

Public Questions

Executive 21 July 2020

Public Question (1)

While recognising that the TDC has amended the plans for the Future High Street Bid concerning the loss of parking in Queen Street, in that a number of parking spaces have been retained in the stretch between Albany Street and the train station, I am still concerned about the loss of all the spaces in the stretch from Albany Street to Lloyds Bank.

Many shops there are very concerned about the potential loss to their business of accessible on street parking. I am not convinced that people who said they would like wider pavements and cafes were aware that the increase in the width of the pavement was unlikely to make this possible and that the traders there were convinced their businesses would be threatened by this lost parking.

I read that many people said they were doing their shopping on cycles and panniers were mentioned. While that might be possible for certain active people, it is not for the vast majority who would struggle even to get their shopping home on a bus.

I feel that the low numbers responding to the consultation are in part due to the time pressure for getting this bid submitted which meant that over most of that time period, we have all been in lock down due to Covid 19, including the shops. This has meant that there has been no opportunity for a public meeting about this where questions would have been asked and answered nor an opportunity for the public to even discuss it amongst themselves as there has been so little social contact. It is not possible to equate a Survey Monkey questionnaire with its often mixed messaged questions on a website with real face to face opportunities for discussion, understanding and chance to make an informed response.

It seemed that many respondents said they walked in to town which is actually not an option for the majority of people we want to attract to our town as they come from the villages, new estates or other nearby towns like Torquay. It is not possible for older people either who live in Newton Abbot itself on our many hills not even served by buses.

I am making these points because I would like to have the reassurance that, if we are awarded this grant, there will be full, face to face, democratic opportunities for consultations beyond on-line surveys before anything is 'set in stone' and these consultations will take into account people who we want to be able to shop in our town coming from the surrounding areas.

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Business, Economy & Tourism

The car parking capacity in the town centre is not being lost via the Queen Street proposals, as there is replacement of town centre parking capacity proposed via the Cricketfield car park decking proposal, which forms part of the strong and interlinked package of proposals for the Future High Street Fund bid. In the question received, there is a desire stated - to attract more customers from outside the walkable area of town. In response to this, the value of customers who live nearby and regularly walk to shop in town must be recognised and appreciated. Many local resident responses

to the survey showed strong support for enhancing the pedestrian environment along Queen Street. In addition, the messaging in our engagement information stated clearly that, alongside benefits for local residents and shoppers, another main objective of the Newton Abbot Future High Street Fund bid is delivery of transformational measures that enable Newton Abbot to become more of a 'destination' town for those who live outside of the town. This requires enhancing and uplifting the town centre where it is most needed, achieving a good environment for spending time, and enhancing the offer and appeal to visitors. The out-of-town visitors would have the option of utilising the expanded Cricketfield car park, offering both short and longer periods of stay, and situated only a 2-3 minute walk from Queen Street.

The views received via the feedback have been reviewed and changes to the plans for Queen Street have been made where appropriate. Achieving success with this bid package, to secure this major investment into our market town of Newton Abbot, relies on meeting the criteria of the Future High Street Fund bid. One of the key criteria is being transformational in ways that enable the town to remain resilient now and into the future, and in a way that presents a strong business case. There is a strong business case for the overall package, and the pedestrian enhancements add notably to this, based on the suite of wellbeing benefits that can be attained, which can also in turn support footfall.

The engagement period that we held, to attain feedback on the Newton Abbot Future High Street Fund bid, ran throughout June 2020. There was clear information on the package of proposals presented online, with surveys for feedback and comments. The response was not poor and we reached many people via the engagement process. We posted letters to businesses along Queen Street, also emailed those on the Town Centre Partnership emailing list to inform businesses directly of the proposals and the online engagement. We also promoted the engagement via social media, both via standard and paid advertisements that Pop-up.

Central government requires all Future High Street Fund bids to be submitted by the end of July 2020. We have worked to a tight timeframe but this has not meant any lack of quality or effort, during a difficult period. This has also included incorporating key changes into the proposals, where appropriate, based on the main feedback messages. The final bid submission is in the form of a business case, which includes the design plans and costs for the suite of interlinked proposals, and the amount of funding requested from the funders: the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government. If successful, the projects are expected to be delivered as proposed, within budget and within the set funding delivery timeframe.

We will continue to keep stakeholders updated but it isn't anticipated that there will be any significant changes to the bid proposals following submission. However, we will look further at street-side parking time restrictions and discuss this more post-bid submission, to ensure the current arrangement is the best option and if not to consider changes and, in addition, inputs will be sought from key local stakeholders on elements such as the species preference for tree planting and suchlike.