



## **BARGOED TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP – 15TH OCTOBER 2014**

**SUBJECT: BUS STOP AT ROYAL SQUARE**

**REPORT BY: ENGINEERING SERVICES DIVISION**

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### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To update town centre group members on the issues surrounding the bus stop at Royal Square

### **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 At the Bargoed Town Centre Management Group (TCMG) meeting held on the 6<sup>th</sup> February 2013, Cllr Davies raised concerns about the bus stop in High Street and its affect on the traffic flow. The Police also expressed reservations, as did the Chamber of Trade representative. Cllr Davies proposed to the TCMG that the current online bus stop be revised to provide a new 'pull in'.
- 2.2 A report that was presented to the TCMG on the 5th June 2013 identified the design philosophy and objectives behind the design of the town centre improvements of which Royal Square and its associated bus stop form part:
- Create a pedestrian friendly environment.
  - Support economic regeneration and vitality of the town.
  - Improve accessibility for pedestrians.
  - Discourage through traffic.
  - Create a low speed environment.
  - Create a focal hub at Royal Square (1 of 3 – Hanbury Square and Lowry Square).
- 2.3 It then focused in on a number of the issues raised at the TCMG and identified costed options for physical works to address the problem.

### **3. CURRENT POSITION**

- 3.1 During 2014 it has been reported that there are still issues associated with buses stopping in the carriageway without any facility for vehicles to pass by at this location. Officers from Urban Renewal, Engineering and Transportation have agreed to review the current situation to investigate the problems reported and establish what cost effective actions if warranted can be implemented.
- 3.2 A small officer working group has been established to investigate the impacts of the online bus stop and to assess and verify and validate the concerns raised by Members and others. Officers will also review the benefits of the existing arrangement and balance those against any adverse impact of the online bus stop.

3.3 This report outlines the progress that officers have made to date on three fronts:

- 1 - Data collection to establish the 'real' impact that the bus stop has had
- 2 – Other wider issues having an impact on traffic flows along the high street
- 3 - Developing options for this bus stops future.

#### 4. DATA COLLECTION

##### 4.1 To date:

**Royal Square Bus Stop Monitoring.** – In order to establish bus stop patronage and dwell time of bus services, monitoring took place on both the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> September for an hour between 10 and 11am and again between 3 and 4pm.

The results indicates that that the average stop over time for buses was 37 seconds. Out of the 65 buses using the stop during the monitoring only 9 had a dwell time of over a minute. The average number of passengers per bus was 3.6.

This data is in line with the stopping times of buses surveyed on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2013 - where it was established that the waiting time at this particular stop ranged from 25 to 85 seconds.

This stop has a consistent steady use by passengers with over 236 using Royal Square in the full 4hrs that the bus stop was monitored. With this flow of passengers it is imperative that the TCMG understand and take account of the bus stop the current impact on shopkeepers in the immediate vicinity.

**Impact of Royal Square Bus Stop on Retailers** - One of the main design principles of locating a bus stop and shelter at Royal Square was to encourage people to use this part of the town centre. Before considering options for the future of this bus stop it was considered necessary to develop a fuller picture of the impact of the bus shelter. Some views have been expressed at previous Town Centre management group meetings and it was felt necessary to gain the views of the immediate retail community that the bus stop impacts upon.

On 17<sup>th</sup> September, the views of local retailers (located in close proximity to Royal Square) were sought through a simple door to door questionnaire. 2 questions were asked and the results from the 17 respondents are outlined below:

*Q.1 Does your business benefit from having the bus stop at Royal Square?*

The response here was that 12 retailers advised that they did benefit whilst 5 considered that they did not benefit.

*Q2. Should the bus stop to be moved further north?*

Here the results were more polarized with 16 out of the 17 respondents stating that it should **not** move further north.

**Bus Operators Views** – Operators using the Royal Square bus stop in Bargoed have been approached and have advised that they are very happy with the stop at this location. The bus operators feel that it has proven beneficial to their customers to get on/off buses in the heart of the town. They also express the view that the stop is now “bedded in” and has proved a useful location for passengers accessing this part of the town.

Bus Operators have instructed their drivers to be mindful of emergency vehicles. Drivers have been reminded to move from the stop to a position where vehicles can pass by in the infrequent circumstances where emergency vehicles are held up due to the setting down or collection of passengers.

**Emergency Services Views** – Traffic Management have been tasked with seeking the views of the emergency services. To date replies have been received from both the Police and the Ambulance services.

The Ambulance service reply states:

*“No reported issues from our crews, when we have needed to get through we have not been delayed.”*

The Police state that they are aware of issues with congestion and will investigate further whether it has impacted on them when they have an emergency call out.

**Parking Survey** – conducted throughout Bargoed on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> September 2014. This report concludes that there is considerable parking in the town centre with the majority appearing to be illegal. The results show that the majority of vehicles were parked illegally either on the footways or in the loading only bays provided along the high street.

There appears to be a number of hotspots that attract illegal parking e.g. Greggs & Ladbrokes area. This information will be key in determining the location of additional defensive street furniture

Furthermore it was observed that it was illegal parking in the bays and poor judgment/manoeuvring by bus drivers at Hanbury Square that prevented a number of buses from accessing the Hanbury Square bus stop which created difficulty and delays to bus services. 11 buses were delayed on Thursday morning, 1 bus was delayed on Thursday afternoon & 1 bus was delayed on Friday morning.

**Change in traffic volumes and reduced HGVs from pre scheme.** - Before the development of the A469 Angel Way relief road the town suffered from heavy traffic flows and associated congestion. 2007 traffic flow figures show 4546 northwards and 4601 southwards through Hanbury Road over an 18hr period. A number of pinch-points existed within the town (including the former northern bridge over the railway line) which often resulted in frequent traffic delays through the heart of the town centre. Surveys undertaken in 2010 after the opening of A469 Angel Way clearly show that traffic through town had been reduced dramatically. Data shows 3050 movements in a northern direction only.

**Traffic Survey** - a further traffic survey is planned to assess the current level of traffic using the route. This survey will help to establish if there have been any significant changes in traffic patterns.

#### **Planned Monitoring:**

**Amount of Vehicles held up at Bus Stop** - During October 2014 it is the intention of CCBC Public Transport Officers to undertake further monitoring of the bus stop to establish the number of vehicles and emergency vehicles delayed behind buses when they stop at the Royal Square bus stop. This data will provide the Council a much more comprehensive overview of the situation and validate the concerns raised to date.

**Bargoed Bus Usage Survey** – To gain a fuller picture of bus usage in the town centre, officers are preparing to monitor all 5 live bus stops (inclusive of the bus station) in Bargoed in October 2014. This will be conducted over 2 days in the same manner as the monitoring already undertaken at Royal Square .

**Bus Passenger Feedback** – The views of bus passengers currently using the Royal Square bus stop will be sought. Bus Users UK have agreed to visit Bargoed and question/canvass bus passengers on this particular issue. It is anticipated that the survey will be undertaken in the first two weeks of October.

## 4.2 Wider Issues

### Use of New bus station

Although the bus station is now frequented by more bus services the topography between Hanbury Rd/High Street and bus station remains a real issue. The significant change in ground levels between the bus station and the retail core of the town is an issue either preventing or discouraging a large proportion of the bus users in Bargoed from boarding and alighting at the bus station to access the town. Officers have investigated this issue and have concluded that there is nothing that can be done to further improve the current pedestrian routes over and above what has already been achieved in recent years.

### Congestion

Officers believe that the issues with vehicles backing up may not solely be caused by the location of the online bus shelter at Royal Square. There still appears to be a lack of enforcement in relation to illegal on-street parking. This impacts negatively on the town centre as loading bays become congested and people park illegally. However double yellow lines have recently been re-established and officers wait to see if this will have a positive impact on this problem.

### Lack of use of car parks

Bargoed has considerable provision of car parking. With the recent opening of the decked car park at Morrisons, the amount of free parking **not** being taken up by vehicle users is something that needs to be investigated further. Officers are currently examining ways of increasing public awareness that the new decked car park is not for the exclusive use of Morrisons customers

## 4.3 Options Appraisal

Officers will investigate further physical options that may address the problem of emergency vehicles backing up behind the static buses when they dwell at the bus stop include:

### **a - Leave the Bus stop where it is.**

Whilst leaving Royal Square as it is will not eradicate all the concerns discussed at the Town Centre Management Group. The current location, in Royal Square allows passengers to alight or board in the retail core of the High Street where direct level access to most shops is possible. To relocate the bus stop could adversely impact on footfall in the northern end of the town at a time when there will be a significant shift in focus to the southern end of the town centre. The design has a rationale behind it, and with the results of the ongoing investigatory work by officers could be seen as the best option.

### **b – Introduce a bus bay at Royal Square**

If warranted, the cost estimate for the introduction of a new bus bay at Royal Square ranges from £109,000 to £250,000 depending on whether major BT fibre optic diversionary works would be required. As has been previously reported to the TCMG no budgets are available to undertake these works. In addition there are no assurances that the new bus bay would not be used by opportunistic vehicle users to illegally park. The introduction of a bus bay at Royal Square would also eat into the enhanced public realm.

### **b – Relocate the bus stop**

In order to allow vehicles to pass stationary buses possibly north to a new location on Lower High Street. Such works are estimated at £10,000.

As outlined in Section 3 above the bus operators and many traders would not be in favour of this option, a view supported by Council Officers who believe moving a stop closer to the new bus station would reduce its usefulness. Moving it southwards to another location on the High Street is not a viable option as there is little or no space for a pull in and shelter to be located and the issue of vehicles backing up behind buses would not be resolved

#### **c – Remove bus stop and shelter totally**

Over £1m has been invested on providing the new bus station for Bargoed and there is an argument that more people should make use of it. However removal of the Royal Square bus stop would mean that the users of the town centre would have to rely more heavily on the new bus station. The topographical constraints between the High Street and the new bus station must be considered and officers have already concluded that nothing more can be done to enhance the pedestrian routes between the town and the station. This option would cost below £10,000

#### **d – Change road alignment and lose loading bay**

The potential of changing the existing road alignment to allow vehicles to utilise the existing loading bay to pass by will be investigated further. However this would only be possible if the current loading bay opposite was to be sacrificed. No detailed costed options for this have yet been developed but a preliminary estimate by a QS has concluded that the necessary works would be in the order of **£15,000**. However a Road Safety Audit would need to be undertaken to ascertain if the resulting highway configuration was deemed safe. It must be noted that any loss of the loading bay would have a detrimental affect on retail businesses that are currently serviced by the loading bay: particularly Comfort Zone and Chisholm's servicing arrangements.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This report updates TCMG of the actions by officers to investigate and validate the problems which are perceived with the current Royal Square bus stop in the middle of the town centre and in particular the congestion reported at the on-line bus stop at Royal Square.

To date the key findings from the ongoing monitoring exercise are:

- There is no significant dwell time by buses at the Royal Square bus stop
- Overall, retailers located around the bus stop benefit from its current location and do not want it moved to the north
- Bus operators are in favour of the stops location
- Police are concerned by their vehicles being held up through the town

A further report will be presented to the next TCMG once all the investigations are completed and costed options available.

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