

SWALE JOINT TRANSPORTATION BOARD	Agenda Item:
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Meeting Date	Monday 1 st March 2021
Report Title	Temporary Road Closures in Faversham, Sheerness & Sittingbourne
Cabinet Member	Cllr Monique Bonney - Cabinet Member for Economy & Property
Head of Service	Emma Wiggins - Director of Regeneration
Lead Officer	Dean Radmore (SBC) – Capital Projects Manager
Classification	Open

Recommendations	Report for information only
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1. Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report is in response to the questions raised by a County Member and provides details on what decisions have been made, by whom, when, taking into account what factors, detailing what Equality Impact Assessments have been part of the process and what medical or public health evidence informed the decisions in relation to the town centre closures in Sittingbourne, Faversham and Sheerness.
- 1.2 This report also sets out the next steps that Swale Borough Council would like to take to consider the suitability of permanent orders in each of the town centres.

2. Background

- 2.1 The current town centre road closures (Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders) were introduced in Sittingbourne, Faversham and Sheerness in early July 2020 to assist with the social distancing measures necessary as a result of COVID-19. These TTRO's were agreed by Kent County Council and Swale Borough Council and were preceded by a 21-day Emergency TRO in each town, including Faversham following a request by the town council. These ETRO's were available from 15th June 2020 however was implemented in Faversham on 19th June 2020 following a town council member decision on 16th June 2020.
- 2.2 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) was not carried out initially in June 2020 by Kent County Council prior to implementation of the Emergency TRO however following feedback to Swale Borough Council regarding disabled

access and deliveries following implementation of the TTRO's in the 3 town centres an EIA was carried out in July 2020 as per the Swale Borough Council guidelines that concluded that appropriate mitigation measures were in place at the time.

- 2.3 Regular reviews have continued to evaluate evidence of town centre usage captured by Officers including newly appointed High Street Ambassadors and have also taken into account feedback from businesses and the public. These reviews consider footfall within the town centres during 'lockdown' periods and consideration has been given to whether the pedestrianisation should be lifted at these times. To date the evidence gathered has shown there to still be a number of users accessing essential businesses providing justification to keep the restrictions in place.
- 2.4 Swale Borough Council also carried out a focus group/telephone interview process regarding the disabled access problems. Members of the public that had already contacted Swale with concerns about disabled access were invited to take part in a telephone interview and then a follow up focus group was planned with some key stakeholders (such as voluntary sector groups that lead on disabled access right). This was promoted through the media however there was very little take-up resulting in a decision not to progress with the focus groups.
- 2.5 At the beginning of January 2021 to coincide with the six-month expiry of the original TTRO's a request was made by Swale Borough Council to extend the orders as a result of the continued COVID-19 risk and an extension was granted, without consultation being carried out by Swale Borough Council for a further year up to the maximum 18-month TTRO period. This is to allow social distancing measures to be maintained throughout the re-opening phase following the end of the third lockdown period and to allow the measures to stay in place or be re-introduced if there are any re-occurrences of the virus.

3. Next Steps

- 3.1 Although there have been concerns raised, specifically in Faversham and Sheerness regarding accessibility for those with disabilities, the impact on trade of individual businesses and access for deliveries and courier services, the continuation of the town centre closures on a permanent basis could have several economic and environmental benefits including but not limited to:
 - Making the town centres safer during the closure period enabling customers and workers to freely use the town centre without worrying about passing vehicular traffic.
 - Improving air quality by removing traffic pollution from the immediate town centre.
 - Providing an increase in available space for pedestrians, parents with buggies and the disabled to move around the town centre.

- Enabling an increase in outdoor seating for the food and beverage businesses and more outdoor events.
- Enabling an increase in outdoor events in the town centre during the hours of closure increasing dwell time and customer expenditure.
- Attracting new businesses to pedestrian dominant town centres.

In January 2021, it was agreed to carry out a pre-consultation (informal consultation) exercise to gauge stakeholder feedback on the current TTRO's and ascertain whether permanent road closure orders should be introduced in the three town centres after the current orders have expired. Informal discussions have recently taken place with the cabinet member for economy & property and members of the town councils from Faversham and Sheerness about the continuation of road closures after the current orders expire and positive feedback has been received regarding the continuation of the closures.

3.2 A specialist consultant has been procured to do this work so that it is independent, follows procedure and is open, fair and transparent. Stakeholder views will be gathered as part of the informal consultation which will be shared and discussed at cabinet meetings, at area committee meetings, and with Kent County Council at the joint transportation board meetings. Any objections will be reviewed and responses fed back to all stakeholders as part of the process and a decision will be made to continue or abandon.

3.3 The pre-consultation (informal consultation) stage includes:

- Reviewing the timing of the closures
- Reviewing the extents of the closures
- Identifying issues and barriers to delivery
- Reviewing and making a case for the Economic Benefits for pedestrianisation
- Reviewing and making a case for the environmental advantages
- Identifying different options to go out to informal consultation with
- Carrying out stakeholder analysis to determine all stakeholders required for the consultation
- Creating consultation documentation sufficient for the informal consultation process
- Informal Consultation for the three town centres (e.g. initial letter drops, community events)
- Review of feedback and objections from the informal consultations processes including outline proposals and cost estimates of any required mitigation measures.
- Working with Swale Borough Council and Kent County Council with regard to reporting progress to elected members, area committee's, cabinet and the joint transportation board as required.

3.4 Only if a definitive recommendation is reached at the end of the informal consultation stage by the Joint Transportation Board will the formal TRO consultation exercise commence.

4. Recommendation

4.1 For information only.

5. Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Improving Community Safety through safer Highways.
Financial, Resource and Property	Cost of carrying out the informal and formal consultation exercises, drafting the Traffic Regulation Order, processing the Order plus the cost of installing any physical changes in each of the town centres. Costs and funding are still to be determined.
Legal and Statutory	Drafting of Traffic Regulation Order, Sealing of Order in due course.
Crime and Disorder	None at this stage.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	None identified at this stage.
Equality and Diversity	The EIA carried out in July 2020 concluded that due regard has been given to the equality duty and that the research and consultation undertaken for the creation and adoption of this project has not identified any discrimination that would arise. Due regard will be given with regard to no unlawful discrimination as the action plan that will ensure the delivery of this project are further developed. Further consideration of this will also be needed through the permanent order process.
Sustainability	Improved air quality by removing traffic pollution from the immediate town centre
Health Implications	The introduction of permanent road closure orders in the town centres is likely to: Make the town centres safer during the closure period enabling customers and workers to freely use the town centre without worrying about passing vehicular traffic and the risk of pedestrian/vehicular conflict. Improve air quality by removing traffic pollution from the immediate town centre.

6. Appendices

6.1 None

7. Background Papers

7.1 None