



17 June 2020

BY EMAIL: Angela Jones, Executive Director Economy and Infrastructure, Cumbria County Council.

To Whom it May Concern,

‘Reallocation of road space in Penrith’

Background:

We are writing in relation to the above proposal by Cumbria County Council which we were given sight of for the first time on Friday 12th June 2020. We note that this was 7 days before the proposed implementation date of Friday 19th June 2020.

At that time, we were asked to keep this information to ourselves and to keep it out of the public domain until Cumbria County Council issue public communication from Monday 15th June 2020.

This was to give Cumbria County Council a period of 4 days which it felt would ‘give sufficient time to ensure motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians are comfortable with the measures.’

As of today, 17th June, we are unaware of any further communication being made.

Cumbria County Council have also confirmed that proposals had been developed quickly to allow for central government funds to be applied for but as these had not been approved (or any guarantees of funding provided) the Eden Local Committee had underwritten the costs to allow the scheme to proceed in any case.

About the Proposal:

We were issued with a map of Penrith showing a scheme involving a north south road closure of Middlegate, Devonshire Street, King Street through to Old London Road and also the section of road from Market Square to the foot of Castlegate.

To facilitate this, a number of priority changes are made including making Portland Street, Princes Street and a section of Hunter’s Lane one-way and the redirecting of traffic around the town showing an identified increase in traffic volume on Salkeld Road, Beacon Edge, Drovers Lane, Meeting House Lane, Folly Lane, Fell Lane, Roper Street, Carelton Road, Castle Hill Road, Wetheriggs Lane, Huntley Avenue and Clifford Road.*

**We note that these are all routes that bound residential areas or areas where, during lockdown, residents have used more intensively for daily exercise and in so doing have become used to using the carriageway to walk along to socially distance from other road users due to the narrowness of footpaths.*

The closure of these roads was, it was pointed out, not a pedestrianisation scheme as the roads would still be used by local buses, loading vehicles and blue-badge holders.

This proposal was produced in the absence of any assessment of numbers of pedestrians, shoppers, residents or vehicles anticipated to be using the Town Centre in the coming weeks.

Our Response:

As a group, we feel that this proposal is poorly conceived and has been rushed through with no consultation to key stakeholders and although setting out to improve public safety, actually does very little to improve safety on the High Street and instead adds further hazard on the road and footpath network elsewhere in the town in areas where the proposal clearly highlights increased traffic will occur.

What is the alternative:

We do not feel that there should be a big rush to change anything in the short term. We want to see people start to come back to town and start to go about business as usual as best they can. We want as much as possible to remain normal and familiar to our residents and shoppers and allow a natural return to the High Street. Returning shoppers will be nervous about coming back and any obstacle or unfamiliar approach will make things more difficult.

We do not envisage a huge influx of shoppers rushing in to our town and believe that we can manage who does come in with the addition of signage within the town. We have been supporting our businesses coming out of lockdown and they are prepared and preparing to meet their customers with COVID SECURE status.

We request that you delay any plans to implement these proposals until such time as we have had the opportunity to work with you to find a softer approach that works for our businesses and our residents in the first instance and then later, once visitors start returning, to create a better 'High Street' experience for all.

We believe that these proposals, if implemented, will impact on the trade of many of our retail businesses and in some cases force them to decide between opening or not opening or indeed closing down for good.

We appreciate that this is not the vision you have but we fear that this will absolutely be the result of your vision if you continue with this proposal.

In conclusion, we would request the following:

1. We need you to pause this process and take stock of our comments.
2. We need you to give us time to consult with local businesses and local residents and get their view on this.
3. We ask that you work together with our organisations, and others, to come up with a better solution not only for now but also for the future of our town.

Signed:



Stephen Macaulay

Penrith Chamber of Trade & Commerce



Darren Broad

Chair, Penrith BID