



BOLLARDS AT COMMERCIAL WAY, WOKING

**LOCAL COMMITTEE FOR WOKING
14 OCTOBER 2004**

KEY ISSUE:

The Committee received a petition at its meeting of 14 July 2004 and asked Officers to consult with various parties about the pedestrianisation of the eastern end of Commercial Way.

This paper reports the outcome of that review.

SUMMARY:

Pedestrianisation of the eastern end of Commercial Way was introduced on the 1 September 1994 operative between 1030 and 1600 Monday to Saturday inclusive.

The restriction on vehicle movements by means of movable bollards was widely ignored and a proposal to introduce rising bollards at the entry to the area was implemented in 2003. Limited vehicle exit movements were permitted on an experimental basis.

The review has shown that the Pedestrianisation forms part of a strategy to maintain parts of the Town Centre vehicle free, encouraging pedestrian use and removing conflict. The majority of those surveyed wanted it to be retained.

The rising bollards have proved an effective means of preventing illegal entry since 2003. A minority would wish that they were removed allowing them access to their car parks and others to park on street despite the illegality this entails. Alternatively they would wish that the Traffic Order were rescinded.

The experimental period for drivers having a right of exit implemented by Woking Borough Council has now ended and Committee must consider whether it should be made permanent.

CONSULTATIONS:

Pedestrians using Commercial Way

Businesses affected by the restrictions

Police, Fire and Ambulance

Woking Borough Council

Woking Town Centre Management Group

Woking for Pedestrians

Woking Cycle Users Group

N.W. Surrey Association of Disabled People (no response)

Frogmore Property Management Limited (no response)

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Committee is asked to agree: -

- (i) that the survey has not identified any need for change to the Traffic Order for the eastern end of Commercial Way and the use of rising bollards to prevent illegal entry and exit; and**
- (ii) that the experimental exit procedure be made permanent.**

INTRODUCTION and BACKGROUND

1. Woking Borough Council passed The Borough Council of Woking (Woking Town Centre) (Traffic Regulation) Order 1994, which introduced restrictions on parking and driving over the eastern end of Commercial Way, Woking between 1030 and 1600 Monday to Saturday inclusive. This prevented parking and vehicle movements across the area although there were permitted exceptions.
2. Before the Order was invoked a public inquiry was held and reported on 19 April 1993. A key factor was the imminent opening of the Peacocks centre and a concern that this would reduce the number of persons visiting the area. In their submission to the inquiry Woking Borough Council stated benefits for the scheme as: -
 - a. improvement to the safety, accessibility and comfort of pedestrians
 - b. improvement of the shopping, commercial and leisure environment of the area,
 - c. improvement to the economy and environment of an established town centre,
 - d. improvement in the traffic flow and safety both in the pedestrianised area and the highway network.
3. Two specific justifications for the Order were quoted to the inquiry which stemmed from a report into the then current environment of the Town Centre: -
 - a. "Throughout the Town Centre, the pedestrian user is subservient to the car"
 - b. "Although part pedestrianised, the Town Centre still provides a dangerous confusion between pedestrian and car priority."
4. The Highways Committee of Woking Borough Council on 4 June 1991 received the results of a survey of vehicle movements in the eastern end of Commercial Way prior to the scheme.

"Surveys have shown that between 9.30am and 5pm a total of some 860 movements occur, on average 115 movements per hour, or one every 30 seconds. Of these 134 were light or heavy goods vehicles, 101 taxis, the remainder being cars."
5. The Inspector stated "the pedestrianisation scheme as submitted by the Borough Council of Woking is well balanced, and has taken into account the needs of the community as a whole." He recommended the making of the Draft Order without modification.

6. The scheme was introduced on 1 September 1994 and movable barriers placed across the entrance to Commercial Way at Chertsey Road. These were not fixed and could be slid back to allow the emergency services entry and exemption holders to exit the area. The natural outcome was that persons also entered in breach of the Order. A survey carried out on one day in 1999 revealed that 85 vehicles entered the area illegally during the restricted period.
7. The proposal to install rising bollards, as an effective way of preventing illegal entry was first brought before the Executive Committee of Woking Borough Council on 6 July 2000. A decision was deferred whilst discussion could take place with Reit Management the then owners of Albion House who were not in favour of the bollards. At its meeting of 8 February 2001 the Executive resolved that:-
 - a. "the existing pedestrian zone restrictions in Commercial Way be retained;
 - b. the rising bollards proposed for Commercial Way and Chapel Street be implemented as soon as finance is available;
 - c. the owners of Albion House be offered 14 Exit Permits for use during the pedestrian hours;....."
8. Woking Borough Council's Executive Committee reviewed pedestrianisation on 7 February 2002 in response to a question to the Chairman. The review took account of the public inquiry and the various issues raised since the Order for part pedestrianisation was invoked. It was resolved that:-

"a two year experimental scheme be implemented to allow additional traffic movements at the eastern end of Commercial Way subject to the following conditions:

- (i) The exit permits be issued only to those businesses which could prove ownership or tenancy over the parking spaces;
- (ii) Only one permit be issued per parking space;
- (iii) The parking bays be clearly marked;
- (iv) The parking permits be only for the use of those businesses and be not transferable;
- (v) The free car park season tickets, issued to some businesses, were to be returned before the permits were to be issued but in the event that the scheme was withdrawn after the trial period of two years the free season ticket arrangements would be reinstated; and

- (vi) Subject to the above conditions, disabled badge holders would also be able to gain access to their space(s) during the hours of pedestrianisation and to exit as necessary.”
8. The Highways Agency moved from Woking Borough Council to Surrey County Council on 1 April 2002. Although the rising bollards were installed operation had not been implemented. Following protracted discussion with the holders of car park spaces meeting the criteria for exit permits the bollards went live on Wednesday 15 January 2003. This process was delayed by disputes between owners and lessees of premises as to who was entitled to particular spaces. Each exit pass was issued under strict conditions for use. Whilst the Order permits the Highway Authority to grant a written exemption there is a duty of care to ensure that they are used with care and the prime function of the Order to create a pedestrianised area is maintained. Other persons parked in the area were able to obtain an exit pass under conditions from the Parking Shop in Chobham Road.

ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY

9. The Transportation Service was asked by Committee to consult with various parties regarding the pedestrianisation.
10. A survey of 161 pedestrians using the area was conducted on Tuesday 31 August 2004, replicated at Annex A. Of those interviewed 83.2% thought the area should remain pedestrianised although 73.9% would still use the area even though it were not restricted. The main reason given for wanting pedestrianisation to continue was safety in particular with children. Users were predominantly female and almost 61% were shopping.
11. Each of the businesses affected by the restriction were sent a questionnaire and the analysis is shown at Annex B. Of the respondees 85% usually travelled to work as a car driver and virtually all were provided with a parking space accessed through Commercial Way. The majority of this group strongly disagreed that the area should be pedestrianised. Reasons for individual opinions are shown as comments in Annex B.
12. The Committee considered Woking Borough Council a key consultee with regard to the future development of the Town Centre. Borough Officers considered the issue and discussed it with their Executive Portfolio Holder. Their response is:-
- “The Council has considered this issue on a number of occasions, the last being on 7 February 2002, when the executive resolved to continue the pedestrianisation but made amendments to the exit permit system. As nothing material has changed since that date, the Council’s position is as per the Executive resolution on 7 February 2002.” (see paragraph 8 above). The

submission requested that if the Local Committee were minded to change the status of the area in question it should be part of a review of the whole length of the street.

13. The Town Centre Management Group “strongly believes that the pedestrianisation should continue”. They request that greater enforcement is provided to deter the current level of abuse by drivers and that the area is “treated” to look more like a pedestrianised area. The Group consists of Alders, Barclays, Boots, Holiday Inn, The Ambassadors, The Peacocks, Sainsburys, Woking Chamber (COTAC), Surrey County Council, Woking Borough Council and Wolsey Place Shopping Centre.
14. Woking for Pedestrians request that the current pedestrianisation is retained and the hours extended with Sunday added to the Order. Woking Cycle Users Group believe the restriction should stay and Commercial Way considered for a safe route for cyclists. Both groups highlight the amount of illegal parking that currently occurs and the need for greater enforcement activity.
15. When the bollards were installed consultation took place with the Police, Fire and Ambulance services on the best method to provide emergency access. A padlock on the control box allows access to an override switch. All these services were provided with keys to obtain entry by this means. To date no observation or complaint has been received from the three emergency services that they have needed, but not achieved entry. Their ability to enter the area has been questioned by others prior to this survey and each service contacted to ensure the arrangements in place were sufficient. No complaint was elicited or specific incident cited. As part of this survey that exercise was repeated with an identical response from the three emergency services. Each was asked specifically whether any of their crews had not been able to gain entry when required and to give examples but none were forthcoming.
 - a. Surrey Police, Inspector Paul Smith – Police have not had problems entering the area. Enforcement has taken place at the entrance to Commercial Way. See letter at Annex C.
 - b. Surrey Ambulance Service, Mandy Wicks – Could not provide any direct examples of Ambulance crews being hindered in their response to calls for assistance. Her reply at Annex D mentions “anecdotal evidence” of crews gaining admittance using Sovereign Travel swipe cards. The cards issued to Sovereign Travel only allow vehicles to exit. A suggestion that a key pad is fitted rather than using keys to activate the override system will be implemented.
 - c. Surrey Fire and Rescue – Peter Stonebanks – Attached at Annex E is the copy of an e-mail response from Peter Stonebanks to specific points raised by John Durrant, who presented the petition, on 25 May 2004. The Fire Service have not encountered any problems in entering the area. On 24 September 2004 Charles Fairfull confirmed this was still the position of Surrey Fire and Rescue.

16. The Ambulance Service has suggested that a keypad be fitted as an alternative to the key entry. The number code would be retained in the service control room and passed to the crew when appropriate. This would remove the need to ensure sufficient keys were available to service the various vehicles which three emergency services operate. This suggestion has been discussed with the bollard manufacturers and can be achieved at a cost of £2,000. Subject to Committee approval it will be actioned as a sensible improvement to the current arrangements.
17. On occasions vehicles park at the bollards causing an obstruction. The area is controlled by a Double Yellow Line system, which is enforced by the Police. When Decriminalised Parking Enforcement goes live in 2005 the responsibility for enforcement will rest with local wardens.
18. Paragraph 8 above outlines the conditions under which the current scheme operates, but for a two year trial period which has expired. The Committee now has responsibility for the area and should decide whether the existing system will be retained. If the principle of allowing a selected group the ability to exit the area once in any day is accepted the current system can be extended in perpetuity. Any costs incurred to replace lost exit cards would be passed to the person responsible for the loss.
19. Officers have recommended that the current system of using rising bollards to enforce the parking restrictions continue. Members should be aware of the outcome were they to decide to dispense with use of the bollards to prevent illegal entry. There would be a return to wide scale abuse and breaking of the Order. Thus whilst a pedestrian zone would still exist vehicles could freely but illegally pass through the area causing conflict. This was the situation, which the rising bollards were installed to prevent. It is significant that the current debate on the need for a pedestrianised area only gathered momentum when rising bollards prevented this illegal activity. Prior to their installation drivers could and did pass freely to or from car parks and on street parking without hindrance.
20. When this section of Commercial Way was identified for pedestrianisation it was part of a wider plan for a pedestrian area within the Town Centre during the main shopping hours. It forms the link between Chobham Road and other parts of Commercial Way and then into Town Square. A pedestrian entering the area should be confident that they can walk safely within the area and not be confused as to which parts are, or are not, pedestrianised. Even the current exemption allowing a limited number of exit movements under controlled conditions whilst meeting the aspirations of a particular group breaches this aspiration.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

21. Installation of a key pad for emergency access will cost £2,000

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

22. The continuous pedestrianised areas assist the mobility impaired within the Town Centre generally.

CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

23. The bollards prevent illegal driving and parking in this area of Commercial Way.

EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

24. There are no Equalities Implications.

CONCLUSIONS AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

25. The pedestrianisation of the eastern end of Commercial Way forms part of a complete pedestrianised centre within Woking Town. It was a crucial element in the decision of the Government Inspector when approving the scheme. There is no fundamental change today from the reasons for his decision in 1993.

26. The survey has shown that whilst a group of people who have a vested interest in obtaining entry to the area with vehicles would want the current restrictions removed or replaced the majority want them to remain in place including the pedestrians surveyed.

27. The exit permits issued by Woking Borough Council under specific conditions breach the desire to maintain a completely pedestrianised area. However the principal has been established and it appears appropriate to maintain this exception.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: Nil

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