

Report of Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Huddersfield Town Centre Accessibility Scheme (Bus Gates)



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Scrutiny Investigation into the Decision Making Process for the Huddersfield Town Centre Accessibility Project

1. Rationale for the Investigation:

Following a petition to Council, which included a specific request for Scrutiny to look at the consultation process for the bus gate project proposals, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee (OSMC) agreed to do a focussed piece of work to look at the decision making process for the bus gates element of the Huddersfield Town Centre Accessibility Project. This would include the rationale for the scheme and how the proposals were promoted and consulted on.

In December 2016, Council also agreed to establish a Huddersfield Town Centre Working Party to explore all facets of town centre development in Huddersfield. The Huddersfield Working Party will also consider an evaluation report on the bus gates project, which will be available once statistical information has been gathered and analysed. It is intended that the findings of the scrutiny work will feed into the work of the Huddersfield Town Centre Working Party. It was noted that the impact assessment would be considered by this group and as such, was not included within the focus for Scrutiny.

2. How the work was carried out:

The work was carried out by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee who appointed a co-optee for the review work. The members were:

Cllr Julie Stewart Turner
Cllr Ken Sims
Cllr Cahal Burke
Cllr Gulfam Asif

Peter Bradshaw – Voluntary Scrutiny Co-optee

The Committee was supported by Penny Bunker and Alaina McGlade from the Governance & Democratic Engagement Team.

Terms of Reference:

1. To understand the rationale for the bus gate proposals;
2. To consider how the proposals were developed including any engagement activity;
3. To consider the consultation process, including the statutory requirements, promotion of the proposals and responses received;
4. To examine how responses to the consultation were considered;
5. To consider the proposals for the evaluation of the project against the anticipated outcomes, feedback and impacts;
6. To identify any lessons learned.

Set out below is the approach taken for the review:

Meeting 1 - Explore the background to the project, including traffic measures plans, the consultation process and the decision making process / identify any further information required.

Meeting 2 - Meet with stakeholders, including the lead petitioner and bus companies, to gather views on the process

Meeting 3 - Consider the evidence, agree findings, lessons learned, conclusions and recommendations

Those people who were unable to attend were invited to submit written views. In addition other written submissions were received from interest groups.

3. Witnesses

Paul Kemp, Acting Assistant Director for Investment and Regeneration
Richard Hadfield, Head of Strategy and Design
Alisa Devlin – La Fleur & member of Huddersfield Town Centre Action group
Gina Hanselman – Merrie England
Paul Keighley – Bramleys & member of Huddersfield Town Centre Action Group
Neale Wallace, West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Oliver Howarth, First West Yorkshire

Written comments:

Mr A - member of Highways Disability Group
Mr G - British Parking Association
Mr P - Older People's Network
Mr W- West and North Yorkshire Campaign for Better Transport

4. Background Context

- 4.1 By way of introduction, the Scrutiny Committee received an overview of the background and rationale for initiating the Huddersfield Town Centre Accessibility Project.

It is widely recognised and documented, in national and international technical publications, that reducing car dominance, providing improved public transport and walking and cycling facilities within towns and cities, generates benefits in terms of health and economic investment potential. Reducing the dominance of the car and providing higher quality spaces for people to enjoy and walk around, can have an effect on the amount of time people spend in those spaces. A report published in 2004 by CABI (Commission for Architecture and Built Environment) demonstrates that a high-quality public environment can have a significant impact on the economic life of urban centres big or small, and is therefore an essential part of any successful regeneration strategy. ¹

In relation to general health benefits, National Government has also become increasingly focussed on encouraging the population to become more active and carbon efficient, particularly by encouraging walking and cycling, but also by becoming less reliant on the car. Sources publications include:

- The Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change and the Eddington Transport Study (DfT, 2006a; HM Treasury, 2006),
- The Department for Transport's response, Delivering a Sustainable Transport System (DfT, 2008c)
- The Low Carbon Transport Strategy (DfT, 2009c).
- Government White Paper "Creating Growth, Cutting Carbon" ²

- 4.2 To facilitate the increased level of walking and cycling, in 2010 the Government introduced a Local Sustainable Transport Fund. Local authorities outside London were able to bid for funding for transport interventions that support economic growth and reduce carbon emissions in communities as well as delivering cleaner environments, enhanced safety and reduced congestion.

- 4.3 However, the Council was aware that a balanced approach was required to satisfy the multiple requirements of users of the town centre, by maintaining not only access to the town for all modes of transport, but also levels of both on and off street parking.

- 4.4 The Committee also considered a timeline setting out the development of the town centre approach and associated projects. It was suggested that the evidence presented illustrated that the vision for an easily accessible Town Centre that can be safely navigated and people can enjoy, had been central to the Council's thinking for some time.

DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE

Date	Activity
2004	<p>Kirklees Council commissioned an “Urban Renaissance Strategic Development Framework: A public Real Strategy for Huddersfield”.</p> <p>Working closely and engaging with local political, business and community interests, a number of objectives and principles were established:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation and maintenance of high quality buildings and public spaces is a key to the renaissance of the town centre; • Everyone must be able to move conveniently and comfortably around the town on foot; • The town centre must be a unified whole; and • Movement, activity and appearance provide the essential ingredients around which a public realm strategy can be composed. <p>It was proposed that overall these objectives and principles should all complement each other and connect up a town centre that works for everyone.</p>
2006	<p>In 2006 a draft Development Plan for Huddersfield Town Centre was shared with the public. The proposals included the areas currently occupied by Queensgate Market Hall, Alfred Street Multi-storey car park, the former Co-operative store and buildings on New Street. The proposed development scheme included a new library, a three storey department store, a 100-bed hotel, 100 homes, a new market hall, bars, restaurants and up to 900 parking spaces.</p> <p>The proposed £200m development plan would require £50m of private sector investment. The Plan was later placed on hold due to the financial impact of the recession.</p>
2009	<p>The first project - the scheme to create public space in front of the Railway Station in St George’s Square. The 2009 scheme sought to lessen the dominance of vehicles travelling through the Square by restricting through traffic, but allowing loading, access and taxis.</p> <p>This complemented existing bus only restrictions on Westgate between Railway Street and John William Street in one direction, which had been in place since 1983, and on Kirkgate between John William Street and Lord Street/Venn Street in both directions, which had also been in place since 1983. These and the 2009 restrictions are shown on the plans attached at Appendix 1.</p>
2010	<p>Development of the Huddersfield Area Action Plan (AAP) to provide a framework to identify, coordinate and prioritise further opportunities (leisure, retail and culture developments, public realm and highway schemes) within the town centre.</p> <p>During the development of the AAP, there were two stages of public consultation;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. November/December 2009- Issues and options covering reasonable alternatives 2. Autumn 2010- Consultation on one preferred option, based on

responses to stage 1

The two stages of consultation covered 6 broad themes:

- The Area Action Plan boundary and character areas
- Shopping and Services
- Working
- Living
- Movement
- Environment

For the movement theme, the following elements were advised as having been consistently raised:

- Increased frequency, quality, cost and reliability of public transport
- An easier centre to walk and cycle around
- More pedestrianised streets in the centre
- Making alterations to existing roads
- Improved parking options for the town centre

The aims and objectives of the consultation on the Huddersfield Town Centre Area Action Plan were to:

- Find out people's current likes and dislikes about Huddersfield town centre in terms of access, shopping, services, built environment, transport, culture and recreational activities
- Find out what people think is important in making the town centre a good place to live, work and visit in the future
- Assess the views of people on the issues and options presented to them
- Ask people to suggest alternative options to those proposed.

Officers advised that a number of supplementary technical documents were prepared as a response to issues raised in the consultation one of which was the Huddersfield Town Centre Public Transport Accessibility Study. This was developed to:

- inform the council of options to increase the reliability of public transport;
- to lessen the dominance of private vehicles in the town and to use the outcomes to:
 - improve the urban realm and to link disparate sections of the town together, which hitherto had been split by busy, vehicular traffic-dominated roads.

Observations undertaken during the study showed that buses experienced significant delay accessing and getting through Huddersfield Town Centre, particularly from Southgate along Kirkgate and Westgate.

In considering options to reduce vehicle dominance; the study looked at enforcing the **existing** traffic management measures on Westgate, Kirkgate and Railway Street. The existing measures were not being enforced and the Council did not have the legal powers to enforce, except by using cameras.

	<p>In addition it was proposed to introduce one new bus only section of road on High Street/Ramsden Street between Market Street and Corporation Street. The new section was to address the delay suffered by buses around Peel Street and to better link pedestrian access to the two sides of New Street.</p> <p>It was suggested that enforcing the existing bus priority traffic management restrictions would result in both improved bus reliability and an improved pedestrian environment.</p> <p>To ensure a balanced approach to the needs of all users of the town centre, the scheme was designed such that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • only one extra bus gate would be provided, ensuring that levels of access to the town centre would be similar to what they were before the enforcement commenced. (See restriction plans at Appendix 1). • The number of on-street car parking spaces provided across the town centre - in the 2015 scheme, pay on street car parking was reduced by 11 spaces, but to offset this loss, the scheme provided 7 additional blue badge bays and 18 new spaces in loading bays.
21st June 2011	Report to Kirklees Council Cabinet meeting on the West Yorkshire Local Transport Plan and Highways Capital Plan 2011/12 to 2015/16. Funding for Huddersfield Town Centre scheme was identified in the 5 year Highways plan.
July 2011	Meeting with Highways Disability Liaison Group to brief the group on proposals for the town centre, including enforcement. The group asked to be kept informed as the scheme progressed.
2012	In 2012, funding became available from Central Government's Department for Transport Highways grant to provide for small transport improvement projects such as road safety schemes, bus priority schemes, walking and cycling schemes and transport information schemes.
9th May 2013	<p>Pre consultation meeting with Huddersfield Town Centre Partnership Ltd (membership organisation for businesses/retailers in the town centre, approximately 150 business members, including large and small businesses).The council presented the scheme proposals to the meeting, with the main concerns raised by the group being;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - potential car parking space reduction; - a request for a review of Traffic Regulation Orders across the town centre to simplify matters.
21st and 24th January 2014	Councillor pre-consultation briefings, with all councillors from Almondbury, Ashbrow, Crosland Moor and Netherton, Dalton, Greenhead, Lindley and Newsome wards invited to a meeting prior to consultation materials being published .
3rd to 15th February 2014	<p>Public consultation on the scheme which included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information booklet circulated to every business and residential premise within the curtilage of the town centre (circa 3000 addresses).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Covering letter with booklet setting out dates for exhibitions. - Exhibitions held in Packhorse Centre between 11am and 2pm on Monday 10th, Tuesday 11th, Thursday 13th and Saturday 15th February 2014 - Email address set up to receive consultation comments. - Booklet and scheme plans put on Council website including on the main advertising banner, Involve and Facebook. <p>Feedback could be made via email, online comments, in writing and via forms at the exhibition events.</p>
4th February 2014	Letter and Consultation booklet sent to all members of the Disability and Older persons group informing them of the consultations, exhibition dates and asking for comments.
13th March 2014	Consultation meeting and e-mails to taxi representatives with regard to scheme proposals -- no comments were raised.
6th June 2014 -	<p>Report to Kirklees Council Cabinet meeting requesting Cabinet to consider the proposals for pedestrian and public transport accessibility and connectivity improvements and traffic restrictions in Huddersfield Town Centre, including the bus gate proposals.</p> <p>The report highlighted --- “that high quality, safe, easy access and connectivity are amongst the most important building blocks of a sustainable and thriving economy” and that the proposals - “were concerned with improving public transport reliability and the pedestrian experience of the town.”</p> <p>The report explained the format and process of the public consultation process. The majority of the enquiries received during the consultation centred on the public’s understanding of how businesses, shoppers and visitors to the town centre could continue to get to the areas that they wished to access. Cabinet approved the proposals.</p>
	<u>Statutory Consultations on Traffic Regulation Order. (TRO)</u>
19th January 2015	<p>– Legal Traffic Regulation Order Advertised (TRO).</p> <p>It was explained that this is the statutory process that has to be undertaken to allow alteration of parking and waiting restrictions in the town centre as well as moving traffic restrictions and new bus gate access restrictions. It requires public notices to be published on street and in the press and allows anyone 21 days to object to the proposals.</p> <p>One objection was received regarding access to a premise impacted by the proposals.</p>
15th April 2015	Cabinet Committee Local Issues Meeting - The objection to the TRO was considered and overruled.
	There were three main reasons why the Council chose to consider enforcing a series of bus only traffic management restrictions within the town centre:

	<p>1 It had been a desire to seek to reduce pedestrian/vehicle conflict and to improve the environment for pedestrians in the town centre that started in 1983 and had been confirmed by later development work;</p> <p>2 A funding opportunity for transport improvement schemes was available in 2012 and a decision was taken to bring forward and implement a highway scheme that would further facilitate the development of Huddersfield in line with the emerging Area Action Plan; and</p> <p>3. The issue of poor air quality was starting to develop as a major national health concern, with town centres and other residential areas, where mixing of slow moving traffic with people being seen as areas of particular concern.</p>
	<u>Construction Works Consultation</u>
May 2015 to Dec 2015 Onwards	Rolling programme of “Start of works letters” issued to the properties in the areas of work affected as the works in advance of works commencing throughout the town centre.
Jan - Feb 2016	In advance of Bus Gate enforcement camera switch on, map based leaflet made available on council website to advise drivers of new bus gates and routes to avoid them.
1st February 2016	Bus Gate cameras switched on and warning notices sent out to non-compliant drivers for several weeks before legal enforcement commenced. Variable Message Sign trailers also located at four different locations on Ring Road to warn drivers of new Bus Gates installations.
21st March 2016	Bus Gates went live and enforcement commenced. This is when the council actually started issuing PCN notices to drivers who contravened the restrictions.

5. Views of witnesses

- 5.1 To supplement the factual information and process documentation provided by council officers, the Scrutiny Committee invited a number of stakeholders to attend the meeting to give their views on the process.

In addition the Committee received some written comments which are summarised in section 5.6.

5.2 Oliver Howarth, First West Yorkshire

Oliver Howarth, Operations Director at First West Yorkshire told the Committee that as part of developing their business offer, First buses always considered the customer impact and congestion has always been an important issue.

First had historically attended regular liaison meetings with the Kirklees Council Highways Service in order to discuss and be kept informed on current plans and priorities. The company could provide advice where necessary and comment on proposals.

In relation to the specific plans for the bus gates, First buses considered the scheme to be a positive way to reduce congestion in Huddersfield town centre and consequently reduce delays to bus services. First buses had been consulted on the bus gates scheme when the proposals were first being considered and expressed a view that the location of the bus gates was appropriate to deliver the anticipated outcomes.

The Committee noted that bus user figures had not dropped since the introduction of the bus gate measures. It was First's view, based on technical expertise, that the bus gates would have a positive impact on the Town Centre.

5.3 Neale Wallace, West Yorkshire Combined Authority

Neale Wallace of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) explained that the WYCA was the transport authority for West Yorkshire. It had been formed by combining the Economic Partnership and METRO Transport Authority.

WYCA were also attendees at the quarterly Kirklees Council Highways Liaison meetings. They had been part of discussions on the bus gates proposals at an early stage.

In 2016, WYCA published a single economic plan which includes information on the concept of good growth. The WYCA felt that sustainable modes of transport would contribute to growth in the economy and support people to live and work in wider areas.

WYCA advised that congestion levels in West Yorkshire had now exceeded the previous peak levels seen in 2007. Throughout West Yorkshire there were

monthly meetings held to consider the impact of congestion on air quality and bus services.

The OSMC was advised that the reaction of bus operators to congestion tended to fall within 3 categories:

- The removal of services on particular routes
- The reduction in the frequency of services on affected routes
- The reduction in journey speed, which impacted on customer numbers

5.4 Alisa Devlin, Local Business Owner, La Fleur, Huddersfield

Alisa Devlin from Huddersfield town centre florist, La Fleur, explained that her experience of the bus gate development process was that it felt to be biased towards buses (bus companies). As such she did not feel that businesses had been fully included in the consultation.

Ms Devlin's view was that the proposals that were consulted on were very ambiguous. Nobody could appreciate at the point of consultation what the potential impact on local business might be. She explained that initial concerns had been highlighted over the number of loading bays that would be available to support business.

Ms Devlin informed the Committee that following the initial introduction of the bus gates, immediate amendments had to be made due to the unforeseen impact of the reduction to single lane traffic on Westgate. She suggested that this illustrated that the impact of the proposals had not been sufficiently considered prior to implementation.

5.5 Paul Keighley, Partner, Bramleys

Paul Keighley of Bramleys Estate Agents told the Committee that the only communication that businesses in the Town Centre received was a letter inviting them to attend the information roadshows being held in the Packhorse Centre to comment on the proposals. Mr Keighley suggested that this was not consultation as he felt the decision had already been made to install the bus gates and local residents and businesses were being asked to comment on which of the three proposals was preferred. Mr Keighley advised that he had visited the Packhorse centre roadshow but his comments had not been reflected in the report to Cabinet.

Mr Keighley voiced his concern that a scheme had been developed to serve only 25% of all town centre users and outlined that these users (bus passengers) were also the ones with least ability to spend money in the town centre due to the difficulty in carrying goods on public transport. He advised that he did not understand the Council's rationale behind the decision but suggested that it was financially motivated as when in attendance at a meeting the revenue generated through the scheme (fines) had been described as a "good by-product".

5.6 Summary of written comments:

(i) Long term member of the Disability and Older People Liaison Group.

Mr A suggested that the bus gates had made it difficult for people with disabilities to be dropped near to where they wanted to go. Restricted access drop off points would go some way to mitigate these difficulties.

(ii) Chair of Older Persons Network (own views)

Mr P raised some issues concerning the Bus Gates with regard to people who have mobility issues. He felt that since the introduction of bus gates it was much harder to negotiate the town centre in Huddersfield and difficult to get close to places with limited designated disabled parking spaces. It was Mr Palmer's view that town centres can only survive if they are easily accessible and shops have a level of foot-fall to sustain their business, particularly in the current financial climate. Mr Palmer felt that "any restrictions or awkwardness is bound to have a detrimental affect"

(iii) President of British Parking Association

Mr G's submission focusses on approaches to parking and potential impacts on the use of cars, below is an extract.

"... Cars are being used for a purpose and will usually be the preferred mode choice for those that have access to them. We also need to recognise that the taxation system favours those who receive a company car compared with those who are offered assistance with public transport costs. Finally, simply stopping car use is a high-risk strategy which could put the social and economic activities that the car facilitates at risk."

(iv) Co-ordinator, West and North Yorkshire Campaign for Better Transport

The campaign was supportive of the introduction of bus gates. An extract from the submission is below:

"... We would like to see better bus provision throughout the county and we are very aware that congestion is doing huge damage to bus service reliability. Slowing down buses and making journey times unpredictable, reduces patronage and puts up bus costs. Bus companies have to put more buses into key routes to maintain reliability, and in order to balance the finances this can lead to reductions in marginal services. First now have 50% more buses on W Yorkshire roads than 10 years ago even though they have withdrawn from some areas.

Reducing congestion would help all the economy and would usefully help emergency vehicles. However it would enable bus companies to enhance and

expand the bus network, keep bus fares down and reduce reliance on public funding.

Most buses are environmentally friendly. Newer buses emit lower emissions than cars. Even older buses are OK as they emit about 7 times the emissions of cars, they will be carrying upwards of 12 passengers on average so the emissions per person are less. If all those bus users switched to cars or taxis it would be a disaster for air quality and congestion ...”

6. Committee Findings:

Set out below are the findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee in respect of each term of reference.

6.1 Term of Reference 1 - To understand the rationale for the bus gate proposals

Views presented to the Committee indicated that it was widely recognised and documented, that reducing car dominance, providing improved public transport and walking and cycling facilities within towns and cities, generates benefits in both health and economic investment potential.

It was also suggested that by reducing the dominance of the car and providing higher quality spaces for people to enjoy and walk around, there can be a positive effect on the amount of time people spend in those spaces.

In the context of the national and international evidence, the Council had a vision for an easily accessible town centre that can be safely navigated and people can enjoy. The Huddersfield Town Centre Accessibility Project, which included the bus gates proposal, was a plan which informed the delivery of the vision.

The initial proposal for the town centre was a large holistic scheme which included the bus gates. Some elements of the scheme have progressed whilst others have not. It was questioned whether the measures designed for a bigger scheme, such as the bus gates, were still appropriate for implementation as part of a reduced project.

The OSMC noted that the rationale for the bus gate proposals had developed over a number of years and an extended process had been undertaken to try and put forward proposals that were appropriate to the multiple users of the town centre, whilst still fulfilling the core aim of the Council’s vision.

In 2012 a funding stream became available that provided an opportunity to take forward aspects of the Huddersfield Town Centre Accessibility Project, including the bus gates proposals.

The OSMC noted that the access arrangements, including parking restrictions and traffic flow, that formed part of the bus gate scheme around Westgate and Kirkgate, had seen minimal change since the original access arrangements

were implemented in 1983. Since 1983 the power to enforce the restrictions rested with West Yorkshire Police. With the introduction of the bus gates there was an opportunity to implement traffic cameras by which the Council could enforce both the bus gates and the pre-existing regulations.

The cameras were installed to enforce restrictions that had been in place around Westgate and Kirkgate since 1983; however the restrictions on High Street/ Ramsden Street were new proposals.

The evidence submitted indicated that there were only a small number of formal complaints submitted regarding the new proposals on High Street/ Ramsden Street. Council officers advised that the new scheme had worked well to reduce delays for buses and had improved pedestrian access to the two sides of New Street.

It is the view of the OSMC that there was a clear rationale for including the bus gates as part of the accessibility project to deliver the Council's vision for the town centre. It was always likely that the enforcement of the existing waiting restrictions and traffic flows on Westgate would be a difficult adjustment for town centre users, given that for a number of years enforcement has not been a priority and inappropriate practice has become common.

The Committee hopes that given the improvements made to bus travel, a subsequent improvement in the overall quality of buses using Kirklees roads might also be made.

Prior to the introduction of bus gates, the two areas were very congested and difficult for pedestrians to navigate, with vehicles travelling through the town centre and conflicting with buses and delivery vehicles. It is the conclusion of the OSMC that the introduction of the bus gates appears to have met the objectives of the scheme.

6.2 Term of reference 2 - To consider how the proposals were developed including any engagement activity and;
Term of reference 3 - To consider the consultation process, including the statutory requirements, promotion of the proposals and responses received

The OSMC found that the proposals had been developed over a number of years and had taken account of government policy direction and guidance. The Committee noted that a number of strategies had been developed by the Council regarding the future of the town centre and the bus gates scheme was put forward as part of delivering the aims of the strategies.

The OSMC received comprehensive information on the actions taken in developing and progressing the bus gate proposals, as illustrated by the timeline information set out on pages 4-8 of this report.

The evidence put forward demonstrated there was an initial two stage public consultation undertaken as part of the development of the Huddersfield Area

Action Plan in 2010. To fully consider views raised in the consultation, a further study was undertaken to understand how to increase the reliability of public transport whilst decreasing the dominance of private vehicles in the town centre.

Evidence was presented that showed that between May 2013 and March 2014 a number of pre-consultation briefings were offered to a wide range of consultees including the Town Centre Partnership, Councillors, the public, taxi representatives and the Highways Disability and Older Person's Group.

The consultation also included direct mailing to 3000 addresses within the ring road, internet information, exhibitions and the council's Facebook page, with around 100 consultees having visited the exhibitions. The scheme was also publicised on the internet, including social media and feedback was able to be received through a number of online channels. Local media picked up the story and this generated discussion in the press and further promotion of the proposed scheme.

Following approval from Cabinet for the proposed scheme, the OSMC saw evidence that the necessary statutory consultations were carried out before a final decision was taken. Evidence was noted that the scheme had been amended to address some of the concerns raised, for example the amount of parking bays for businesses. It was noted that only one formal objection was received, which followed the appropriate decision making process in being considered by the Cabinet Committee Local Issues.

In order to further publicise the scheme and give road users the chance to understand the implications of it, the council activated the cameras on the bus gates scheme and issued warning letters to non-compliant drivers for an introductory period of six weeks, before formal legal enforcement commenced.

Overall, the evidence showed that there were a number of different opportunities and mechanisms for people to comment on the proposals, both through informal engagement events and formal consultation. The statutory consultation requirements were followed.

6.3 Term of Reference 4 - To examine how responses to the consultation were considered

The evidence presented indicated that the majority of the 180 enquiries received during the consultation centred on the public asking how businesses, shoppers and visitors to the town centre could continue to get to the areas that they wished to access. The OSMC noted that once it was explained how people would still be able to get to their desired location, albeit via a slightly different route, most respondents appeared satisfied with the proposals.

The OSMC learned that the key issues and concerns that came from the consultation focussed on:

- access to St Peters Church;

- disabled parking;
- loading facilities in St Georges square;
- further pedestrianisation requests;
- cycle connectivity.
-

The OSMC also considered the verbal and written opinions received from ward councillors, which broadly echoed the points raised through the wider consultation.

The OSMC considered a summary of how Council officers had sought to address a number of more complex issues and concerns that had come out of the consultation (see table below). There was evidence that as part of responding to the issues raised, amendments were made to the proposals to try to resolve the concerns where possible.

Issue	Concern	Changes made
Access to St Peter's Church	The alternative route for funeral corteges was considered to be undignified	The existing traffic direction on Byram Street was retained and vehicles forming part of a cortege would be classed as authorised vehicles. Authorised Vehicle status will also extend to other official cars that attend for church services e.g. wedding cars.
Disabled Parking	It was felt that there was a lack of disabled parking within the town centre and concerns were raised about the conversion of the disabled only parking on Corporation Street to Pay and Display spaces along with the loss of two disabled only parking spaces on Peel Street.	Permit Holder' parking on Corporation Street was converted to 'Disabled Only' instead of to Pay and Display. The two disabled only spaces on Peel Street were to be retained.
Loading Facilities in St Georges Square	Concerns were raised about a lack of loading facilities in St Georges Square.	The 'Rail Replacement Service Only' bus stop on Railway Street was converted to a loading bay.
Pedestrianisation	Requests were made to pedestrianise Cloth Hall Street, part of John William Street and the remaining part of New Street.	A feasibility study to investigate options for pedestrianising these areas was proposed.
Cycling Connectivity	Concerns were raised regarding poor cycling connectivity across the ring road and through the town centre.	Three pilot projects were proposed to be introduced to the town centre proposals and were described in more detail in another part of the report.

The OSMC is satisfied that a thorough process to provide information on the proposals, engage with the public and affected parties, and comply with statutory consultation requirements, has taken place. The Council publicised both the consultation processes for the proposals and the implementation of the proposals in a manner that conveyed the intentions clearly and aimed to reach as wide an audience as possible.

The OSMC found that a relatively small number of concerns were raised throughout the extensive consultation and engagement process and the Council gave due regard to these concerns and tried wherever possible to resolve the issues. The one formal objection to the proposal was treated according to statutory process and given due consideration by Cabinet.

The OSMC noted that at the pre consultation and engagement stage, only minor concerns were raised about the bus gates proposals by local businesses in the town centre. It is acknowledged, as expressed by one of the local business owners that it was difficult to anticipate the potential impacts that the measures might have once introduced.

Following the introduction of the scheme, concerns have been raised by local businesses about a negative impact on trade. However no definitive quantitative evidence has been provided to help the OSMC to make a finding on the extent to which the bus gates project has impacted, given the wider issues facing local high street shopping including the impact of the national economic downturn on spending patterns.

The absence of baseline information, including footfall in the Westgate / Kirkgate area prior to the introduction of the measures is disappointing, as it may have helped towards providing a picture of the area before and after the measures were introduced.

The OSMC was made aware by one witness that they did not feel the comments they had made at the exhibition were reflected in the Cabinet report. The OSMC noted that whilst notes were taken at the exhibition it was not always possible to capture everything. People were asked to complete comments forms but many chose not to. The Panel feels it is important at any information giving event or consultation exercise, that those attending are very clear about what will, or will not, happen with their verbal comments.

The OSMC suggests that the Council could be more innovative in how it captures informal consultation views, for example vox pops, or by using mobile recording devices, to ask people to say what they think and then compile those comments as part of the consultation response.

6.4 Term of Reference 5 - To consider the proposals for the evaluation of the project against the anticipated outcomes, feedback and impacts

The OSMC was made aware that it was always the intention to provide an evaluation report to Cabinet when the scheme had been in operation for 12 months, with enforcement taking place. Officers advised that the report would include figures relating to footfall, car parking, bus timings and air quality information. The report would also be presented to the Town Centre Working

Group. The OSMC requested an opportunity to comment on the evaluation report before any potential decision was made by Cabinet.

6.5 Term of Reference 6 - To identify any lessons learned

The OSMC acknowledges that consultation is a complex process, especially when proposals affect a wide and diverse group of users. The Committee is satisfied that officers carried out a thorough process to try and consult and make people aware of the proposals. The evidence showed that consultation views were given consideration and amendments to the proposals had been made before the final decision was taken to implement the scheme. Once implemented a further amendment was made to the lane arrangements. In part this was due to the impact of utilities work in the Westgate area.

It is not possible to say that 100% of comments made as part of discussions at public information sessions were captured. However, as stated in previous paragraphs, it is important that at any information giving exercise or consultation, those attending are very clear about what will, or will not, happen with their comments.

The Committee felt that going forward, the Council should consider new and innovative ways of capturing and recording comments received during consultation or informal feedback to ensure that a full overview of feedback is captured, such as vox pops or the use of mobile recording technology.

The Committee also noted that the process had been tested through appeals to the adjudicator and had been found to be legally sound.

The Huddersfield Town Centre Accessibility Project has been ongoing for a number of years. The timeline submitted to the Committee specifies that consultation on the bus gates proposals was part of the development of the Huddersfield Area Action Plan in 2010. The bus gates finally went live in 2016. The Committee feels that in all projects, baseline data should be captured as part of understanding the pre implementation environment. This information can then be used to facilitate any early high level impact analysis that is required. The panel saw no evidence of a range of baseline data in respect of the bus gates scheme.

In protracted projects that take a number of years from initial consultation to implementation, the Committee believes there should be a periodic refresh of baseline data. This will enable an up to date statistical picture and ensure that proposals are still relevant and cognisant of changing trends.

In the case of the Huddersfield bus gates, comprehensive baseline information would have enabled a more informed response to some concerns about the impact of the scheme prior to the undertaking of a full impact assessment and project evaluation.

The other challenge in protracted projects is keeping the proposals in the public consciousness, so that when they move to statutory consultation and implementation, the proposals are not perceived to be a new project being pushed through.

7. Conclusions

At the outset the OSMC recognised the fact that the majority of the restrictions enforced by the bus gates scheme had been in place since the original access arrangements were approved in 1983. The power of enforcement did not lie with the Council. The only alteration in relation to Westgate and Kirkgate was the introduction of traffic cameras as a means of enforcing the bus gates and existing regulations.

The OSMC observed that the alterations that were made did not prevent access to any part of the Town Centre; however in some cases, town centre users would have to use alternative routes. A high number of the initial concerns received by the council were in relation to this matter and the majority appeared satisfied once an explanation was provided.

The development of the bus gates proposal had included consultation with key technical partners and their expert advice had been considered within the development of the plans. The OSMC feels that in developing the bus gates proposals the requirements of the multiple users of the town centre were taken into consideration whilst also addressing the health and environmental needs of the town centre as reflected in the Council's strategy.

The OSMC considered the comments of town centre business representatives that the consultation process seemed biased towards bus companies and that local businesses were not fully consulted. The OSMC did not find any evidence of this. From the evidence presented the OSMC found that the council had undertaken an extensive consultation process which sought to inform and engage with residents, businesses and town centre users so that people had a range of opportunities to give their views. The process was thorough and went beyond the statutory minimum required for the introduction of new traffic measures.

It was noted that the full impact of the bus gates scheme was difficult to predict prior to implementation. Whilst local business representatives felt that the Council had not anticipated the full impact of the scheme prior to implementation, the OSMC feels the Council has been open and transparent with the information that was available up to the point of implementation. In any scheme it is unlikely that all impacts can be foreseen prior to implementation, however it is the OSMC's view that comprehensive baseline information could have been gathered as part of planning the scheme. If comprehensive baseline information had been available then it would have assisted the council in producing an impact assessment at the earliest opportunity once concerns had been raised.

The OSMC concludes that due consideration of the consultation feedback has been given and this was evidenced through amendments to the original proposals as summarised in the Cabinet reports. The Committee noted the feedback from one of the business witnesses who suggested that comments he made at the roadshow exhibition were not included in the report for Cabinet. In future the people who attend information giving or consultation events should be very clear about what will happen to any comments they make. It is also recommended that going forward, the Council should consider new and innovative ways of capturing and recording comments received during consultation to ensure a full overview of feedback is captured, such as vox pops or using mobile recording technology.

Overall the OSMC concludes that it is satisfied that the decision making process for the bus gates elements of the Huddersfield Town Centre Accessibility Project was comprehensive and robust and met all of the statutory requirements.

8. Recommendations

1. That for similar projects developed in the future, a comprehensive baseline of information should be gathered in order to provide an accurate position against which to measure the impact of the implementation of a scheme as part of any future evaluation. Depending on the length of the project, there may be a need to refresh and re-evaluate the data to ensure any interim changes are taken into consideration prior to implementation.

2(a) That participants at information giving events, informal or formal consultation should have a clear understanding of what will, or will not happen to their comments, both written and verbal.

(b) That for future engagement and consultation exercises, the Council considers the use of new and innovative ways of using technology to remove barriers to capturing and recording feedback received during consultation.

3. That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee have the opportunity to comment on the Bus Gates Impact Assessment Report, before it is considered by Cabinet.

References:

1 - Transport, Physical Activity and Health: Present knowledge and the way ahead, by Roger L. Mackett and Belinda Brown. 2011. Available from:

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/pdf/transportactivityhealth.pdf>.

<http://thegreatbritishhighstreet.co.uk/pdf/Successful-Town-Centres.pdf?2>

2 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creating-growth-cutting-carbon-making-sustainable-local-transport-happen>

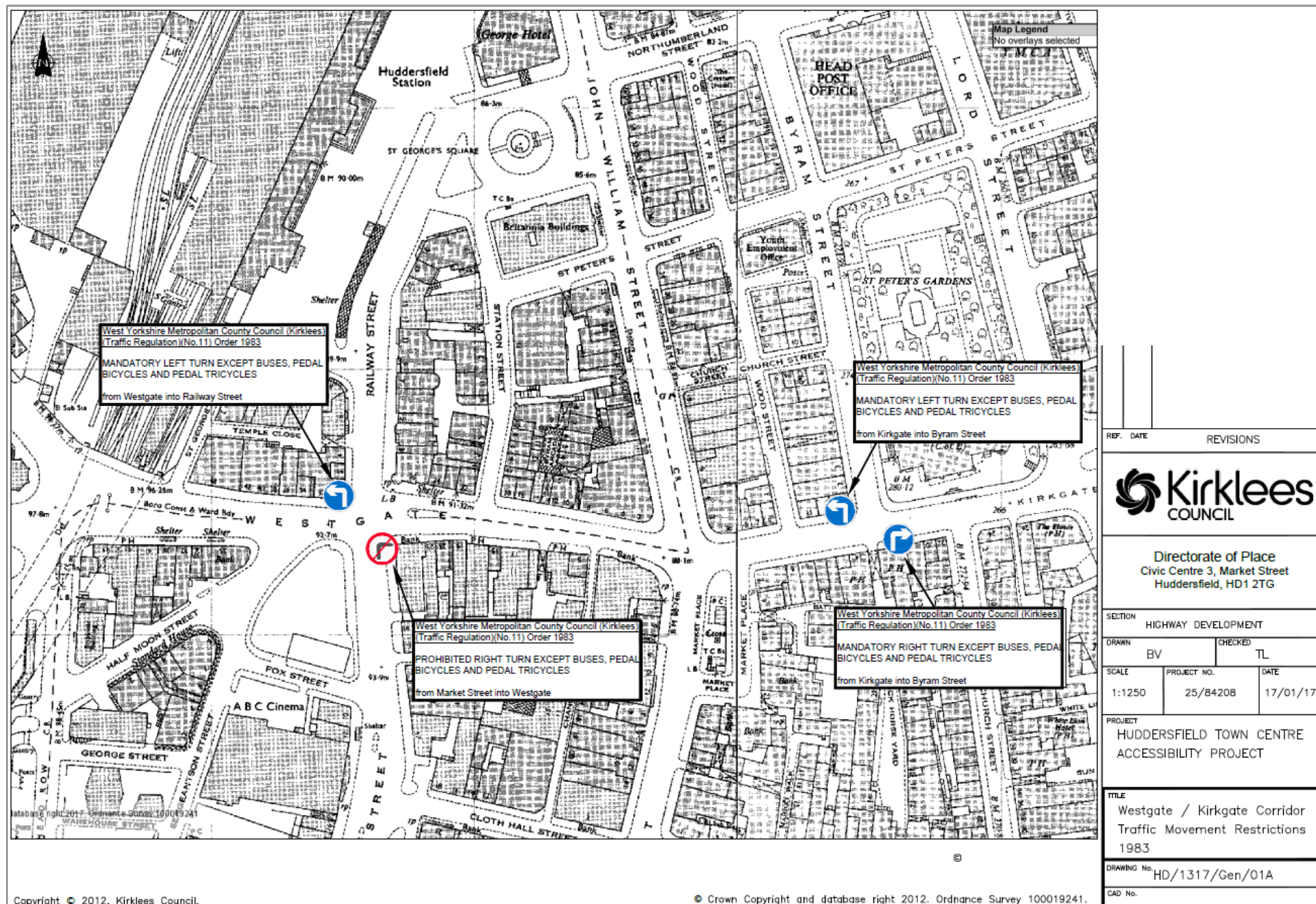
3 - KMC Traffic Regulation (no.11) Order 1983, Statement of Reasons)

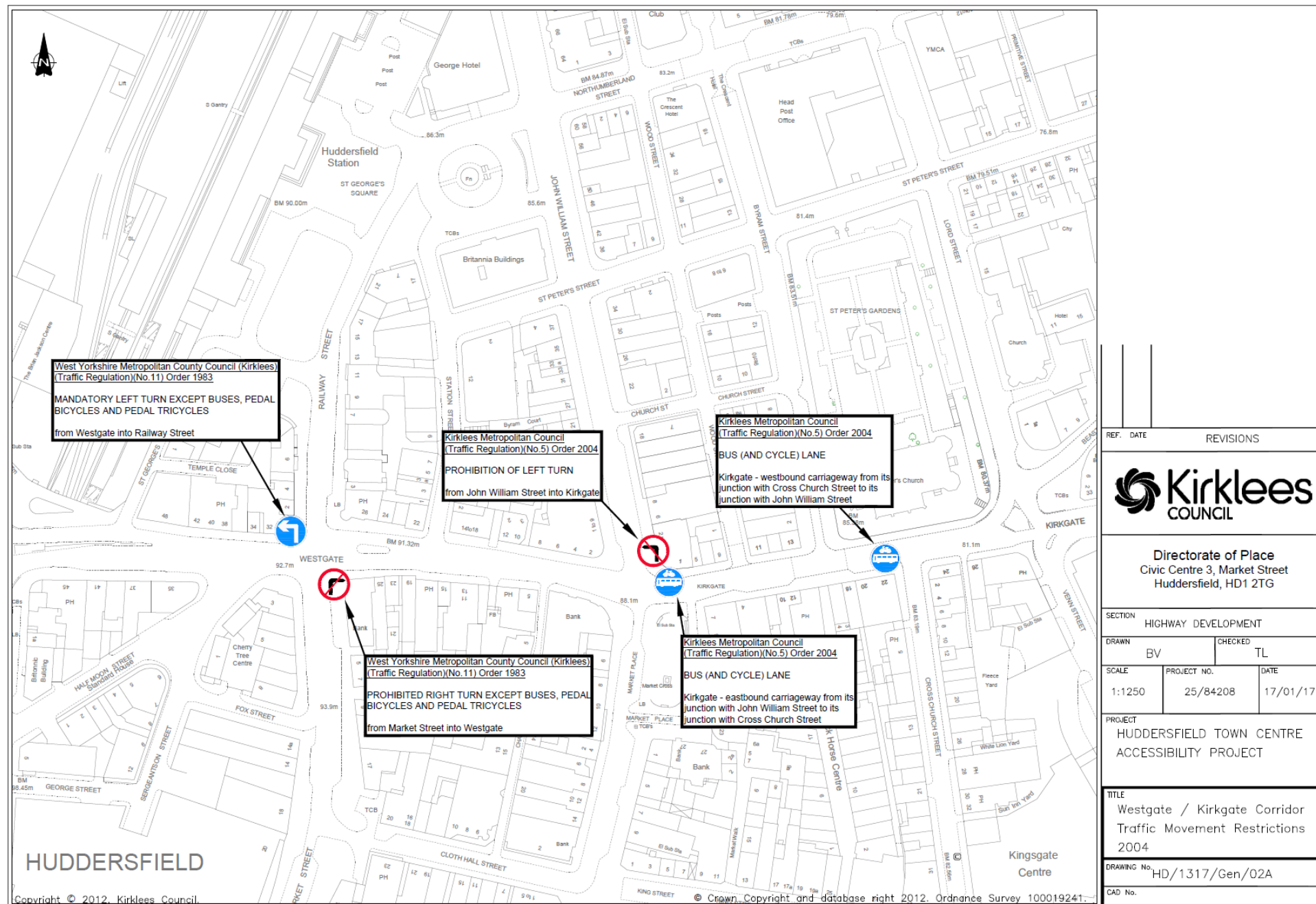
Appendix:

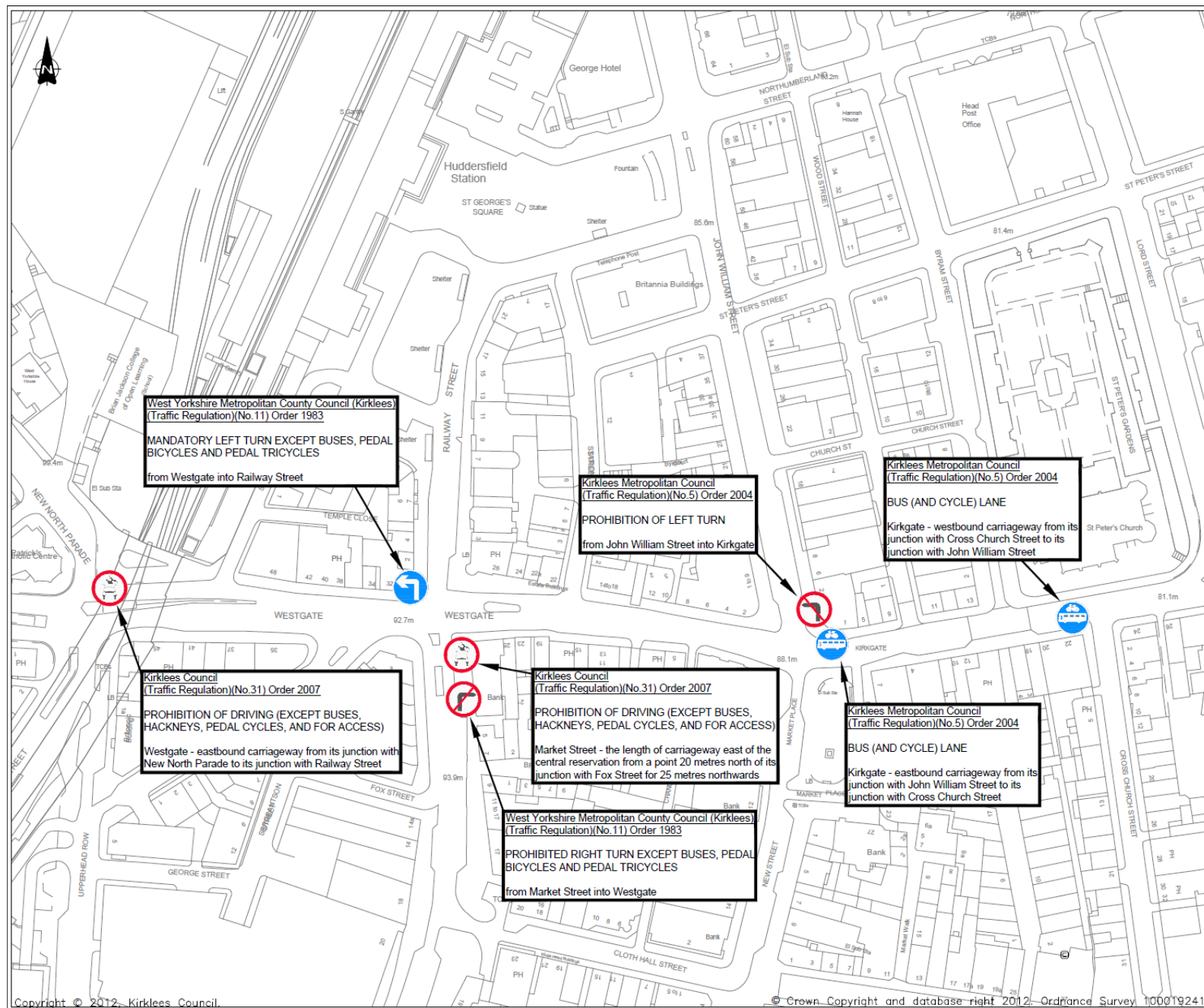
1 – Proposed traffic measures plans showing positions from 1983 to 2014

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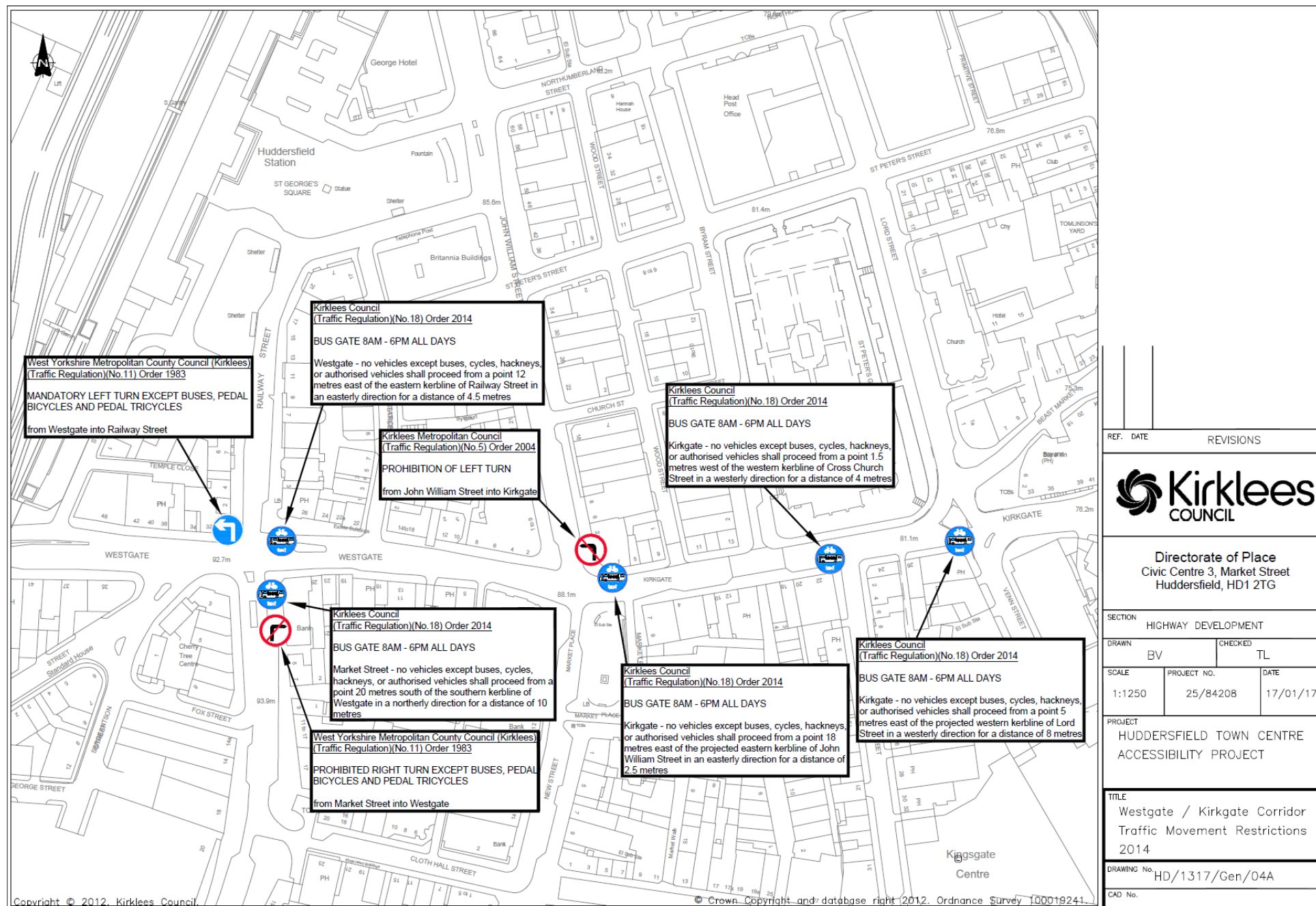




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Directorate of Place Civic Centre 3, Market Street Huddersfield, HD1 2TG		
SECTION	HIGHWAY DEVELOPMENT	
DRAWN	BV	CHECKED TL
SCALE	PROJECT NO.	DATE
1:1250	25/84208	17/01/17
PROJECT	HUDDERSFIELD TOWN CENTRE ACCESSIBILITY PROJECT	
TITLE	Westgate / Kirkgate Corridor Traffic Movement Restrictions 2007	
DRAWING No.	HD/1317/Gen/03A	
CAD No.		



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PROJECT HUDDERSFIELD TOWN CENTRE ACCESSIBILITY PROJECT		
TITLE Westgate / Kirkgate Corridor Traffic Movement Restrictions 2014		
DRAWING No.	HD/1317/Gen/04A	
CAD No.		

AREA 2
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