



**REPORT of
RE-SET AND RECOVERY WORKING GROUP**

to
COUNCIL
1 OCTOBER 2020

COVID-19 HIGH STREET RECOVERY PLAN

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 In June 2020 the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) in consultation with the Interim Measures Group (IMG) approved a High Street Recovery Plan.
- 1.2 The Recovery Plan set out steps including:
- at phase 1:
 - Additional safety signage.
 - Pedestrian management using volunteer network.
 - 20mph speed limit implemented.
 - Develop opportunities to stagger shop opening times and relax licensing restrictions.
 - at phase 2:
 - Working with stakeholders to widen pavements, to avoid queues and ‘face to face’ contact.
 - Engaging further with Essex County Council to support the above by accessing the £9.1m funding allocated to Towns in Essex.
 - Reduce the voluntary speed limit on the High Street to 10mph.
 - Give greater priority to pedestrians and cyclists on the High Street.
- 1.3 This report updates Members on progress and sets out the next steps to achieve phase 3 of the plan (section 3.10 of this report refers).

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the public consultation on High Street proposals, outlined within this report, be approved to run from 5 October – 16 November 2020.

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 An Officer Working Group for the High Street has been established and The Institute of Place Management “COVID-19 Recovery Framework” is being used to adapt to

the rapid changes in government and medical advice. It is designed to help take the most effective action now, move out of crisis stage, and to build capacity for recovery and longer-term transformation.

- 3.2 The High Street will move between the four-recovery phases listed below (section 3.10 below refers), dependent on the transmission rate of the virus, the efficacy of the “track & trace” system, and the testing and vaccination program. There is also the potential to move back into crisis phase, if the transmission rate escalates.
- 3.3 The Crisis, Pre-Recovery and Recovery stages (1a and 1b) of the plan have been delivered and adapted as necessary, and we now look to the longer-term transformation stage.
- 3.4 To support High Street Recovery, pedestrians will need more space to minimise COVID-19 transmission, increase consumer confidence, and support increased fitness and health resilience. The government therefore expects local authorities to make significant changes to their road layouts, to embed altered behaviours seen during lock down and demonstrate the positive effects of active travel. Phase 3 of the plan deals with this aspect.
- 3.5 The Department for Transport (DfT) released an Emergency Active Travel Fund, and Officers have, over the past two months, been providing the Commissioning Officer at Essex County Council (ECC) with the evidence to support Maldon as a high priority within Essex, and also framing how this work ties into other approved partnership projects and objectives that we are working towards together.
- 3.6 Unfortunately, ECC did not prioritise MDC for this fund and has stated categorically that they will not support the one-way system put forward by MDC due to the impact on bus services. However, the two authorities are committed to develop a future permanent scheme based on the attached plans (Appendices 1, 2 and 3).
- 3.7 This scheme reallocates substantial road space to pedestrian use, by making the High Street accessible only to buses, cyclists and pedestrians. The proposal has a considerable amount of work streams to resolve challenges within the scheme, but these all align well with the objectives of the Air Quality Action Plan and the Central Area Master Plan.
- 3.8 These challenges include the following:
 - Provision for Blue Badge holders;
 - Managing deliveries;
 - Safety concerns;
 - Pedestrian crossing / desire lines;
 - Church access;
 - Provision for cyclists;
 - Refuse collection;
 - Emergency services access;
 - How and where taxis are to be accommodated;

- Number of signs and barriers required and the impacts these will have.

3.9 The consultation will be live from 5 October to 16 November 2020. The Consultation document is attached at **APPENDIX 4**.

3.10 The response phases are as follows:

Phase	Dates	Status	Response
1a - Crisis	23 March – 15 June 2020	Essential food shops and business only open. Residents are in lock down	Signage implemented by shops. 2-metre social distancing in place. Communication and signposting to business support packages
1b - Pre-Recovery	15 June 2020 July 2020	Non-essential shops can open Anticipated restaurants and bars open	Additional signage implemented on the High Street. Pedestrian Management. 20mph (or less) speed limit implemented. 2-metre social distancing in place. Develop opportunities to stagger opening times and relax licensing or planning restrictions.
2 - Recovery	July / August 2020	MDC not prioritised for DfT Emergency Active Travel Fund	Officers continue to work with stakeholders for infrastructure improvements to allow wider pavements which support reduced transmission rate, increased distancing capacity, increased walking and cycling possibilities, thus allowing more shoppers to use the space safely.
3 - Transformation	September 2020 – September 2021	Move to the Re-Set and Recovery Working Group	The ‘transformation’ stage points at the conscious attempt to improve the high street – to do more than just recover. Though innovation, address new challenges, such as climate change, decarbonisation, economic inequality, and social cohesion. Implementation of scheme based on attached plans.

4. OPTIONS AND ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The main alternative option considered in phase 3 was a one-way High Street scenario. ECC have categorically refused to support or implement this scheme as it will require the diversion of some bus routes. The Re-Set and Recovery Working Group has requested further engagement with the Passenger Transport Team at ECC to understand the rationale for this, which may bring forward more options to the scheme development.

5. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY PRIORITIES (AND OTHER NATIONAL OR LOCAL POLICIES OR STRATEGIES)

- 5.1 The project, although a crisis response, integrates into various strategy documents.
- 5.2 These include the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the Local Development Plan, the Maldon and Heybridge Central Area Masterplan, the Corporate Plan and the Air Quality Action Plan.

6. CONSULTATION

- 6.1 No formal consultation has taken place in relation to the detailed scheme, due to the very short time frame, but Officers have informally engaged throughout the stages of the framework and have developed an engagement strategy.
- 6.2 Essex County Council – The Commissioning Delivery Manager, The Principal Transportation and Infrastructure Manager, and Senior Transportation and Infrastructure Planner, listened to the proposals for phase 2 (increased pavement space), and were supportive of the principle. They stated that they would need to engage their passenger transport colleagues and would be prioritising actions within Essex. The Director of Highways, advised that the views of traders would be critically important to the success of any measures installed and that a mandatory speed limit of 10mph could be considered.
- 6.3 Essex County Council – The Transportation, Planning and Infrastructure Manager, and his engineering team have produced the attached plans (see **APPENDICES 1- 3**) as a solution to pavement widening in the High Street.
- 6.4 Residents have been telling us how they would like the High Street space to be reallocate using the following interactive map:
<https://www.widenmypath.com/maldon/#17/51.73152/0.67868>
- 6.5 School children are currently responding to a live questionnaire, telling us how what they would like to see on the High Street:
https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=VH_RilQmuUumwvI0YlcqFHND_d-An8IGqAYUXc-qlh9UM09XWDBQTjQxQ0dKWE9TVDgxNDhYM1NCNy4u
- 6.6 Over 100 High Street Businesses have completed questionnaires telling us their views and delivery requirements.

- 6.7 Town and Ward Members attended an Engagement Workshop on 6 June 2020 and put forward items needing further consideration before any proposal is brought forward. Particular reference was made of the need for full consultation, and a consideration of the impacts of any displaced traffic.
- 6.8 Bus operators reported that their business model is very fragile in this phase as they seek to find new ways of operating with social distancing, and the two companies that responded did not support diversion of routes from the High Street but are supportive of this scheme.
- 6.9 The Maldon Business Board was engaged on 19 May 2020. Full support was given to the proposal for increased pavement space on the High Street.

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 It is imperative to take action to ensure that the high street is a safe place for all users, to increase confidence in shoppers so that they return, and to develop further strategies that support future transformation.

8. IMPACT ON STRATEGIC THEMES

- 8.1 Outcomes to protect and improve the environment under the theme of “Place”. The plan supports open spaces, partnership working and environmentally friendly initiatives. Working with communities to support health priorities, supports the “Community” theme. Appropriate traffic management within Maldon supports tourism under the theme of “Prosperity”. The scheme aligns with the Central Area Master Plan and Air Quality Action Plan.

9. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – Implementing social distancing measure, reduces COVID-19 transmission and infection rate. Safe infrastructure changes in addition reduce risk of passenger / vehicle collision. Businesses are supported to make the necessary changes. Active travel is embedded within the culture to increase community resilience. Use of car parks by customers and subsequent income may be impacted if car use reduces.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – Early scientific data suggests that COVID-19 impacts different social groups in different ways. Reducing transmission rates in the population reduces the highest risk groups from being exposed. Increased pavement space addresses inequalities to groups who require more space, such as people with disabilities.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk** – During crisis management stage, significant resources are diverted away from “Business as Usual”. Moving to a recovery stage, will reduce the risk to the Council’s other services.

- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** –
- i. The work is being undertaken outside of normal work streams and is resource intensive.
 - ii. There are two funds currently available to access, and it is anticipated that more will come forward:
 1. Reopening High Streets Safely Fund: £57,000 available directly to Maldon Council.
 2. £250 million fund released under the Traffic Management Act 2004: network management in response to COVID-19: £9.1m available directly to Essex County Council.
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – The work is being undertaken outside of normal work streams and is resource intensive and therefore adds additional cost.
- (vi) **Impact on the Environment** – In the short term, lock down has delivered notable air quality improvements. The Transformation stage of the recovery framework looks to embed sustainable principles supporting decarbonisation and clean air.
- (vii) **Impact on Strengthening Communities** – The actions include working with communities and partners to support our health and well-being priorities. Actions are delivered with effective engagement with bus and taxi operators as well as local businesses and schools to support strong and resilient communities.

Background Papers:

- Safer Public Spaces:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5ebbb57ae90e070831aeb0d3/Guidance_Safer_Public_Places_During_Covid_v5.8.pdf
- Reallocating Road Space in Response to COVID-19
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reallocating-road-space-in-response-to-covid-19-statutory-guidance-for-local-authorities>
- Reopening High Streets Safely Fund
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/887244/Reopening_High_Streets_Safely_Fund_-_Guidance.pdf
- The IPM COVID-19 Recovery Framework
<https://www.highstreettaskforce.org.uk/covid-19-recovery>
- High Street Task Force <https://www.highstreettaskforce.org.uk/covid-19/social-distancing-in-public-places/>

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