

Looe Neighbourhood Plan – Shopping and Services Report – Phase1

Monday, 08 October 2018

1 Introduction

The brief for the Shopping and Access to Services working group was:

To 'develop options to support the town centre as a prosperous and vibrant local centre for retail, service and entertainment activity, that:

- Supports the development of a broader integrated strategy for the town centre linking public realm and car parking management, pedestrian circulation within centre and from car parks, visitor promotion, and community safety;
- Includes policies to control and enhance the quality of advertising and built environment
- Identifies and gives policy for 'opportunity sites' for redevelopment
- Identifies, protects and enhances space for events

This was carried out by:

Chris Roy – Team Leader

Armand Toms

Paul Penhaligan

Jill Fleming

2 Approach

It was quickly determined that the above brief held considerable overlap with other working groups and that options for the town centre with respect to shopping, services, car parking and pedestrian circulation were limited.

Existing shops and services were identified and attempts made to envisage their potential shape and structure by 2026, bearing in mind the need to minimise the erosion of Looe's distinct character.

This initial analysis did not offer any specific prospects for new or change development, except when considered against the rapid development of online shopping or servicing technology. Here, it became apparent that a number of shops or services are likely candidates to move from the traditional town centre/high street operating model, to either a partial or complete online model.

The potential propensity for this is indicated in Appendix i.

The team felt that it would be prudent to capitalise on such developments and possibly enhance the shopping and visitor experience, by actively embracing internet technology and social media and by providing improved and safe environments for parts of the town centre.

This included the need for an appropriate long term car parking and pedestrian circulation strategy.

There is also potential to better utilise the Polean with the addition of improved service providers.

3 Findings

At this stage, the team feels that with the steering group being an open forum, the potential to start unwarranted speculation amongst the local populace is more than a little significant. So our findings must be considered as just concepts, pending decisions on whether to progress from the conceptual to specific proposals.

One of the concepts being visualised is commercially sensitive so details will not be published in this report. Another, the pedestrianisation of parts of Looe town centre, is perceived as being more than a little contentious and is included in the report, but should not, at this stage, be discussed outside of the steering group.

3.1 Looe Broadband and Extranet

Background

It is predicted that online trade will continue to erode store sales and other services.

In practice, it is likely this means a significant number of our local retail and service outlets will go either fully web based or majority web based over the next 10 years.

It is also increasingly seen that “Town centre/high street plans must encompass a complete community hub solution incorporating; health, housing, education, arts, entertainment, business/office space, manufacturing and leisure, whilst developing day time, evening time and night time cultures where shops are just a part of the total plan”. (From The Grimsey Review).

Concept

To utilise and expand on the existing broadband routers in Looe to deliver 21st Century developments, thus facilitating visitor experience and delivering the means for local shops and service providers to move to web or semi web-based operations.

The base concept, Phase 1, would simply provide free access to the internet for all within the coverage area. Phase 2 would deliver a service that guides all users to an Extranet that locates and promotes local shops, businesses and services, while also giving access to the general web.

Note: An Extranet is a private network that uses Internet technology and the public telecommunication system to securely share part of a business's information or operations with suppliers, vendors, partners, customers, or other businesses.

Strengths

- Zero impact on local architecture as all of the infrastructure will be hidden from sight
- Promotes and facilitates sales from local outlets and enables some outlets that are struggling to meet high street costs to remain in business, operating from less expensive premises.
- Improves visitor experience by providing information of locations of local events, goods and services.
- Enables residents and business owners to access the internet for free.

Weaknesses

- The basic hardware and set up costs are not too expensive, but the development of an Extranet will be expensive if a bespoke system is the preferred solution. An off the shelf solution would be much cheaper if available. However functionality would then necessarily be constrained.
- Cost of maintenance

Opportunities

- Gives web only/semiweb Looe retailers the opportunity to sell online for home delivery.
- Significant marketing opportunity for Looe
- Possibility to also link this to messaging boards sensitively designed to fit with the local ambience, advertising events and items of local interest. E.g. Accommodation vacancies, trips, weather forecast etc.
- Sets up wifi hot spots throughout the town accessible to all.
- Opportunity to link to CCTV in Looe to improve security.

Threats

- Any downtime would leave a big hole in local communications.
- The increasing potential for system security to be compromised would need to be fully addressed.

Comparisons

The extranet offered by Visit Newquay <http://www.visitnewquay.org/information/login> is of interest as it provides a potential role model. Note the ability of members to update availability, amend prices, change details and add special offers.

3.2 Time-Restricted Pedestrianisation of a Designated Section of Looe Town Centre

Concept in brief:

Fore Street between Barclays Bank and the left turn into Higher Market Street to be closed to traffic between designated hours (eg 11am – 5pm) on designated days (eg Tues, Thurs, Sat, Sun June to September)

Exact details would need to be further discussed and defined, but the more properties affected by closure, the greater the number of anticipated objections.

With this concept, traffic access to Barbican Hill, Sea Front Car Park, Church End, Quay Rd, Buller Street and Higher Market Street will be maintained via Barbican Hill with traffic lights controlling alternate two way flow.

Strengths of concept

- Fore Street already an attractive street, historic buildings, boutique-style shops, main access to seafront – no new building required, simply improving its appeal.
- More relaxed atmosphere, removes conflict between pedestrians and traffic.
- Facilitates Mediterranean-style cafe culture/holiday environment.
- Promotes more up-market image of Looe, to attract wider range of tourists.
- Evidence-based strong local support. Figures from LNP questionnaires – 75% on local survey wanted at least partial pedestrianisation.
- No traffic noise/fumes during closed times.

- Safer for pedestrians, especially children.
- Pedestrians able to relax, browse and enjoy the atmosphere, not constantly checking for approaching traffic.
- Businesses able to use pavement space for imaginative display, cafe tables etc – in effect, free sales space.
- Potential customers able to linger and browse more freely, so potentially increased marketing opportunities and sales for shops.
- Advantageous to both residents and visitors.
- Safer and easier wheelchair/disabled walkway access.
- Favourable reports from other towns that have tried this system eg St Austell.
- Access maintained to Sea Front Car Park via Barbican Hill.
- Access maintained to properties on Barbican Hill, Church End, Quay Rd, Buller St and Higher Market St.
- Access maintained to all current parking provision.
- Alternatives available for emergency access.

Weaknesses of concept

- Couriers unable to access properties along Fore Street during road-closed times
- Retail deliveries may need to be re-scheduled to avoid closed times
- Emergency access might be compromised – need to evaluate
- Susceptible to wet/poor weather
- Need to store additional equipment/display material only needed on closed days
- Some cost involved in installation of barriers, traffic lights and signage
- Impact on Barbican Hill from increased traffic, traffic light queues etc
- Impact on Higher Market Street from traffic lights queues, exhaust fumes
- Quay Rd from Lifeboat Station still open to traffic, but also popular with pedestrians
- Road access to beach area would be only via Barbican Hill during closed times, might distress disabled visitors

Opportunities arising from concept

- To make Fore St one of the most picturesque and popular streets in Cornwall
- To add to Looe's appeal as a holiday and day trip destination
- To demonstrate to visitors that Looe is committed to providing a tourist-friendly welcoming environment, reducing the present pedestrian-motor car conflict
- To offer an experience that cannot be gained from online shopping
- Potential improved sales opportunities for shops along Fore Street
- Shop premises in Fore Street become more attractive for rental, increased demand from potential retailers, leading to wider product offer
- System could also be implemented during times of flooding, to minimise wave damage from passing traffic
- Major marketing opportunity for TIC and other tourism promoters eg Visit Cornwall, 'new development in Looe', attractive photographs, positive publicity generator

Threats to the concept

- Strong local objections when concept mooted earlier, LTC did not proceed. Maintaining maximum access might resolve this.
- Possible lack of entrepreneurial approach in some businesses, may be unable or unwilling to identify and seize opportunities for promotion and increased sales
- Some local opposition to tourism and its needs, entrenched resistance to change
- Emergency access issues need to be resolved – using quayside roadway?

Supporting Evidence

LNP questionnaires responses - To question in local survey How do you think the NP should deal with the Town Centre, 193 of 428 responses said improving the pedestrian environment was the MOST important, while a further 114 thought it the second most important. Also strong support for the options 'Less vehicular access' and 'Vehicle bans in town centre during peak periods'. Therefore, evidence of strong local support.

LNP questionnaires responses showed marked support for keeping traditional feel of Looe. Making the street more pedestrian-friendly arguably does that.

LNP visitor survey – suggestions for pedestrianisation also featured

St Austell feedback – letter to Armand Toms from Sandra Heyward re successful pedestrianisation project there

Ove Arup recommendations 2003 reports positive observations from other towns, eg Wadebridge in Cornwall, plus Bath, Brighton, Kingston upon Thames

Need to examine details of previous objections to concept when proposed road closure was more extensive – have they been addressed with current concept?

3.3 Polean Brownfield Site

The team believes full development of this site is desirable after complete site clearance, the potential re-location of Jewsons to a more practicable edge of town site and the transfer of existing small businesses to a new on-site development.

The team acknowledges the following overlaps the work of other groups, but this just serves to highlight the need to restructure the teams to accommodate such overlap.

Development could include:

3.3.1 Significant shopping and service providers

This could include a small shopping centre, a visitor centre or possibly a community service centre to provide out of town facilities with ample car parking.

3.3.2 Housing

Location - overlooking West Looe river and Kilminorth Woods and suitably screened from other users.

Priority would be affordable 1, 2, 3 and 4 bedroom houses.

3.3.3 Light Industrial

A blend of light industrial units and lockable storage.

3.4 Millpool Car Park

There is an opportunity to fully commercialise the area with a view to improving both the visitor and resident experience, as follows.

- Remove all current payment machines and replace with “pay as you leave barriers”
 - Guests will stay longer
 - Not be forced to decide when they are leaving as soon as they arrive
 - Make for a more relaxed visit
 - Increased spend in town and potentially increased revenue for the car park
 - Parking attendants can focus on selfish parking.
 - Carpark to be fenced in (stop barrier avoidance) – Potential increased advertising revenue around car park perimeter.
- The “Pool” is totally under used and unattractive
 - Consider a “floating” restaurant/coffee shop. On stilts, but gives impression of floating
 - Add an outdoor family picnic area on grass wedge between pool and river, thus encouraging people to stay longer and enjoy their locally purchased products.
 - Create an entertainment area (sponsored by Looe Music Festival?) to encourage new talent plus existing traditional entertainment, such as Bands and Choirs. (Modern design with sailing theme?)
- Consider development of land alongside library.
 - Transfer county’s rubbish site to new Polean light industrial unit
 - Demolish café eyesore
 - Demolish vets (new location presently being worked on)
 - Introduce annual resident permit parking on this “new strip” easing pressures on the town’s limited residential parking spots and increasing county income at same time.

Note that access to Emergency services is in hand with the probable development Looe Police Station to accommodate Police, Ambulance and Fire services.

4 Recommendations

Restructure the current teams to geographical areas such as Polean and Millpool, Town Centre etc. to minimise overlap.

The re-structured teams to consider which of the above merit further investigation

When considering new team structures, the current Shopping and Services team feel they would be of most use in the following areas.

Chris Roy – Town Centre

Armand Toms – Town Centre

Paul Penhaligan – Polean and Millpool

Jill Fleming - - Town Centre

5 Appendix i - Existing Shops and Services

- 3 High propensity to switch to Internet trading
- 2 Potential to do both
- 1 Likely to remain on high street

