

Report of Director of City Development

Report to Executive Board

Date: 18th December 2013

Subject: Proposed Extension to the Hours of Pedestrianisation of the Leeds City Centre Retail Core

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s): City & Hunslet	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. One of the four key objectives of the 2013 Best Council Plan is to 'promote economic growth'. In Leeds city centre, footfall is increasing and the economy of the area has been given a major boost with the opening of the Trinity Leeds and the First Direct Arena. The Victoria Gate scheme, which starts on site in early 2014, will provide another area of high quality retail and leisure space.
2. Collectively, these developments represent a step change in the quality of the environment in Leeds city centre. It is important that the existing 'High Street' remains an attractive and economically competitive destination. In February 2013, Executive Board supported proposals to extend the pedestrianised hours in the retail core of the city. This proposal will mean an improved pedestrian and retail environment in the city in the early evening, helping to secure Leeds' place in the top 5 UK retail destinations.
3. Executive Board requested that the formal 'advertising' of the proposals was carried out as part of the statutory consultation process.
4. This process is now complete, and of around 300 businesses directly consulted, 14 objections were initially received. In dealing with the limited objections following further discussions with businesses, it was deemed appropriate to propose hours that incorporated as wide a position as possible. The proposed hours of pedestrianisation were therefore shortened to 10.30am – 7pm (rather than 8pm). As

a result, all objecting delivery companies withdrew their objections so only four objections from businesses remain, plus a further four objections from cyclists. This relatively small level of objection demonstrates that most businesses feel they can accommodate these proposals.

5. Many businesses are supportive of proposals to extend the pedestrianised hours, and some wish to see a much longer extension than the one proposed, so it is felt that 10.30am until 7pm is a reasonable balance. The current hours of pedestrianisation are 10.30am until 4.30pm.
6. In order to implement these proposals, it is likely that a public inquiry will be necessary. Any outstanding, relevant objections to a Traffic Regulation Order cause a public inquiry to be called. This public inquiry will be held in early 2014 and it is expected that it will cost Leeds City Council up to £15k, depending on the number of attending objectors and the outcome of the inquiry.
7. Leeds is in competition with other centres and internet-based retailing, and the city has to keep up with changing retail trends. Retail hours are getting longer, with many retailers in Leeds open until 8pm. This will develop a broader and more cosmopolitan evening economy, which is more attractive to all visitors, including families.

Recommendations

8. This report seeks Executive Board's approval to:
 - (i) Extend the hours of pedestrianisation in the city centre to 10.30am – 7pm, seven days a week;
 - (ii) Proceed to a public inquiry in order to implement these proposals in the event of the Council not being able to secure the withdrawal of the remaining objections.

and to note:

- the stages required to implement the decision as outlined in 3.2 – 3.3
- proposed timescales for implementation as outlined in 3.3
- that the Chief Officer, Highways & Transportation will be responsible for implementation.

1 Purpose of this report

1.1 The report seeks approval of Executive Board to:

- (i) the proposal to extend the hours of pedestrianisation to 10:30am – 7pm (rather than 8pm); seven days a week;
- (ii) the proposal to call a public inquiry as a step towards implementing these proposals.

2 Background information

2.1 In February 2013, Executive Board supported the principle of extending the pedestrianised hours in the city centre from a current time of 10.30am – 4.30pm, to a new time of 10.30am – 8pm. Executive Board requested that the formal consultation (or 'advertising') was carried out.

2.2 This formal consultation resulted in 14 objections, from more than 300 businesses who were directly consulted. Discussions have since taken place with all objectors, advising them that the pedestrianised hours will be reduced to 10.30am – 7pm (rather than 8pm). Only four objections from businesses remain, plus a further four objections from cyclists. However, the cyclists' objections do not relate to the extension of the hours per se. This relatively small level of objection demonstrates that most businesses feel they can accommodate these proposals.

2.3 Three of the four objecting businesses are independent retailers. It is important that the needs of independent retailers are recognised, because they play a key role in the attractiveness of Leeds city centre. Officers believe the concessions offered in 2.5, below, address the concerns of almost all businesses in the city centre, including independents. There are around 50 independent retailers in the pedestrianised area, and only three have objected.

2.4 The reasons stated for objections include:

- (i) Generally, the four objecting city centre businesses believe it will make it more difficult for them to receive deliveries, or send collections, in the evenings.
- (ii) The four objecting cyclists wish to cycle two ways on the pedestrianised area rather than having to adhere to the existing one way system.

2.5 The concessions offered to objectors, to make the proposals more workable, include:

- (i) The proposed hours of pedestrianisation have been reduced, compared to the original proposals. Vehicles will be able to enter the pedestrianised area from 7pm, rather than 8pm.
- (ii) There are a number of loading bays adjacent to the pedestrianised core. At each of these loading bays, the amount of time allowed for loading shall be increased from 20mins to 40mins, to give companies sufficient time to walk goods onto/from the pedestrianised area.

- (iii) King Charles Street, adjacent to the pedestrianised area, has been identified as a location from which deliveries and collections can take place. The street runs parallel to Lands Lane and can be accessed by vehicles at any time.
- (iv) Central Road, which is part of the pedestrianised area, will remain accessible to vehicles from 4.30pm (as now).
- (v) Cyclists will be allowed to cycle through the pedestrianised area, but they will have to adhere to the one way system.

- 2.6 It is important to state that these proposals do not prevent businesses from receiving deliveries or collections. It only prevents vehicles from pulling up right outside their door.
- 2.7 Collectively, recent and upcoming developments such as Trinity Leeds, the Arena and Victoria Gate, represent a step change in the quality of the environment in Leeds city centre. It is important that the existing 'High Street' remains an attractive and economically competitive destination. This proposal will mean an improved pedestrian and retail environment in the city in the early evening, helping to secure Leeds' place in the top 5 UK retail destinations.
- 2.8 Leeds is in competition with other centres and internet-based retailing, and the city has to keep up with changing retail trends. Retail hours are getting longer, with many retailers in Leeds open until 8pm. This will develop a broader and more cosmopolitan evening economy, which is more attractive to all visitors, including families.
- 2.9 Consequently, there are currently, and will continue to be, more pedestrians on the streets in the late afternoon and early evening. For example at 16.30, when vehicles are allowed onto the streets, there can be up to 20,000 pedestrians in the pedestrianised core.
- 2.10 It is therefore important the pedestrianised hours are extended so that the city centre's pedestrianised area remains an attractive and safe destination for visitors.

3 The Way Forward

- 3.1 No solution will satisfy the requirements of all parties. Some businesses wish to see a longer extension than 10.30am – 7pm, but some businesses do not want to see any extension at all. It is felt that the current proposed hours achieve a reasonable balance.
- 3.2 A public inquiry will be necessary if the remaining objectors do not withdraw their objections. It is likely that at least some of these objections will remain, so an inquiry currently appears to be the most likely outcome if the proposals are to be realised. .
- 3.3 The cost and timescale for an inquiry would depend on the number of objectors willing to present their case and the complexity of each case presented. At this stage we estimate that an inquiry could cost in the region of £15k and would add a few months to the process of implementing the proposals. If no public inquiry is required then the extension could be implemented by Spring 2014.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.1 Two main consultation exercises have taken place and as a result of each exercise, concessions have been offered.
- 4.1.2 In 2010, 44 businesses objected to proposals to extend the hours to 10am – 6pm. Most of these objections centred around the morning extension (the proposal to move the start of pedestrianised hours to 10am, back from 10:30am). So the proposals were therefore altered to take account of these concerns. It is now proposed that the start of pedestrianised hours stays at 10.30am.
- 4.1.3 The 2013 consultation resulted in 14 objections to proposals to extend the hours to 10.30am – 8pm. As a result of this a reduction to 7pm was proposed, and this resulted in six of the 14 objections being withdrawn. Only four objections from city centre businesses remain, the rest are from cyclists, who are not objecting to the extension in the pedestrianised hours per se.
- 4.1.4 The relatively low amount of objections demonstrates that generally, the new proposals are workable for city centre businesses.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is attached with this report.
- 4.2.2 The proposals in this report do not include any alteration to the current provision for disabled parking or access for 'blue badge' vehicles to the pedestrianised area.
- 4.2.3 The proposal to extend the pedestrianised hours increases the period of time during which pedestrians can enjoy a vehicle-free environment. These proposals are therefore beneficial to most groups of people, including the elderly, parents with young people, carers and some groups of people with disabilities (for example, those with a visual impairment). A full assessment of this will be made as part of the equality impact assessment.
- 4.2.4 The outcome of a previous impact assessment relating to the existing pedestrianised hours confirmed that it would not be viable to allow motorised vehicles onto Briggate at all times, as it would potentially increase the risk of personal injury accidents and the perception of pedestrians that they were no longer in a safe environment. This outcome was evidenced by road accident statistics on Briggate and a collective view that allowing vehicles on Briggate at all times would be detrimental to most people, including the elderly, parents with young children, carers and people with other types of disability needs.

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

- 4.3.1 The Council's City Priority Plan states that the Council should "support the sustainable growth of the Leeds economy". The proposal to extend the

pedestrianised hours is aimed at improving the pedestrian and retail environment in the evening, and therefore providing a platform for an improved evening economy.

- 4.3.2 The City Priority Plan also aims to improve the environment through reduced carbon emissions. The proposal will not have a significant impact on carbon emissions, but it will improve the environment within the pedestrianised area in terms of air quality through a reduced number of vehicles.
- 4.3.3 The recently published “Leeds, Becoming the Best City Centre” document states amongst its main aims that the city centre should have a quality environment and be walkable and welcoming. The proposal to extend the pedestrianised hours helps to meet all of these aims.

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 Without a public inquiry, the implementation of the Traffic Regulation Orders will take around 3 months, and will cost around £15k. This would include traffic management staff costs and costs to change the existing signage.
- 4.4.2 If a public inquiry is necessary, this will extend the implementation period to at least six months and increase the total cost to around £30k.
- 4.4.3 The process to change the TRO will be managed by Leeds City Centre Management in conjunction with Traffic Management.
- 4.4.4 All costs would be found from within the City Development Directorate budget.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

- 4.5.1 An extension to the city centre’s pedestrianised hours requires the implementation of a new Traffic Regulation Order (TRO). Permanent changes to TROs are subject to The Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996.

4.6 Risk Management

- 4.6.1 If the hours of pedestrianisation are not extended there is a risk that the competitiveness of Leeds City Centre as a retail and leisure destination would be impaired, and there would be risk to the development of more diverse evening economy attractive to all people and visitors, including families.
- 4.6.2 There is a risk that the proposals could have a negative impact on a small number of businesses, however through the measures listed above in 2.5, the impact of these proposals is being minimised.

5.0 Conclusions

- 5.1 The consultation process, which started in 2010, has resulted in alterations to the proposals to make the extension in pedestrianised hours more workable for businesses. Only four objections from city centre businesses remain. Other

businesses support the proposals and believe it is an essential part of enhancing the retail environment and encouraging a safer, more diverse evening economy in the city centre. On balance officers believe that change is necessary and that the potential difficulties will be overcome.

6.0 Recommendations

6.1 This report seeks Executive Board's approval to:

- (i) Extend the hours of pedestrianisation in the city centre to 10.30am – 7pm, seven days a week;
- (ii) Proceed to a public inquiry in order to implement these proposals in the event of the Council not being able to secure the withdrawal of the remaining objections.

and to note:

- the stages required to implement the decision as outlined in 3.2 – 3.3
- proposed timescales for implementation as outlined in 3.3
- that the Chief Officer, Highways & Transportation will be responsible for implementation.

7 Background papers¹

7.1 None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.