Individual Decisions

The attached reports will be taken as
Individual Portfolio Member Decisions on:

19th February 2007

Individual Decision

Title of Report:	**Newbury Town Centre Pedestrian Priority Area including Wharf Street – Prohibition of Motor Vehicles and One Way Traffic**
Report to be considered by:	**Councillor Keith Chopping** **on:** 19th February 2007
Forward Plan Ref:	ID1363

Purpose of Report:

To inform the Executive Member for Planning and Highways of the responses received during the statutory and public consultation on revised proposals, associated with the prohibition of motor vehicles and one way traffic restrictions within the Newbury Town Centre Pedestrian Priority Area, including Wharf Street, and to seek approval of officer recommendations.

Recommended Action:

That the Executive Member resolves to approve the recommendations as set out in section 7 of this report.

Reason for decision to be taken: To enable the Traffic Regulation Order that effects the prohibition of motor vehicles and one-way traffic restrictions in the Newbury Town Centre Pedestrian Priority Area to be modified to include Wharf Street and progressed to implementation.

List of other options considered: Not to modify the Traffic Regulation Order to prohibit motor vehicles from Wharf Street.

Key background documentation:

- Newbury 2025 – A Vision for Newbury Town Centre
- Executive Committee Report EX1032
- A Market Place for All – Consultation Survey Results Nov 05
- Consultation plan Nos. TM81266/003 and TM81266/006
- Newbury and Thatcham SATURN Traffic Model: Assessment of Wharf Street closure and removal of pedestrianisation
- Recommendations of the Special Newbury Town Centre Task Group on 5th February 2007.

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Supporting Information

1. Background

1.1 The Council approved 'Newbury Vision 2025' in October 2003. This document set out the future Vision for Newbury Town Centre and included a detailed Action Plan for the implementation of a range of initiatives and projects. Integral to Newbury Vision 2025 are a number of phased environmental enhancement projects some of which have already been completed. The most recent of these Environmental Enhancement projects were Northbrook Street, substantially completed in July 2006, and the Market Place, substantially completed in November 2006.

1.2 In accordance with the environmental enhancement scheme design, the roads within the proposed pedestrian priority area have been re-laid with a variety of decorative road surfaces and with all kerbs being at grade to create a shared level surface for vehicles and pedestrians.

1.3 A public consultation, 'A Market Place for All', was undertaken during May 2005 seeking views on the future use of Market Place. The consultation letter indicated that once the scheme was complete, Market Place would be a pedestrian-focused area with the restriction currently in operation on Northbrook Street and Bartholomew Street between 10am and 6pm being extended to include Market Place and part of Wharf Street.

1.4 Following the conclusion of the public consultation exercise in May 2005 a petition containing 1,300 signatures was received opposing the potential closure of Wharf Street to traffic. The petition organiser has continued to add signatures to this petition and has subsequently re-submitted it to the Council for further consideration.

1.5 Executive Committee Report EX1032 presented the results of the consultation, part of which indicated that:

(1) 76% of the respondents were either in favour of, or strongly in favour of, the proposed scheme as a whole.

(2) 75% of people agreed that the pedestrian priority scheme between 10am and 6pm should be extended to the Market Place.

(3) 64% of people were not in favour of the Market Place being retained as a short term car park area.

(4) Responses from businesses in the area related largely to operational issues rather than indicating a preference for the scheme. The majority of businesses outside of the area were in favour of the scheme.

1.6 In conjunction with the proposal to prohibit motor vehicles from the environmentally enhanced area during the period 10am and 6pm and retain the existing one way traffic system, it was proposed under separate Traffic Regulation Orders to prohibit waiting 'At Any Time', prohibit loading between 10am and 6pm and also extend the existing 20mph Zone throughout the area. These latter Traffic Regulation Orders are now in force.

1.7 Statutory consultation and advertisement on the prohibition of motor vehicles (except buses) and except taxis from Wharf Street, and one way traffic was undertaken between 12th October and 2nd November 2006 at the same time as the statutory consultation on the other Traffic Regulation Orders mentioned in 1.6 above.

2. Responses to statutory consultation

2.1 At the end of the statutory consultation and advertisement period a total of 7 responses had been received. Whilst the resubmitted petition, in excess of 2,000 signatures, against the proposed closure of Wharf Street was not received in direct response to this statutory consultation, it has been included for consideration in this report.

2.2 Of the 7 responses, Newbury Town Council made a general comment but did not indicate for or against the proposals. 2 responses were duplicate letters from the same individual sent from both their business and residential address. This is also the petition organiser. 3 other responses were from 2 businesses on Wharf Street who also sent a letter from their shared residential address replicating their objection to the proposal.

2.3 The original 1,300 signature petition was presented to the Executive on 10th November 2005 as part of EX1032. At that time the Executive recommended that a decision be referred back to the Newbury Town Centre Task Group for consideration.

2.4 A summary of all the comments received to the statutory consultation, together with officer comments, is provided in Appendix A to this report.

3. Traffic Modelling Work

3.1 The Council has employed a consultant to produce a SATURN Traffic Model, which covers Newbury and Thatcham. The model, which was fully validated in December 2006, consists of a morning peak model (8am - 9am) and an evening peak model (5pm – 6pm).

3.2 In order to assess the effect of the closure of Wharf Street on traffic moving around Newbury the Council's Consultant, WSP, has carried out a number of runs using the evening peak model. The aims of the assessment were to investigate the following areas:

- The effect of closing Wharf Street to all traffic except taxis during the pm peak (5pm – 6pm).
- The effect of reducing pedestrianisation times to 10am to 5pm, thereby opening Bartholomew Street, Bridge Street and Northbrook Street to traffic in the pm peak.
- An assessment of the peak traffic flows to identify the worst off peak hour to ascertain that there is not a worst case situation than the pm peak with higher traffic flows in the town with Wharf Street closed. The am peak (8am-9am) has not been considered because Wharf Street would always be open until 10:00am when the pedestrianisation period begins.

3.3 A report on the assessment undertaken by the Council's Consultants is available as a background paper to this report. As part of this work consideration was given to the traffic light timings at the Market Place/Bear Lane/Cheap Street junction. One option used existing timings as there are also pedestrian crossings at the junction. An alternative option, which retains a pedestrian phase, was tested with reduced green time from Market Place southbound and increased east-west green time. This latter option reflects the reduced traffic flows through Market Place.

3.4 The details of the traffic flow changes and journey time impacts are presented in detail in the Assessment Report. A summary of these impacts is presented in tabular form in Appendix B to this report.

3.5 The Assessment Report makes the following conclusions for the three aims set out in Section 3.2 above.

3.5.1 Closure of Wharf Street appears to have no major impact on the adjacent streets in terms of journey time or junction operation. Although there is an increase in traffic on both Wharf Road and Bear Lane (westbound), this is within capacity and there appears to be no knock-on effects on outer lying areas of the network.

3.5.2 Optimising signals to create maximum green time for east-west movements at the Bear Lane/Cheap Street/Market Place junction, whilst improving east-west capacity here, is in close proximity to the junctions of Bear Lane/A339 and the Kennet Centre/Council office/Market Street, which are both operating at capacity and so restrict and prevent any large-scale increases in additional through traffic. Some rerouting of traffic exiting Wharf Road occurs, but this is within local road capacities and the effects are not far-reaching. However, one cannot discount the possibility of queuing when exiting Wharf Road if drivers prefer to queue for an opportunity to turn left into Bear Lane contrary to the SATURN model predictions.

3.5.3 Purely in terms of traffic flows and journey operating efficiency, the proposal to end pedestrianisation at the earlier time of 5pm appears to be workable with little or no adverse effects. Indeed, for those residing or working in the central, central-western and central-southern area, there are advantages in being able to avoid lengthy delays at the Robin Hood roundabout.

3.5.4 Journey times for through-traffic which could be considered most likely to divert according to proximity to the newly opened town centre routes (to and from the A343 and A4 Western Avenue) are severely worsened when diverted to the town centre compared with remaining on the A339 via the Robin Hood roundabout. Indeed, in almost all cases the journey time via the A339 is actually improved due to reduced traffic volumes created by other traffic diverting to the town centre routes, creating an incentive to remain on the A339. The same is also true for certain town centre movements (for example Market Street to Shaw Hill) and it is only locally based origin and destination zones which benefit from the alternative routes.

3.5.5 However, there are other issues which also need to be taken into consideration such as safety aspects. Pedestrians currently using the town centre would have become accustomed to a traffic-free area, and would not immediately be aware of the dangers of traffic if the restrictions are lifted at 5pm, and may be considered to be at a higher risk of accident compared with areas in which they are accustomed to expecting traffic.

3.5.6 A further consideration is the impact that the opening of Northbrook Street will have on the character of the town centre shopping area. There would be approximately 330 vehicles per hour as a combined total for both directions on Bridge Street, changing it substantially from a pedestrian dominated area to one for traffic. This change needs to be considered in terms of the aspirations set out in the Newbury Vision and the Newbury Movement Study as well as that of pure highway operation.

3.5.7 Interpeak flows were assessed in comparison with pm flows for traffic travelling southbound over Park Way bridge into Wharf Road, but were found to be lower than those in the pm peak period. Hence the worse case scenario with regard to traffic volume is the pm peak and any effects from closing Wharf Street could be expected to be smaller in the Interpeak period.

4. Officer comments on the Consultant's conclusions

4.1 Since the town centre returned to normal operation, with the traffic lights removed from Park Way bridge and buses back in Northbrook Street traffic flows have been well managed with no particular congestion problems over and above what would be expected at peak times. This has coincided with Wharf Street remaining closed, backed up by a temporary prohibition of driving order, which runs out

on 4th March 2007. The works carried out using the SATURN model therefore bears out what has actually occurred on the highway network.

4.2 There have been some problems of drivers ignoring the prohibition of motor vehicles (except taxis) signs and still driving through Wharf Street. These problems could be overcome by providing rising bollards in Wharf Street and a capital bid has therefore been put forward to obtain the necessary funds to achieve this in the new financial year. If the bid is approved it is envisaged that these rising bollards would be installed as soon as possible after 1st April 2007.

4.3 It might be argued that the road safety risks raised by the Consultant regarding the lifting of the restrictions at 5pm rather than 6pm are no higher than those that would exist before 10am in the morning. It is considered however that the risks are lower in the morning because the traffic is already present in the pedestrianised areas when workers and shoppers start to use the areas and they are therefore likely to exercise more care. In the evening pedestrians will be used to a traffic free environment (except for buses or taxis in Wharf Street) when all traffic re-enters the pedestrian areas. Consequently the risks will be greater.

4.4 Whatever the ultimate decision on bringing forward the end of the prohibition of driving period from 6pm to 5pm it will not be possible for this to be changed on 4th March 2007 when the temporary prohibition of driving order runs out. The officer's view is that the risks of bringing the time for the lifting of restrictions forward to 5pm are too great and that this is not recommended, particularly given that there are no significant traffic flow or journey time benefits (see Section 3.5.4). There are consequently strong grounds for leaving the pedestrianisation period as it is at present (i.e. 10am to 6pm).

4.5 This could be reviewed as we move towards the start of the Park Way re-development when it is likely that through traffic movements on this route will be disrupted in order to facilitate the construction works. The SATURN model could be used nearer that time to assess various Park Way closure or redirection of traffic options and whether ending restrictions at 5pm would help to overcome associated congestion problems. Based on the work already undertaken however, this is doubtful and the road safety risks previously discussed would still be an important factor that would require very careful consideration before any decision to revert to 5pm could be taken.

5. Consideration by the Newbury Town Centre Task Group

5.1 The Chairman of the Newbury Retail Association was given the opportunity to present his views on the proposal to keep Wharf Street closed to all traffic except taxis during pedestrianisation hours at a special meeting of the Task Group on 5th February 2007. He put forward the case that Wharf Street should be opened to all traffic until other traffic congestion problems in the town had first been removed. The difficulty with this approach is that it is inevitable that there will always be congestion problems at peak times. The findings of the assessment work on the effect of closure of Wharf Street undertaken using the Newbury and Thatcham SATURN model were subsequently presented to the Task Group. A draft copy of this ID report was also considered at the meeting and the unanimous decision of the Members present was that the restrictions, as advertised, should be supported (ie Wharf Street should remain closed during pedestrianisation hours and the pedestrianisation period should be retained as 10am to 6pm as it is at present).

6. Conclusion

6.1 There has been extensive public consultation on the proposals for Newbury Town Centre and the Environmentally Enhanced Area in particular. The Statutory Consultation on the prohibition of motor vehicles (except buses) and except taxis from Wharf Street, and one way traffic has resulted in a low response, excluding the petition, which was not received in direct response to this statutory

consultation and pre-dated the detailed assessment work undertaken using the Newbury and Thatcham SATURN model. It is considered that the majority of residents or interested parties are satisfied with the proposals.

7. Recommendations

7.1 It is recommended that the proposed restrictions be introduced as advertised.

7.2 That the respondents and the petition organiser be informed accordingly.

7.3 That the pedestrianisation period be retained as 10am to 6pm as it is at present.

Appendices

Appendix A – Summary of the responses received during the statutory and public consultation, with officer comments.

Appendix B – Summary of traffic flow changes and journey time impacts.

Implications

Policy:	Vision 2025 provides the policy context for this scheme. The consultation was in accordance with the Council's consultation procedures.
Financial:	The implementation of the physical works has been funded from the approved Capital Programme. The costs of the Statutory Consultation and Traffic Regulation Order processes are funded from the Capital Programme.
Personnel:	None arising from this report.
Legal:	The sealing of the Traffic Regulation Order will be undertaken by Legal Services.
Environmental:	An urban design consultant has been used to prepare the design for the Scheme. There has been extensive consultation both within and outside the Council. The emphasis has been in preparing a high quality scheme that reflects the key role that the Market Place has within Newbury Town Centre. The proposals reduce the level of traffic able to use the Environmentally Enhanced area of Newbury town centre and consequently there are environmental benefits for residents, businesses, workers, shoppers and visitors to the area.
Equalities:	The 'A Market Place for All' consultation targeted specific groups, such as the Disability Alliance, to elicit reactions to the proposed scheme.
Partnering:	The Council is working in partnership with the Police to ensure that the project operates as it should.
Property:	None arising from this report.
Risk Management:	None arising from this report.
Community Safety:	None arising from this report.

Consultation Responses

Members:

Leader of Council:	Councillor Graham Jones supports the recommended action.
Overview & Scrutiny Commission Chairman:	Councillor Jeff Brooks was away on business for the period between the Task Group meeting and the deadline date for sending out this report. However any comments received will be verbally reported when the ID is made.
Policy Development Commission Chairman:	Not applicable.
Ward Members:	Councillor Roger Hunneman supports the recommended action.
Opposition Spokesperson:	Councillor Keith Woodhams supports the recommendation but wishes additional signs to be provided to advise drivers of the closure, particularly when rising bollards are installed in Wharf Street.
Local Stakeholders:	Have been consulted as part of the public and statutory consultation process. Officers and Members on the Newbury Town Centre Task Group have been consulted and support the recommendations.
Officers Consulted:	Alex Drysdale, Terry Richards, Jon Winstanley, Mark Edwards and officers present at the Special Task Group meeting on 5th February.
Trade Union:	Not applicable.

Is this item subject to call-in.	Yes: ☐	No: ☒

If not subject to call-in please put a cross in the appropriate box:

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval	☐
Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council	☐
Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position	☒
Considered or reviewed by OSC or associated Task Groups within preceding 6 months	☒
Item is Urgent Key Decision	☐

Summary of comments to Statutory Consultation

Appendix A

No. of Comments	Comments	Officer Comments
2000+	Re-submitted petition containing over 2,000 signatures stating. "I the undersigned believe that regardless of what form the Market Place scheme takes the Wharf St is a very important link and should remain open to vehicular traffic."	The Executive Committee meeting in November 2005 recommended that a decision on whether to close Wharf Street to traffic between the hours of 10am and 6pm (except to taxis and emergency vehicles) be deferred subject to an evaluation of the traffic impact of closing Wharf Street during the construction period; and that this matter be referred back to the Newbury Town Centre Task Group for consideration.
2 (from the same person)	Wharf Street is a vital route for the economy of the town.	The proposal will enable traffic to access Wharf Street and Market Place outside of the core shopping hours, (10am – 6pm), and this route will therefore remain open during the morning peak period for through traffic . Businesses will be served in the same manner as Bartholomew Street and Northbrook Street businesses.
2	Comment on traffic congestion while works were underway on Market Place and on implementation of the proposal.	It is inevitable that there would be some disruption during construction, however this was addressed by the introduction of temporary diversion routes. Once bus movement is returned to Northbook Street / Bartholomew Street and Park Way Bridge returns to normal operation, traffic congestion in the area will be reduced.
2	Comment on the effect of the pedestrianisation on their businesses in Wharf Street as there has been a noticeable downturn in business while works on the Market Place have been underway.	Due to the nature of Wharf Street and parking restrictions previously in place, any customers to these businesses have had to use the nearby car parks. This will still be the case. Vehicles wishing to service these businesses would be able to access Wharf Street prior to 10am.

1	There are no disabled facilities provided for persons wishing to access the businesses in the enhanced Market Place. The objector is a disabled driver who indicated that they are unable to use a wheelchair.	The proposed scheme does enable vehicles to access Market Place prior to 10am and disabled drivers will be able to park in the areas subject to a prohibition of waiting 'At Any Time' until 10am when the prohibition of loading comes into force that would prevent this exemption from the waiting restrictions. Regarding facilities for disabled drivers, there are parking bays at the north end of Northbrook Street and within the Wharf, Northbrook and Kennet Centre car parks. The Northbrook car park also contains a shopmobility centre provides motorised wheelchairs.
1	Response from Newbury Town Council: "It is the view of this Council that by sterilising the Market Place it will make it extremely difficult for Local Businesses to trade effectively."	The comment does not indicate an objection to the proposals. There has been extensive consultation on the proposed scheme, including with Newbury Town Council and local businesses and it is considered that the environmental enhancement scheme will provide an attractive area for shoppers and Local Businesses. Restricting traffic movement will ensure the safety of pedestrians visiting these businesses. Other businesses in the pedestrianised areas of Northbrook Street and Bartholomew Street are able to trade effectively.

Table 1: Journey Times from London Road to Bartholomew Street

Route	Journey Time (seconds)		
	Base	Wharf Street Closed	Wharf Street Closed & Signals Optimised
London Road to Bartholomew Street via Wharf Street	297 sec	N/A	N/A
London Road to Bartholomew Street via Wharf Road	331 sec	317 sec	305 sec
London Road to Bear Lane roundabout via A339	308 sec	355 sec	355 sec
London Road to Bear Lane roundabout via Wharf Road	311 sec	409 sec	309 sec

Table 2: Summary of traffic flow changes in streets affected by closure of Wharf Street

	Traffic Flow (Vehicles per hour)		
	Base	Wharf Street Closed	Wharf Street Closed & Signals Optimised
Wharf Road (SB)	431	635 (+204)	635 (+204)
Bear Lane (EB) approaching Wharf Road mini-roundabout	428	431 (+3)	493 (+62)
Bear Lane (EB) approaching A339 roundabout	595	621 (+26)	602 (+7)
Bear Lane (WB) west of Wharf Road mini-roundabout	604	778 (+174)	875 (+271)
Bear Lane (WB) exiting A339 roundabout	464	453 (-11)	469 (+5)
Cheap Street (NB)	429	432 (+3)	494 (+65)
Cheap Street (SB)	821	781 (-40)	878 (+57)

Table 3: Journey Times with re-routing when pedestrianisation ends at 5pm

Route	Journey Time (seconds)		
	Base	No pedestrianisation	
	Route via Robin Hood roundabout	Route via Robin Hood roundabout	Route via Town Centre
Kennet Centre to M4	476 sec	492 sec	614 sec
Kennet Centre to Shaw Road	342 sec	347 sec	424 sec
A343 to Western Avenue / Oxford Road (NB)	302 sec	279 sec	343 sec
A4 Western Avenue to A343 (SB)	487 sec	465 sec	525 sec