

Public Questions for Council 8th November 2012

(NOTE: The following question and answer will be published on the Council's website as soon as possible after the meeting and linked to the published draft minutes of this meeting.)

1. Question from Rae Harris

Why is B&NES implementing the current Public Realm and Movement Scheme in High Street, Bath - the World Heritage Site's medieval market-place - where:

- i. There is an obvious potential death-trap at the shared-use entry to Cheap Street (the open-top tour buses waiting at the dedicated stop will obscure pedestrians' view of vehicles and vice versa);
- ii. The lengthening of the single-carriageway section outside the Guildhall will cause vehicles to back up from the bus-gate - thereby blocking the escape route via Bridge Street - even more than they do now;
- iii. Vehicles will have problems entering and/or leaving the box-end lay-bys and will not only disrupt traffic flows but damage the very expensive kerbstones on the corners (and this will particularly apply to the buses); and
- iv. The public realm design is based on a totally out-dated and alien concept, where - in spite of the above faults - vehicles have been given much greater consideration than cyclists and pedestrians and all sense of history has been lost, including the opportunity to mark the position of the city's original North Gate (the most important one of all)

Response from Cabinet Members for Sustainable Development and Transport

- i. The tightening of the entrance to High Street from Orange Grove within the new scheme, combined with appropriate local signage and speed restrictions in the wider area, should all contribute to vehicles approaching the entrance to Cheap Street in a cautious and interactive manner. Neither the designer nor the stage 1 and 2 road safety auditors have highlighted this matter as an issue and believe the sightlines will be adequate.
- ii. Although the length of bus lane has effectively been reduced, CCTV footage demonstrates that for most of the day traffic flow is light and queuing is infrequent. Delivery vehicles often park illegally in the bus lane outside Cafe Nero, which is similar to the constriction created by the new scheme and, again, on these occasions doesn't pose a problem. It is recognised that queuing is evident around 6pm after the busgate becomes non-operational, although it quickly disappears as a result of the long green time within the signal stages. The High Street scheme is seeking to improve the environment in High Street for pedestrians and public transport users and to create a stronger crossing to the Guildhall and Market. It was felt, therefore, that the time-limited impacts on vehicular movement should not take

precedence over benefits to pedestrians. The provision of time limited loading bays (in front of the Guildhall) will allow businesses to load/unload goods.

- iii. The overall lengths of the lay-bys in front of the Guildhall have been oversized to allow for the easier entry/exit of vehicles and the new kerb layout in the High Street has in general been designed in accordance with Highways design standards for the movement of buses. Additionally, the kerbstones have been selected and kerb/foundation detail designed to minimise any possible damage arising from vehicular overrun.
- iv. The High Street is a major hub for key bus services and this use will continue for the foreseeable future. While it is desirable to limit other vehicular movement within the street, it was beyond the scope and influence of the High Street project to re-configure traffic movement in Bath city centre, which will need to be directed by a comprehensive transport strategy for the city in the future. For these reasons, the Council's Public Realm and Movement Strategy identified High Street as an arrival and departure space.

Acknowledging this brief, the design of the High Street scheme received input from a range of Bath stakeholders and from national design advisers, including one of the most innovative public realm engineers in the UK. It was felt that the new design is flexible enough to accommodate further pedestrian enhancements in the future eg replacing tarmac in the carriageway with stone sets, should it be possible to change existing vehicular movement patterns as a result of a new transport strategy.

These limitations accepted, the new scheme for High Street will make a major improvement to the public realm particularly for pedestrians, through widening of footway areas, strengthening the crossing points to the Guildhall and Market and creating a better experience for bus users queuing in the street. It will significantly upgrade the quality of the streetscape with natural stone paving and new street furniture to a level that reflects the significance of the street and its remarkable heritage buildings. It will also improve the functionality of the space for cyclists and public transport vehicles.