

**Cheltenham Borough Council**  
**Cabinet – 5<sup>th</sup> November 2019**  
**Cheltenham Transport Plan**

<b>Accountable member</b>	<b>Councillor Andrew McKinlay, Cabinet Member Development and Safety</b>
<b>Accountable officer</b>	<b>Tim Atkins, Managing Director Place and Growth</b>
<b>Ward(s) affected</b>	<b>All</b>
<b>Key/Significant Decision</b>	<b>Key</b>
<b>Executive summary</b>	<p>The Cheltenham Transport Plan funded through the DfT Local Sustainable Transport Fund has been ‘rolled-out’ on a phased basis since 2016, in line with the Gloucestershire County Council Traffic Regulation Order Committee (“GCC TRO) recommendation, endorsed by GCC Cabinet. The first 3 phases have been deemed successful by GCC and are deemed permanent. Phase 4 associated with the removal of through traffic at Boots Corner has been undertaken as an experimental traffic order, and as it now approaches the end of its 18 month implementation, GCC has requested that this Authority confirms its position, either to implement a permanent TRO or to abandon the proposed TRO.</p> <p>It is recognised that phase 4 of the scheme (the Boots Corner trial) has attracted criticism culminating in a petition that was considered by the Council on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2019. The concerns raised by residents and businesses were a mixture of genuine and perceived. GCC responded to the genuine concerns through agreeing changes to the trial scheme and along with CBC have continued to collect data to provide evidence that challenges some of the perceptions.</p> <p>A range of measures has been considered to arrive at a recommendation, and these range from the micro (Cheltenham only impacts) to the macro such as climate change. The report covers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy Alignment – with particular note of the parallel CBC and GCC climate change motions, and the work of Systra in developing the Connecting Cheltenham study with its emphasis on pedestrians, cyclists and public transport.</li> <li>• Traffic Flows – the GCC traffic monitoring report is appended and the 2019 data suggests the closure of Clarence Street as part of the Cheltenham Transport Plan Experimental Traffic Regulation Order is having only a limited effect on the wider traffic network. Critically traffic volumes across Cheltenham between 2008 and 2015 decreased by approximately 13% and are continuing to fall. In 2018, traffic volumes across Cheltenham were approximately 20% lower than they were in 2008. This pattern is likely to continue given the rise in home working and modal shift. In summary, although traffic increases have been seen on some routes because of the Experimental Traffic Regulation Order, traffic flows largely are still less than they were in 2008.</li> </ul>

- Modal Shift – this is the transference of travel from the private motor car to alternatives. The data collected identifies greater pedestrian flows and cyclists in Boots Corner itself and also growth in patronage of Stagecoach services against a national backdrop of declining bus usage. The Cheltenham Residents' Survey 2019 which will be considered by Cabinet in December 2019 also identifies “promoting walking, cycling and public transport” as one of the top 3 priorities for residents.
- Air quality monitoring – CBC has one of the most extensive air quality monitoring arrangements for any comparable town and this demonstrates that areas of NOx (nitrogen oxide and dioxide) exceedance are small and isolated. The comprehensive data and associated paper appended to this report concludes that CTP Ph.4 has made very little difference, either positive or negative to air pollution levels across the town, which have displayed a slow steady decline in exceedances (-7.5%) since 2014. This is probably not surprising, as the scheme was not explicitly designed as a project to improve air quality, but wider factors such improvements in the emissions from HGV's and buses and modal shift away from private vehicles have impacted the data.
- Economic impacts – initial assessments as reported on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2019 compared the actual number of jobs created against those predicted when the bid was originally submitted. Subsequent measures have considered wider impacts but against a rapidly changing economic and social landscape, and whilst Cheltenham experiences losses from its retail portfolio, it also continually welcomes new entrants such that the vacancy rate at 8% sits below the national average of 12% and well below comparable Gloucestershire towns. Again mirrored in the footfall data which shows a trend of Cheltenham maintaining its footfall against a wider picture of decline. That is not to say that the scheme is perfect; it still provides some challenges and these were articulated at a meeting with 11 of the 531 BID members in late September.
- Longer term – the trial scheme has reinforced the need to deal with the A4019 from both a vehicle movement corridor and air quality perspective, and CBC welcomes the news from GCC that in 2020 £1m of capital funding has been allocated to deal with the traffic lights along this corridor. Not necessarily a panacea but this traffic light synchronisation work will assist in improving performance (journey times) along this route and equally assist with more rapidly dispersing some of the traffic on South to North journeys.

## Recommendations

**In light of the economic and other evidence, and based upon GCC traffic flow data, CBC air quality data, and wider considerations, CBC urge the GCC Traffic Regulation Order Committee (TRO) and GCC Cabinet to make the Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (phase 4) of the Cheltenham Transport Plan permanent.**

**That Cabinet authorise the Managing Director – Place & Growth to write to GCC and the TRO committee to make CBC's position clear.**

<b>Financial implications</b>	<p>There are no direct financial implications resulting from the recommendation of this report.</p> <p>However, should the County Council determine that the trial be made permanent then that will allow public realm upgrades as part of the High Street ambition.</p> <p>That ambition will have financial implications and will be brought back to Cabinet in due course.</p> <p><b>Contact officer: Paul Jones, paul.jones@cheltenham.gov.uk, 01242 264365</b></p>
<b>Legal implications</b>	<p>The legal power and responsibility for the introduction and implementation of a Traffic Regulation Order (including those Orders that follow any Experimental Traffic Order) rests with the County Council.</p> <p>In order to assist it in making a decision on whether or not to make this Experimental Order permanent the County Council is seeking the formal view of this Authority on whether or not it supports the making of the Experimental Order permanent.</p> <p>Whilst this Authority can provide a formal view the County Council is not bound by this view and it will consider all views and comments provided as part of its consultation before coming to its own view on whether or not to make the Experimental Order permanent.</p> <p><b>One Legal - legal.services@tewkesbury.gov.uk</b></p>
<b>HR implications (including learning and organisational development)</b>	<p>None</p>
<b>Key risks</b>	<p>Climate change opportunity and reputation</p>
<b>Corporate and community plan Implications</b>	<p>One of the key priorities in the corporate plan 2019-23 is the continued revitalisation and improvement of our vibrant town centre and public spaces. Delivery of the Cheltenham Transport Plan is one of the key under-pinning projects to deliver this priority The recommendation will also contribute to the recent council decision to develop a route-map to that would see future carbon neutrality for Cheltenham.</p>
<b>Environmental and climate change implications</b>	<p>Strong evidence is provided in this report showing positive modal shift to more sustainable means of travel. Failure to seize the opportunity presented by the phase 4 trial will put back aspirations to tackle climate change in Cheltenham. If the significant reduction in vehicles travelling through the centre of the high street is reversed this would have a negative impact on the Council's climate change and environmental sustainability aspirations. It will also be in direct conflict with national, regional and local policy regarding transportation and sustainability.</p>
<b>Property/Asset Implications</b>	<p><i>At this stage there are no property implications. However, as proposals emerge for the works to the high street and public realm, further consideration will need to be given to any CBC interests.</i></p> <p><b>Contact officer: Dominic.Stead@cheltenham.gov.uk</b></p>

## 1. Background

- 1.1 The Cheltenham Transport Plan (CTP) has been a Department for Transport funded project for which GCC with the support of CBC, secured funds from the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) in 2012. Its implementation has been phased with the final phase (phase 4 Boots Corner) enacted as an 18 month trial under an experimental traffic order, that was enacted on 28th June 2018.
- 1.2 Full Council considered the initial assessment of the trial after its six month milestone on 21st January 2019. This was supported by a GCC analysis of traffic flows and a wider consideration of the predicted and actual economic outputs of the LSTF package of measures. This concluded that the economic outputs in the form of jobs created and temporary construction work were in line with or exceeded expectations. This same Council meeting also considered a petition requesting that the traffic trail be abandoned.
- 1.3 The outcome of the GCC initial assessment was to make amendments to the trial and to continue it for its full experimental period of 18 months, up to 28th December 2019. The consultation period closes on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2019 and the view of this Authority is submitted as during that period.
- 1.4 Following the end of this consultation GCC will be holding a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) Committee at St Paul's church on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2019 to consider the outcomes of the Cheltenham Transport Plan.
- 1.5 The purpose of this report is to respond to a GCC request for a formal position statement from CBC, as district authority, regarding the experimental traffic order. It is worth noting that GCC advise that it is a binary decision and can only conclude either that the experimental order should be made permanent or abandoned; there is no latitude for alternatives or caveats.
- 1.6 In determining the position a range of factors will be considered. These will include policy alignment, updated traffic flows (since last consideration in January 2019), modal shift data (including pedestrian flows, cycling and bus patronage), air quality monitoring, economic impacts and longer term factors.

## 2. Policy Alignment

- 2.1 The delivery of the CTP aligns with the CBC Corporate Strategy 2019-2023, notably the key priority of *'continuing the revitalisation and improvement of our vibrant town centre and public spaces'* with specific reference to *'continue to invest in our High Street and public spaces'* and to *'work collaboratively to develop and gain approval for a new Cheltenham transport plan including support for cycling and walking projects that will also improve local air quality and health in the town.'*
- 2.2 It also aligns with the GCC Local Transport Plan (LTP), specifically the 2015-2031 Implementation Report 2017. Specific objectives are set out at 2.1.CPS1 - Central Severn Vale Connecting Places Strategy – 2.1.5 Cheltenham Transport Plan. The Cheltenham plan also contributes to other targets e.g. LTP PI – 9 Increase use of bus and more recent initiatives such as the Department for Transport Cycle & Walking Investment Strategy 2017, which aims to make cycling & walking the natural choices for shorter journeys, or as part of a longer journey. The GCC LTP is currently the subject of a refresh and emerging themes are a greater focus upon modal shift with walking, cycling and public transport being prioritised.
- 2.3 CBC has embraced the opportunity to support the LTP and engaged Systra to undertake a comprehensive review of transport opportunities in and around Cheltenham. 'Connecting Cheltenham' as a study is attempting to align climate change; townscape quality; local environmental impacts such as air quality; equitable and inclusive access to transport; health and wellbeing and the accommodation of planned growth. The outputs were the subject of a member

seminar on 7<sup>th</sup> August; considered by O&S on 19<sup>th</sup> August and considered by Cabinet in October 2019. Given that GCC were part of the wider stakeholder engagement, the final report unsurprisingly reflects the emerging themes in the LTP.

- 2.4** Both GCC as transport authority and CBC as district authority have accepted the need for climate change action with motions declaring a climate emergency approved on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2019 and 9<sup>th</sup> July 2019 respectively. These motions encourage both authorities to take a robust stance to climate change issues and support positive measures such as reducing carbon emissions and working towards becoming carbon neutral. In the case of GCC specific measures noted include - *Ensure that our major plans, such as the local transport plan, have clearly identified strategies to reduce carbon emissions;* - *Work with district and borough councils to reduce the districts' carbon footprint within their corporate strategies.*
- 2.5** Essentially this places the two Councils (Gloucestershire and Cheltenham) on the same platform as UK MPs who approved a motion to declare an environment and climate emergency on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2019.
- 2.6** To progress this ambition CBC has engaged a specialist consultant and will be considering a wide reaching report. This will note that eliminating the emissions from transport is a key challenge to carbon neutrality: implementing such an ambition may involve stepping stones such as an Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) as operated in London.
- 2.7** It is also worth noting that other agencies have also applauded the trial. These are Sustrans, the national charity dedicated “to making it easier for people to walk and cycle” and Tom Beasley from Active Gloucestershire, a charity whose vision is that “everyone in Gloucestershire is active every day”. Upon noting the increased walking and cycling recorded at Boots Corner he commented that “Across the UK, half of women and a third of men are damaging their health through physical inactivity. By turning our towns into places that make being active an easy choice, we can improve public health, help people to stay active later in life and reduce stress on the NHS.”

### **3. Traffic Flows**

- 3.1** The full details of the most recent GCC traffic flow analytical report is contained in appendix 1 and is available on line at [https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/media/2092806/191002\\_ctp\\_4\\_update\\_report-final.pdf](https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/media/2092806/191002_ctp_4_update_report-final.pdf) but key highlights of the report of the experimental traffic order at Boots Corner and its impacts are noted below.
- 3.2** The GCC report leads with the comment: ‘*The traffic data collected during March 2019 suggests the closure of Clarence Street as part of the Cheltenham Transport Plan Experimental Traffic Regulation Order is having only a limited effect on the wider traffic network*’, although this is later underpinned by a wider narrative on falling traffic volumes (see 3.7), so it could be argued that the Cheltenham Transport Plan has, since its delivery inception in 2016, contributed to this wider picture.
- 3.3** Daily traffic flows can vary significantly due to a wide range of factors including weather, road traffic collisions, congestion elsewhere on the network and local events. Therefore, an allowance for daily variation in traffic flows needs to be included within any analysis of future traffic flows on local roads. The baseline traffic surveys were undertaken in 2015 and the Boots Corner trial commenced in 2018. There is a need to take account of background traffic growth on the network before considering the impact of the Boots Corner closure. The UK Government produces a set of traffic growth forecasts and supporting software, TEMPRO. For Cheltenham, TEMPRO forecasts a 4.44% traffic growth between 2015 and 2018. Additionally, the Department for

Transport (DfT) guidance suggests that automatic traffic survey equipment confidence values should be plus / minus 5%, or a variation of 10%. Therefore increases in traffic in 2018 of up to 9.44% over 24 hours will be discounted as this is demonstrably due to background traffic growth and daily variation.

- 3.4** Boots' Corner was temporarily closed for a week in May 2009. Traffic surveys were undertaken before, during and after the closure at a total of 24 locations across the town to understand the impacts of the closure. The 2009 surveys showed that the majority of roads had showed less than 10% increase in traffic during the Boots' Corner closure over a 24 hour period. Combined with the 9.44% variation in background growth, a 20% increase in traffic has been taken as the threshold for an acceptable level of traffic growth.
- 3.5** Compared with pre-Cheltenham Transport Plan traffic data from 2015, three sites are showing traffic increases over the 20% background growth threshold:
- St. George's Street
  - St. James' Square
  - Winchcombe Street (South)
- 3.6** The increases on St. George's Street, St. James' Square and Winchcombe Street (South) are not unexpected, as they are on alternative northbound routes immediately either side of the restricted route. Traffic data and feedback received during the first six months of the trial is currently being reviewed and options to consider and address the increases in traffic along immediate alternative routes is being considered.
- 3.7** It should be noted that whilst traffic flows at St Georges Street, St James' Square and Winchcombe Street (South) have increased above the 20% traffic growth threshold set, traffic volumes across Cheltenham between 2008 and 2015 decreased by approximately 13% and are continuing to fall. In 2018, traffic volumes across Cheltenham were approximately 20% lower than they were in 2008. This pattern is likely to continue given the rise in home working and modal shift. In summary, the traffic increases seen on some routes because of the Experimental Traffic Regulation Order are still less than they were in 2008.
- 3.8** Analysis of Bluetooth journey time data shows journey times along key routes in Cheltenham have remained, for the most part, unchanged since April 2015. Journey times have increased on the following routes, but by no more than one minute:
- Saints Corridor northbound (St. George Road to St. Margret's Road) in the PM peak period
  - A4019 eastbound between Gloucester Road and North Place in the AM and PM peak periods.
- 3.9** The full GCC report is appended (Appendix 2) to this document but given that some of these issues existed pre-trial and that GCC have committed to improving the traffic flow on the A4019 through major capital investment in the traffic light synchronisation, and that traffic flows are reducing with changing work patterns, and individuals desires to reduce their carbon footprint, there is every reason to be optimistic that the residual challenges will be dealt with in the future.

## 4 Modal Shift

- 4.1 A key tenet of the LSTF funded project was to encourage individuals to explore alternative lower carbon travel options where possible. Since the phased implementation CBC has been working with partners to establish the impact.
- 4.2 Early phases saw benefits for cyclists and buses along Albion Street, but greater impacts were delivered by the phase 4 trial. In order to capture the impact, a range of measures have been deployed; these are independent footfall and movement counts through Boots Corner, wider footfall data and also data from Stagecoach, specifically on patronage and timetable reliability.
- 4.3 The independent footfall counts have been taken to compare movements across Boots Corner with a baseline measure taken prior to the start of the trial. The data collected in survey week 6 (10-16 June 2019), and one year on from the first dataset collected, survey week 1 (11-17 June 2018), which was before the trial began demonstrates significant changes of movement patterns within the space. The data shows the following activity in week 6 compared to week 1:
- 133% increase in the number of pedestrians,
  - 138% increase in the number of cyclists,
  - 84% increase in the number of parked bicycles,
  - 28% decrease in the number of people sitting, and
  - 142% increase in the number of wheelchair/mobility scooter users.

The anomaly is clearly the decrease in the number of people sitting in the space and reflects the fact that Week 6 had very wet and cold weather in comparison to week 1. A wider comparison can be achieved by averaging the results since the trial began, compared to the pre-trial data set. Taking an average of all the survey weeks since the phase 4 traffic trial started (weeks 2 – 6), the data shows the following activity:

- 121% increase in the number of pedestrians,
- 189% increase in the number of cyclists,
- 71% increase in the number of parked bicycles,
- 20% increase in the number of people sitting, and
- 113% increase in the number of wheelchair/mobility scooter users

All in comparison to survey week 1 - before the traffic trial started.

These results demonstrate the greater pedestrian and cyclist activity since the trial began and also show that the space is seemingly more attractive for wheelchair/mobility scooter users.

- 4.4 The Stagecoach data identifies significant modal shift since the trial began. Rupert Cox, Stagecoach managing director, said on 29<sup>th</sup> July 2019 “During the past 12 months we have seen an extra 270,000 bus passenger journeys made across Cheltenham. That’s about 5,200 a week or 4.3% growth. (Additionally) Our buses have seen an improvement on their punctuality which is up from 92.5% to 93.1% (based on all routes which cover about 2.6 million annual miles). We are also investing more than £2m in 14 new buses for services in the town and they are expected to enter service in late 2019.”

- 4.5 This performance is contrary to the national picture where bus patronage has seen a national decline compared to the 4.3% growth in Cheltenham over the last 12 months;
- 4.6 Equating this to ‘potential vehicle movements avoided’ can be undertaken by utilising the Department for Transport vehicle occupancy data. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/nts09-vehicle-mileage-and-occupancy#history> The data for “all purposes” for 2017 (most recent data) gives a national occupancy of 1.55 persons per vehicle although for commuting this fell to 1.16 persons per vehicle. On this basis, an additional 5200 person journeys per week by bus has probably resulted in between 3,354 to 4,482 fewer private vehicle movements per week on the network. This aligns with the traffic data produced by GCC with falling vehicle movements recorded over the long term.
- 4.7 Reporting wider town centre footfall data is more challenging as the BID have reported disruption to the footfall cameras within their control due to various works and consequently doubts remain over the veracity of some of the data. However, Springboard, a company which collects data nationally also has a single data collection point on the High Street in Cheltenham and has been recording data since August 2017 and sharing this with Cheltenham BID. This data is used to compare performance collected by Springboard across the South West region and wider UK. This data set operational since August 2017 is noted below and whilst the trends are erratic it does suggest that Cheltenham is performing well compared to the South West region and wider UK; critically Cheltenham had a positive footfall towards Christmas which is such a crucial trading period for many retailers especially when set against a regional and national decline.

Month	2017/2018	2018/2019	Cheltenham	South West	UK
January		422,475		-3.10%	-4.80%
February		435,014		-1.40%	-1.30%
March		545,318		-9.30%	-4.80%
April		469,950		-4.00%	-4.90%
May		462,187		0.80%	-0.70%
June		586,984		-0.10%	-0.90%
July		492,615		0.10%	-2.30%
August	490,377	481,291	-1.90%	-2.30%	-4.30%
September	610,100	601,947	-1.30%	-1.60%	-3.20%
October	488,818	469,198	-4.00%	-2.50%	-5.40%
November	487,593	497,290	2.00%	-3.80%	-5.00%
December	703,184	716,023	1.80%	-2.10%	-5.70%
January	422,475	430,865	1.99%	0.34%	-1.27%
February	435,014	441,132	1.41%	-3.16%	-1.53%
March	545,318	589,108	8.03%	-0.33%	2.65%
April	469,950	438,400	-6.71%	1.21%	-1.52%

- 4.8 The Brewery Quarter has its own monitoring system and in July 2019 reported “that from June last year to June this year their footfall has increased by 12%, with average trade performance up by 5%”. This is of course against a challenging national backdrop with the Retail Gazette reporting in July 2019 that “Overall UK footfall declined by 2.9% in June compared this time last

year when it declined 0.9%". So whilst Cheltenham cannot afford to be complacent the data does show a healthy position compared to national data with no evidence to substantiate that the trial has dissuaded people from visiting Cheltenham; in fact the data suggests that Cheltenham is performing better than many comparable towns.

- 4.9 Wider influencers also exist and for several years CBC has been setting car park tariffs that dissuade commuters but aim to remain competitive for visitors. The most recent car park data suggests that despite price increases above inflation that car park usage, using income as a proxy, remains buoyant.
- 4.10 Further active engagement also exists with CBC sponsoring the Cheltenham Spa railway station improvements in concert with GWR, Network Rail, GFirst LEP and GCC. One objective of the current works is to establish a dedicated cycling and walking link from the town centre all the way to GCHQ and Gloucester by linking-up a range of measures. These include extending the Honeybourne Line south from Queens Road bridge to link up with Lansdown Bridge; deploying Growth Deal 3 funds secured by CBC via GFirst LEP to connect Lansdown Bridge to Arle Court and Highways England funding for the link onwards to Gloucester via the B4063.
- 4.11 The Cheltenham resident's survey 2019 undertaken independently by BMG, and which has a high statistical confidence identified "promoting walking, cycling and public transport" as one of the top 3 priorities for residents; re-enforcing this desire for modal shift.

## 5 Air Quality Monitoring

- 5.1 CBC has a statutory responsibility for monitoring air quality. This led to the declaration of a borough wide air quality management area (AQMA) in 2014. Since that date, the data obtained by monitoring levels of NOx across the borough have indicated that areas of exceedance are small and isolated.
- 5.2 The location of monitoring points has varied over the 26 years that this monitoring has been carried out, and in July 2018, 7 new sites were installed to try and assess the impact of CTP Phase 4 on the air quality of the local area reflecting concerns raised by local constituents that the trial closure would either move or exacerbate poor air quality into residential streets. It is believed that Cheltenham now has one of the most comprehensive air quality monitoring networks in any town of its size.
- 5.3 It is worth noting that other towns and cities are exploring more radical solutions than simply removing through traffic. These include a proposed ban on fossil fuel vehicles in city centres by 2030 in Scotland; charges for all higher emission vehicles in Bath from 2020 in a bid to reduce nitrogen dioxide levels.
- 5.4 Recent detailed modelling of air pollution suggests that the area of exceedance is confined to a narrow corridor close to the A4109, running approximately from the junction of St. George's Street through Poole Way and High Street to the junction of Gloucester Road and Tewkesbury Road. A detailed independent report by Bureau Veritas is expected imminently, and it is anticipated that this will be used to revoke the whole-borough AQMA in favour of a more focused AQMA in the area worst affected. Re-declaring the AQMA will allow improvement efforts to be more focused on the area worst affected by air pollution.

- 5.5** In very general terms there has been a slow, steady decline in NO<sub>2</sub> levels over the last 10 years, as can be seen by the figures in the full report as row “Ave of long term sites”, which calculates the average annual level recorded at 16 sites that have operated continuously between 2014 and the present. This analysis has found a 7.5% drop in average level across that period. This is largely attributed to improvements in the emissions from HGVs and buses, along with modal shift away from domestic vehicle use, as reported by GCC traffic flow data.
- 5.6** Measured levels at “new” sites in operation since August 2018 are all in compliance with the 40ug/m<sup>3</sup> limit with the exception of the site at Princess Elizabeth Way (North), where the initial 12 months of results suggest a slight exceedance. This site has already been identified as needing further investigation and is subject to more detailed modelling in a detailed assessment being carried out for the purposes of the AQMA review.
- 5.7** The comprehensive air quality monitoring analysis including trend data validated by Defra from 2014 is attached as appendix 3.
- 5.8** The conclusion from the data considered is that the CTP Ph.4 has made very little difference, either positive or negative to air pollution levels across the town. This is probably not surprising, as the scheme was not explicitly designed as a project to improve air quality. In some areas, closest to the trial restrictions there have been incidental improvements in air quality. In likely diversion routes around the town centre there may have been some small increases in pollution, but all monitored sites are still well within legal limits.
- 5.9** The Cheltenham resident’s survey 2019 undertaken independently by BMG, and which has a high statistical confidence, reported the fact that 75% of residents agree that CBC should try to reduce vehicle emissions in the borough and when focussed upon air quality 25% of responses identified that reducing the number of cars/traffic would improve air quality.

## **6 Economic Impacts**

- 6.1** Determining the specific economic impact of the phase 4 trial beyond the direct LSTF outputs reported at the Council meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2019 is not simple. All High Streets are under significant stress as a result of changing consumer behaviour; financial pressures for retailers and institutional landlords; rating challenges etc and Cheltenham is no exception.
- 6.2** It is recognised that Cheltenham is currently experiencing a number of retail closures including Kath Kidston, Whittards, LK Bennett and Karen Millen. However, these are national closures or restructures and not specific to Cheltenham. Whilst we have some units that are “sticking” due to contractual issues eg. former Austin Reed unit, other retail units churn very quickly, such as the former Laura Ashley store which has been taken by Anthropologie and the LKBennett store which has an application for change of use for a café.
- 6.3** The JCS retail review early headlines identified the following statistics in September 2019
- Cheltenham
    - Increase in convenience goods turnover from £20.6m in 2015 to £29.9m in 2019
    - Decrease in comparison goods turnover from £483m in 2015 to £436m in 2019
    - Loss of market share in clothing/fashion, health/beauty, furnishings and recreation goods
    - Sustained fall in vacancies since 2010. Vacant units now comprise 8% of all retail units below the national average of 12%

- Gloucester

17% of units vacant in the city centre.

Continued loss of market share to surrounding centres and the internet.

Fall in comparison goods turnover from £319m in 2015 to £269m in 2019

- Tewkesbury

Continued rise in vacancy levels. In 2019, 17% of all units in the centre now vacant

Falls in the amount of convenience and comparison retail businesses

Falls in convenience and comparison turnover levels. Comparison turnover has fallen from £25m in 2015 to £19m in 2019.

- General trends

Weaker growth in convenience and comparison goods spending.

Convenience expenditure unlikely to grow in the short to medium term.

Lower comparison goods expenditure growth than estimated in the 2015 JCS Retail Study will affect future capacity levels. Comparison goods retailers are now concentrating on just the larger town and city centres which will hit Cheltenham, Gloucester and Tewkesbury, but particularly the latter two centres. Town centres are experiencing an over-supply of space, recognised by the Government who are now promoting a much more diverse set of land uses in centres.

- 6.4** This data reflects the experience in Cheltenham, which has had challenges but nowhere as sustained as other Gloucestershire retail centres. The planning process is supporting changes of use and positive outcomes are being delivered. These include 30,000ft<sup>2</sup> of fully occupied office space in the Brewery Quarter, previously designated for retail; conversion of Formal House storage depot to town centre offices; conversion of the former BHS store in the Regent Arcade to a range of uses. The overall objective has been to diversify the town centre from a dependence upon retail only and by encouraging town centre employment and town centre living, footfall has been maintained. Equally other uses have been supported, in particular food and beverage and the leisure uses at the Brewery Quarter (cinema, gym, bowling); uses which in many towns are found out of the town centre.
- 6.5** In 2018 The Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) ranked 70 High Streets based upon the number of payday lenders, bookmakers, tanning salons and fast food outlets; with the lowest ranking going to those towns with the greater number of these outlets. Cheltenham was ranked in the UK's 10 healthiest High Streets, so clearly resisting the challenges facing other towns.
- 6.6** Other positives include the JLP store being shortlisted for a national REVO award and also responses from national agents with Knight Frank citing Cheltenham town centre as ranked 9 out of 200 nationally for investment and Colliers International who noted "Polarisation between the 'best and the rest' retail locations is becoming increasingly apparent throughout the UK and this is no different for the South West. The dominant centres in the region, such as Bristol, Bath, Cheltenham, Exeter and Plymouth, continue to benefit from good levels of demand and relatively low levels of vacancy. An example is Cheltenham, where rents remain unchanged from 2017 and the town will welcome a new 115,000 sq ft John Lewis department store in October of this year."
- 6.7** The BID undertook a survey to attempt to identify the impact of the traffic trial on town centre performance. Unfortunately only 28 of 531 (5.2%) eligible BID members participated; the majority of those taking part expressing concerns although not necessarily empirically evidenced. As the survey was undertaken just prior to the changes implemented in June 2019 the BID held a further

survey, to better understand the implications of the changes undertaken by GCC to respond to earlier concerns about the trial. This survey was conducted with those initial 28 respondents but only 5 responses were received.. As a consequence CBC and GCC offered to meet with the initial 28 respondents to explore their concerns. This meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2019 was well attended and a constructive dialogue identified some on-going key concerns. These included the items below with responses from GCC and CBC

- Confusion for visitors – hopefully addressed once trial status determined and satnav companies update maps
- What happens when all the new houses arrive as part of the JCS? - GCC have committed up to £1m capital spend in 2020 to address the A4019 corridor. Additionally £22m will be spent on the A40 Arle Court starting May 2020 and that a major bid had been submitted to upgrade J10. All actions that would assist with wider traffic movements within the town.
- Clarence Parade need for parking for business use – recognised that the trial coincided unhelpfully with the withdrawal of permits as part of a wider review. GCC to explore options
- Rodney Road is perceived to be attracting too much use and junction with High Street perceived as risky to pedestrians - GCC have explored options including 'soft' traffic calming (planters, signage etc) but we believe want a final determination on the trial before finalising a strategy. Signage for key districts such as Montpellier - Could better signage be deployed at P&R and Royal Well. GCC/CBC to explore

## **7 Longer term factors**

**7.1** Both the GCC traffic flow data and air quality monitoring demonstrate challenges associated with the A4019 corridor. It would appear that the trial has not significantly impacted upon these measures in this location either positively or negatively and that longer term challenges associated with this stretch of highway remain. The most recent GCC bluetooth data notes that the A4019 continues to experience significant variability in travel times.

**7.2** GCC have however committed significant funding (£1m has been quoted) in their 2020/2021 capital programme to undertake traffic light improvement works, to help support the long term housing growth associated with the Joint Core Strategy land allocation at NW Cheltenham. Critically this could involve software upgrades so that the various sets of traffic lights interact with each other rather than stand alone. It is understood, that whilst not a panacea, that this traffic light synchronisation work will assist in improving performance (journey times) along this route and equally assist with more rapidly dispersing some of the traffic on South to North journeys. The specific timescale for this work is yet to be announced by GCC, although it is understood that preliminary investigations have already been undertaken.

**7.3** Should the TRO committee recommend that the trial be made permanent and this is ratified by GCC, then future steps can be planned and implemented. These will focus upon a range of ambitions including further improving cycling, pedestrian and bus routes in line with the 'Connecting Cheltenham' work and emerging LTP, and also the opportunity to progress the wider ambition for upgrading of the High Street / central core in line with the 'fly-through' published and promoted in July 2019.

[https://www.cheltenham.gov.uk/news/article/2289/how\\_your\\_high\\_street\\_could\\_look](https://www.cheltenham.gov.uk/news/article/2289/how_your_high_street_could_look)

The fly-through had in excess of 10,000 hits and whilst the number of viewers completing the survey was low at c150 the general response was supportive of improvements.

**7.4** At Boots corner itself the ambition will be to consolidate the temporary works undertaken to support the trial into a permanent quality setting. This will permanently reclaim the road space prioritised for pedestrians within the experimental traffic regulation order. Elements such as the pelican crossing are anticipated to remain to align with requests from the accessibility advisory group. The final design for the wider space will be determined once a decision is made on the experimental TRO and may well include a water feature, but importantly it will not retain the fake grass which has been a temporary measure during the trial and has attracted a mixture of support and ridicule but most importantly, as demonstrated by the data measuring those sitting at Boots Corner, the importance that pedestrians and cyclists attach to usable public space at this central point in the town.

## **8 Conclusion**

**8.1** The original LSTF bid in 2012 was predicated upon reducing severance at Boots Corner and re-invigorating the town centre. Clearly many factors have changed since that time, not least the dramatic change in consumer spending patterns and the growing importance of climate change.

**8.2** Whilst the trial has faced criticism, as noted by the 21<sup>st</sup> January 2019 petition, it has critically been over making certain journeys more challenging, and claims of consequential impacts, such as significant traffic dispersal to residential streets, and air pollution impacts. However, the data collected as part of the wider trial monitoring does not substantiate these claims, and the issue of more challenging journeys is a consequence of closing a through route and encouraging individuals to consider alternative travel options. Specific concerns and allegations include:

- *The relocation of Boots Corner traffic to residential streets.* The reality is, as predicted, that many journeys have 'evaporated', or put another way have simply not started. Individuals choosing to use alternatives to the private motor vehicle borne out by the additional footfall, greater bus patronage and reduced car flows; as noted the transfer of individuals from private motor vehicle to bus alone significantly reduces the vehicle movement on the network. Significant concern has been raised about specific routes within the town, for example College Road but the GCC data demonstrates a 12% increase in traffic flows on this road, and not the apocalyptic 20 fold increase reported on social media. This is not to say that pinchpoints do not persist and the A4019 corridor and some associated feeder routes such as St George's Street (36% increase equating to an additional 18 vehicles per hour over 24 hours) remain a challenge but one that will be improved in 2020 by GCC and their commitment to a traffic light improvement scheme along this corridor.
- *Air quality will deteriorate particularly in residential areas.* With the benefit of one of the most comprehensive air quality monitoring networks in any comparable town it is clear that Boots Corner has not resulted in major air quality deterioration. The situation is essentially benign with no major positive or negative changes but critically a longer term gradual improvement, reflecting falling traffic volumes, which will hopefully continue given the propensity of individuals to pursue modal shift and use alternatives to the private motor vehicle, plus the growing popularity of hybrid and electric vehicles and the on-going upgrade of the Stagecoach bus fleet.
- *Visitors will be driven away from Cheltenham.* The BID survey carried out by CARD and reported to full Council on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2019 identified that less than one in four town centre users came to Cheltenham by car, the majority arriving by bus or on foot. The increase in

bus patronage allied to the footfall data does not validate this assertion. Cheltenham has been performing well against regional and national footfall trends which generally are in decline. Additionally investors are very active in Cheltenham with current developments and refurbishments at the Quadrangle and 111-117 High Street, and recently completed schemes at Honeybourne Place and the Brewery

- *Buses and pedestrians do not mix.* Given that this scenario has been operative for over a decade from Boots Corner to the Brewery without serious incident, and is common place in many other European cities, it is pleasing to note that this mix, which also includes taxis has been operating successfully.
- *The scheme is only there to make money for the Council.* This was clearly far from the intention and the scheme would not have secured funding from the DfT had this been the case. GCC have publicly advised that the fines levied as the disincentive on non-exempt vehicles from driving within the exemption zone has effectively funded the on-going maintenance of the trial.
- *The Cheltenham Transport Plan is explicitly designed to allow CBC to sell off the Municipal Office buildings.* It is no secret that CBC has a desire to relocate to more suitable office accommodation but this will only happen when a suitable alternative arises. CBC has acquired alternative office properties but as these are currently let it assists in keeping council tax costs under control. Should the CTP be made permanent it will allow an opportunity to consider how better to utilise Royal Well and the Inner Promenade which have effectively been nothing but traffic islands around which traffic has flowed for too long. Reducing the traffic flows as has happened during the trial period creates the circumstances to explore options not focussed purely on vehicle movements and which will benefit all occupants of the Inner Promenade and wider area.
- *The fake grass and bicycle stands at Boots Corner are not befitting of the town.* Both measures were temporary in line with the experimental traffic order requirements. Should the trial be made permanent then a more ambitious quality solution will be proposed in line with the recent “fly-through” promoted by CBC in July 2019.
- *The town centre will be less attractive to individuals with disabilities.* Clearly this was never the intention which was why GCC provided additional blue badge bays both prior and during the trial such that there are now more dedicated blue badge bays than pre-trial, and the Pelican crossing at Boots Corner was retained. It is fully recognised that blue badge holders have had to change their driving and parking patterns to align with the current restrictions, but the increased number of wheelchair/ mobility scooter users recorded passing through Boots Corner itself since the trial began suggests that the traffic removal has not had a detrimental impact on access to the town centre. Additionally any future re-modelling of Boots Corner, should the traffic regulation order be made permanent, will result in further consultation with local accessibility groups.

**8.3** The footfall data across Boots Corner and the significant investment at the two ‘bookends’ of the High Street (Brewery Quarter and former Beechwood shopping centre) demonstrate that the original intention of the Local Sustainable Transport Fund, to reduce severance at Boots Corner and re-invigorate the town centre has been met.

- 8.4** Given that the 2018, traffic volumes across Cheltenham were approximately 20% lower than they were in 2008, and that GCC believe that this pattern is likely to continue given the rise in home working and modal shift, one can conclude that overall the trial has demonstrated positive impacts for the town, and given the joint need of CBC and GCC to take measures to address climate change it would be a retrograde step to deliberately encourage thousands of vehicles a day back into the heart of the town by reversing the positive gains demonstrated by the trial. This is further supported by the fact that the trial has not created air quality hot spots elsewhere and that the pre-existing challenge along the A4019 remains to be addressed by GCC planned interventions in 2020.

## **9 Reasons for recommendations**

- 9.1.** Notwithstanding the concerns raised by residents and businesses, the balance of evidence generated from a wide range of sources does not demonstrate many of the negative outcomes that many predicted or feared. Having given full consideration to the issues and concerns, and recognising that there are a limited number of routes with traffic increases (as noted by the GCC traffic flow report), on balance the positives outweigh the negatives. Key factors are that town-wide traffic flows are reducing, air quality is on a gradual improvement, modal shift is improving, GCC has committed capital funds in 2020 which will help alleviate the persistent pre-trial and during trial A4019 traffic flow and air quality challenge, the town continues to perform favourably, and the recent Cheltenham Residents' Survey identifies an appetite for traffic reduction, so this is a time for CBC to demonstrate its leadership and commitment to the wider climate change agenda.

## **10 Alternative options considered**

- 10.1** The alternative option is for CBC not to urge the County Council to make the ETRO permanent. If the County Council did not make the order permanent the traffic regulation would revert back to the pre-ETRO position and effectively re-introduce c10,000 additional vehicles per day back into Boots Corner.

## **11 How this initiative contributes to the corporate plan?**

- 11.1** Provides a platform and early win for the climate change journey

## **12 Consultation and feedback**

- 12.1** The trial has been subject to consultation by GCC since 28th June 2018 when the initial trial was implemented. The consultation will close on 3rd December 2019, following 6 months after the changes were made to Clarence Street/Clarence Parade following earlier feedback. In addition CBC has been collecting wider data on footfall specifically through Boots Corner and data from Stagecoach. Beyond this CBC has engaged with a range of stakeholders including Cheltenham BID, Cheltenham Chamber of Commerce and the Civic Society.

<b>Report author</b>	<b>Contact officer:</b> <b>tim.atkins@cheltenham.gov.uk,</b> <b>01242 264103</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Risk Assessment</li> <li>2. CTP phase 4 update from GCC</li> <li>3. CTP data from CBC environmental health team</li> </ol>
<b>Background information</b>	<p>Specific detail can be found on the GCC website at</p> <p><a href="https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/highways/consultations/cheltenham-transport-plan/">https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/highways/consultations/cheltenham-transport-plan/</a></p>

The risk				Original risk score (impact x likelihood)			Managing risk				
Risk ref.	Risk description	Risk Owner	Date raised	Impact 1-5	Likelihood 1-6	Score	Control	Action	Deadline	Responsible officer	Transferred to risk register
	Should GCC make the TRO permanent CBC will need to further engage with the accessibility forum to ensure that any associated public realm changes do not create an inequality impact			4	1	4	Accept	Liaise with accessibility forum			
	A decision to re-introduce c10,000 vehicles per day back into the town centre will damage opportunities to deliver the climate change agenda and hence CBC & GCC reputation			5	3	15	Reduce	Encourage GCC to make the Boots Corner trial permanent			
<b>Explanatory notes</b>											
<p><b>Impact</b> – an assessment of the impact if the risk occurs on a scale of 1-5 (1 being least impact and 5 being major or critical)</p> <p><b>Likelihood</b> – how likely is it that the risk will occur on a scale of 1-6 (1 being almost impossible, 2 is very low, 3 is low, 4 significant, 5 high and 6 a very high probability)</p> <p><b>Control</b> - Either: Reduce / Accept / Transfer to 3rd party / Close</p>											