

## **EXETER CITY COUNCIL**

**EXECUTIVE  
5 JULY 2011**

### **JOHN LEWIS STORE – IMPLICATIONS FOR CITY CENTRE TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT**

#### **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 This report is to inform Members of transport implications arising out of the decision by John Lewis to open a store in the former Debenhams building, 1-11 Sidwell Street and to seek members support for extending the current one-way system in Paris Street into new North Road.

#### **2.0 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The store at 1-11 Sidwell Street has been vacant since Debenhams relocated to the then-new Princesshay development. John Lewis Partnership is now preparing to open a store in the building in 2012. This is a very significant development for the City and has been widely welcomed as demonstrating confidence in Exeter by a major retailer.
- 2.2 The introduction of a popular retailer like John Lewis will undoubtedly be a significant attraction for shoppers at the northern end of the city centre. The number of journeys by all modes of transport is expected to increase, and journey patterns are likely to change.
- 2.3 Particular issues arising out of this are:-
- The need to create a safe and attractive environment for an increased number of pedestrians walking to and from Sidwell Street, and therefore crossing all arms of the signal-controlled crossing in London Inn Square.
  - The need to accommodate car-borne shoppers heading for the new store, and to attract them to the most appropriate car park, without compromising the above objective.
  - The need to maintain convenient public transport connections to this part of the city centre, and to encourage visitors to the new store to use these wherever practical.
  - The need to maintain safe and efficient operation of the road network for other users.
- 2.4 Members will be aware of the work carried out by Exeter Highways and Traffic Orders Committee and Devon County Council assessing whether the Highway Authority should reinstate two-way traffic in Paris Street. This work followed a request from the City Council to reinstate two-way traffic in Paris Street. Following a consultation exercise early last year, including taking representation from City Council members and officers, the County Council in July 2010 resolved no alteration be made to the traffic management arrangements at the present time.
- 2.5 In February 2010 Executive approved a number of measures to reduce carbon emissions including measures to make a pleasant pedestrianised city centre with more public spaces and efficient public transport system. Members considered

proposals that involved the creation of a traffic free London Inn Square and recognised that it was important for a city centre vision to provide a context for individual initiatives, such as the treatment of Paris Street, and resolved that a joint ECC/DCC city centre transportation strategy to be prepared. The draft 'A City Centre Vision for a Green Capital' was considered by Scrutiny Committee on the 9<sup>th</sup> June and Executive on the 21<sup>st</sup> June. A number of principles relate to the issue of prioritising pedestrians in the city centre and discouraging cross town traffic. These initiatives have identified a desire to make the City Centre more attractive to pedestrians, to encourage public transport and to tackle cross town traffic. The practicality of delivering on these principles is challenging and will require choices to be made. The John Lewis announcement has given urgency to the matter.

### **3.0 PEDESTRIANS**

- 3.1 The Exeter City Centre Transport Study, produced by Devon County Council and its consultants in January 2011, identified walking as the mode of travel for about a quarter of shopping trips to the city centre. It was also identified as the most popular mode of travel for journeys to the city centre originating within the city boundary. In addition, it should be remembered that everyone arriving in the city centre by other means is effectively a pedestrian in the sense that they will walk once they arrive there, with the exception of a small number prevented from doing so by a disability.
- 3.2 Of all the road crossings surveyed, the London Inn Square junction saw the highest number of crossing movements undertaken by pedestrians. During a twelve hour period on a weekday, 21,790 pedestrians were counted, being more than double the number of vehicles passing through this junction. The north crossing (New North Road) was used by more pedestrians than the south crossing (Paris Street) and the opening of the John Lewis store appears likely to increase this trend.
- 3.3 The importance of providing a safe and attractive environment for pedestrians crossing at this location has been recognised in the context of proposals to redevelop the bus station site, and is illustrated by these figures. Traffic flow on Paris Street is seen to be a barrier to the successful redevelopment of the Bus and Coach Station site. Land Securities, and other retailing experts, have made it clear that Paris Street with traffic could impact negatively on footfall and this may work against plans to attract investment in the bus station site. Traffic in Paris Street and New North Road separates the city centre. Ideally, therefore, the volume of vehicular traffic using the London Inn Square junction should be reduced as much as possible.

### **4.0 CARS, CAR PARKING AND SIGNING**

- 4.1 Driving was identified as the most popular means (33.3%) of getting to the city centre for shopping, with a further 6.4% of shoppers being dropped off by car. More Saturday visitors (for all purposes) had come by car than was the case during the week (32.0% as opposed to 23.5%).
- 4.2 Most of Exeter's radial routes are full to capacity during the peaks, and Devon County Council's Baseline Traffic Evidence Base Report (February 2011) shows that traffic levels remain relatively high for much of the day. Encouraging more cars into the centre would inevitably add to congestion. However it has to be recognised that the car plays a vital role in getting shoppers and others into the

city centre, and that in many cases there will be no practical alternative. This may be because of the need to carry bulky purchases, or simply because individuals may live somewhere in Exeter's rural hinterland which is not served by public transport.

- 4.3 A transport strategy for the city centre therefore needs to strike a delicate balance. It is essential to encourage use of other travel modes by those for whom that is possible and practical, not least to free up valuable road space for those who have no practical alternative to the car. Coupled with the need to provide an improved pedestrian environment, this presents a significant challenge.
- 4.4 The Exeter Car Parking Study produced in March 2010 by WSP for Exeter City Council showed that for the five city centre car parks surveyed, there was a pronounced draw from a particular catchment, which appeared to correspond to the highway route they were located on or near. So, for example, Broadwalk House car park (most conveniently accessed from the east of the city) drew 24% of its users from each of the Heavitree Road and Pinhoe Road catchments, with only 13% from Cowley Bridge Road.
- 4.5 Conversely, the study does indicate that there is scope for reducing cross city traffic by encouraging more drivers to use a car park which is better related to their route. This could remove, for example, some of the cross city journeys made by the 13% of Broadwalk House car park users or the 14% of Triangle users travelling via Cowley Bridge Road, or the 27% of King William Street car park users travelling via Heavitree Road and Topsham Road combined. (The study excluded Princesshay car park as its scope was limited to ECC's own facilities.)
- 4.6 The extent to which it is possible to reduce cross city traffic looking for somewhere to park will depend on a number of factors that govern drivers' choice of car park:-
  - 4.6.1 The environment and facilities in the individual car park affect its overall attractiveness; therefore King William Street is at a disadvantage compared with car parks with a more inviting environment and/or "Pay on Foot" system of payment (where it is not necessary to predict the length of stay). To increase its relative attractiveness would need considerable investment in refurbishment.
  - 4.6.2 Some drivers are likely to choose their car park according to their destination in the city rather than their approach route; so people aiming for Marks and Spencer will aim for Guildhall, others will aim for Princesshay. Branding could have a part to play here, so for example renaming Broadwalk House and Dix's Field as Princesshay 2 and 3 may encourage drivers to use them rather than queuing for the existing Princesshay car park. Describing King William Street as "for John Lewis" would have the disadvantage of attracting drivers from the east of the city, but would have the positive effect of intercepting more drivers from the north, and the generally beneficial effect (in the case of shoppers heading for John Lewis) of directing drivers straight to where they want to be, via the route we want them to use.
  - 4.6.3 However, evidence suggests that other drivers tend to use the same car park on every visit to the city, regardless of their destination. This means that it is important to put measures in place by the time John Lewis

opens, to ensure that new visitors to the city as a result of the store are directed to our preferred car park.

- 4.6.4 Currently the signage for Dix's Field fails to take into account the extra capacity at weekends (when the Civic Centre spaces are available for general use), which may contribute to its being only 50% full at these times. Rectifying this (if technically possible) and showing the space available as "Princesshay 3" (as suggested above) should have the combined effect of encouraging drivers to use this car park rather than queuing for "Princesshay 1".
- 4.7 Other measures to mitigate queuing for Princesshay car park and the congestion caused by it could include re-aligning traffic lanes and islands in lower Paris Street, or removing the outbound bus lane to allow two traffic lanes plus a cycle lane inbound.

#### **TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT**

- 4.8 The issue of Paris Street was considered by Exeter Highways and Traffic Orders Committee (HATOC) and Devon County Council's Cabinet in July and September 2010. HATOC heard evidence from ECC councillors and officers, DCC officers, and representatives of pedestrian, cycling and disability groups, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and Stagecoach. HATOC recommended and Cabinet agreed to maintain the current system of one-way working but to keep the issue under review, dependent on progress with development in the area. The anticipated opening of the John Lewis store makes it necessary to address the issue again, with the need to improve the environment for pedestrians taking a high priority. Closure of Paris Street altogether, with the exception of buses and cycles, would improve this environment significantly, but would be challenging and this is not proposed.
- 4.9 The closure of Paris Street to eastbound traffic has been unpopular with some, but the traffic congestion in Sidwell Street and Cheeke Street which prompted much of the original criticism appears to have been resolved by various mitigation measures subsequently introduced. These include the relocation of Sidwell Street bus stops further from the Paris Street junction, and the ending of the use of Cheeke Street bus stops for driver changeovers. However, some problems are still experienced in Sidwell Street, which notably suffers from a poor accident record, particularly involving accidents to pedestrians. Some 30% of the traffic which previously used Paris Street westbound has dispersed over such a wide variety of alternative routes as to be unidentifiable, and it ought to be possible to remove westbound traffic in a similar manner if appropriate mitigation were put in place.
- 4.10 A proposed next step is to retain the one way system in Paris Street but to extend it into New North Road up to the junction Longbrook Street. Buses and taxis would be able to enter into Sidwell Street from Paris Street but eastbound traffic would be precluded from entering New North Road beyond Longbrook Street junction. This would increase the pedestrian space that would be provided immediately in front of John Lewis as a consequence of reducing new North Road to a one way road. The impact of extending the footway is to reduce the impact of the road.

- 4.11 Any changes to the traffic management arrangements would have consequences for surrounding junctions that will need to be addressed. Key junctions to be considered in relation to changes to traffic movement includes: London Inn Square; New North Road/Longbrook Street; York Road/King William Street; and Sidwell Street/Summerland St and York Road. The County Council's consultants are preparing initial designs for these junctions and one would expect significant changes will be required to traffic orders and signing. Alternative bus routes for buses from Crediton and Tiverton would need to be agreed.
- 4.12 Bus comes a close second to driving a car as the favoured mode of travel to the city centre for shopping trips (29.3% as opposed to 33.3%). It is the most popular mode for journeys to work (39.8%). It is the country services, and the Sowton and Honiton Road park and ride buses, that are of particular relevance to this report, in view of their use of Paris Street and turning movements at London Inn Square. Several country routes use Sidwell Street northbound, either on their journey to or from the bus station. The park and ride services need to retain a central pick up and set down point to maintain their attractiveness, which means that their current circuit via Paris Street and Sidwell Street, and stops in Paris Street, need to remain for the time being.
- 4.13 Should the County Council support a change to the traffic management arrangements it would prepare more detailed plans to demonstrate how the proposed improvements would work and would identify potential locations for bus stops and taxis ranks etc. Whilst this detailed work is already in preparation, given the City Council previous resolution on Paris Street it is important that Executive gives a clear indication in principle of its support for extending the one way system.

## **5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 At present the City Council has approved £218,300 from the capital programme towards the enhancement scheme for Sidwell Street. This scheme proposes replacing current paving with granite to match the High Street. The works do not extend into the highway. A more extensive enhancement scheme would be more costly. The City Centre capital programme (Including the funding committed for Sidwell Street) has potentially £685,000 available for the years 2011/12 - 2012/13 which could be allocated to these proposed works. Initial estimate of the cost of work is that it would be in the region of £1 million. This would include the cost for works to London Inn Square plus works to junctions and signage on wider network. In the past the County Council has been in a position to match fund capital works in the City Centre; Whilst the County Council's budget pressures are likely to preclude funding at this level, it is suggested that a contribution be requested.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 The opening of the John Lewis store will be a significant draw to shoppers, and the city's transport systems need to be able to cope with it from the day the store opens. John Lewis Partnership and Land Securities have identified the current road dominated junction as a physical barrier to the successful integration of the John Lewis into the wider City Centre. It is in the wider interests of the city centre traders that shoppers attracted to John Lewis are encouraged to explore the whole of the City centre. The immediate concern is to reduce through traffic and to increase the width of the paved area in front of the store. In the longer term a successful redevelopment of the bus and coach station site will require greater

pedestrianisation and integration of both sites of Paris Street. An extension of the One Way system in Paris Street together with improved signing of car parks is proposed as part of a package of measures to support the opening of the store.

## **7.0 RECOMMENDATION**

**It is recommended that:**

- (i) Executive support in principle reducing traffic flow and pedestrian/vehicular conflict outside the new John Lewis store by simplifying traffic movements and increasing the footway area;
- (ii) Executive request Devon County Council and the Exeter Highways and Traffic Orders Committee give positive consideration to the proposal to reduce traffic flow and pedestrian/vehicular conflict outside the new John Lewis store and promote the necessary traffic orders including consultation as appropriate

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**ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE**

**Local Government Act 1972 (as amended)**

**Background papers used in compiling this report:-**

Exeter City Centre Transport Study – Jacobs for DCC, January 2011

Baseline Traffic Evidence Base Report – DCC, February 2011

Exeter Car Parking Study – WSP for ECC, March 2010