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| Report To: | Safe, Sustainable Communities Committee | Date: | 17 January 2012 |
| Report By: | Corporate Director Regeneration & Environment | Report No: | SSC/ENV/IM/11.107 |
| Contact Officer: | S. Jamieson/ R. Graham | Contact No: | 01475 714827 |
| Subject: | Cathcart Square - Trial Closure and Future Pedestrianisation | | |

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to examine the process and impact of the temporary closure of Cathcart Square over several weekends this summer and to consider, in principle, the pedestrianisation of Cathcart Square and William Street.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 Cathcart Square and William Street are part of the town centre conservation area and are bounded by some high quality buildings. This area should complement the setting of the town centre but is rarely visible due to the number of vehicles occupying the Square.
- 2.2 The closure of the Square for specific events could bring additional economic activity to the Town Centre, improving footfall in the wider area, but this has to be reconciled with adequate parking arrangements. A trial closure took place over several weekends this summer for an events programme promoted by Discover Inverclyde (DI).
- 2.3 The Council is currently reviewing town centre parking arrangements to improve access, traffic flow and improve parking arrangements so that there is sufficient short, medium and long term parking to support town centre activity.
- 2.4 Following the trial closure local businesses commented that there was a slight improvement in trade in the first week of the events. Traders were all in broad agreement that it was a good idea which brought some activity and more footfall to the area and hoped it would continue. It has to be acknowledged that turnout will vary by popularity of planned events and, inevitably, the weather. Offices felt the weekend closures had no impact on them as they are closed on weekends although they would be affected if a permanent closure were to be considered. DI demonstrated that a temporary closure was able to work. It brought activity to the area with hundreds of people attending the events. Permanent closure would allow the space to be used for other planned events, including community events and there has already been an approach for a market in the Square.
- 2.5 Almost all were concerned about the parking implications, which would need to be addressed as part of the parking strategy. It was recognised that the current parking arrangements are not ideal and status quo is not the best option. In this regard two main options were considered:
- Retaining the status quo with the existing Traffic Regulation Order reinforced
 - Pedestrianisation of Cathcart Square with restricted access.

3.0 RECOMMENDATION

3.1 That Committee:

- take cognisance of the feedback from the organisers of the events and town centre businesses and organisations that public events in Cathcart Square were beneficial and disruptions manageable;
- approve, in principle, the proposal that Cathcart Square and William Street is pedestrianised; and
- agree to the development of an appropriate management scheme, including traffic management, to complement the pedestrianisation of Cathcart Square and William Street, which will be brought forward for Members' consideration as part of Parking Strategy Report in summer 2012.

Ian Moffat

Head of Environmental and Commercial Services

4.0 BACKGROUND

4.1 Cathcart Square was closed for a number of months last year as a result of gas main repairs and a water leak which affected the road surface. It was closed in the early part of 2011 in order for the surface to be reinstated, with a significant upgrade to the quality of the road surface. Some businesses surrounding and adjacent to the Square experienced a loss of business during both of these periods, citing loss of access as the cause of loss of income.

4.2 Cathcart Square is the heart of the historic town centre of Greenock. As well as listed buildings, it is also the centre of a Conservation Area. On completion of extensive surface refurbishment work, there has been a desire to see Cathcart Square function as a proper town square in the same way as other historic squares in continental Europe, which are used for community events with café bars during the summer months. The businesses in the Square and surrounding areas have experienced major difficulties over the last 18 months in respect of falling trade. The Regeneration and Environment Directorate is keen to see a longer term solution with regard to vehicular access to William Street and the Square which will address the concerns that have been raised with them on a regular basis. It had been suggested that Discover Inverclyde (DI) talk to all the businesses concerned to get agreement as to their preferred way forward.

There was particular concern for provision for people with mobility problems and the use of the church and Town Hall for weddings.

Inverclyde Carers Centre, while supportive of the use of the Square for public events, has requested that adequate disabled parking bays be allocated at the Bank Street end of Cathcart Street car park.

The Wellpark Mid Kirk has generally been positive about the trial. Their needs for access were met and there was sympathetic scheduling of noisy events. However, there is concern that this might not always be considered.

Wedding cars were unable to get into Cathcart Square so there was no direct access to the Carriageway under the Municipal Buildings. The closest vehicular access to the Town Hall would be from the Wallace Place entrance. On the whole this caused minor disruption, but restricting traffic from Cathcart Square may cause further disruption to functions if it was to close permanently – i.e. access for supplies and equipment for functions, deliveries to businesses in the Square and William Street which will require to be addressed.

4.3 Permanent pedestrianisation of the Square would require Council approval. It will also result in displaced traffic and a permanent solution would need to be considered within the new parking strategy. Evidence from a trial period of closure of the Square for a summer (weekends only) could be used as part of the consultation process to include within the parking strategy proposals. It was decided to explore the possibility of a 3 month (weekends only), temporary traffic order for Cathcart Square on a trial basis to allow DI, to develop a programme of events for 2011 to include things like Greenock Farmers Market, Continental Markets, local bands/artists, craft fairs, Taste of Inverclyde.

4.4 Seven Council departments had to be consulted to allow closure of The Square during the Summer:

- Legal – lease for the use of the square;
- Licensing – public entertainment licence, temporary structure licence for marquees, raised structure permission for stage, street trader's licences, market operators' licence, variation of license for serving drink outside;
- Roads – TRO;
- Property Assets – lease of ground in square;
- Planning;
- Building Control – temporary structures such as marquees and raised stages; and
- Safer Communities – toilets, Litter, noise.

The Emergency Services and Inverclyde Disabled Group were also consulted regarding the closure. The bars and restaurants felt that the additional licence requirements were a particularly time consuming, costly and overly bureaucratic exercise hence this did not go ahead as envisaged. However, a more streamlined approach could be developed such as The Pavement Café guide issued by Aberdeen City Council, which

sets out all the legislative requirements, permissions, assessment procedure and operational requirements of a Pavement Café. It also has the costs associated with the Pavement Licenses clearly laid out with the ground rental, administrative and legal costs bundled together.

- 4.5 DI is a not for profit, private body consisting of a volunteer board who aim to promote tourism, leisure, retail and the arts in Inverclyde. The board members are part time and do this in conjunction with running their businesses. The lack of a dedicated resource led to delays finalising the programme around license applications and permissions and in the end a shortened programme over 5 weekends took place. Saturdays were better attended than Sunday events and it is possible that a critical mass of activity is required to create sufficient activity and Sunday activity in the town centre is often limited, even although some Cruise Liners visits take place on Sundays.

5.0 PROPOSALS

- 5.1 A number of options were examined regarding the future management of Cathcart Square these included:
- Retaining the status quo with the existing Traffic Regulation Order reinforced
 - Pedestrianisation of Cathcart Square with restricted access.

As a result of the trial closure of Cathcart Square and the feedback as detailed above it is proposed, in principle, that Cathcart Square and William Street are pedestrianised.

- 5.2 As there are significant traffic movement and vehicular access issues to be considered as part of the pedestrianisation proposals, it is further proposed that a management plan, including traffic management, is brought forward to Members detailing how the pedestrianisation can be implemented including access arrangements, alterations to the adjacent roads network and estimated costs. This will be included as part of the report to Members on the Greenock Parking Strategy Report in summer 2012.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Finance: To be considered as part of the detailed report in Summer 2012.

Financial Implications – One off Costs

| Cost Centre | Budget Heading | Budget Year | Proposed Spend this Report | Virement From | Other Comments |
|-------------|----------------|-------------|----------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |

Financial Implications – Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

| Cost Centre | Budget Heading | With Effect from | Annual Net Impact | Virement From (if Applicable) | Other Comments |
|-------------|----------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a. |

Personnel: None.

Legal: To be considered as part of the detailed report in Summer 2012.

Equalities: To be considered as part of the detailed report in Summer 2012.