



FLEET ROAD PEDESTRIANISATION SCHEME

Updated Summary Report

OCTOBER 2020

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BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

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1 INTRODUCTION

As part of the Council's response to Covid-19 and in line with Government expectations, the Fleet Road pedestrianisation scheme aims to provide additional space and confidence for local people to visit shops and residents during Covid-19 restrictions. The initial pilot has however, met with concern from some sections of the community.

At Council on the 24th September the following Motion was adopted:

“Despite great efforts and good intentions from all involved, there is a concern that the closure of Fleet High Street to traffic has not been a success. This Council therefore resolves to actively engage with retailers to understand and assess the nature of their concerns and to physically observe at peak times the impact of traffic on neighbouring roads. If compelling and verifiable evidence gathered indicates that the benefit to retailers does not outweigh any negative impact on businesses or residents, then this Council requests Cabinet to have the road closures removed and to reopen the High Street to traffic as soon as is practically possible and not later than the end of October in sufficient time to support the Christmas trading period”.

It was agreed at the Cabinet Meeting held on the 1st October 2020 that:

- a) To give an objective, rigorous and detailed account of business views while measuring progress and benefits, a consultant is engaged to actively engage with retailers to understand and assess the nature of their concerns.
- b) That the current traffic monitoring that is already being carried out by Hampshire County Council is supplemented by physical observation of the impact of traffic on neighbouring roads.
- c) The Portfolio Holder Place (in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment) be authorised to have the road closures removed and Fleet Road reopened to traffic by 31 October at the very latest if, in his opinion, compelling and verifiable evidence has been gathered that indicates that the benefit to retailers does not outweigh any negative impact on businesses or residents.

Therefore the following activities have been undertaken:

A) Engagement with Retailers

A consultant (Matt Baker of Rise Associates) was appointed to provide an objective, rigorous and detailed account of business views while measuring progress and benefits. The aim being to meet the Motion's need to engage with all retailers, businesses and other interested parties to understand concerns and collect evidence around the benefits of the scheme.

B) Physical observation at peak times of the impact of traffic on neighbouring roads must be carried out

Additional walkabouts with Councillors were to be undertaken at peak times to physically observe the impact of traffic on neighbouring roads during peak periods. The observations have been supplemented by the comprehensive traffic monitoring data collected by Hampshire County Council.

2 ASSESSMENT OF RETAIL MATTERS

Matt Baker of Rise Associates will attend the meeting of the Fleet Members working Group on Wednesday 21st October 2020 to discuss the engagement with businesses and his findings.

Supplementary information can be found within the appendices, on a range of qualitative and quantitative measures, including usage of the car parks, footfall, and feedback from the Fleet BID questionnaires. This information was previously submitted to Councils within the Data Summary Report for the scheme issued on 23rd September 2020. The following information has been updated.

Review of Fleet Road Mailbox from the 24th August to 16th October 2020

A summary of all comments received via the Fleet Road mailbox since the 24th August 2020, is provided within Appendix C. The summary outlines the number and type of comments received; whether these are from Businesses or Residents; the time period they were received and whether the comments were positive or negative.

Face to Face and Footfall Surveys on Fleet Road

Face to Face surveys and footfall surveys were undertaken by People&Places on behalf of Hart District Council on the following days. A summary of the survey results is provided within Appendix D:

- Thursday 10th September 2020
- Thursday 24th September 2020
- Thursday 8th October 2020
- Saturday 26th September 2020
- Saturday 10th October 2020

Footfall surveys were conducted to understand the number of visitors to the Town Centre in comparison to previous surveys undertaken in 2012, 2015 and 2018. The survey was undertaken at three locations along Fleet Road using the same collection methodology and recording people passing in both directions. The footfall averaged between 118 and 192 persons per ten minutes in the busiest location between

Sainsbury's/M&S and McDonalds on Thursdays and 329 to 236 persons per ten minutes on Saturdays.

Face to Face surveys were conducted with 104 surveys completed between with people answering 10 questions relating to the scheme and the Town Centre. It was found that 57% of those surveyed felt that the pedestrianisation scheme had a positive impact on their visit to the town centre and 54% felt Safe/Very Safe.

Comments were received during the face to face surveys. Positive comments were received that felt the pedestrianisation scheme had created a good vibe and was deemed very beneficial. Requests to extend the scheme to include additional retailers was highlighted with some feeling it was seen as a halfway house to what could be highly successful. Negative comments were also received which included general issues with congestion on local roads, some felt the scheme was reducing trade for retailers, impact on disabled/elderly and there was a general consensus to remove the temporary barriers.

Summary of Fleet Car Park Usage

Car park usage has been updated to include sales information up to 12th October 2020. This information has been examined to understand any associated impact of the scheme on visitors to the Town Centre.

A summary has been provided within Appendix G which shows the difference between weekly car park ticket sales from week commencing the 17th August 2020 (week 34) up to and including week commencing 12th October 2020 (week 42). This has then been compared to the same time period for 2019. A variation of 3,149 in the number of weekly tickets sold was noted, with the largest number sold during the week commencing 24 August 2020 when the road closure was implemented. Saturday ticket sales have remained stable and risen slightly over the period of the pedestrianisation.

It was found that the ticket sales since the road closure was introduced are comparable with the seasonal downward trend from the previous year.

Payments using the MI permit phone app has also been summarised for the same weeks in 2019 and 2020. An increase in the use of the app for parking payment as a percentage of weekly transactions when compared with the same period in 2019 was identified.

3 ASSESSMENT OF TRAFFIC ON SURROUNDING ROADS

This note provides a summary of the findings of the physical observation at peak times of the impact of traffic on neighbouring roads together with the latest findings of the traffic data monitoring exercise.

Monitoring of traffic data on local roads before and after the scheme have been collected through the use of radar survey technology by Hampshire County Council (HCC). Survey sites were located on Albert Street, Clarence Road, Connaught Road, Church Road and Elvetham Heath Way to measure traffic volumes and speeds. In conjunction with this, traffic flow and speed data are also obtained from static traffic counters on the local highway network. The survey locations are shown on the plans within Appendix B.

Since the previous summary report was provided the following traffic data and information has been obtained and reviewed as part of the assessment process:

- Radar survey data and Static counter survey data for week commencing the 5th October 2020 on all local roads previously assessed.
- Historic traffic data during March 2016 provided by HCC as part of the residential 20mph Trial for Albert Street, Clarence Road and Connaught Road
- Comparison of use of all vehicles: Great Britain-v-Hart
- Traffic engineering and highway design capacity of all local roads

A technical note has been provided within Appendix A that summarises the findings of the traffic assessment using the latest available data. A comparison to historic traffic flow data has been undertaken to show the level of impact on all local roads. It can be seen that the impact of traffic on local roads is minimal.

Key findings:

- When comparing current traffic levels along Clarence Road and Connaught Road with traffic from March 2016, it was found that traffic has returned to 2016 levels.
- Traffic flows on Albert Street have increased by approximately 30% above levels recorded in 2016. However, it should be noted that this does not take into account growth of baseline traffic in the preceding four years and the highway design capacity could easily accommodate additional flows.
- A 30% increase in traffic in Albert Street takes the average hourly flow from 395 vehicles in 2016 to 509 vehicles in October 2020. This is an increase of 114 cars per hour; or less than 2 cars per minute.
- Comparison of traffic flows recorded in Hart with the nationally recorded figures, shows that traffic within urban roads is running at approximately 75% to 85% of pre-Covid levels, whereas rural primary roads [A30] are closely aligned with the national levels. Therefore, both types of road are following the national trend, which is showing a downward trend in flows.

- Overall, average hourly traffic flows and mean speed have remained relatively stable and at similar levels to Week 3. In general, there has been a nominal increase in traffic flow of 1-2 additional vehicles a minute and generally a notable reduction in motorists speed.
- It is deemed that all roads within central Fleet area remain to operate within design capacity.
- The capacity at junctions are considered within acceptable limits at the Reading South Road junctions with Albert Street, Clarence Road and Connaught Road.

In assessing the impact of traffic, the requirements in the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 109) is considered a useful test. It states, “development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe”. From the evidence gathered it is concluded that there would be no grounds for removal of the scheme in terms of traffic impact.

It should also be noted that HCC’s have undertaken a second gateway review found that there would be no reason for the scheme to be discontinued based on the traffic data analysis. No highway safety issues were identified with the scheme. Similarly, there were no severe impact traffic conditions and limited congestion on the highway network was noted. This is verified from the traffic data collected during the monitoring period.

4 SITE OBSERVATIONS DURING PEAK PERIODS

Hart District Council Officers invited Fleet Members to attend a series of site visits to observe the impact of the displaced traffic due to the closure of Fleet Road on a typical weekday following the return of the school term.

Site visits were undertaken on the following days:

- Wednesday 30th September – 8:00 am
- Tuesday 6th October 2020 – 8:00 am
- Thursday 15th October 2020 – 8:00 am and 4:00 pm

In general, the observations recorded during the walkabouts with Fleet Members corroborated the findings of the traffic data assessments. Observations included:

- Traffic flows and network operation appearing to be normal.
- Queues were seen backing down Reading Road South when the Oatsheaf traffic lights were red. This is to be expected and reflects normal traffic volumes along Reading Road South.
- Limited queues did occur at the Albert Street / Reading Road South junction with vehicles waiting to turn north. Queues were caused when the Oatsheaf traffic lights were on red. When on green traffic was able to flow out onto Reading Road South and the queue cleared.
- At Upper Street, a good flow of cyclists was observed during the morning and afternoon school period, with parents cycling with children and teaching them good roadcraft.
- Pedestrians were also observed to cross away from the controlled crossing point on Albert Street, and whilst there was occasionally a small delay waiting for a suitable gap, it was not long.
- Queues were reported to occur at Connaught Road, of seven vehicles, but these were never seen.
- Generally very little traffic on Clarence Road or Connaught Road
- Church Road – both north and south of Fleet Road – no issues.