

Oswestry Town Council

Report from the Town Clerk and the Retail Markets and Events
Manager to Council – Wednesday 24th June 2020

Oswestry Parking and Access Restrictions Bailey Head, Bailey Street and New Street

Purpose

To set out a response to the consultation being undertaken on changes to the parking and access restrictions for the Bailey Head, Bailey Street and New Street.

Background

A review of the parking and access restrictions has been needed for some time and has been called for by elected members and by the Oswestry BID. A number of issues exist such as parking, unloading and unauthorised vehicular access.

Full details on the proposals and details of the consultation, which closes on 30th June 2020 are set out on the Shropshire Council website <https://shropshire.gov.uk/get-involved/oswestry-bailey-head-area-vehicular-access-and-waiting-restrictions/>

Shropshire Council note that “These changes are being proposed in the interests of highway safety. They will improve pedestrian amenity and the regulation of traffic on Bailey Street and its adjoining roads.”

This report sets out issues for this Council to consider as part of their response. Market traders have been encouraged to contribute to the consultation. Shropshire Council officers have engaged with the Town Council and the BID on the matter throughout the process to date to address the concerns that both organisations have about the flow of traffic up, down and across the streets concerned.

Proposals

The street plan shown at Appendix A to this report details the streets in question and the restrictions. These are presented as two issues but essentially, they are both aimed at improving the pedestrian experience. An explanation of the two elements are set out below:

Vehicular access restrictions – police enforced regulations which restrict access;

Prohibition and restrictions of waiting and parking places – no parking or waiting during hours of regulations enforced by Shropshire Council.

The proposals extend current regulations to include Sundays and extend the prohibitions to include all New Street and a further section of Arthur Street.

The review is necessary to ensure that there are a set of rules in place that are understood and enforceable.

In 2009 Shropshire Council applied for changes to the Traffic Regulation Order for Bailey Street, Arthur Street, Albion Hill, New Street and Church Street. It is officers' understanding that the Bailey Head was not included on the original application.

Market Operations

The market has operated successfully on the Bailey Head and Bailey Street under the existing regime and it is important that this is maintained. Traders have been able to take down their stalls and pack up their vehicles safely within the current restrictions. Whilst there have been some issues with enforcement action, this has been infrequent.

The concern will be that with the refreshed regulations will come more frequent and stringent enforcement action making the market difficult to operate.

Whilst some local businesses will express a view that market traders cannot be treated any differently from any other business, markets by their nature are more susceptible to weather conditions.

Generally, the outdoor market operates up to 2.30pm / 3pm (sometimes later in the summer months) and most traders will bring their vehicles onto the Bailey Head and Bailey Street to pack up. Practically most market traders will need their vehicle on site and therefore could be penalised for doing so.

Adverse weather has a significant impact on market traders, not just from a custom perspective, but also risk of damage to stock.

Issues for consideration and options

It is recognized that there is a need to reduce the number of vehicles travelling on pedestrian streets. However any response needs to highlight that this Council's concern has been unrestricted vehicle access not parking and loading. With the police reluctant to enforce access restrictions additional engineering measures are needed.

Markets contribute significantly to the town and their successful operation and a vibrant market is advantageous. The Council have recognised and various studies have identified that the Bailey Head square needs improving with seating, planning etc to encourage dwell time and improve the look and feel of the area.

It seems that there is an increased risk of traders being booked by enforcement officers. The same applies to Oswestry Town Council vehicles as staff take down the market stalls.

The Bailey Head itself is Town Council land registered with the Land Registry. The Oswestry Markets and Fairs Act and Market Charters also clearly recognises that the site is market land. In line with this it could be argued that market traders should be permitted to load and unload without fear of penalty and it will be for the Retail Markets & Events Manager to manage traders who are not complying with the market policies. There needs to be some management of traffic on this area, but on non-market days access for loading only could be permitted.

Bailey Street is more complex with the area being narrower, more attractive for market trading and adjacent to shops.

Consideration could be given to end restrictions at 3pm but Bailey Street is a busy walk through for school children and therefore it is difficult to justify the earlier time.

Operational challenges and additional costs will come to the fore if the Council insist that market traders stay until 4pm. That said market traders need, especially during the summer months, to be encouraged to trade for longer hours.

It would seem prudent therefore to work with Shropshire Council to find a mutually agreeable way forward recognising the need to manage vehicles but also recognising that market traders need access. The most appropriate way forward may be through the issue of a permit to traders on the day, with conditions applied to allow them to pack down their stall using their vehicles. This option has been explored with the Unitary Authority and a workable compromise could be achieved.

Summary

Markets are recognised by the Institute of Place Management research to be key influencing factors to create vibrant and vital town centers. As all towns look to recover their footfall and local economy after Covid19 then market trading, events and entertainment must be enabled wherever possible and their value recognised. This can be achieved by providing flexible shared use community space within town centre, not restriction that then stifles local initiative and limits the opportunity for a vital outlet for local small and start up business.

Council are asked to agree a response taking into consideration the dialogue with Shropshire Council.

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