

<u>Committee and date</u>	<u>Item</u>
Cabinet	
21st July 2021	

SHREWSBURY HIGH STREET – PEDESTRIANISATION: A PROPOSED WAY FORWARD

Responsible Officer Steve Brown

Email: steven.brown@shropshire.gov.uk

Tel: 01743257802

1 Summary

- 1.1 The significant impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the local and national economy is well documented. It is widely accepted that COVID-19 has accelerated change that was already taking place across town centres. This has included a further shift towards online retail, increased working from home, and consequential impacts on public car parking and public transport. These issues combine, underlining the need for town centres to prioritise and transform the visitor experience as part of their recovery.
- 1.2 The High Streets Task Force message reinforces this approach. In its recent publications sets out a challenge of “.... to support place leaders to make the best decisions on the future of their high streets and how they best serve their communities, and to build long-term capacity for this local transformation. We have a vision for town centres and high streets as the heart of their communities, with a unique sense of place and a strong identity. Whilst expert advice can help to solve some complex and technical problems facing high streets; the vision and capacity for change is generated from local leaders, businesses, people and organisations that care about their location.....”
- 1.3 In June 2020 social distancing measures were introduced formal guidance to local authorities relating to social distancing (reopening our high streets safely) following central government guidance for Shrewsbury (and other towns across Shropshire). A Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO) was introduced via the established process to enable the closure and pedestrianisation of the high street for the purpose of social distancing. To encourage a return to town centres and businesses in a safe and socially distanced manner. Over the past year, through a series of different restrictions and lockdowns, footfall measured in Shrewsbury has shown the town to be performing comparatively well to other town centres. The pavement licence scheme introduced in Summer 2020 has been embraced by local businesses and a café culture has flourished particularly during the summer months and provides an enhanced experience to visitors of the town but also additional trading space to hospitality-based businesses. It is worth noting that Shrewsbury has performed

comparatively less well during periods of lockdown when only essential retail was open in the town centre.

- 1.4 Central Government has indicated that social distancing measures and the associated regulations will be withdrawn, and social distancing measures will be removed on July 19th, 2021. In Shrewsbury the measures have been met with general approval and support for the high street. Indeed, there is a concern that the removal of the current social distancing on High Street – which in effect is pedestrianisation - would impact negatively on the vibrancy and economic bounce back of the town. Surveys and discussions with stakeholder groups have identified views and an indication of support and concern from residential areas , but *no* formal or tailored consultation has been brought forward across all groups, stakeholders and members of the public, and this report seeks approval to consult formally on this issue to determine a way forward.
- 1.5 This report sets out an approach for approval by Cabinet to implement a new Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) to adjust from social distancing to an experiment for high street (particularly in allowing buses, taxis, cycles to access to the high street during Monday to Friday to better support access given previously during the closure periods all traffic was prevented). Further, for town walls to ascertain the support for the formalisation of existing measures and/or a Low Traffic Zone. The closure times would remain unchanged, and on weekends all traffic would be prohibited during the closure period. Stakeholders and general public are to be engaged via a consultation exercise and thereafter appropriate approval to be sought for the implementation, or not, of measures as informed by the outcomes of the consultation. The new ETRO will therefore replace previous measures from July 19th. The consultation planned for the late Autumn will consider all impacts of the measures and will assist the Council and its partners to implement the optimum longer-term arrangements for the town centre, its businesses, residents and stakeholders. Shropshire Council would be the lead body as the highway authority, but this is very much a partnership approach as evidenced in this report.
- 1.6 As the Highways Authority, Shropshire Council has the necessary legal powers to implement pedestrianisation via traffic orders, and to facilitate this working with partners to enable changes and interventions generated from wide discussion and engagement including:
 - Shrewsbury Big Town Plan Partnership (BTP)
 - Shrewsbury Recovery Taskforce
 - Shrewsbury Town Council
 - Shrewsbury Business Improvement District (BID)
 - Shropshire Council (Transport, Economic Growth, Passenger Transport, Trading Standards and Licensing)
 - Arriva Buses
 - Town Walls residents and stakeholders including schools.

- 1.7 Transitioning from social distancing to supporting the town's wider economic recovery, aligns with advice, guidance and messages from the High Streets Task Force who are encouraging town centres across the country to consider how to support and provide for sustainability of the high street. Additionally, there are potential positive equality, health and well-being impacts for groups in the community as a result of reduced road traffic as well as from more accessible pedestrian spaces, encouraging certain groupings to venture out, particularly those with caring responsibilities and those who consider themselves to be vulnerable. There are however also concerns, especially in residential areas, that should also be considered.
- 1.8 This measure could contribute towards improving the health and well-being of Shropshire's residents by facilitating social distancing requirements in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, improving actual safety by reducing the likelihood of road traffic accidents, improving perceived safety, and by encouraging the increased use of more sustainable and active modes of transport that can help people to become fitter and healthier.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 **Cabinet is requested to agree that following the end of social distancing measures on 19 July an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order be confirmed closing Shrewsbury High Street to traffic Monday to Sunday 11-4 but allowing buses and taxis to use the road Monday- Friday and for this arrangement to continue until after the consultation referred to in recommendation 2.2 has been completed and a further report has been considered by Cabinet to longer term arrangements for High Street.**
- 2.2 **Cabinet is requested to approve an 8-week public consultation to be initiated in the late Autumn led by Shropshire Council and its key partners to consider proposals for pedestrianisation of the High Street between:**
- **Monday to Friday 11am – 4pm for all vehicles except buses, taxis, and cyclists to be prevented from accessing the High Street.**
 - **Saturday/Sunday 11am – 4pm all vehicles to be prevented from accessing the High Street**
 - **to reduce or restrict through traffic on Town Walls via the formalisation of existing temporary measures on Town Walls and or the implementation of a Low Traffic Zone.**
- 2.3 **Cabinet is requested to delegate authority to the Executive Director of Place, and Head of Communications / Head of Transport and Environment (working with partners) to finalise the consultation plan with the Council's key partners.**
- 2.4 **Cabinet to receive a further detailed report on the outcomes of the public consultation.**

3 Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

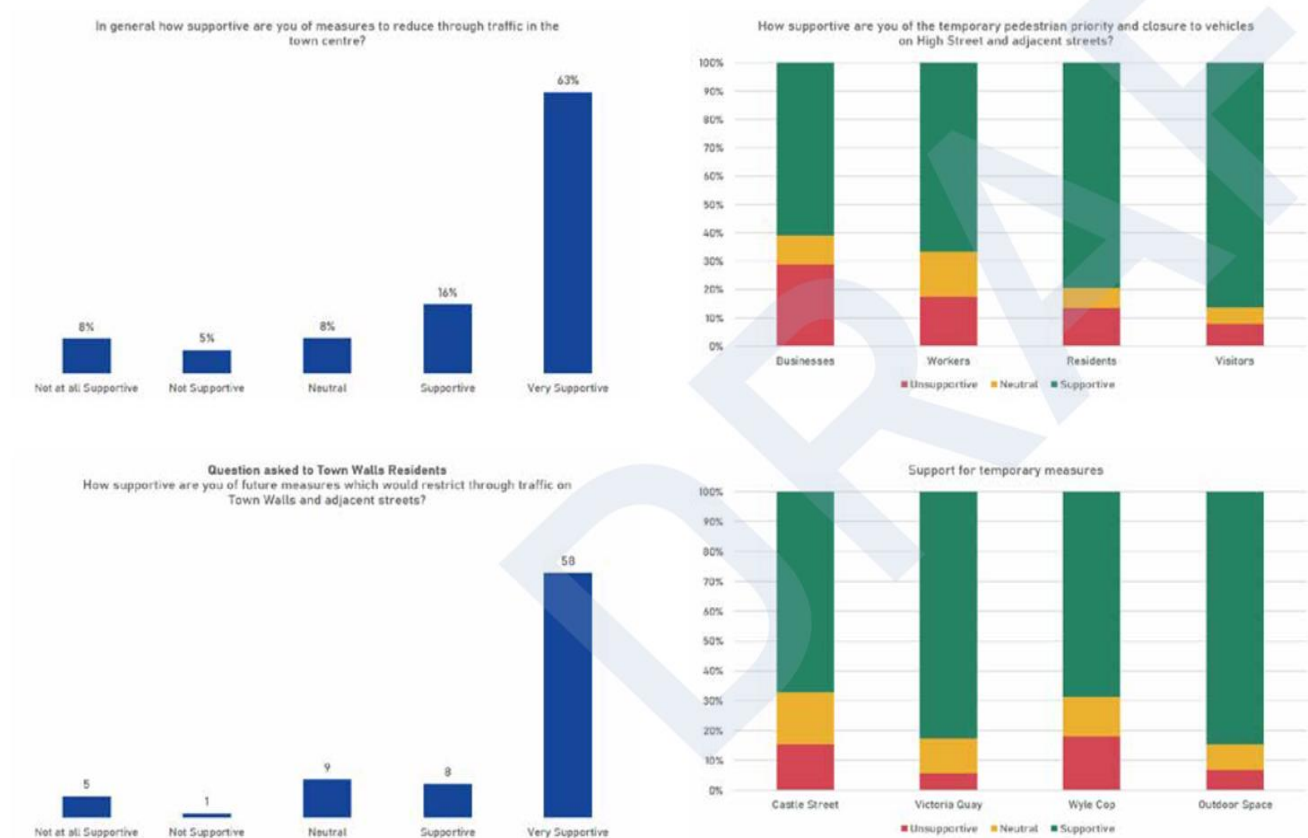
- 3.1 It is recognised that formalising pedestrianisation of High Street would be a significant and material change to how the town operates and functions. Surveys carried out over the past year indicate there is some support from businesses and the public to retain some of the measures introduced through social distancing (see below Figure 1). The recent Big Town Plan consultation further underlined the consensus for reducing through traffic in the town centre. The Town Council and Business Improvement District are supportive of the proposed experimental order and formal consultation in the Autumn.
- 3.2 There are risks with a project such as this, the risk to a degree are mitigated due to:
- A partnership approach as detailed in this report
 - Formal meeting of Shrewsbury Recovery Group (numerous agencies and partners participate).
 - Meetings with representative groups and residents
 - Shrewsbury Bid - will utilise their networks to identify any issues or concerns.
 - Measures have been in place for the previous year.
 - Mitigations for town walls traffic are in place and agreed.
 - There is enough confidence and data to suggest that the initiative would be supported.
- 3.3 There will however, be risks of any challenge, resident or business concern and direct access to the town centre specifically;
- Possible reputational issues - concerns raised in the local media
 - Managing access by vehicles to the town centre Monday - Friday with a mix of pedestrianisation.
 - Not all business may be supportive of the proposal and issues may be raised.
- 3.4 The conclusion from the Equality and Social Inclusion Impact Assessments (ESIIA) was that a range of measures to facilitate pedestrianisation, with access for buses and taxis, would support certain users or demographics through improved access and perceptions of safety e.g. for families with young children. The improvements in air quality arising from a traffic free zone would be met with likely support from pedestrians and cyclists, particularly people with caring responsibilities for families and adults with learning disabilities, older people and people with physical disabilities including respiratory illnesses. There would be a loss of some disabled spaces and loss of weekend bus stops. There would also be a need to manage the impacts on Town Walls. It is key to note that the proposals are only until October 2021 and subject to public consultation for review, amendment or withdrawal.

- 3.5 As there has not been a specifically designed and formal consultation of all stakeholders this report seeks approval to instigate such a consultation to allow engagement with all users, groups and members of the public to collect evidence to inform the Council as the Highways Authority in formalising a proposal.

Figure 1

VISITOR/TRADER/RESIDENT SURVEY –

As part of this review, there has been a comprehensive survey of businesses, residents and visitors which received over 1300 responses. Overall there has been very strong support for the measures that have been put in place and for future interventions to reduce through traffic. Full results of the survey can be found as an appendix.





Visitors and shoppers enjoying a traffic free environment on High Street

4 Climate Change

- 4.1 Energy and fuel consumption can increase where an intervention results in an increase in stationary traffic and there could also be a potential adverse impact on air quality. The extent to which queuing or stationary traffic is generated as a result of these interventions will need to be monitored and the impact assessed, reducing traffic in the town centre and the possibility of a low traffic zone would support this requirement.
- 4.2 Renewable energy generation. The decision arising from this report is not considered to create opportunities to generate renewable energy.
- 4.3 Carbon offsetting or mitigation. These measures are being introduced on a temporary basis for an absolute minimum limited period, no carbon off setting or mitigation has therefore been identified.
- 4.4 Climate Change adaptation. These mitigation measures could contribute towards improving the health and well-being of Shropshire's residents by facilitating pedestrianisation as a result of improving perceived safety. The measures may also increase use of more sustainable and active modes of transport that can help people to become fitter and healthier.

5 Financial Implications

- 5.1 To transition from social distancing (of which other financial provision has met these costs in full) to continuing with closures from the summer as soon as social distancing requirements are withdrawn (which will be confirmed by central Government) until the 31st of October 2021 will incur a revenue cost for ongoing traffic management and provision of signs, and a requirement to retain the measures as required on Town Walls until October 31st October 2021. These revenue pressure costs are set out below and will be an ongoing pressure for service budgets to absorb.

£49,000 (approx.)	For provision of traffic management barriers, traffic cones, signs and measures on town walls reduction assuming late July until October 31 st , 2021.
£8,000	New traffic information signs to provide information and background
£1000	Legal costs for Orders and miscellaneous
£0	Consultation material - posters, leaflets, social media, marketing - Partnership cost - no direct charge
£58,000	total

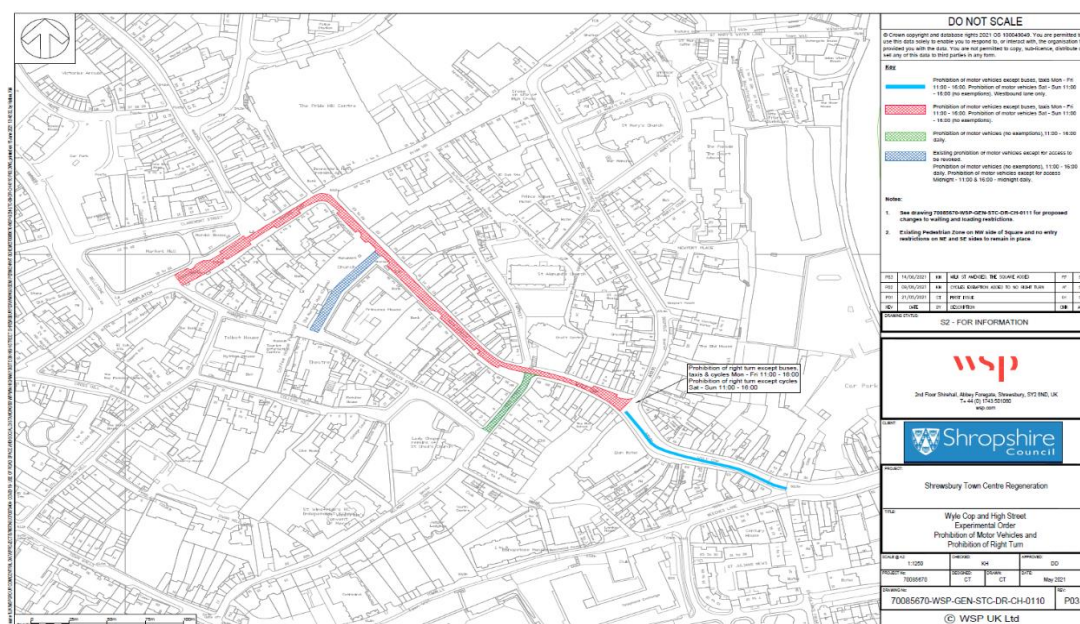
- 5.2 The purpose of this report is to seek approval to formally consult on pedestrianisation via the wider town centre and economic recovery with partners (Shrewsbury BID, Big Town Plan Board, Town Council, etc.), town centre users and businesses, organisations and wider members of the public to determine whether permanent interventions would be beneficial or not, and if so the nature and most appropriate locations for any such interventions. Improvements to the public realm may also be considered such as barriers, planters, bollards, changes to layout of key junctions or access points, footways and presentation of our key access points to the town, new signs, resurfacing etc. Subject to approval and the consultation on the principle of pedestrianisation confirming further measures to be beneficial, then the capital costs of designing and implementing measures to a standard suitable for such an historic and heritage environment would require an approximate budget of £850,000.
- 5.3 Interrelated projects such as the Big Town Plan and Shrewsbury Integrated Transport Package, and the potential Levelling Up Bid (LUF) could also provide opportunities to bring forward funding for this work and attract external funding to support any final package of interventions rather than a direct capital cost. Provision for this budget has been agreed for the 2022/23 financial year capital programme subject to approval.
- 5.4 Should the recommendations in this report be approved final detailed costs of implementation can be derived, based on a menu of costed options for consideration informed by the consultation. The pace of any proposed intervention and timescales would also be crucial to ensure that works can be coordinated with other key projects and as funding opportunities present.
- ## 6 Context
- 6.1 During the pandemic social distancing and supporting our high streets whilst encouraging safe use and maintaining economic sustainability of our towns centres was a key issue. External funds were attracted to support this initiative, specifically Reopening Our High Streets Safely Fund (RoSF) which brought forward pedestrianisation some 18 months ago.
- 6.2 Following implementation of the High Street closure and pedestrianisation by a Temporary Traffic Order (TTRO) it became apparent that there is support for some

of the measures to continue as the town moves from social distancing to a decision to support the town and its longer-term economic recovery. (Shropshire Star 21.6.21 <https://www.shropshirestar.com/news/transport/2021/06/21/plenty-of-support-for-keeping-shrewsbury-high-street-traffic-free/>) and numerous partners have been working with Shropshire Council such as:

- Shrewsbury Big Town Plan (BTP)
- Shrewsbury Business Improvement District (BID)
- Shropshire Council (Transport, Economic Growth, Passenger Transport, Trading Standards and Licensing)
- Shrewsbury Town Centre Recovery Group
- Arriva Busses
- Town Walls residents and stakeholders (local schools, business)
- Shrewsbury Town Council Clerk

6.3 Following discussions and previous experience of social distancing over the last 18 months a package of measures has been identified, widely discussed and with media coverage, to attempt to balance the competing issues in the town arising from a proposed 11am - 4pm closure for Monday to Friday (access for buses, taxis and cyclists only this is a change to the previous social distancing measures that prevented vehicles during the closure period) and Saturday/Sunday 11am – 4pm closure – no vehicles. These revised proposals from the existing measures support the aspirations of the Big Town Plan in reducing through traffic and creating a more pedestrian friendly environment and to a degree be the beginning of delivery on a wider Shrewsbury agenda. The extent of the closures is demonstrated below in paragraph 6.4.

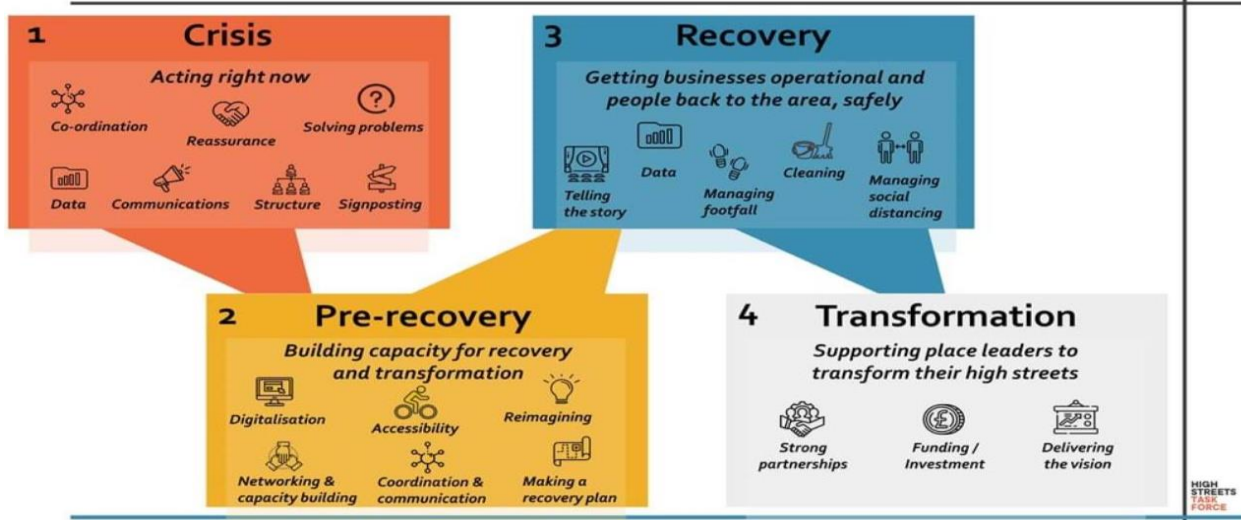
6.4 The extent of the proposed closure is identified on the schematic below.



6.5 Experience over the last 18 months from implementing the original closure and liaising with groups, individuals and stakeholders has developed a basis for an experimental order to be implemented for wider consultation, following discussions at/with:

- Shrewsbury Big Town Plan Board
- Shrewsbury Recovery Taskforce
- Portfolio Holder for Highways
- Shrewsbury BID Board
- Town Clerk
- Town Walls residents' group
- Local Member(s)

6.6 This approach mirrors the advice and guidance as set out the High Streets Task Force publication on supporting High streets, by bringing forward and reinventing and animating a town and its strategic approach to renewal (extract below).



High Street Taskforce Recovery Framework has been used by partners in Shrewsbury

- **Restructuring** – putting in place the capacity, leadership and partnerships to deliver change and considering large-scale spatial change that will be needed to transform your town centre
- **Repositioning** – knowing your town, using relevant data and information to develop a collaborative, inspiring vision that achieves change
- **Rebranding** – establishing an identity and sense of place that can engender pride, commitment and attachment and making sure you communicate this across the whole community
- **Reinventing** – activate and animate your town, diversify its attractions. Multifunctional places offer different things that draw in footfall and spend.

The High Streets Taskforce 4Rs Framework for Place Renewal

6.7 Working together to produce a package that supports the aspirations of the Big Town Plan, encourages further growth of the town and should also addresses some other issues such as: -

- Quality of experience as demonstrated below.
- A safer and welcoming environment

- Provides additional trading spaces for hospitality business via approved pavement licences in the short-term and pavement permits in the longer-term
- Constancy of message - for ease of messaging and continuity of marketing and promotion



Pavement licenses being used by hospitality businesses within the closure zone

- Encourages footfall and dwell time.
- Provides a unique experience and marketing proposal for the town

7 Issues and concerns

7.1 The times and rationale for the current closure mirror those in place for the last 18 months, except for the allowance of buses, taxis and cycles, to allow:

- Deliveries to High Street shops and or maintenance to occur prior to 11am or after 4pm, generally this has become recognised and worked effectively.
- Buses, taxis and cyclists to be allowed into the High Street on Monday to Fridays. The previous closure under social distancing did not allow any traffic at all; however, it was apparent that concerns were being raised from public transport users of a wide demographic and recognition that there are certain sections of the population that access to the town centre via public transport is required, and this report addresses those concerns
- As Cabinet would expect there is not universal support, further recent Shropshire Star articles (21.6.21) demonstrate the concerns which can be summarised as excess traffic, frequency of bus services, impact upon the historic environment, queuing traffic which also must be considered.
<https://www.shropshirestar.com/news/local-hubs/shrewsbury/2021/06/21/historic-town-walls-is-suffering-from-the-closure-of-shrewsbury-town-centre/>

8 Town Walls

- 8.1 Over the past year, whilst social distancing measures and closures have been in place on High Street, there has been a significant increase of through traffic using Town Walls. Concerns have been raised by residents and schools about the impact of increased traffic and pollution on this historic and narrow street which is used by large numbers of pedestrians each day.
- 8.2 A package of temporary measures has been introduced on Town Walls following discussion aiming to improve the pedestrian experience and safety implications and to deter the amount of traffic on this route including:
- Safety review report and risk assessment commissioned, and all recommendations implemented by agreement.
 - Diversion signs to the inner ring road placed at all key interchange points to encourage traffic to direct away from town walls.
 - Speed reduction measures across town walls and increased repeater signs
 - Temporary pedestrian segregated routes to support safety
 - Temporary controlled crossing points to support pupils' access to schools and colleges, as agreed with local Head Teacher
 - Working with colleagues at Arriva being restricted uses to minimise buses using Town Walls.
- 8.3 When social distancing measures end, buses will no longer use the Town Walls route from Monday to Friday, but cars and other vehicles will be able to access as normal.
- 8.4 A working group has been meeting regularly including residents, Shropshire Council, Shrewsbury Town Council, Shrewsbury High School, Shrewsbury Colleges Group, local Member, Shrewsbury BID and Arriva to look at possible longer-term solutions if pedestrianisation of the High Street is to continue beyond social distancing. The working group has been supported by consultants and funded through the Big Town Plan Partnership.
- 8.5 The working group has concluded that a holistic approach should be taken to preventing through traffic on both High Street and Town Walls route which would prioritise active travel and public transport.
- 8.6 This would mean that general traffic coming across English bridge would either be going to park in the Wyle Cop or St Julian's Friars car park or access/servicing businesses in the river loop but not passing through the town centre. All other traffic would be directed to other parts of the town via Old Potts Way and the Inner Bypass. Traffic modelling carried out in summer 2020 suggested that at least half the traffic currently using Wyle Cop (up) and Town Walls is "through traffic", which is simply aiming to reach the north or west of the town.
- 8.7 As part of the consultation in the Autumn, it is proposed that the Low Traffic Zone is considered as part of the consultation for Town Walls only, to gather views from the public, businesses and key stakeholders on this, or the formalisation of the current temporary measures, subject to finances, design, agreement and other issues being resolved and costed. A proposal will then be included in a future report to Cabinet.

9 Consequences

- 9.1 The only change from the previous 12 months is to allow access to the High Street on Monday to Friday for buses and taxis for the reasons laid out in this report. On balance, for some of our visitors to the town centre and certain demographics (particularly elderly in accessing the town centre or younger families with push chairs etc.) this is a necessary compromise especially given the duty on the Council to consider equality issues. There is no change on weekends to the previous 12 months and no vehicles would enter High Street during the closure times. The consequence of this is that pavement licences held by 10 hospitality businesses on High Street and Shoplatch will not be valid Monday – Friday; however, at weekends this will be unchanged. Shrewsbury BID will provide support with liaison with business concerned and on all wider communications.

10 Preparation

- 10.1 A working group, led by the Head of Transport and Environment, has been preparing with colleagues from Passenger Transport, Trading Standards and Licensing, Traffic and Communications in respect of safety procedures and advice. Formal liaison with all bus providers has been undertaken with assurances provided from bus companies that a speed limit of no more than 15mph will be observed in the closure zone. A similar arrangement has been reached with taxi and private hire representatives. A formal process for any future legal traffic order will consult with all key and statutory providers plus the “chair” of Town Walls residents to shape the final order for approval.

11 Proposed Consultation

- 11.1 The proposed consultation would have the following core principles: -
- The proposed measures as per the recommendations in this report receive support or raise issues or concerns that have not previously been identified or appreciated.
 - Identify any necessary adjustments to the proposal.
 - Should pedestrianisation be permanent, seasonal (spring until Autumn), for the Christmas period or not at all?
 - Identify if the proposal should be fundamentally amended or even withdrawn.
 - How the measures to prevent vehicles accessing the closures should be installed/deployed (e.g. planters, gates, bollards etc).
 - Identify potential additional measures for the Town Walls route to reduce and restrict through traffic.
 - Identify if the implementation of a Low Traffic Zone for town walls is appropriate or not.
 - Identify what improvements in the public realm should be considered to improve the appearance and experience of the town should the proposal go forward.

- Identify and understand if any issues are incurred by certain groups, demographics, business or organisations.
- Identify or not how the proposals would support town centre businesses directly and support marketing of the town at a wider regional level.
- The consultation will last for 8 weeks and be operated via the council's Get Involved portal, and be supported by the Big Town Plan Partnership, Shrewsbury BID and Town Council in respect of communications, messages, responding to queries and clarifications, and via public meetings either virtual or physical as part of a wider process of engagement.

12 Summary

- 12.1 As a response to the pandemic social distancing measures were introduced into Shrewsbury and other towns. The Shrewsbury measures, although based on anecdotal evidence, have been deemed a success by many but a formal evidence-based solution for permanent measures has been called for. This report aims to resolve a way forward and recognise that our changing town centre will need support and interventions to enable their ongoing vibrancy; indeed, the High Streets Task Force recommend this very approach. This report attempts to recognise this but to also ensure awareness of the issues that the proposed measures create for residents of the town. Hence, implementation of an experiment to identify support or issues and then proceed to a full public consultation with a further detailed report to cabinet with necessary analysis would hope to move this issue forward.
- 12.2 This initiative supports and fully aligns with the Big Town Plan intent and aspirations and should be an enabler of that initiative.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)
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Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)
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Cllr Steve Charmley Portfolio Holder - Highways and Transport

Local Member

Cllr Nat Green

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Equality and Social Inclusion Impact Assessment (ESIIA)
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