

The Time Is Right

A proposal to reduce traffic in Shrewsbury town centre



Bus Users Shropshire
Working for passengers

1 July 2015



1. Background

- 1.1. Twenty five years ago, Shrewsbury & Atcham Council took the bold and successful step of closing Pride Hill to traffic. We believe the time is right to extend those benefits to Shrewsbury's High Street.
- 1.2. The original proposal attracted objections from local businesses concerned about possible loss of trade in Pride Hill. Does anyone today suggest re-opening Pride Hill to traffic?
- 1.3. This paper explains why Shrewsbury town centre needs less traffic, and describes some proposals that could achieve that result.

2. The problems that need dealing with

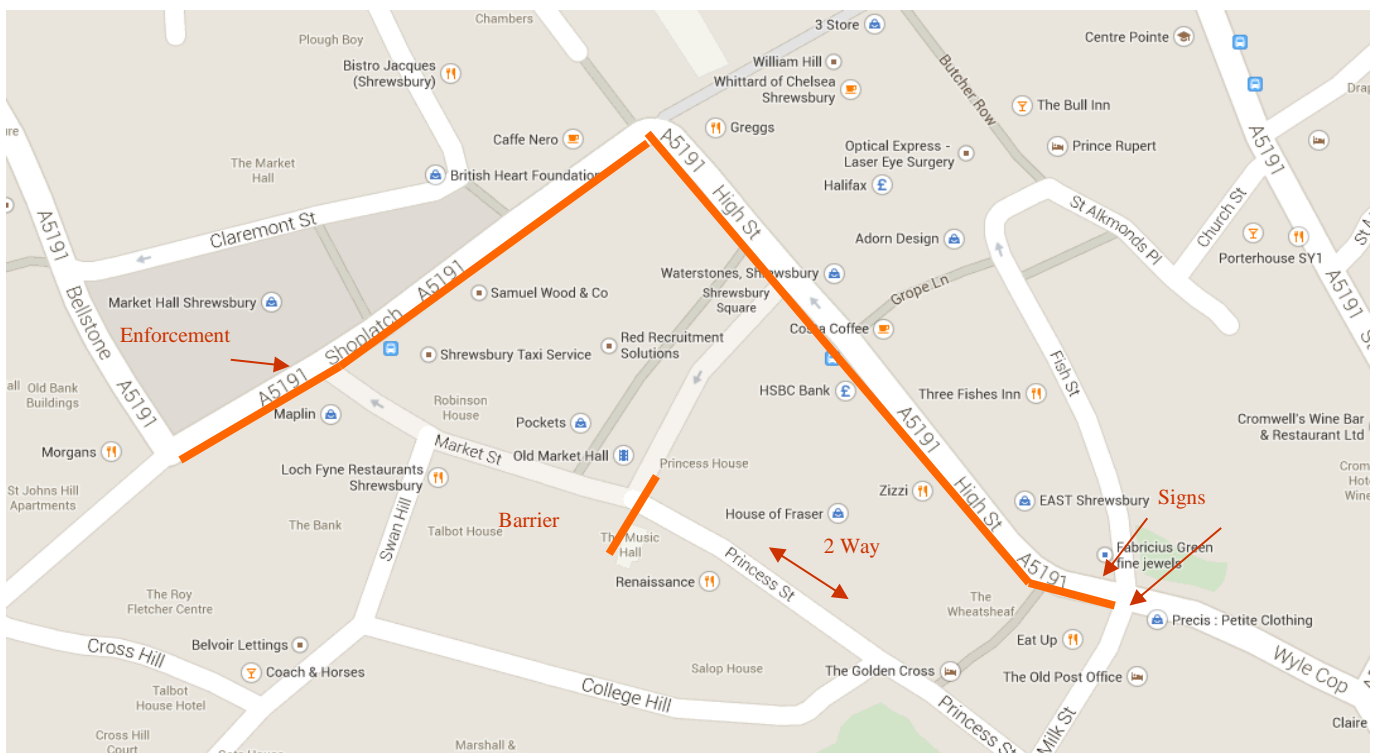
- 2.1. Shrewsbury town centre, like all successful town centres, is today a place to spend leisure time pursuing a mix of activities that includes retail, rather than doing routine shopping as in previous decades.¹ Vehicle noise and intrusion detract significantly from the quality of the 'Shrewsbury experience'.
- 2.2. The town centre is an air quality management area. Nitrogen dioxide levels from vehicle exhausts must be reduced.
- 2.3. Shrewsbury's population is planned to grow with edge of town developments to the south and west, a university centre, and an active campaign to attract more visitors. Their arrival will strain town centre space still further.

3. The proposal

- 3.1. This proposal seeks to provide the maximum benefit for the minimum cost and disruption.
- 3.2. The first part of the proposal aims to reduce traffic going through the town centre. We propose that signs be installed on all routes into town, from outskirts up to gateways. Ideally these will give real-time information about traffic flow, car parking spaces and prices. The signs will guide traffic:
 - to Park and Ride
 - to the car parks on the near side of town.
 - around the centre of town for destinations beyond Shrewsbury and to the car parks on the far side of town
- 3.3. The second part of the proposal aims to reduce traffic within the town centre. We propose that vehicle access be restricted along High Street, Mardol Head and Shoplatch during shopping hours, as follows:
 - 3.3.1 Close High Street, Mardol Head and Shoplatch to all vehicles except buses, bicycles, and disability scooters from 10am to 3pm Monday to Saturday.
 - 3.3.2 Place permanent/demountable bollards at the junction of Princess Street/The Square and make Princess Street two-way. This will allow use of the car park in

Princess Street but stop vehicles rat-running along Princess Street, across the front of the Museum and Art Gallery and down to Shoplatch.

- 3.3.3 Relocate disabled parking bays from High Street to Princess Street, and from Shoplatch to Claremont Street.
- 3.3.4 Erect appropriate warning signs wherever necessary including:
 - on the outskirts of town and roads leading to Wyle Cop, to reduce the number of cars which actually drive into the town centre and then need to take evasive action
 - at the entrance to High Street
- 3.3.5 Position parking enforcement officers at the junction of Shoplatch/Market Street to make periodic checks on cars and issue on-the-spot fines.



4 Discussion of the proposal

- 4.1 The closure may cause some additional traffic on Town Walls, but the hours for the proposed closure are outside peak commuting and school travel times, so traffic volumes in Town Walls are expected to be manageable. High Street is closed regularly every year on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays for events such as Street Theatre, Cartoon Festival, Mayor's Parade and Carnival. With signage and advance warning people walk to town or find other routes.

When Dogpole was closed for repairs in 2008 for 6½ weeks, there was a 17% increase in footfall in the town centre, and a 16% reduction in cars within the loop with no measurable increase in car traffic on other routes, and no ill effects on businesses.²

- 4.2 Taxis are included in the traffic reduction scheme. If they were given exemption, it would greatly reduce the effectiveness of the scheme. Taxis can pick up passengers very close by in Princess Street and also in Market Street if there is some alteration to the “no cars access” in Swan Hill. Enforcement officers would be able to exempt taxis from fines if they approached from Market Street – but not if they came from High Street/Mardol Head.
- 4.3 There is a car park in Market Street for permit holders. These drivers should be able to show their permits to the enforcement officers.
- 4.4 Buses are not included in the reduction scheme. Bus mass transport is both space and fuel efficient and people will be more likely to use it if it provides convenient access from edge of town locations to the heart of Shrewsbury. At current frequencies one bus moves along High Street every two minutes. Electric, hydrogen and gas powered buses are operating in many towns and, it is to be hoped, will start to be seen in Shrewsbury before too long.
- 4.5 Advance warning signs should encourage cars to divert to car parks before they reach the bottom of Wyle Cop. This should lead to a reduction in traffic on Wyle Cop and more people approaching the town centre on foot – which will be of benefit to the shops in Wyle Cop.
- 4.6 Cars that continue towards the High Street will have to divert into Milk Street or Fish Street. If the parking bays in Fish Street were closed, this would further discourage cars from going up Wyle Cop. Access to Fish Street itself is necessary to get to the Prince Rupert Hotel.
- 4.7 Delivery vehicles will need to use adjacent streets or deliver at times when vehicles are not excluded from the streets concerned. Experience in other towns suggests that, following changes such as these, shops do not have problems with deliveries.⁷
- 4.8 Residents along High Street, Mardol Head and Shoplatch may need to park a vehicle on one of these streets on rare occasions such as for moving premises. If this cannot be accommodated outside the closure periods, we suggest an access permit for residents to alleviate this.
- 4.9 Ideally, the proposal will be supported by making Shrewsbury a “pedestrian priority area” ie. all design would put pedestrians first: eg. the green man would be on by default at lights and car drivers would press a button to move through; there would be a very low speed limit; all street design would encourage pedestrians to step freely into and across the streets etc.

5. How does the scheme fit in?

- 5.1 The proposal is in line with existing Shropshire Council strategies, including:
 - Shrewsbury Vision Framework 2010. *“To incrementally reduce the amount of traffic to the Town Centre and entering the heart of the Town Centre. To improve the quality of the town centre experience through reducing the amount of traffic.”*³
 - Local Transport Plan Strategy 2011-2026. Policy E7 includes reduction in traffic, increased pedestrian priority.⁴

- Shrewsbury Visitor Economy Strategy 2011. “Traffic – volume and flow speed.....through route from Abbey Foregate and Wyle Cop..... potentially/ genuinely damaging businesses”.⁵

- 5.2 Who’s driving in town? About 25,000 cars enter the loop on a weekday. 50% of this traffic is considered ‘through traffic’, passing through without stopping. Of the 50% of traffic that stops in the loop, much of it is thought to be traversing to a distant car park perceived to be more convenient, and then back again.³
- 5.3 The closure of High Street, Mardol Head and Shoplatch to traffic will contribute to reducing Shrewsbury’s air pollution. In Shropshire, over 4% p.a. of the deaths of people aged 25+ are attributable to pollution (130 people) – with 1289 associated life years lost.⁶ Shrewsbury town centre is an air quality management area and this proposal should contribute significantly to a reduction in pollution.
- 5.4 Town centre vitality can best be assured by providing a high quality visitor experience that is pleasant and free from noise and fumes, and which gives pedestrians space to move freely and securely as research shows they wish to.¹ In consultation in 2010, 88% of people agreed to “giving increased priority to pedestrians and cyclists in the heart of Shrewsbury” (the highest rating for any of the options proposed).³
- 5.5 Investing in streets and spaces for walking can provide a competitive return compared with other transport projects; walking and cycling projects can increase retail sales by 30%.⁷ Surveys of retailers nationally show that retailers generally overestimate the importance of the car for customer travel and underestimate the numbers who come on foot, bus or bike.⁷ They also show that, following anxiety before pedestrianisation, most retailers were in favour following changes.⁷

6. References

- ¹ *Understanding High Street Performance*. Dept for Business, Innovation and Skills. 2011 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/31823/11-1402-understanding-high-street-performance.pdf
- ² *Shrewsbury Traffic Reduction Trial April and May 2008*. Shropshire Council [Dogpole closure & traffic reduction trial 2008.pdf](#) [Appendix A Dogpole Closure Draft Report.pdf](#)
- ³ *Shrewsbury Vision Framework Baseline Transport Report 2010*. Shropshire Council [Shrewsbury Baseline Report- final 3.6.10.pdf](#)
- ⁴ *Shropshire Local Transport Plan Provisional LTP Strategy 2011- 2026*. Shropshire Council <http://www.shropshire.gov.uk/media/281952/provisional-ltp-strategy.pdf>
- ⁵ *Shrewsbury Visitor Economy Strategy 2011*. Shropshire Council <http://shropshire.gov.uk/media/672509/Shrewsbury-Visitor-Economy-Strategy.pdf>
- ⁶ *Estimating Local Mortality Burdens associated with Particulate Air Pollution* Public Health England. 2014. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/332854/PH_E_CRCE_010.pdf
- ⁷ *The Pedestrian Pound: the business case for better streets and places*. Living Streets 2013. http://www.livingstreets.org.uk/sites/default/files/content/library/Reports/PedestrianPound_fullreport_web.pdf