

My Ref: T: Scrutiny/Correspondence/Cllr NH

Date: 16 October 2020



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Councillor Caro Wild
Cabinet Members
Cardiff Council
County Hall
Cardiff
CF10 4UW

Dear Councillor Wild,

Castle Street Closure

On behalf of the Committee Members, thank you for attending the Economy & Culture Scrutiny Committee with Andrew Gregory, Neil Hanratty, Jason Bale and Richard Hyett to discuss the Castle Street closure. Members note that this forms part of a package of measures to implement the Cardiff Recovery Strategy, enabling social distancing and providing outdoor space that hospitality businesses could utilise, with the aim of safely attracting people back into the city centre.

Members wished to explore the economic impact of the closure of Castle Street. We heard from FOR Cardiff and officers at the meeting that it is very difficult to assess the economic impact. This is because it is hard to disentangle its impact from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic overall and the impact of other schemes put in place to assist hospitality businesses, such as Eat Out to Help Out and temporary pavement licences in St Mary Street and High Street. However, it is possible to measure some of the direct impact for eateries involved in the Café Quarter; we note that circa 60,000 orders were placed overall, with circa £425,000 generated in August 2020. We also note the positive comments and anecdotal evidence from quotes, tweets and posts.

A key area that Members explored was how the closure of Castle Street has affected access to the city centre and the impact of this on the economy. Members are clear that good access is critical to the future success of Cardiff's city centre and wished to understand the impact of the closure on buses, taxis, cars and overall footfall.

Members heard from officers that they have received concerns about the lack of access to city centre drop off points for buses. Members also highlighted issues raised with them regarding car access, in terms of a lack of forewarning and signage for alternative routes, and FOR Cardiff's point that it is impossible to know if people were put off coming into the city centre.

However, Members note that footfall overall in the city centre has increased during the time period of the road closure and Café Quarter, with footfall in August 2020 15%-18% higher than in other core cities. Members heard that the closure helped change footfall patterns, providing a city centre square that linked St Mary Street/ High Street with Queen Street and that this in itself helped to improve access to the city centre.

Members were interested to explore witnesses' views on the impact on other businesses, located nearby and elsewhere in the city centre, having received anecdotal evidence of negative impact on arcades and shopping centres. We note the views expressed that it is hard to assess but that the increased footfall should have benefitted the whole of the city centre.

Overall, Members wish to pass on their thanks and congratulations to all those involved for their work to date. We believe an attractive, safe space with novelty value was created, which showed Cardiff was open for business and this, along with the other city centre schemes, enabled footfall to recover and helped minimise loss to the eateries involved. Members are clear that we now need to build on this. Footfall is declining, with the Centre for Cities report showing that only London and Oxford have a worse decline. Members note that this could be linked to employment patterns, with more people in Cardiff employed in sectors where they are able to work from home, and that it will be influenced by weather patterns, the end of school holidays, local lockdowns and general uncertainty about people's economic future.

Members were therefore keen to understand plans for the future, given that the Castle Street road closure has been implemented under temporary measures. Members heard that an urgent review is taking place over the next couple of weeks to resolve further temporary usage of Castle Street whilst officers from across the Council work on developing a suite of possible permanent options for Castle Street.

Members note that these permanent options will aim to maximise place making, transport and economic benefits, and will take place in the context of plans for other spill-out spaces and systematic upgrading of spaces. Members also note that future spill-out areas will be located near to the businesses that use them, which will reduce costs.

Members appreciate that the development of these options will take time to generate and consult on and that implementation is months away. In terms of consultation, Members were pleased to hear that there will be opportunities for full engagement on future proposals, with comprehensive consultation on permanent proposals, including residents, communities, businesses, major employers, public transport users and road users.

Members believe that the time is now right to trial other approaches to transport usage, so that people will have experiences of these to draw on to inform their responses to options developed for consultation and the Council will have monitoring evidence to inform their decision making. Members **recommend** that two approaches are trialled, consecutively; one enabling bus, taxi, cycle and pedestrian usage; and one trialling the previous proposals put forward for single lanes in both directions, for use by all vehicles, including cars. We are in unprecedented, unpredictable times and we do not know the impact of rising unemployment, the end of the Job Retention Scheme, the start of the Job Support Scheme and changing consumer patterns; we need to trial new approaches and remain flexible, engaging and consulting with stakeholders to define what we need to achieve. Members **recommend** that the consultation with stakeholders is also used to define what it is we need to achieve to ensure a viable city centre and to select a matrix of measures based on this; it is understandable and laudable that the aim to date has been to minimise the loss for businesses but is this enough going forward?

Finally, Members wish to gently suggest that in future there is more fluency between uses for the space created by the Castle Street closure. It will take time to implement a permanent solution and there may be several temporary uses in the meantime - it should be possible to marry up uses and avoid a gap. Members seek to understand why it has been necessary to have a gap on this occasion and would like your response to **provide the reasons** for this.

Our thanks to you and those who attended with you; Members found the discussion useful and helpful and recognise the challenges faced in finding the best permanent solution. We look forward to seeing proposals and wish to scrutinise these, from an economic viewpoint.

This letter requires a response, please, to the recommendations highlighted above and the request for reasons for the gap in usage.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nigel Howells', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**COUNCILLOR NIGEL HOWELLS
CHAIR, ECONOMY & CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

cc Members of the Economy & Culture Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Russell Goodway
Andrew Gregory Neil Hanratty
Jason Bale Richard Hyett
Clair James Imelda Seymour
Cabinet Support Office