

Report to	Scrutiny committee 21 February 2013	Item
Report of	Head of city development services	5
Subject	Process and procedure - St Stephens and Chapelfield highways scheme	

Purpose

To review the recent consultation on the proposed traffic changes in the city centre

Recommendation

To note the steps taken to engage with the local community on the recent consultation to change traffic circulation in the St Stephens Street and Chapel Field North area

Corporate and service priorities

The report helps to meet the corporate priority a safe and clean city, a prosperous city and a city of character and culture and the service plan priority of delivering the Norwich Area Transport Strategy.

Financial implications

None direct

Ward/s: Mancroft

Cabinet member: Councillor Bremner – Environment and development

Contact officers

Andy Watt, head of city development services 01603 212461

Bruce Bentley, principal transport planner 01603 212445

Jon Barnard, NATS manager, Norfolk County Council 07909 895214

Background documents

None

Report

Background

1. Residents of the Chapel Field North area have raised concerns with the Chair of this committee about the recent consultation on the proposals to change the traffic circulation in the St Stephens Street and Chapel Field North area. Their concerns are;
 - a) The consultation period was inadequate
 - b) Residents were not aware that the changes to traffic circulation in that area were planned
 - c) The supporting evidence for the proposals was inadequate
 - d) Confusion relating to membership of the Norwich Highways Agency Committee (NHAC) and the role of non – voting members.
2. They have also submitted a petition following that consultation objecting to the proposals and asking for a new consultation to be undertaken. The petition was signed by over 1500 people
3. The purpose of this report is to review the consultation and decision making process.

Addressing the residents' concerns

Formal consultations undertaken

4. Transportation policy across Norwich is set out in the Norwich Area Transportation Strategy (NATS) and the principles of the strategy were subject to a twelve week consultation in 2003. This established the idea of the Northern Distributor Road and the need to encourage people to walk, cycle and use public transport. While specific proposals for the city centre were not included, the idea of removing through traffic from the city centre was agreed as a principle.
5. In the autumn of 2009 there was a major consultation on the NATS implementation plan. This did include the details of the proposed changes to traffic movement in the city centre, including the proposals for St Stephens Street and Chapel Field North. This again was a twelve week consultation and a leaflet explaining all the proposals in the implementation plan was sent by Royal Mail to every household in the Norwich policy area. There was also a series of mobile exhibitions held throughout the Norwich policy area, with all venues widely publicised, with 2 days held outside The Forum. 11,000 responses were received to that consultation, with over 1,000 visitors to the exhibitions, and 73% of respondents supported the city centre measures. The NATS implementation plan was formally adopted in April 2010 by the county council.
6. Having established the principle of changes to traffic movement in the city centre through the NATS implementation plan consultation, it leaves specific schemes to be taken forward in accordance with relevant legislation. Statute (Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984) requires that there be a 21 day consultation on any Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO) that are needed to make changes to the use of the highway. The minimum requirement for consultation is that the proposed TRO must be advertised in a local paper and information given by one other means, such as putting notice up in the street.

7. The consultation that was undertaken for the scheme in question lasted for longer than the statutory requirement at 28 days, commencing 5 November 2012. Officers wrote to 894 households and 695 businesses in the areas directly affected by the proposals informing them that the consultation was underway and directing them to the city council website for full information on the scheme. 2000 flyers were distributed to bus operators for them to make available to their passengers alerting them to the consultation, and the electronic message screens in city centre bus stops also alerted passengers to the consultation. Two meetings were held with members of the public living close to the Chapelfield proposals. Whilst the formal consultation period lasted 28 days, representations were received and accepted after the 'closing date' and these were both considered and reported in the January NHAC report.

Informal consultations

8. When the details of the Chapel Field North scheme were being developed in the spring of 2011, the project manager met with representatives of a range of interest groups and businesses, including the Chapelfield Society, to discuss the proposals.
9. The proposals received coverage in the local media, both at the time of the formal consultation and when the two reports to NHAC were considered; first in May 2011 and then September 2012.

Supporting evidence

10. The evidence and data supplied with the consultation is extensive and includes traffic modelling data, including bus and HGV numbers, casualty statistics, a noise and vibration report, an equality impact assessment and an environmental impact screening opinion. Following concerns raised by residents an air quality report was commissioned and made available to the residents before NHAC considered the scheme in January. In the report to NHAC reference is made to this information in discussion to fully address concerns raised by consultees.
11. Residents have questioned why no traffic data is provided for Bethel Street and Exchange Street. This is because the county council's strategic traffic model is designed primarily to model traffic on the main road network. Reconfiguring the traffic model to analyse detailed traffic flows would be expensive and time consuming, and cannot be justified given that the changes in flows on Bethel Street are not significant.
12. No formal environmental impact assessment (EIA) has been completed for the proposals. The guidance for EIAs says that schemes should not be broken down into different elements but they should be treated as one entity. The screening opinion concluded that a full EIA was not needed for the scheme, although there has been environmental assessment of specific issues that might affect Chapelfield Gardens and Chapel Field North

Democratic process

13. Norfolk County Council is the highway authority for Norwich and the city council has an agency agreement to undertake the majority of highway powers in the city on its behalf. As highway authority the county council is responsible for determining the transport strategy for the city. Highways and transportation functions of the county council are exercised in the city by a joint committee with the city council, i.e. NHAC.

This committee is made up of two county council members and two city council members. One of the county members chairs the committee and the vice-chair is one of the city members. In addition, the committee is advised and assisted by three non-voting members from each of the two councils.

14. Across the rest of Norfolk the responsibility for determining whether a traffic scheme should be implemented rests ultimately with the relevant cabinet member. Such a system was considered not to be appropriate for the city when NHAC was set up in 1996.

Conclusions

15. This report demonstrates the comprehensive efforts made to engage with the residents and businesses in shaping both the transport strategy as a whole and the delivery of the St Stephens Street and Chapel Field North schemes. The consultation process in relation to the latter exceeds what is required by statute and background evidence for the proposals has been made freely available to the public.
16. The scheme has been debated in a public arena at the Norwich Highways Agency Committee on the 24 January where members asked for the scheme to be deferred to 21 March to allow officers more time to consider the alternative proposals put forward by local residents and to check some of the technical data that the residents were querying. This deferral demonstrates the commitment of NHAC to ensure that the proposals are fully considered and that the residents concerns are heard.