

**CONSULTATION - EXTRACT FROM REPORT TO CABINET,
NOVEMBER 2004**

25. Public and stakeholder consultation of the scheme is an important part of developing the design. Consultation and publicity have consisted of the following:
- (a) Scheme design information issued to key stakeholders including special interest groups such as CABE, English Heritage, Darlington Civic Trust, 'hard to reach' and community groups, and other key stakeholders such as the bus operators, Darlington Association of Disability (DAD), Town Centre businesses, residents and retailers, inviting them to the consultation exhibition or for meetings. Over 500 letters have been issued.
 - (b) Meetings held with stakeholder groups such as Darlington Civic Trust, DAD, the bus and taxi operators, the indoor and outdoor market traders, emergency services, etc. Discussions with bus operators, in particular, have been extensive.
 - (c) Scheme design/Consultation/Exhibition information published within the Northern Echo, Darlington & Stockton Times, Herald & Post, Darlington Town Crier, and numerous professional magazines and aired on local BBC breakfast news.
 - (d) Scheme design literature contained on the Darlington Borough Council website (www.darlington.gov.uk), under the Pedestrian Heart logo link.
 - (e) Public Consultation Exhibition held Wednesday 7 July (10am – 4pm); Thursday 8 July (10am – 5pm); Friday 9 July (10am – 4pm) and Saturday 10 July (10am – 3pm). Very large numbers of people visited the exhibition and discussed the scheme.
 - (f) Additional presentations have been made available to retailers in some specific parts of the town centre, when requested. Additional presentations have also been made to special interest groups such as Growing Old Living in Darlington (GOLD) and the Darlington Rotary Club.
 - (g) On 5 July 2004 the Town Centre Board received a Pedestrian Heart scheme briefing on the proposed concept design and access plans prior to commencement of public consultation.
 - (h) On 6 July 2004 two presentation sessions were held to enable all Darlington Borough Council Members the opportunity to be fully briefed on the proposed concept design and access plans for the Pedestrian Heart scheme prior to commencement of public consultation.
 - (i) On 15 July 2004 the Town Centre Board received a further briefing and update regarding the feedback received during public consultation.
 - (j) On 26 July 2004 the Joint Town Centre and Transport Forum received a briefing on the proposed concept design and access plans in order to seek views and approval on the scheme design.

- (k) On 29 July 2004 the Darlington Partnership Economy & Environment Sub Group received a Pedestrian Heart scheme briefing on the proposed concept design and access plans in order to seek views on the scheme design.
- (l) On 2 September 2004 a report and presentation were taken to Environment Scrutiny Committee to ensure Members were fully briefed and given the opportunity to ask any questions.

Key Issues Arising from Consultation

- 26. 343 questionnaires were completed as part of the Public Consultation Exhibition. The tick-box content of these questionnaires has been analysed, indicating that the responses are very positive.
 - a. 80% agreed that the new design and layout is good (compared with 13% who disagreed).
 - b. 81% agreed that the pedestrianisation plans will make the town centre safer (compared with 9% who disagreed).
 - c. 57% said they would shop in or visit the town centre more often if it were pedestrianised as planned (compared with 13% who disagreed with the statement and 30% who neither agreed nor disagreed).
- 27. Analysis of the questionnaire comments and further stakeholder meeting comments has been recorded and analysed by Gillespies, who have produced a report (refer to **Appendix Eight** of November's Cabinet report) categorising comments into one of four areas:
 - a. Valuable comment - incorporation in to the detailed design of the scheme.
 - b. Good comment - further research and investigation work required before potential incorporation in to the scheme.
 - c. Comment noted, however, impractical suggestion which cannot be incorporated in to the scheme.
 - d. Comments referred to Darlington Borough Council for a decision.

Valuable Comments that will be incorporated into the overall scheme

- 28. Category (a) points have already been incorporated into the scheme proposals. Many comments under this heading were concerns expressed by the Darlington Association on Disability (DAD) group. These included:
 - a. the lack of blue badge parking around the library building
 - b. Crown Street becoming a 'difficult and dangerous' place to cross
 - c. the lack of a 'pedestrian only' area on High Row
 - d. 'poor surfacing' on Horsemarket

- e. a lack of disabled parking along Skinnergate during 'core hours'.

29. These issues have been resolved through:

- a. providing additional parking to Crown Street (South) and East Street. This is in addition to the existing parking retained and new parking proposed on Quebec Street, Priestgate (East) and the Crown Street Car Park. This provides a large amount of Blue Badge parking in close proximity to the Library
- b. the introduction of build outs in the road or a light controlled crossing on Crown Street to ensure a formal pedestrian crossing area. In conjunction there are a series of pavement build outs and several formal pedestrian crossing points proposed on Crown Street to allow safer pedestrian movement across the proposed bus loop
- c. the introduction of a slight kerb to denote a 'pedestrian only area' outside the core hours, when service vehicles use High Row
- d. proposals to resurface access zones to proposed disabled parking areas on Horsemarket using a material that is sympathetic for disabled users, and that will also deal with the transition between the Market Square and the proposed Darlington Heart scheme
- e. Disabled parking to remain available for the statutory time along Skinnergate.

30. In addition a large proportion of the consultation comments have been explored as the scheme progresses through detailed design and have now been incorporated into the scheme proposals. These include:

- a. More seating needs to be provided for town centre – *back to back seating to be used as and where appropriate, ensuring provision of quality seating within the scheme*
- b. Concerns over the choice of materials, requiring consideration in more detail – *proposals now look to incorporate vernacular materials such as natural stone paving within the 'pedestrian only' area along High Row and West Row/Prebend Row area*
- c. Careful balance between removing clutter and adding a layer of detail to enrich the town – *a simple set of high quality steps will run the full length of the scheme, with proposals to incorporate planting, a water feature, seating etc., and the celebration of key landmarks and incorporation of events areas*
- d. Concerns that there are not enough planting areas to fulfil the Britain in Bloom objectives – *proposals now look to incorporate additional planters within sections of the steps*

Good Comments, will look at in more detail during the detail design stage

31. A large proportion of the consultation comments are grouped as category (b) actions. These are comments that will be explored as the scheme is progressed through the detail design stage. A summary of these points are highlighted below:
- a. Detail design of street furniture such as seating, railings to reflect heritage of town.
 - b. Water Feature- concerns over vandalism, maintenance, and safety.
 - c. Organization of market and how it is accessed in terms of servicing and integration of the outdoor market with the indoor market requirements.
 - d. Concerns that the character and heritage of Darlington is not reflected, ballustrading and railings are strong historic precedent and should be incorporated into the scheme (*refer to section 35 point (f) for further information*).
 - e. Durham County Council have pointed out that there may be archaeological deposits beneath Pedestrian Heart site which will need a watching brief by archaeological contractor when below ground deposits are likely to be disturbed.
 - f. Need to consider skateboarders and blades within design.
32. One of the main concerns relates to retaining the character and heritage of the town, maintaining a sense of place and responding to the features that typify Darlington. The design proposals will place a strong emphasis on reflecting the heritage of Darlington through the street furniture, materials and details. For example this could be through using a classical profile to the steps, bespoke railings and seating details or lighting columns.

Comments noted, but not considered valid or relevant within the context of the project

33. A key theme to the comments that emerged from the consultation is the proposals for the bus loop around Crown Street and Priestgate. The concern being that these streets are narrow and that there will be increased noise and pollution.
- a. An air quality assessment has been undertaken by Faber Maunsell. The results have shown that the forecast for 2005 and 2010 levels of all 5 key pollutants were well within acceptable limits
 - b. Many of the general public raised concerns over the lack of parking in the town centre and the forthcoming charges - the scheme does not affect car parking charges or numbers.
 - c. A number of the public raised the issue of provision of toilets in the Town Centre. Provision of modern facilities would be extremely difficult within the constraints of the layout of the streets and existing provision is considered adequate.

Comments referred to DBC for consideration

34. There are a number of comments and concerns on which the consultants have specifically sought the Council's guidance. The proposed response to these issues is shown in italics below.
- a. The DAD group have major concerns over the lack of parking and access provision for Blue Badge holders; this could be partly resolved by providing more dedicated blue badge parking within the Abbott's Yard Car Park. *Blue Badge holders can use, without charge, any space in Abbott's Yard (although they would not be wide enough for wheelchair users): it is proposed to monitor the usage of dedicated spaces (which are generally well used at present). Abbott's Yard spaces are popular with other shoppers as well as Blue Badge holders, and dedicating more spaces to Blue Badge holders would result in a loss of supply to others. Paragraph 29 explains other changes to benefit Blue Badge holders.*
 - b. Extending the vehicle-free hours from 10:30 am - 4:00 pm to 10:00 am – 5:00 pm has raised some concerns from a number of retailers. These retailers are generally located on Skinnergate and the Yards who will be affected by the new servicing hours. *Extending the vehicle-free hours will greatly benefit shoppers and should ultimately attract more trade to the town centre. It is suggested that during the traffic regulation order process specific problems of individual retailers be considered further. After careful consideration the proposals for Skinnergate have been amended to retain the existing service access regime but change the times of restriction to coincide with core hours of 10.00am to 5.00pm.*
 - c. There is strong support for and against the proposals for allowing cyclists to cycle within the pedestrian areas. *Unless cyclists are allowed through the town centre, there would be a serious gap in the town's cycle network, forcing cyclists to use the inner ring road for cross-town journeys, which would raise serious safety concerns. Dedicated cycle lanes through the pedestrianised area were considered but experience elsewhere has shown that these are less safe for pedestrians. Experience of towns elsewhere that have allowed cycling in pedestrianised areas is that cyclists will use the areas responsibly and this is best practice recommended by Government. Anyone using a bike in an anti-social way is likely to cause problems in the town centre even if cycling were not allowed. A fuller consideration of this issue is set out in **Appendix Nine** of November's Cabinet report). It is therefore proposed that cycling is allowed initially, for a six-month trial period, but that this is carefully monitored, and the results of the trial formally considered by Environment Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.*
 - d. Location of the market stalls and whether they should be relocated from the Market Place. *The design allows for the market either to continue in the Market Place or to wrap, in part, around the indoor market. The specific location can be determined nearer to the completion of implementation.*
 - e. There have been a number of concerns from local residents and the Civic Trust regarding the removal of the existing balustrades, steps and railing as they regard these elements are part of the heritage of Darlington and should be incorporated into the new scheme. *The proposed scheme aims to provide a new chapter for the main pedestrian space, providing a modern interpretation of the historical precedents. The proposals look to interpret the essence of what makes Darlington unique- the change in level. The grand set of steps proposed celebrate this change in level; reflecting the pre-1901 streetscape in its simplicity*

and boldness, whilst also reflecting the current layout with its formal terrace arrangement. In 1992 a comprehensive restoration of the ornamental railings, stonework, balustrading along High Row etc. was commenced. Numerous features of the 1901 ornamental terrace arrangement were needed to replace severely dilapidated or missing sections. A fuller consideration of this issue is set out in Appendix Ten of November's Cabinet report.

- f. An important consideration for the project is the after care/maintenance. An increase in revenue funding for the aftercare of the streets should be considered. *Gillespies have been asked to produce a maintenance plan which can be considered for future revenue budgets. In early years the maintenance cost will reduce when the scheme is new, but appropriate long-term maintenance is vital.*
- g. Some concerns have been raised by Durham Constabulary regarding the operation of the proposed bus gate on St Cuthberts Way. *Discussions are currently taking place between the design consultants and the police to try to resolve these issues.*

35. Further discussions are also continuing with Darlington Association on Disability (DAD) in relation to issues they have raised. At a recent meeting, solutions to blue badge parking re-organisation were agreed, but DAD remained opposed to three elements of the design:

- a. the removal of the two steps that separate the High Row carriageway from the pavement - *(refer to section 29 point (c) for further information on the proposal to introduce a slight kerb to denote a 'pedestrian only' area, which is hoped will now satisfy this concern).*
- b. the reduction of blue badge parking and the taxi access on High Row;
- c. the proposal to allow cycling within the pedestrian zone.

36. On 2 September 2004 a report and presentation were taken to Environment Scrutiny Committee, to enable the Committee to consider the scheme and the comments received. The Committee recommends:

- a. the re-location of the 'Locomotion' flower display on High Row - *this is being considered as part of the detailed design process*
- b. commemorative paving slabs within the pedestrian areas - *this is being considered as part of the detailed design process*
- c. incorporation of anti-skateboarding elements in to the design proposals - *this is being considered as part of the detailed design process*
- d. the re-use of the High Row railings and balustrading in another location in the Town - *where practical and in keeping with the proposed scheme, the High Row railings will be incorporated within the new scheme. The detailed design process is also reviewing the possibility of re-using the granite blocks and steps as kerbs ensuring the sustainability of materials and an element of historical continuity within the town centre. Where it is not possible to re-use materials such as the balustrading, these features will be removed and new locations of their use/display will be considered.*

- e. the proposed changes to service access times be considered carefully with the possibility of leaving Skinnergate's service access times the same as at present – *after careful consideration the proposals have been amended to retain the existing service access regime but change the times of restriction to coincide with core hours of 10.00am to 5.00pm.*

- f. careful consideration regarding free access of cycles within the pedestrian areas rather than using specific cycleways - *a full consideration of this issue is set out in Appendix Nine of November's Cabinet report. It is proposed that cycling within the town centre is allowed initially, for a six month trial period, but that this is carefully monitored, and the results of the trial formally considered by Environment Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet*