quarter of the year October through to December

Response: The project team have been in contact with local businesses to understand operating hours, delivery times, delivery vehicles etc. They will use this information to develop a Programme that seeks to minimize disruption to businesses and trading.

16. When will solutions be given which support those who can't walk easily, don't cycle and have a Blue Badge? The current plan totally disregards this group

Response:

- An Accessibility and Equality working group was established July 2021 to specifically ensure the needs of the groups identified in the question are addressed. The scheme is also supported by an Equalities Impact Assessment and supported by the Council's Equalities Officer. The scheme has been amended in response to feedback and includes:
- 9 enforceable blue badge parking bays are located on the High Street (8 are currently in operation)
- 1 x drop off/pick up bay, plus loading and unloading
- Reintroduction of the bus to the High Street
- There are blue badge parking bays in Rock Street, St Mary's Centre, and Castle Court car parks.

- Blue badge holders can park on Castle Court for 3hrs providing they don't cause any obstruction and display a blue badge. The full details can be viewed in the FAQ document on our webpage [Thornbury High Street | BETA - South Gloucestershire Council \(southglos.gov.uk\)](#)

17. Is there a budget/plans to spend on promoting Thornbury as a destination and to build on the existing successes already in place e.g. the market and other events.

Response: Yes, this is not just a construction project it's High Street investment scheme which will include ongoing support for businesses and The Chamber of Commerce, events, active and sustainable travel modes to ensure that the scheme is fully embedded and achieves the outcomes of the project.

18. Why can't South Gloucestershire Council return the High Street traffic arrangements back to their pre-covid (2019) status for a period of 12 months, and at the same time collect all necessary data in respect to vehicle, cycle and pedestrian movements, footfall and business outlook from individual traders, air quality data and any other safety and environmental information? This information can then made available to the Public, alongside a parallel set of data from a 12-month period from the previous two years of the interim scheme. Residents of Thornbury and the surrounding local villages can then be given a binding Referendum vote within three months of the publication of that data, so that they can select and decide which option is the most suitable for the future of Thornbury going forward. This will at least enable a start to be made in regaining the trust and belief of Thornbury residents in our constitutional democratic system. It would also enable a start to be made in repairing the damage to our 'split community' that Councillors often refer to.

Response: As part of its commitment to supporting Thornbury High Street, on the 7th June 2021 the Cabinet agreed to support a high level vision for its future. The report presented at this meeting included data from the stakeholder engagement and 6 month consultation on the Experimental Traffic Order. In addition, the business case upon which funding was agreed by WECA has been based upon an appropriate level of local information.