

Appendix A
Hertfordshire High Street Recovery

Briefing note for Rickmansworth Project Board

DATE : 21February 2022

REPORT TITLE : Rickmansworth High Street Recovery Project

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This briefing note provides background and further information to support the recommendations made by the Rickmansworth Project Board for the High Street Recovery Project
- 1.2. The Project Board has collectively formed a recommendation on how the project should proceed, agreeing that the project should move to a formal trial phase, initially for 6 months with a review at the end of that period and opportunity to trial an alternative closure regime if this is felt appropriate. Further information on the proposed trial can be found in this briefing note. This recommendation will be taken to Three Rivers District Council (TRDC) IHED Committee on 22 March 2022 for consideration.

2. Project Overview

- 2.1. The Rickmansworth High Street Recovery Project Board (hereafter the Project Board) was set up in July 2021 to enable the County Council and TRDC to consider the impacts of the changes implemented in response to Covid – 19. This includes, to review feedback and engagement outcomes and make recommendations on the future of the High Street Recovery project.
- 2.2. Having considered the information available the Project Board are recommending that the project proceeds to a formal trial. Further details of the trial can be found in section 4 (Analysis and Findings) of this report.

3. Background Information

- 3.1. The current temporary closure of Rickmansworth High Street was an HCC led exercise, supported by TRDC. The scheme was implemented as a public health measure in response to the pandemic to enable social distancing on the High Street and in doing so encourage people back to the High Street.
- 3.2. From June 2020 the scheme involved safety barriers along the High Street which reduced on street parking and essentially allowed a temporary widening of the pavements to allow social distancing. In late August 2020 initially temporary barriers, and then formal gates, were erected at either end of the road closure and relevant signage erected.
- 3.3. A Temporary Traffic Regulation Order (TTRO) allowed the implementation of the road closure. This Order expires at the beginning of April 2022. Currently, HBC Civil Enforcement Officers manage the opening and closure of the barrier on behalf of TRDC, with Environmental Protection assisting on Monday mornings and Bank Holidays. This is managed within the current Hertsmere BC Partnership contract. The Police are responsible for the enforcement of the road closure.
- 3.4. More recently, with the relocation of the bus stop to Northway, a bus shelter has been constructed on Northway near Solomans Hill. Following ongoing feedback regarding loss of disabled blue badge bays in proximity to the shops TRDC has also revised the Ebury Road car park to include additional blue badge parking bays. Parking on the High Street is currently available until 9.30am on Mondays to Saturdays, allowing cars to move before the 10am road closure. The road reopens at 6pm except for Saturdays when it remains closed until Monday morning.
- 3.5. In addition, planters have been placed by the barriers (December 2020). These were supplied and filled with top soil by HCC, and HCC paid for the plants, which were planted by TRDC EP. Currently

TRDC EP staff are maintaining the planters (although this initially only agreed until March 2021) with costs covered by HCC.

Project Rationale

- 3.6. The purpose of the trial is to further test and monitor the impact of the measures in place as a means to deliver the defined objectives of the projects which are considered to be:
- To support economic recovery by providing flexible outdoor space which could be used for street trading and dining
 - To support economic recovery by increasing footfall and dwell time
 - To support journeys by sustainable modes to and around the town centres
 - To support environmental, sustainability and climate change objectives by reducing motor vehicle movements and traffic levels.
- 3.7. Supporting an increasing number of journeys to be made by sustainable and active modes of transport, such as by bus, walking or cycling align the goals of Hertfordshire's Local Transport Plan and more widely in addressing the climate change emergency.

Stakeholder Engagement

- 3.8. Through Summer and Autumn 2021, stakeholder engagement has been taking place to seek feedback on the current measures in place and gauge opinion for a possible trial. Below is a summary of the feedback received. The feedback outlined below has been shared with the Project Board for its consideration.

Public engagement – High Street Recovery survey Summer 2021

During Summer 2021 an HCC online survey was used to seek feedback from the public, residents and businesses. The survey was promoted using social media, website updates and through posters put up in windows of local business and in bus stops. Two in person visits were made to Rickmansworth High Street where officers visited each premises to encourage participations in the survey and to promote it with visitors.

- 3.9. 493 responses were received, of these responses 93% were from local residents, 3% from business owners and 4% from visitors to Rickmansworth. The proportions of type of respondent are similar to other locations in Hertfordshire.
- 3.10 The principle of a trial was supported by 68% of respondents, 2% were unsure and 30% did not support a trial. Respondents indicated they most liked that the current changes created a more pleasant environment and most disliked that availability of parking had reduced. See **Appendix 2** for a summary of the survey results.

3.11 Public engagement – Three Rivers High Streets Survey

In September 2021 TRDC launched its own High Streets Survey which was part of wider measures aimed at business support and secured through external Additional Restriction Grant funding. The survey aimed to gather feedback to help the council develop a range of initiatives to support retailers, hospitality, and leisure businesses. The survey was aimed at all retail areas in TRDC and its customers.

The survey received 731 responses. 98% from customers and 2% from businesses (15).

A link to the survey can be found here: <https://www.threerivers.gov.uk/news/what-do-you-think-of-your-high-street-survey-of-shops-and-shoppers-launched>

In summary for Rickmansworth Town Centre there is a desire from the public to have it more welcoming and easily accessible. The public favour a more diverse offer, as is the case across the district. Whilst the cost of parking is brought up several times, respondents indicated that there is enough parking. Of those who identified pedestrianisation the majority of those were happy with pedestrianisation to be permanent if the street area was improved and enhanced.

There is a desire for regular markets and events and more independent trade to fill the empty shops which have emerged due to national and local closures during the pandemic.

Emergency Services

- 3.12 The emergency services have been engaged in this project since the initial deployment of emergency measures. Representatives have previously provided feedback in relation to the current measures and coded padlocks have been provided to improve access. Engagement will continue with the emergency services as the project progresses.

4. Analysis and Findings

- 4.1. The Project Board met on three occasions and discussed the current High Street closure, the findings of the surveys and stakeholder meetings and feedback they have received directly from businesses.
- 4.2. TRDC Officers also met informally with a number of stakeholders and fed back their views which were predominantly support for a partial closure of the High Street.
- 4.3. The general consensus of the Project Board was the current closure had merit (especially in terms of public health objectives) but also that it was attractive to customers in offering traffic free shopping with more space, and also offered opportunities to businesses to expand their business offerings (in some cases with the use of pavement licences). There was also an encouragement to support markets and other outdoor events whilst the road was closed which would make the High Street more attractive. There was an initial consensus to continue the road closure but with further consideration to opening hours/days of the week.
- 4.4. Further discussions revolved around the merits of continuing the current closure (7 days a week (as existing) or to limit the days/hours. However, it was agreed with the current removal of restrictions and as more people return to the High Street, in connection with improved weather and opportunities for events/outdoor seating in the next 6 months (from April 2022), continuation of the current road closure could be appropriate. This would be accompanied by communications encouraging feedback and further review.
- 4.5. The recommendation from the Project Board is to undertake a formal trial which consists of the following:
- An initial 6-month trial of the road closure regime which would commence in April 2022 – retaining the same times of closures as currently operating (closed 10am-6pm Monday to Saturday). Options to enable cycling during the closed period are being considered by the technical team.
 - At the end of this 6-month period a review of feedback will be undertaken. This review will inform whether the trial will be continued including options for modifications to be made for a different closure regime
- 4.6. The physical infrastructure will be similar to that which is currently in place, with a review of planters, signage, disabled parking bay provision and parking/loading undertaken as part of the detailed design process

Monitoring, Engagement & Consultation

- 4.7 Monitoring will take place throughout the trial period – including monitoring of traffic footfall and user perceptions. The objectives of the monitoring will be linked to the project objectives set out in table 1 below.

Table 1 Project Objectives

Objective Theme	Objective
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A. Economy	A.1. To support a recovery of the retail and hospitality businesses in Rickmansworth Town Centre by creating an environment that encourages more people to visit
	A.2. To support a recovery of the retail and hospitality businesses in Rickmansworth by creating an environment that encourages people to stay longer
	A.3. To support a recovery of the retail and hospitality businesses in Rickmansworth by creating space for outdoor trading and dining.
	A.4. To support a recovery of the retail and hospitality businesses Rickmansworth by creating traffic free space which can be used for outdoor events.
B. Sustainable Transport	B.1. To encourage more journeys to be made to the High Street using active and sustainable modes of transport .
	B.2. To encourage more journeys to be made to and across the city centre using active and sustainable modes of transport .
C. Health, Wellbeing & Environment	C.1. To create an environment which feels safe
	C.2. To create an environment which feels more welcoming
	C.3. To create an environment where people choose to walk and cycle
	C.4. To create an environment where people feel relaxed

4.8 Engagement would take place throughout a trial period, supported by online information and survey. People will be able to give feedback throughout the process and for each phase should modifications be made, as well as giving their views in a final consultation at the end of the trial period. This will seek a preference for one of the options or removal and a return to pre covid -19 arrangements.

4.9 In line with similar projects, the principal channel for engaging will be via a website. However, alternative provision will be made for those who find it difficult to access this. A range of engagement types will be used to gather feedback from stakeholders during the trial. An engagement plan will be produced and implemented for the start of the trial.

4.10 A communications plan will be developed to manage and support communications surrounding the trial.

4.11 Project Responsibilities

This project is being undertaken jointly by HCC and TRDC, the following provides a summary the respective responsibilities during a trial phase.

During a trial HCC would be responsible for:

- Implementing and amending physical measures such as gates, planters, road lining and signage
- Carrying out repairs or replacement of physical infrastructure
- Leading the engagement and communications process

- Promoting the necessary Experiment Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) to enable a trial to take place
- Leading the monitoring and evaluation process
- Providing officer support to enable governance and review of the project

During a trial TRDC would be responsible for:

- Operation of the gates to provide access in line with the agreed trial
- Enforcement of parking and waiting restrictions
- Supporting the monitoring and evaluation process through data provision
- Supporting engagement and communications
- Street cleansing

4.12 TRDC would continue discussions with Batchworth Community Council around maintaining the planters.

Longer Term

4.13 During the trial process authorities and stakeholders will need to continue working together to plan for what might take place after the formal trial has been completed.

Planning for the longer term will include exploring how each of the trial phases might be implemented as a permanent solution and the associated costs and possible funding sources for this to be implemented.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Having considered the findings of various public surveys and wider engagements, the Project Board are recommending that the Rickmansworth High Street Project proceeds to a formal trial.

Appendix 1 – Trial proposal diagrams

N.B These are indicative only and are not for the purposes of design.

Appendix 2 – Survey Results



493

RESPONSES TO THE SURVEY

FROM
93% LOCAL RESIDENTS
3% BUSINESS OWNERS
4% VISITORS

RICKMANSWORTH HIGH STREET RECOVERY SURVEY

2020-2021

HIGH STREET

Rickmansworth High Street is closed at certain times to through traffic using a gate at the junction of Northway to the junction at Station Road. When the road is closed the space provides the opportunity not only to safely social distance, but also enables retailers' opportunities to trade within the highway/street environment.

RESPONDENTS

MOST LIKED

LESS TRAFFIC & MORE PLEASANT ENVIRONMENT

which can be used for outdoor dining and trading.

RESPONDENTS

MOST DISLIKED

LACK OF PARKING

with concerns that this impacts negatively on local businesses



RESPONDENTS THOUGHT

IMPROVEMENT COULD BE MADE

By creating space for outdoor dining and trading, increasing the number of benches (places to rest) or by removing the temporary changes.

SOCIAL DISTANCING

In these locations the following agreed the changes allowed for safer use of the high street by making social distancing easier.

76%

HIGH STREET



Respondents views on keeping the changes

18 MONTH TRIAL

ROAD	SUPPORTED A TRIAL	WERE UNSURE ABOUT A TRIAL	DIDN'T SUPPORT A TRIAL
HIGH STREET	68%	2%	30%



Respondents thought measures had

LOCATION	POSITIVE IMPACT	NEGATIVE IMPACT	NEITHER
HIGH STREET	69%	24%	8%



