



To: Executive Councillor for City Centre and Public Places (and Deputy Leader): Councillor Carina O'Reilly

Report by: Head of Planning Services

Relevant scrutiny committee: Community 19/3/2015  
Services  
Scrutiny  
Committee

Wards affected: Abbey Arbury Castle Cherry Hinton Coleridge  
East Chesterton King's Hedges Market Newnham  
Petersfield Queen Edith's Romsey Trumpington  
West Chesterton

## **CAMBRIDGE CITY CENTRE ACCESSIBILITY REVIEW**

### **Not a Key Decision**

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#### **1. Executive summary**

- 1.1 In 2014 a review was commissioned to gain a fuller understanding of the issues affecting ease of access in and around the city centre for a range of users but particularly pedestrians, disabled and wheelchair users. The review was completed recently and the final draft report is attached for consideration.
- 1.2 The review provides a baseline assessment of current accessibility issues in and around the city centre and potential areas for future action. Key issues identified that are impacting upon accessibility include 'clutter' and obstructions on streets in the city centre and issues with the configuration and quality of the public realm. These issues and their resolution will of necessity involve the support and engagement of a number of partners.
- 1.3 The next steps in this process will be to develop a plan to support action on the conclusions of the review, to maximise the effectiveness of existing actions by partners and to inform future investment decisions that impact upon the accessibility of the city centre such as City Deal and other initiatives.

## **2. Recommendations**

The Executive Councillor is recommended:

- [1] To agree the findings of the city centre accessibility review and to note the recommendations for further action set out in the study at Appendix A;
- [2] To agree the development of a detailed action plan to be brought back to Scrutiny Committee at its next cycle for consideration

## **3. Background**

- 3.1 The City Centre Accessibility review was commissioned by the council to gain an objective understanding of accessibility issues in and around the city centre. The scope of the study was to undertake a baseline review of the accessibility of Cambridge city centre (looking at the Historic Core and Grafton areas as defined in the Local Plan 2014).
- 3.2 The accessibility issues focussed on are those of particular concern/interest to pedestrians, disabled and wheelchair users that impact on their ability to move around the city's streets and spaces. The review did not consider car access or parking or cycling. Its focus was on accessibility around the city centre once people have got there, not about getting there.
- 3.3 A wide range of partners, organisations, stakeholder and interested groups were contacted as part of the review. Local access groups were surveyed and their feedback has been included within the review report and recommendations. Council officers, including the Access Officer provided the reference group for the consultants undertaking the study.
- 3.4 The review considered thematic and practical issues and the baseline assessment focussed on key parts of the city centre (historic core and Grafton areas). These were broken up into reference areas and specific streets were surveyed for accessibility issues. The study also considered the legal and policy framework impacting on the use and management of the city centre, the agencies involved and their varied responsibilities. Interviews and surveys were used to gain understanding of issues from a wide range of agency and user viewpoints.
- 3.5 The centre of Cambridge is already under pressure from the number of people using it and with the planned growth in population together

with rising numbers of students and visitors this will only increase. The ability of the city centre to cope with the increase in numbers of pedestrians is constrained by its historic and generally narrow street pattern. The current County Council Transport Plan and emerging City Council Local Plan both refer to meeting the needs of pedestrians and to proposals for improving the quality of the public realm. The accessibility review has the potential to feed into the implementation of these plans and influence other initiatives such as City Deal which will be important for users of Cambridge city centre in future.

- 3.6 The main conclusions from the study are that parts of the city centre are difficult to access, particularly for disabled and wheelchair users for a variety of reasons including:
- street obstructions; street furniture, street trading, Advertising boards, badly parked bikes, licensed activities, unlicensed activities and other 'clutter'
  - Public realm and maintenance – pavement widths, crossovers, obstructions, maintenance issues
  - Complexities in the different agencies involved in licensing and enforcement activities, and differing enforcement priorities
- 3.7 The most common issues being raised by pedestrians during the review were:
- Narrow pavements (often with steep cross fall);
  - Poor quality surfacing;
  - Lack of dropped crossings and crossing places;
  - Obstacles on pavements – such as A-boards, poorly parked cycles, and tables and chairs;
  - Punt touts; and
  - Motorists and cyclists not obeying access restrictions.
- 3.8 The consultations undertaken indicated a broad agreement on the main issues to be tackled and widespread support for improving the quality of the public realm in the study area. The City Council has committed to commissioning a Public Realm Strategy that could form the basis for the setting of future priorities for public realm investment.
- 3.9 The report makes a number of recommendations for future action. These actions are varied in their ease of delivery, cost and complexity but focus on:
- Addressing ease of accessibility by looking at street clutter and particularly how advertising 'A' Boards are dealt with in future
  - Cycle parking and management of abandoned cycles
  - Public realm investment and removal of surplus street furniture
- These actions will of necessity require an inter-agency approach to their delivery.

- 3.10 Actions to improve accessibility and address the issues identified in the review need to be understood and developed to take account of other initiatives affecting the city centre such as Cambridge BID, City Deal, planned redevelopments and any public realm investment associated with that. Alongside this, the context of recent commitments to increased investment in street scene cleansing and greater street scene enforcement will also need to be considered. Some actions will ultimately be easier to deliver than others and may or may not be possible within existing budgetary provision.
- 3.11 The recommended actions will be evaluated by officers and discussed with partners and stakeholders as the next stage of this project. These will then be worked up and brought back to the next Scrutiny Committee meeting for consideration.

## **4. Implications**

### **(a) Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications at this stage. The development of an action plan as the next stage of this project will review any budgetary implications above existing budget commitments.

### **(b) Staffing Implications**

Capacity will be needed to take forward the preparation of the action plan and to secure the future implementation of identified actions. This capacity will be found from existing budgets wherever possible or highlighted as a requirement in the action plan when brought back to Community Services Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

### **(c) Equality and Poverty Implications**

The accessibility review has not been subject to EQIA but the action plan will be assessed using that process when reported back to Community Services Scrutiny Committee next cycle.

### **(d) Environmental Implications**

There are no adverse climate change implications from the accessibility review study. The development of an action plan will consider climate change implications in detail.

### **(e) Procurement**

The procurement of the study has followed the council's procurement regulations.

**(f) Consultation and communication**

The draft accessibility study has been circulated to stakeholders and interested groups who have been asked to give feedback to help inform the development of the action plan. The Access Officer and the Disability Consultative Panel have received a presentation on the review findings and meetings have been held with the Cambridge BID.

**(g) Community Safety**

There are no adverse community safety implications. Improvements to personal accessibility and the wider public realm are likely to have a positive effect upon access and public safety.

## **5. Background papers**

These background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Draft Cambridge City Centre Accessibility Study 2015

## **6. Appendices**

Appendix A – Draft City Centre Accessibility Study 2015

## **7. Inspection of papers**

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact:

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