

Public Document Pack

Public questions and replies

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WEST OF ENGLAND JOINT COMMITTEE

28 JANUARY 2022

PUBLIC QUESTIONS & REPLIES

The following questions were submitted by the deadline (full details of questions are set out in the following pages):

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- Q 2 Chris Holland – Thornbury High Street
- Q 3 Ashley Smith – Thornbury High Street
- Q 4 Jane Mitchell – Thornbury High Street
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- Q 28 Rob Cyphus – Thornbury High Street
- Q 29 Julie Roberts – Thornbury High Street

QUESTION 1

Question from: Anthony Domaille

Subject: Thornbury High Street

Question:

In the absence of an economic impact assessment, environmental impact assessment, and public support, how can South Gloucestershire Council justify the changes to Thornbury High Street?

REPLY FROM METRO MAYOR:

As Metro Mayor I have consistently stated that I would not agree to further funding from the West of England Investment Fund unless there has been a full, respectful consultation which has buy-in from the local community. I have not yet been persuaded that this has taken place to the necessary degree and that the community's views and positions on this matter have been appropriately taken into account. However, perhaps mindful of my opposition, South Gloucestershire Council has now requested the funding from a different stream from that originally envisaged. There will therefore be a vote seeking funds from the Economic Development Fund at the meeting on 28 January. **As Metro Mayor I do not have a vote on this matter.** If this funding is approved by the council leaders and council mayor, then South Gloucestershire Council will be responsible for ensuring that there has been full and transparent consultation and engagement with the local community prior to any Full Business Case approval to release funding and the scheme commencing. You may wish to raise detailed questions and concerns regarding the scheme, and why the High Street is currently so empty, directly with South Gloucestershire Council.

QUESTION 2

Question from: Chris Holland

Subject: Thornbury High Street

Question:

This is to register my objection to the provision of any further funding for changes proposed to Thornbury High Street. I make this request on the basis that South Gloucestershire Council did not carry out full, fair and respectful consultation before implementing the alterations that are currently in place.

The consultation was not full because the questionnaire conspicuously failed to provide any opportunity for respondents to select a "make no changes" option. It was not fair because the consultation information and questionnaire were not adequately publicised beforehand, and it was not respectful because it was conducted without the involvement of the town council and presented as if the changes were "faits accomplis" and introduced alongside measures stated to have been taken to make social distancing easier for pedestrians.

I should like to ask the following two questions.

Why was the period for which special provision permitted the closure of the High Street not followed by a return to the pre-closure situation?

Why was a questionnaire, which included questions about individuals' use of the High Street, conducted at the height of a pandemic when most normal activities, including people's interaction with the High Street, were suspended or severely curtailed by law?

REPLY FROM METRO MAYOR:

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QUESTION 3

Question from: Ashley Smith

Subject: Thornbury High Street

Question:

1. Why do people who don't live or work in Thornbury have the ability to impose a scheme on Thornbury residents that the vast majority don't want? Around 90% of people surveyed at the start opposed it, after now living with it for 18 months I presume the opposition will now be much higher. Why doesn't SGC care about the upset, chaos, danger and frustration they are causing by carrying on with this ludicrous plan?

2. If you plough through the available online documents and reports and have gone to the 'secret' presentations at the library, it's obvious that proper and respectful consultation has not taken place, and that planning and consultation of implementation hasn't happened. Shops and businesses weren't approached for a proper comparative economic survey, very few local groups were approached, and the plans discriminate against the disabled and elderly. The fiasco with the bus and the wasted £400,000 proved this is being made up as they go along. Will there ever be a proper consultation where the views and inputs from local residents are respectfully considered, as SGC has only paid lip service to their views and responses to date?

REPLY FROM METRO MAYOR:

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QUESTION 4

Question from: Jane Mitchell

Subject: Thornbury High Street

Question:

1. What is fair and respectful about a consultation which is done just because it has to be done, and the results aren't listened to?
2. Why have they not carried out a full economic survey of the potential effects of their plans and considered the opinions of every single trader, analysing fully the effect on these businesses since their changes?

REPLY FROM METRO MAYOR:

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QUESTION 5

Question from: Ann Probert

Subject: Thornbury High Street

Question:

I ask for reasons before so much more money is spent why a full consideration has not been thoroughly discussed.

Where is the bus stop to be placed and parking for traders?

Have thoughts of residents even been read let alone considered?

REPLY FROM METRO MAYOR:

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QUESTION 6

Question from: Helen Reeves

Subject: Thornbury High Street

Question:

As a local resident I would like to know what impact studies have been undertaken BEFORE changes were made to the High Street regarding

- * accessibility for those with disabilities
- * traffic, pollution and response times for emergency services
- * on local retailers and businesses

and what consideration has been taken into account of the effect on a designated conservation area?

It's as if the heart and soul of Thornbury has died. What was a pleasure to go to is no longer the case.

REPLY FROM METRO MAYOR:

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QUESTION 7

Question from: Jeanette Walters

Subject: Thornbury High Street

Question:

I personally think the closure of the Thornbury High Street has been handled in a completely undemocratic way. This has made the town centre inaccessible to many of our older residents and people with disabilities.

The question I want to ask is why are so many of us obviously being treated as a second class members of Society?

REPLY FROM METRO MAYOR:

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QUESTION 8

Question from: John Lee

Subject: Thornbury High Street

Question:

I am totally against what the SGC is doing to our High St.

I would put 2 additional questions to you.

1. This all started when covid broke out and the central government offered money to Local councils if they wanted it to safeguard the public. SGC said "Yes we will have some money please."

How much did they get and what was it used for? This has all been kept secret. WHY?

2. I receive a regular email circular from SGC, with pretty photos of the Chief Exec and the Chairman.

They comment about all sorts of things but NEVER have I seen any comment about the High Street debacle and what is the most talked about happening in Thornbury. WHY?

If SGC get away with this they will never be forgotten or forgiven.

REPLY FROM METRO MAYOR:

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QUESTION 9

Question from: John Reynolds

Subject: Thornbury High Street

Question:

1. In the light of the fact that South Gloucestershire Council's original "vision" for the centre of Thornbury, which was for a pedestrian zone and traffic-free, which was rejected by a straight 90% majority of those answering the Council's own online survey, and which has now evolved into a street allowing *inter alia* limited access for traffic and limited parking, including future access for buses, why have the revised versions of the Council's vision, and their future plans based on this, not been put to the public for full and unbiased consultation and comment via an independent survey of residents prior to the undertaking of any permanent works?
2. Why does South Gloucestershire Council claim to have undertaken full, fair and respectful consultation with the residents of Thornbury over the current and proposed changes to the centre of the town, when six of the nine groups actually contacted were opposed to the changes, when it has failed to contact and consult with numerous other interest groups in the town and where the present and proposed changes vary significantly from the original proposition?

REPLY FROM METRO MAYOR:

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QUESTION 10

Question from: Vivien Reynolds

Subject: Thornbury High Street

Question:

1. Despite having already supplied WECA with an Outline Business Plan, seeking funding for making permanent certain changes to the centre of Thornbury, why has South Gloucestershire Council been unable to produce substantiated answers to two Freedom of Information requests submitted by Thornbury and District Residents' Association, which would have been available had the Council already carried out the following necessary impact assessments via information obtained prior to and after the application of emergency measures in the town centre:

- Economic
- Traffic management
- Environmental

upon which to base their business plan and justify their claims for the scheme, which has already been rejected by a majority of Thornbury residents?

2. Why does South Glos Council maintain that the barring of through traffic in Thornbury High Street will be and can be remediated, when the result of forcing all through traffic onto one road has only succeeded in shifting the combined airborne traffic pollution onto one route and, as a consequence of significant residential development to the north and west of Thornbury, led to regular traffic congestion with concomitant additional pollution on the diversionary route?

REPLY FROM METRO MAYOR:

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QUESTION 11

Question from: Tanisha Dagger

Subject: Thornbury High Street

Question:

I am writing this email to yourselves in reference to the upcoming meeting for the continuous closure of Thornbury High Street.

I do have a couple of questions -

1. Why was the survey/opinion option given if this was only going to be ignored (like it has been)?
2. What will the money go towards if this is miraculously turned around for the Thornbury residents and the high street is re-opened?

I hope that the responses you have been given has enlightened you to see that the ever increasing housing that Thornbury has and closing the high street will put a strain on not only the working community but also the town community as a whole. Individuals with disabilities and the elderly are ever more struggling due to the lack of decency that this idiocy has caused.

For a survey to be given for this so called "covid experiment" for it now to become permanent without taking the residents thoughts into consideration is absolutely appalling.

REPLY FROM METRO MAYOR:

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QUESTION 12

Question from: Colin Wise

Subject: Thornbury High Street

Question:

I object to this plan on several counts, where I believe consultation has been inadequate, illustrated by the following two questions and one personal view:

Q1. How does the proposal improve road safety?

I am not sure that it does. Specifically, the plan diverts traffic from the High Street, a road with:

- * Three junctions from which traffic might emerge (all very minor*) between the pump and the mini roundabout and the end of Midland Way.

- * A 20 mph speed limit (Statutory Notice PT.7038).

Instead, traffic that would have taken the High Street will have to go via The Plain - Quaker Lane - Rock Street – Midland Way route (or its converse), much of which is 30 mph, traversing:

- * Fourteen junctions from which traffic might emerge**, many quite significant, including:

- * One 'midi' roundabout with a fabricated hub (connecting with Tesco),

- * Two mini roundabouts, with marked hubs, probably more prone to near-misses and erosion of markings,

- * Possibly the worst blind exit in Thornbury (emerging from the Aldi car park and associated service areas)

Housing development in Thornbury continues apace. It seems perverse to significantly increase the number of houses in Thornbury and so increase the number of cars, probably by thousands, while simultaneously reducing the number of strategic thoroughfares to take this traffic. How can road safety be improved by the congestion and the increased demand on drivers arising from filtering all town centre traffic through the route with the maximum possibilities for interaction with other vehicles.

We used to have three roads through Thornbury. One road (St Mary's Street, not a major thoroughfare) was closed decades ago. Is this not enough? If the plan goes ahead might it transpire that, in a few years, Rock Street will need a relief road and it will be found that the High Street will do nicely?

Q2. Pollution: How has the continuing beneficial impact of electric vehicles been considered?

One motivation of for the changes is to '*keep the benefits of ... reduced air pollution and reduced carbon emissions*' engendered by lockdowns. But closing roads, like the High Street, might not help if we just get the same traffic funnelled into fewer roads, and with longer diversions. Might this not just give more congestion and, possibly, more pollution as a result? How has the pollution benefit been quantified?

Large pollution/carbon benefits will be steadily achieved over the course of a few decades by the rapid growth in use of electric vehicles, with or without expenditure on changes to the High Street. Spending the same money on electric charging points in Castle Court and Rock Street car parks might incentivise this change and produce more effective results.

Postscript concerning cycling (not a question, but a personal view) - Cycling facilities seem to play a part in the rationale for this scheme. As a cyclist who often shops in Thornbury on a pannier-equipped bike I can say that I have never found the experience to be at all daunting with the existing (High Street open) arrangements. I have never found negotiating even the full length of the High Street (to get to Tesco in my case) to be a problem. I might even feel slightly embarrassed to have a vast and empty High Street to myself. Most of my journeys have in fact been to Aldi, where the prospect of more traffic on Quaker Lane as a result of the proposals is more of a concern. Nor have I ever been embarrassed by a lack of secure bike racks in Thornbury. Besides, more bike racks can easily be introduced without full High Street closure. I doubt if closing the High Street will make the existing ones more used.

Looked at another way, cyclists might well be more daunted by the journey to the town centre than by conditions once they are there. I myself have been sworn at on Gloucester Road by a motorist trying to squeeze between me and a bollard. So if bike use is an objective, improvements in the journey rather than the destination should be where the emphasis lies. Busier roads caused by unfettered housing development are surely only making this worse. Under these circumstances, a strictly enforced 20 mph limit throughout the whole of Thornbury might do a lot more for bike use than a closed High Street.

REPLY FROM METRO MAYOR:

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QUESTION 13

Question from: Paul Morrish

Subject: Thornbury High Street

Question:

Q1. Why is South Gloucestershire Council still retaining the outdoor eating facilities at the Swan, Butchers Hook and The Malthouse in the High Street?

These were introduced when it was not possible for customers to enter the eating establishments.

With Covid-19 restrictions greatly reduced, there is not the demand for these facilities, especially now with the inclement weather.

If these areas were removed, there would be far more room to allow shoppers to access the shops.

Q2. Why is South Gloucestershire Council still retaining the two-way traffic at the top end of Thornbury High Street?

There will definitely be problems between The Close and the top Round-a-Bout because some vehicles still now, try to drive northbound (down the High Street), but then have to do a three-point turn, which will cause a hold up especially when buses start to travel southbound – it will not be safe.

REPLY FROM METRO MAYOR:

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QUESTION 14

Question from: Meg Wise

Subject: Thornbury High Street

Question:

I strongly object to the plans to make such extensive changes to thornbury high street, where i believe consultation has been inadequate. i have been a volunteer at thornbury & district museum for over 20 years, researching the town's long history and producing exhibitions and publications. i am therefore objecting on the grounds that the promoters and planners involved in this scheme seem to be unaware of the importance of the historic context of the high street and its junction with the plain and castle street.

Question: how do these plans stand up against south gloucestershire council's own designation since 1975 (& consequently renewed at regular intervals) of the centre of thornbury as being a conservation area?

REPLY FROM METRO MAYOR:

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QUESTION 15

Question from: Peter Mannion (and L Mannion, P. Waller, F & A Britton, I & L Clark, R & B Evanson, T & S Martin, S & E Bennett, R & S Ripanti, F. Reynolds, P. Blenkiron, P & G Needs, L & C Riddiford)

Subject: Thornbury High Street

Question:

We write with respect to the ongoing attempt by South Gloucestershire Council to close the High Street in Thornbury without, as one has come to expect, any proper and balanced consultation.

We do have some questions that have remained satisfactorily unanswered despite two attempts so perhaps WECA would ask on our behalf.

1. Having allegedly followed a consultation process why does the Chamber Of Commerce, whose members would be in the main adversely affected, not feel like they were part of this consultation?
2. Why, when it has been shown that a majority of Thornbury residents are not in favour of closing the High Street, does the Council continue to ignore the views of the people it represents?

We anticipate that once again there will continue to be no accountability for the actions of the Council members but look forward to seeing an answer to these deep concerns on behalf of the residents of Alveston who valued the opportunity to utilize the High Street with ease.

REPLY FROM METRO MAYOR:

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QUESTION 16

Question from: David Redgewell

Subject: Transport – passengers forum

Question:

When is the west of England mayoral combined transport Authority and North Somerset council going to set up under the National bus strategy and the west of England bus service improvements plan with North Somerset council?

A bus service Advisory Board and a passengers forum under the Department for transport guidelines. We have not had a passengers forum for 2 years - is a date set with mayor Dan Norris metro mayor and Don Davies leader of North Somerset council for passengers forum meeting

REPLY:

I am very keen to meet bus users as soon as possible in a public forum.

We are setting up, with the first meeting in the next two months, a broad-based Bus User Forum (covering the whole West of England area) to offer a wider perspective on operational bus matters across the region and comment on the provision and performance of bus services in the area. I hope this will be a useful input to the consideration, through the year, of changes to the network and also to the Bus Passenger Charter which we are committed to producing by October.

A bus users forum will be very useful in the current climate when Government funding for buses has been slashed.

The Government guidance on delivering Bus Service Improvement Plans using an Enhanced Partnership includes a requirement for the Local Transport Authority to engage with stakeholders such as bus operators, Local Highway Authorities and passenger groups, as well as with the business, health and education sectors. Plans are already in train that draw representatives from these groups into the Enhanced Partnership process via an Advisory Panel which will meet on a regular basis and give advice and make recommendations to the Enhanced Partnership Board on actions necessary to keep the Enhanced Partnership on course towards meeting the targets and objectives from the Bus Service Improvement Plan. The Government has recently revised the timeframe for the completion of Enhanced Partnerships, and we will now look to establishing the Advisory Panel in late spring/early summer subject to further confirmation from Government of the Enhanced Partnership requirements.

QUESTION 17

Question from: David Redgewell

Subject: Transport – customer service website

Question:

What progress is being made on setting up a customer service website for public transport and bus service and public transport phone number for the travelling public?

in line with the other combined transport Authority in the west Midlands and Greater Manchester combined transport Authority

REPLY:

At present, bus and rail operators provide their own customer service and journey planning facilities – both online and by telephone. In addition, there are national timetable and journey planning facilities such as Traveline and National Rail Enquiries.

Travelwest provides up-to-date travel and journey planning information online for the West of England area.

Our Bus Service Improvement Plan includes an aspiration to develop a single customer service point of contact for the bus network and we have bid for funding to deliver that.

Looking to the future, the Mobility-as-a-Service platform, developing as part of the Future Transport Zone Programme, will provide a new way to plan, book and pay for journeys in the West of England. The platform will direct users to the relevant customer services to resolve any issues they have with their journey, booked and paid for through the platform. It will integrate with the above-mentioned single customer service point of contact.

QUESTION 18

Question from: David Walker-Cornes

Subject: Thornbury High Street

Question:

Can you justify spending £4.6million on a bid that defies the majority of taxpayers' preferences when there is a stalled alternative project that taxpayers DO want and that requires a similar amount of money?

REPLY FROM METRO MAYOR:

As Metro Mayor I have consistently stated that I would not agree to further funding from the West of England Investment Fund unless there has been a full, respectful consultation which has buy-in from the local community. I have not yet been persuaded that this has taken place to the necessary degree and that the community's views and positions on this matter have been appropriately taken into account. However, perhaps mindful of my opposition, South Gloucestershire Council has now requested the funding from a different stream from that originally envisaged. There will therefore be a vote seeking funds from the Economic Development Fund at the meeting on 28 January. **As Metro Mayor I do not have a vote on this matter.** If this funding is approved by the council leaders and council mayor, then South Gloucestershire Council will be responsible for ensuring that there has been full and transparent consultation and engagement with the local community prior to any Full Business Case approval to release funding and the scheme commencing. You may wish to raise detailed questions and concerns regarding the scheme, and why the High Street is currently so empty, directly with South Gloucestershire Council.

QUESTION 19

Question from: Chris Roberts

Subject: Thornbury High Street

Question:

1. Please can an explanation be given to justify only 2 days during a pandemic for movement surveys as a reasonable representation of future movements and how this survey data has influenced the design parameters for the carriageway/footway designs for areas other than the High Street e.g. Midland Way/Rock Street? (para 3.4)

2. Please can there be an explanation of what matters have been recommended to counter the expected increased air and noise pollution that will arise in Rock Street due to the increased traffic movements and if any what surveys have been undertaken to assess air quality changes since the trial began?

REPLY FROM METRO MAYOR:

As Metro Mayor I have consistently stated that I would not agree to further funding from the West of England Investment Fund unless there has been a full, respectful consultation which has buy-in from the local community. I have not yet been persuaded that this has taken place to the necessary degree and that the community's views and positions on this matter have been appropriately taken into account. However, perhaps mindful of my opposition, South Gloucestershire Council has now requested the funding from a different stream from that originally envisaged. There will therefore be a vote seeking funds from the Economic Development Fund at the meeting on 28 January. **As Metro Mayor I do not have a vote on this matter.** If this funding is approved by the council leaders and council mayor, then South Gloucestershire Council will be responsible for ensuring that there has been full and transparent consultation and engagement with the local community prior to any Full Business Case approval to release funding and the scheme commencing. You may wish to raise detailed questions and concerns regarding the scheme, and why the High Street is currently so empty, directly with South Gloucestershire Council.

QUESTION 20

Question from: Susan Blick

Subject: Thornbury High Street

Question:

Question 1 - What recent Risk Assessment have South Gloucestershire Council carried out into conflicting movements of Pedestrians, Cyclists and other traffic in Thornbury High Street ~ particularly for young Children and elderly Residents using the new proposed “shared surface”,(one level), as created under this amended scheme ~ which allows Cyclists to use the High Street in **BOTH directions**, whilst other vehicles will be only allowed “one way”? (Does the person who has written that Risk Assessment feel comfortable ~ that they may have to justify their decision ~ in a worst-case scenario in a Coroners Court).

Question 2 - What evidence do SGC have, that the number of disabled parking bays and limited drop-off areas ~ are sufficient to meet the needs of local Residents and Visitors ~ and will not impact on Highway safety, and increased pollution, as drivers will “circulate” looking for an available space?

REPLY FROM METRO MAYOR:

As Metro Mayor I have consistently stated that I would not agree to further funding from the West of England Investment Fund unless there has been a full, respectful consultation which has buy-in from the local community. I have not yet been persuaded that this has taken place to the necessary degree and that the community's views and positions on this matter have been appropriately taken into account. However, perhaps mindful of my opposition, South Gloucestershire Council has now requested the funding from a different stream from that originally envisaged. There will therefore be a vote seeking funds from the Economic Development Fund at the meeting on 28 January. **As Metro Mayor I do not have a vote on this matter.** If this funding is approved by the council leaders and council mayor, then South Gloucestershire Council will be responsible for ensuring that there has been full and transparent consultation and engagement with the local community prior to any Full Business Case approval to release funding and the scheme commencing. You may wish to raise detailed questions and concerns regarding the scheme, and why the High Street is currently so empty, directly with South Gloucestershire Council.

QUESTION 21

Question from: Jill Cyphus

Subject: Thornbury High Street

Question:

1. The results of the 6 month survey showed a significant majority in favour of returning the High Street back to parking for shoppers; why has this not been done ?
2. If full and proper consultation has taken place, as claimed by South Glos Council, on what elements of the consultation process can they justify their continued actions ?

REPLY FROM METRO MAYOR:

As Metro Mayor I have consistently stated that I would not agree to further funding from the West of England Investment Fund unless there has been a full, respectful consultation which has buy-in from the local community. I have not yet been persuaded that this has taken place to the necessary degree and that the community's views and positions on this matter have been appropriately taken into account. However, perhaps mindful of my opposition, South Gloucestershire Council has now requested the funding from a different stream from that originally envisaged. There will therefore be a vote seeking funds from the Economic Development Fund at the meeting on 28 January. **As Metro Mayor I do not have a vote on this matter.** If this funding is approved by the council leaders and council mayor, then South Gloucestershire Council will be responsible for ensuring that there has been full and transparent consultation and engagement with the local community prior to any Full Business Case approval to release funding and the scheme commencing. You may wish to raise detailed questions and concerns regarding the scheme, and why the High Street is currently so empty, directly with South Gloucestershire Council.

QUESTION 22

Question from: Thornbury Town & District Residents Association

Subject: Thornbury High Street

Question:

1. General Arrangement Plan

We have been waiting 20 months, since June 2020, to see a proper scale drawing of the proposed road layout of the High Street

General Arrangement Plan of the proposals for the Thornbury High Street “Enhancement” in Atkins Outline Business Case dated 19 November 2021 was eventually made available for the public on Friday 21st January 2022

The drawing itself titled THORN-ATK=HGN-D-DR-0001 Revision P01 **dated 12th November 2021** is quite recent and so should be up to date – but it is not

The layout of the roads/carriageways and positions of parking bays, bus stops, zebra crossings etc. clearly is unworkable

The Question is:

Please confirm what changes to the General Arrangement Plan are South Gloucestershire Council proposing to make following preparation of the Outline Business Plan and the Drop-in Sessions?

2. Vision

South Gloucestershire Council (SGC) Vision and Aims seem to change every five minutes

The Question is:

Please confirm exactly what the Vision and Aims of SGC for Thornbury High Street were in May 2020 and are now in January 2022?

REPLY FROM METRO MAYOR:

As Metro Mayor I have consistently stated that I would not agree to further funding from the West of England Investment Fund unless there has been a full, respectful consultation which has buy-in from the local community. I have not yet been persuaded that this has taken place to the necessary degree and that the community’s views and positions on this matter have been appropriately taken into account. However, perhaps mindful of my opposition, South Gloucestershire Council has now requested the funding from a different stream from that originally envisaged. There will therefore be a vote seeking funds from the Economic Development Fund at the meeting on 28 January. **As Metro Mayor I do not have a vote on this matter.** If this funding is approved by the council leaders and council mayor, then South Gloucestershire Council will be responsible for ensuring that there has been full and transparent consultation and engagement with the local community prior to any Full Business Case approval to release funding and the scheme commencing.

You may wish to raise detailed questions and concerns regarding the scheme, and why the High Street is currently so empty, directly with South Gloucestershire Council.

QUESTION 23

Question from: Rob Galpin

Subject: Thornbury High Street

Question:

1. Environmental Information Request

This refers to the Freedom of Information request dated 28th October 2021 and South Gloucestershire Council (SGC) response Environmental Information Request that I received on 24th December 2021

There appears to be a deliberate attempt to deny that the information requested exists and then to delay its publication a further until **after May 2022** - which will be 4 or 5 months after a decision on funding of the business case by WECA in January 2022

A frequent response to questions is "At this time, the Council is applying the relevant exemption in the Environmental Impact Regulations 2004, Reg 12(4)(d) – material that is in the course of completion. In respect to the application of the public interest test, this exemption has been applied as the information requested (where such information is held by the Council) is not in a completed form and may be subject to further revision and amendment, hence the benefit of retaining the information at this stage outweighs the public interest of disclosing incomplete information. In accordance with reg 14(3)(b) it is estimated that the information will be in completed format ready for disclosure after May 2022 (subject to change)

One of the Questions concerned Traffic Surveys which did indeed receive the response indicated above

However, within the Business Case (dated 19th November 2021) it now appears a Traffic Survey carried out in July 2021 which shows the response was misleading and untruthful

The Question is:

Since SGC obviously had the full information in their possession why was this not given in the SGC response to the FOI sent to TTA/DRA on 24th December 2022 and what other information is available but has not been released by South Gloucestershire Council?

2. Environmental Information Request

This refers to the Freedom of Information request dated 28th October 2021 and SGC response Environmental Information Request received 24th December 2021

One of the Questions was:

What are the increases in response times for emergency services caused by rerouting from the High Street and increased congestion – police, ambulance and fire. For instance, the Fire Station is manned by volunteers who would firstly need to

reach the fire station from their place of work/home and then experience traffic delays and Ambulances would be unable to travel North along the High Street

The response was “Under Regulation 12, part 4 (a) – The Council does not hold this information when the request was made. Rather evasive since South Gloucestershire Council did not respond until 8 weeks later (having had an extension of 4 weeks)

Obviously, since this is vital information, that should have been used in preparation of the various Surveys, Consultations and reports

The Question is:

We are aware that the Avon Fire & Rescue Service were approached In October 2021 and they subsequently submitted figures for delayed response times, so why have these not been published?

REPLY FROM METRO MAYOR:

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QUESTION 24

Question from: Julia Galpin

Subject: Thornbury High Street

Question:

1. Atkins Business Case

Unfortunately not wanting public scrutiny, South Gloucestershire Council have chosen not to publish the Atkins Business case even though it was sent to WECA in mid-November

There are countless errors, omissions, incorrect statements, engineering of facts & figures and misleading statements throughout the report

To give just three examples:

- A. *SGC claim that the High Street is in decline and a large proportion of High Street premises are empty*

A cursory stroll along the High Street, The Plain and Castle Street reveals that there are 3 empty premises (4%) and 3 being refurbished (4%). The proportion within the pedestrian zone between The Close and Castle Court is even smaller

The remaining 92% are working - as normally as South Gloucestershire Council the restrictions allow

Obviously, the occupancy of business premises in High Street is not in decline

- B. *2.2.1. Impact of Not Changing*

*Recent traffic counts in the town centre (with High Street closed to traffic) revealed that Rock Street typically carries over 10,000 vehicles in the 12-hour period from 7am-7pm. Reopening High Street to traffic would be expected to see a large proportion, **if not most, of this traffic to divert to High Street***

What complete and utter nonsense - Quite obviously this is incorrect since an earlier traffic count in 2015 showed that only 37.5% of traffic went along the High Street as opposed to 62.5% along Rock Street. With the subsequent increase in through traffic along Rock Street the proportion is likely to be 30% along the High Street and 70% along Rock Street

- C. *Figure 2-4 – Surveys conducted from August 2020 to April 2021 demonstrate that there has been an increase in footfall from 341 pedestrians in August to 478 pedestrians in April, this indicates more residents are walking along the High Street which is likely to have a positive impact on the number of people shopping locally*

These figures are completely meaningless. The survey should have as a base the number of pedestrians using the High Street prior to Covid restrictions and introduction of the road closure. Only then can a fair comparison be made to later surveys, which in any case should state the Covid restrictions in force at the time.

Time and time again the comparisons made by South Gloucestershire Council and Atkins do not compare like with like

As any science student will attest THIS NOT A FAIR TEST

The Question is:

When will SGC be retracting their Business Case and request for Funding from WECA in order to correct these problems - or will SGC carry on as usual and blag their way through regardless?

2. Premises outside the restricted length of the High Street – South of The Close, North of Castle Close, The Plain and the Southern end of Castle Street

Around 40% of the High Street premises fall outside the proposed restricted zone, however they are heavily affected by SGC proposal to restrict parking of all types. These restrictions will have a negative affect upon these businesses

The question is:

Why have SGC not taken these businesses into account in their plans for the High Street?

REPLY FROM METRO MAYOR:

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QUESTION 25

Question from: Malcolm Best

Subject: Thornbury High Street

Question:

Question 1 - Why are South Gloucestershire Council doing this to us (the residents of Thornbury) and acting in such an undemocratic way?

When the significant majority of almost 3000 people who responded to the original consultation survey clearly indicated that they did not want the changes now being imposed by SGC.

A petition against the closure of the High Street and requesting restoration of previous status was signed by 1832 residents and submitted to SGC in September 2020. The responses provided by SGC at that time are no longer valid.

At subsequent Town Residents Meetings held at Thornbury Leisure Centre the vast majority of attendees again strongly expressed their view that they did not want these changes.

And again, during the most recent consultation regarding the imposition of the 5 Traffic Regulation Orders for the High Street, over 90% of respondents were strongly against the changes.

Is this what democracy looks like in the twenty first century?

Question 2 - Could South Gloucestershire Council please define the problem it is attempting to solve through the changes it is seeking to impose on Thornbury High Street?

Residents understood and accepted the temporary measures introduced for Covid distancing measures in June 2020, but as we head into 2022 the situation has changed significantly and most people recognise that these measures will no longer be sustainable in the medium or longer term.

The Experimental Traffic Regulation Order imposed over the last 18 months has resulted in a significant negative economic impact for several businesses on the High Street. Why do you now seek to potentially drive these businesses to the wall?

Traffic congestion has increased significantly, with an undoubted increase in global warming gas emissions, and at best, other pollutant emissions only being transferred from one location to another. This congestion has a negative economic impact on the Town and the wider district surrounding Thornbury.

REPLY FROM METRO MAYOR:

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Thank you for your question. The points you raise have been noted. As you will be aware, the West of England Joint Committee will be considering the Outline Business Case and related funding on 28 January. If this is approved, South Gloucestershire Council will be responsible for ensuring that there has been full and transparent consultation and engagement with the local community prior to any Full Business Case approval to release funding and the scheme commencing. Your detailed questions / concerns regarding the scheme should be raised directly with South Gloucestershire Council.

QUESTION 26

Question from: Sheila Watson

Subject: Thornbury High Street

Question:

Question 1

What significant measures have SGC included in their Business Case for the High Street, that will support active and sustainable transport to enable residents in the residential areas of Thornbury and the surrounding district to get to the High Street?

Without significant support and improvement to enable people to get to the High Street, the proposed changes are simply all 'stick' and no 'carrot'. With the detrimental and negative impact to the High Street observed over the last 18 months.

The methodology outlined at paragraph 3.4.2 of the OBC - 'Active Travel Demand' and the Propensity to Cycle Tool' (PCT) clearly states this is based on an '**Origin to Destination**' principle. There is no 'Origin' consideration in any of the evaluations or impact assessments contained in the OBC. The majority of the conclusions subsequently stated in the OBC regarding these issues must therefore be considered invalid.

Question 2

In their 'High Street Catalyst Project Report' commissioned by SGC and dated 06 May 2021, Atkins Consultants clearly identified that provision of a bus stop and the return of bus services to the High Street was a key and essential provision for the implementation of the proposed plan.

Why did SGC not include that provision in their 'Vision Report' to Cabinet for the 07 June 2021 meeting, and took a further 5 months to acknowledge this requirement through their 'Buses will return to the High Street' News Release on 17 November 2021?

Could it be this was a deliberate action, to enable the making permanent of the ETRO's which were signed off on the same date?

There is no provision or detail for the return of bus services included in the OBC and now submitted to WECA, Engagement Sessions at Thornbury Library in December 2021 confirm this. The return of bus services to the High Street will have a major impact on many of the impact assessments, proposals, infrastructure changes that form the basis of the OBC, as there will now be a degree of one way 'through traffic' now using the High Street. The OBC should therefore be reworked and resubmitted to WECA once measures for the reintroduction of bus services have been identified.

REPLY FROM METRO MAYOR:

As Metro Mayor I have consistently stated that I would not agree to further funding from the West of England Investment Fund unless there has been a full, respectful consultation which has buy-in from the local community. I have not yet been persuaded that this has taken place to the necessary degree and that the community's views and positions on this matter have been appropriately taken into account. However, perhaps mindful of my opposition, South Gloucestershire Council has now requested the funding from a different stream from that originally envisaged. There will therefore be a vote seeking funds from the Economic Development Fund at the meeting on 28 January. **As Metro Mayor I do not have a vote on this matter.** If this funding is approved by the council leaders and council mayor, then South Gloucestershire Council will be responsible for ensuring that there has been full and transparent consultation and engagement with the local community prior to any Full Business Case approval to release funding and the scheme commencing. You may wish to raise detailed questions and concerns regarding the scheme, and why the High Street is currently so empty, directly with South Gloucestershire Council.

QUESTION 27

Question from: John Nash

Subject: Thornbury High Street

Question:

Question 1

I live within the closure, and it is my understanding that the DfT statutory guidance for TTRs (including emergency procedures) carries recommendations for the closure work and its funding (ref: Update 12/01/2021), stating that the Council should consult local residents at the design stage to ensure schemes will not have unintended consequences. So, why is it acceptable for the Council to have not proactively engaged with me throughout 2020 and up to July 2021 (I recall no such specific engagement or consultation until two days after my formal complaint was lodged in July 2021) and for the Council to apparently believe that they had no obligation to do so, leaving me with doubt over insurances, legal rights, access rights and safety concerns throughout that time and still now, as well as a fait accompli over the future, which I, as part of a majority, did not vote for in the “community consultation”? (You should be aware that, up to July 2021, the Council were reactive in response to questions, concerns and complaints from me, i.e., after the fact, hence consequences or, sometimes too late to influence or change.)

Question 2

Have the Council correctly applied the rules laid down in the TSRGD, when suggesting that people can drive through the zone boundary restriction signs at the north end of the High Street (ref: Councillor comments in Thornbury Gazette 06/10/2021 and Council letter to residents August 2020), even though the signs mandate that people cannot drive through them, thus leaving insurance, legal and safety concerns, resulting from potential problems if the Police were called to an incident?

REPLY FROM METRO MAYOR:

As Metro Mayor I have consistently stated that I would not agree to further funding from the West of England Investment Fund unless there has been a full, respectful consultation which has buy-in from the local community. I have not yet been persuaded that this has taken place to the necessary degree and that the community's views and positions on this matter have been appropriately taken into account. However, perhaps mindful of my opposition, South Gloucestershire Council has now requested the funding from a different stream from that originally envisaged. There will therefore be a vote seeking funds from the Economic Development Fund at the meeting on 28 January. **As Metro Mayor I do not have a vote on this matter.** If this funding is approved by the council leaders and council mayor, then South Gloucestershire Council will be responsible for ensuring that there has been full and transparent consultation and engagement with the local community prior to any Full Business Case approval to release funding and the scheme commencing. You may wish to raise detailed questions and concerns regarding the scheme, and

why the High Street is currently so empty, directly with South Gloucestershire Council.

QUESTION 28

Question from: Rob Cyphus

Subject: Thornbury High Street

Question:

It is claimed that the closure of the High Street is a popular move, and will lead to a thriving town centre. If this is so, why has the High Street gone from a bustling hub, to being deserted most of the time, and most businesses suffering a huge drop in sales.

How can you claim to be offering fair and open consultation when the FOI documents, requested back in October 2021, are only finally being released to TaTRA on Jan 25th the day AFTER questions can be submitted for the meeting this coming Friday.

REPLY FROM METRO MAYOR:

As Metro Mayor I have consistently stated that I would not agree to further funding from the West of England Investment Fund unless there has been a full, respectful consultation which has buy-in from the local community. I have not yet been persuaded that this has taken place to the necessary degree and that the community's views and positions on this matter have been appropriately taken into account. However, perhaps mindful of my opposition, South Gloucestershire Council has now requested the funding from a different stream from that originally envisaged. There will therefore be a vote seeking funds from the Economic Development Fund at the meeting on 28 January. **As Metro Mayor I do not have a vote on this matter.** If this funding is approved by the council leaders and council mayor, then South Gloucestershire Council will be responsible for ensuring that there has been full and transparent consultation and engagement with the local community prior to any Full Business Case approval to release funding and the scheme commencing. You may wish to raise detailed questions and concerns regarding the scheme, and why the High Street is currently so empty, directly with South Gloucestershire Council.

QUESTION 29

Question from: Julie Roberts

Subject: Thornbury High Street

Question:

1. Other than relying on anecdotal evidence from other similar places (within the SGC OBC) how has the economic impact of the SGC proposal been addressed; what relevant data has been collected during the trial period specifically relating to: the impact on businesses in the High Street, those businesses adjacent e.g. St Mary's Centre and in the local environment of the High Street and their supply chain.
2. Has WECA considered engaging a suitably qualified professional to undertake a Peer Review of the options appraisal within the SGC OBC, to scrutinise if the selected option is the correct one, on the basis the OBC recommends the option preferred by SGC before any other option studies or surveys were undertaken. Do WECA agree this would be prudent to enable WECA to justify any decision they take.

REPLY FROM METRO MAYOR:

As Metro Mayor I have consistently stated that I would not agree to further funding from the West of England Investment Fund unless there has been a full, respectful consultation which has buy-in from the local community. I have not yet been persuaded that this has taken place to the necessary degree and that the community's views and positions on this matter have been appropriately taken into account. However, perhaps mindful of my opposition, South Gloucestershire Council has now requested the funding from a different stream from that originally envisaged. There will therefore be a vote seeking funds from the Economic Development Fund at the meeting on 28 January. **As Metro Mayor I do not have a vote on this matter.** If this funding is approved by the council leaders and council mayor, then South Gloucestershire Council will be responsible for ensuring that there has been full and transparent consultation and engagement with the local community prior to any Full Business Case approval to release funding and the scheme commencing. You may wish to raise detailed questions and concerns regarding the scheme, and why the High Street is currently so empty, directly with South Gloucestershire Council.