



REPORT TO:	Cabinet
DATE:	Tuesday, 15 November 2022
SUBJECT:	Representative Group set up to address public space use of Spalding Town Centre
PURPOSE:	To consider a motion from Spalding Town Forum to establish a sub-group to explore options and put forward recommendations concerning the future strategy for access to public space in Spalding Town Centre
KEY DECISION:	N
PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Cllr Roger Gambba Jones Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Chair, Spalding Town Forum
REPORT OF:	Matthew Hogan, Assistant Director for Strategic Growth and Development
REPORT AUTHORS:	Matthew Hogan, Assistant Director for Strategic Growth and Development Paul Jackson, Executive Programme Manager
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	Spalding Castle; Spalding Monkshouse; Spalding St John's; Spalding St Mary's; Spalding St Paul's; Spalding Wygate;
EXEMPT REPORT?	N

SUMMARY

At Spalding Town Forum held on 8 June 2022 the Chairman recommended that a sub-group was set up to inform and advise on the way forward on the use of public space within the town centre. This recommendation was supported.

It was proposed that the sub-group would comprise all Spalding ward members and that a representative of each of those groups with an interest in the public use of the town centre would be invited to participate. In addition, a town centre 'user perspective' would be sought. Senior officers from key public sector agencies would also be invited to participate. Membership of the sub-group has yet to be formalised.

Since the tabling of the motion by STF, work has been undertaken to consider a structure for how this might be taken forward, including discussions with the County Council concerning their support for the process.

This report sets out the background to this matter, seeks cabinet authority to proceed, and sets out a proposal for how it might be taken forward.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That authority be granted from SHDC's Cabinet to the Spalding Town Forum to create a sub-group with a remit to explore options and put forward recommendations to key decision-making bodies in respect of the matter of access to public space within Spalding town centre.
2. That the approach to progress the work of the subgroup, as detailed within this report, is considered and agreed

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

To establish and agree a partnership approach and working group that can explore future options and strategies in respect of the public space within Spalding Town Centre.

To agree on a strategy that will service the needs and aspirations of the town into the future.

To promote a collaborative approach towards delivering a strategy for the town in respect of access which is capable of providing a springboard to a more holistic regeneration strategy for the town centre as a whole

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Do nothing – Under this option, the report recommendations do not proceed and such a group would not be established.

1. REPORT

- 1.1** The heart of Spalding's town centre contains significant areas of public space flanking the main thoroughfare and primary 'high street'. These areas generally fall within the public realm and comprise areas of paving and highways, some of which are essentially pedestrianised. The use of these areas of public space facilitates access to town centre amenities, including retail, leisure, and financial services, by a range of users with differing needs, these including both pedestrians and vehicular traffic.
- 1.2** There is some physical demarcation within the immediate town centre environment between pedestrian and non-pedestrian areas, but the reality is that people and motorised vehicles often share the main town centre thoroughfare. Equally, whilst there are a number of restrictions on the use of the highway which limit the use of the main thoroughfare by motorised vehicles. These restrictions are not well understood and difficult to effectively monitor and/or enforce. This has led to a situation where the levels of interaction between those on foot and those using motorised vehicles are commonly perceived as frequent.

1.3 The interaction between pedestrian and vehicular traffic is potentially hazardous and can cause a degree of friction. The present situation neither achieves a town centre shopping experience within which the public space is largely free from traffic nor effectively limits the use of motorised vehicles, and particularly so during peak trading hours.

1.4 The current town centre highway restrictions

1.5 Outside of the immediate environs of the town centre 'core', fairly extensive restrictions are in place which seek to control both parking and waiting on the highway. These restrictions were imposed by the County Council, in its role as highways authority, in consultation with the District Council and others. The present range of restrictions is shown in the screenshot attached at Appendix One.

1.6 Within the confines of the town centre 'core' further controls exist in those areas of public space that are presently either fully or part pedestrianised. These additional controls place further restrictions on the movement of vehicular traffic, adding an additional layer to the wider town centre parking and waiting restrictions. They cover the largely pedestrianised sections of Hall Place, Bridge Street and Red Lion Street together with the partly pedestrianised section of Hall Place, leading in to Market Place, from its northerly intersection with New Street to its southerly intersection with Broad Street. In essence, driving within these areas is prohibited other than for means of access. These additional controls are not widely understood. Indeed, they appear to be regularly breached. There are also inherent difficulties associated with both monitoring and subsequently enforcing access by vehicles that the existing regulations seeks to restrict.

1.7 The role of the town centre 'core'

1.8 The core to Spalding's town centre, akin to many market towns nationally, seeks to provide for a wide range of retail, entertainment and service uses and is, in part, pedestrianised. It is served by an extended hinterland of retail, entertainment, service and business uses which, taken together, seek to provide for the full range of town centre uses for both the local population and wider.

1.9 These areas include not only the immediate out of town retail uses at Holland Market, closely linked with the town, but areas further afield, these including out of town shopping at Springfield and Morrisons. There is an expectation, and this is largely delivered, for users of the town to be able to park close to those facilities that are either at edge of centre or beyond.

1.10 In the case of the semi-pedestrianised town centre 'core' the expectation is perhaps rather different. Shoppers and other town centre users tend to want to congregate within the core, with the expectation that they can shop freely and engage with others largely free from direct interaction with vehicular traffic. Others, however, may not share this view – this including some shoppers. This is perhaps the nub of the issue as the current restrictions on vehicular movements within and through the town centre core are frequently perceived as being ineffective.

1.11 It needs to be acknowledged that there is presently no common consensus on the most appropriate way to manage the use of public space within the town centre 'core'. Whilst it is perhaps recognised that some forms of control over the numbers and types of vehicular movements within the town centre 'core' are necessary, there will always be exceptions to

consider. A bus service which accessed the town centre core would be welcomed by some. There is an accepted need to maintain access for the servicing of shops and businesses and to cater for the operation of the market. The access needs of less able users also need to be accommodated. Further, there may be a view that vehicular access to the town centre core should be unrestricted. These are all issues which, amongst others, warrant further exploration in order to determine a consensus approach to the overall management of public space within the town centre core.

1.12 Stakeholders, the preparation of recommendations and decision-making

- 1.13** Towns centres are complex spaces that are governed by the decisions and activities of a wide range of different agencies, stakeholders and forums. The decisions and activities of these stakeholders impact upon both residents and businesses. There continues to be a national discussion on the future role of town centres and town centre public space and in this context the issues facing Spalding town centre are no different. Many of the decision-making powers in respect of issues affecting Spalding Town centre sit with Lincolnshire County Council as Highways Authority. Furthermore, many decisions relating to highways issues in Spalding are overseen by the Spalding and Holbeach Transport Board; an LCC-led board consisting of the LCC Executive Member for Highways, the four County Council division members that represent the town, and LCC Highways Officers. The Spalding and Holbeach Transport Board is also attended by SHDC officers.
- 1.14** The subject of town centre management and the wider role of both the County and the Districts in the context of 'place making' has been a regular topic at Spalding Town Forum. The matter of town centre access has also been regularly discussed at the Spalding and Holbeach Transport Board. In light of these discussions, and particularly given that a common consensus has been expressed by LCC division members concerning the need to explore future options and strategies, the County Council have agreed to dedicate highways team officer time to support a process looking at the potential options and strategies for town centre access in greater detail.
- 1.15** Whereas no certainty can be provided at this stage that recommendations stemming from any group will be implemented (given the potential for future options to carry with them legal, budgetary and operational implications), the County Council have identified three senior officers to support any group that is formed. There is also an acknowledgement from the County Council that future options and strategies for town centre access cannot be assessed purely from a highways perspective, without taking into consideration views and considerations on desired 'place making' objectives for Spalding town centre. This is a view shared by officers from the district council.
- 1.16** It is therefore proposed that any group established is structured in such a way that it brings together local perspectives on the future ambitions for the town. It is important in this context that the views of town centre users are sought in order to seek to establish a consensus perspective. Decision-making bodies can thereafter consider and potentially implement any agreed policy objectives. The motion tabled at the June meeting of the Spalding Town Forum sought to constitute a sub-group of the town forum itself, but with an express desire for the group to have close ties with key decision-making bodies. It is not proposed that the sub-group will have decision-making powers itself. It is, therefore, proposed that meetings of the sub-group be structured around a series of workshops. In order to promote healthy debate and to seek to involve the wider views of a range of town centre users it is not envisaged that these meetings will take place in public. It is,

nevertheless, fully intended that the options explored and recommendations made are made publicly available as the work of the group progresses.

1.17 Furthermore, it is proposed that the group be supported by an external facilitator who can assist in shaping the sessions that the group will undertake, providing specialist advice, and assist in capturing the views and recommendations emerging from the group. It is also recommended that this facilitation role is performed by an individual with insight into the wider national agenda in respect of town centres and high street regeneration, so as to bring an external and wider perspective on the issue, support with strategic advice, and to act as a 'critical friend' to the process.

1.18 Accordingly, the following broad approach is recommended:

- That an initial meeting of all Spalding ward members is set up and that this meeting is supported by a small number of senior district council officers. Members ought to be provided with large scale plans of the town centre core which clearly identify existing areas of public space. These plans ought to be supplemented with additional plans detailing the wider locale in order to identify areas of highway control and the availability of parking, bus routes and bus stops, key pedestrian routes and the proximity of other areas of shopping and leisure.
- That the purpose of this meeting should be two-fold. A session on identifying an initial consensus view on the physical extent of the boundaries to the town centre core should be followed by a robust discussion on what works, what doesn't and what we could do to improve the contribution made to the town centre by better utilising key areas of publicly available open space. Important areas of open space need to be clearly identified and the discussion ought to centre on how these spaces should be used and by which type or types of users. The focus, throughout, should be on public use rather than outward physical appearance, as the former determines the approach to the latter. At the conclusion of this meeting members will need to agree on which interest groups they want to invite to the follow-up meeting and who ought to be approached as representatives. Thought will also need to be given to seeking a current 'users' view, perhaps by means of a separate focus group or by means of wider public consultation.
- The follow-up meeting will need to focus on firstly eliciting the views of the wider group prior to determining how matters are taken forward. This may involve the need for further discussion groups to meet in order to seek to achieve a consensus view on the direction of travel. The sub-group will need to focus on agreeing a consensus approach to desired outcomes. It would be key at this stage to involve lead officers from key public sector agencies so that advice could be given on how best to achieve the agreed outcomes. This advice will need to focus on the 'art of the possible' and ought to include advice on the strengths and weaknesses of any potential enforcement regime.
- The next stage would be to submit a report to the Council's Cabinet for consideration. This could be an initial report, prior to wider public consultation being undertaken, or a full report with recommendations following public consultation.
- Following on from the full report with recommendations being submitted to and agreed by Cabinet, the recommendations ought then to be presented to the Spalding and Holbeach Transport Board for consideration, action and implementation. At this stage it is not possible to predict timescales. The final report together with its recommendations to the Transport Board ought to include reference to both timescales and any financial implications.

1.19 In respect of district council officer support, it is proposed that this will be provided by Matthew Hogan (Assistant Director for Strategic Growth and Development) and Paul

Jackson (Executive Programme Manager). Furthermore, it is proposed that co-ordination support be provided through the council's Town Centre Improvement Plan Co-ordinator and the council's Democratic Services team.

- 1.20** It is also recommended that a financial allowance be set aside to fund discreet areas of support and activity relating to the above. This will include external support through the proposed facilitator and advisor to the group, alongside external support relating to engagement activity (including necessary ancillary costs associated with such engagement activity). Accordingly, it is anticipated that the activity contained within the report will require the use of a small quantum of council funds. However, funds will only be expended where it is considered necessary and appropriate to support the process.

2. CONCLUSION

- 2.1** Further to a formal motion at the June meeting of the Spalding Town Forum, this report seeks to set out a partnership and approach structure through which options and potential recommendations can be explored for the matter of access to public space in Spalding town centre, with a view to providing a framework through which recommendations and options can be presented to key decision-making groups with influence over Spalding Town Centre (namely SHDC's Cabinet, and LCC's Spalding and Holbeach Transport Board).

3. EXPECTED BENEFITS TO THE PARTNERSHIP

- 3.1** The proposals contained within this report are design to support both South Holland District Council's and the wider SECLP's ambitions to support its market towns.

4. IMPLICATIONS

4.1 SOUTH AND EAST LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCILS PARTNERSHIP

- 5.1.1** There are no specific implications for the SECLP as an entity identified as part of this report.

5.2 CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 5.2.1** The recommendations contained within this report are design to support both South Holland District Council's and the wider SECLP's ambitions to support its market towns

5.3 STAFFING

- 5.3.1** The recommendations within this report will be supported by both District and County Council officers. These implications are captured within the report.

5.4 CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.4.1** As the proposal does not involve creating a group with formal decision making powers. Instead, the group will focus on preparing options and recommendations for decision making groups, alongside presenting recommendations to Spalding Town Forum. The group will be a sub-group with a 'task and finish' remit, as opposed to a formal sub-committee.

5.5 DATA PROTECTION

- 5.5.1** None identified

5.6 FINANCIAL

- 5.6.1** It is anticipated that the activity contained within the report will require the use of a small quantum of council funds. This includes spend on discreet areas of support and activity

relating to the report recommendations, including the services of an external advisor and facilitator. It is proposed that funds will only be expended where it is considered necessary and appropriate to support the process.

5.7 STAKEHOLDER / CONSULTATION / TIMESCALES

5.7.1 The report recommendations will involve various stakeholders, including the potential for future public consultation if options and recommendations are successfully developed further.

5.8 REPUTATION

5.8.1 It is anticipated that the work of the subgroup and any resulting recommendations will generate wider public interest. To assist in managing this, both internal communications support, coupled with external specialist communications advice, may be sought to assist with ensuring that wider public and stakeholder interest is well-coordinated for the benefit of both residents, businesses and the core stakeholders involved.

5.9 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY/ HUMAN RIGHTS/ SAFEGUARDING

5.9.1 The matters of equality and diversity will need to be considered carefully in the activity of the proposed sub-group and any engagement activity that stems from the work of the group.

5.10 HEALTH AND WELL BEING

5.10.1 Whereas the report recommendations themselves do not carry any direct health and wellbeing implications, it is intended that the work of the subgroup created will give consideration to health and wellbeing considerations when formulating recommendations to be put forward to key decision-making bodies.

5.11 CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

5.11.1 Whereas the report recommendations themselves do not carry any direct climate change and environmental implications, it is intended that the work of the subgroup created will give consideration to climate change and environmental considerations when formulating recommendations to be put forward to key decision-making bodies.

5.12 LINKS TO 12 MISSIONS IN THE LEVELLING UP WHITE PAPER

MISSIONS	
This paper contributes to the follow Missions outlined in the Government’s Levelling Up White paper.	
Pride in Place	By 2030, pride in place, such as people’s satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between the top performing and other areas closing.

6. ACRONYMS

6.1 LCC – Lincolnshire County Council

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Spalding Town Centre – Current Access Restrictions

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY OF THIS REPORT

(If none then insert the wording 'A report on this item has not been previously considered by a Council body'. Also delete the below text/boxes.)

Name of body

Date

Name of body	Date

REPORT APPROVAL

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