

CABINET

RE-PURPOSING MORECAMBE BUS STATION AS A YOUNG PEOPLE HANG-OUT AREA TO HELP COMBAT ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

24 April 2018

Report of Chief Officer (Health & Housing)

PURPOSE OF REPORT					
To approve re-purposing Morecambe bus station as a youth hang-out area, helping to meeting young people's needs to congregate socially and at the same time positively addressing anti-social behaviour in an area of need.					
Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Non-Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Referral from Cabinet Member	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Date of notice of forthcoming key decision		N/A			
This report is public.					

Recommendations of Councillor Andrew Warriner:

- (1) That in principle, approval be given for Morecambe bus station to be re-purposed for the use detailed in this report, subject to the proposal being deemed as having an acceptable level of residual risk (i.e. medium) following full assessment, and sufficient budgetary provision being identified as follows:
 - the refurbishment costs of up to £7K being funded from the Corporate Property Reserve; and
 - all other one-off and ongoing costs, including future repair and maintenance, Wi-Fi connectivity and any additional cleansing costs, being funded from existing Public Realm budgets.
- (2) That subject to (1) above, the Chief Officer (Environment), in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder and the s151 and Monitoring Officers, be given delegated authority to implement the decision.
- (3) That the effectiveness of the initiative be monitored and evaluated and reported to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Health and Housing by September 2019.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Young people related anti-social behaviour (ASB) ranging from excessive noisiness and minor public disturbances to hate, assault or behaviour verging on criminal damage rarely arises with a single individual. Commonly a small group and sometimes a large gathering is involved. Only a small minority of young people will deliberately cause serious ASB, whilst some others willingly follow a ringleader.
- 1.2 The council's Anti-Social Behaviour Team established in 2017 has a strategy favouring root causes identification and prevention or de-escalation. It also has a key theme focussing on young people related ASB. The council's ASB officers have already made a wide range of patrols, responses, enquiries, investigations and both informal and formal interventions. Formal community protection actions and even prosecutions are being raised where necessary. However where possible a preventative or de-escalating approach is taken as this tends to be quicker, less expensive and longer-lasting in positive impact for all concerned. Informal interventions involve advice, verbal warnings, parent-child home visits, school liaison, and restorative justice.
- 1.3 There has been a young people related ASB hotspot in central Morecambe not far from Morecambe bus station. Confirmed ASB locations have included Morecambe library, the foyer at Morrisons supermarket (which young people say they find attractive because it is sheltered) and in some fast food establishments. The attentions of the council's ASB team working with the neighbourhood policing team in parts of Morecambe have also seen some dispersal and displacement of young people towards Lancaster city centre with undesirable consequences. The lack of a suitable hang-out area for young people is believed to be a significant part of the reason why this has happened.
- 1.4 For purposes of this report a 'hang-out area' is a defined space, which whilst unsupervised, is a safe facility that young people are encouraged to use in preference to less desirable locations. A hang-out area is likely to be positively received if it is located in an area where young people would choose to spend time together, and particularly if it offers some shelter, seating, lighting and ideally wi-fi connectivity.
- 1.5 Young people are already using Morecambe bus station in its derelict state, one reason being that it is situated adjacent to the skate park provided. Carrying out the minor works noted in this report and offering the bus station as a place of resort would help to minimise ASB impacts.
- 1.6 Our research on the ground has confirmed that the majority of secondary school aged young people have no interest in being associated with ASB, they are responsible and law-abiding, simply seeking places where they can congregate and socialise with people their own age. Commonly, such young people say they feel self-conscious and labelled as anti-social both by local communities and by public officials. This is where preventative solutions such as diversionary activities and places where young people can safely come together for social purposes would be particularly suitable.

- 1.7 A strong community demand has been identified, evidenced most strongly in the Morecambe area, for young people diversionary activities and the establishment of safe hang-out areas. Suitably located and equipped hang-out areas would meet a clear social need for this age group. However choosing and establishing them is likely to pose some costs, logistical issues and local sensitivities. The Public Realm team's research indicates that the cost of creating a new youth shelter accommodating up to 10 people would be in the order of £5k not including fitting-out. Making use of any suitable pre-existing facilities and open spaces may present the quickest, simplest and least expensive short-term way of meeting this need. There appears however to be a very limited supply of existing suitable locations.
- 1.8 It should be noted that Morecambe bus station lies just within the town centre's Development Opportunity Area no.5 for purposes of encouraging beneficial investment and development within the central area (see comments under Relationship with Policy Framework).

2.0 Proposal Details

- 2.1 This proposal presents an opportunity to test the positive impact we can make on ASB by creating a young people's hang-out area in Morecambe. This will support a future determination of wider provision of hang-out areas.
- 2.2 Morecambe bus station, recently the subject to plans for demolition, has been identified as a strong candidate for a suitable hang-out area at least until any regeneration proposals are brought forward for the town centre area. It is relatively central to the transport network and it is well placed to minimise impacts on residents. It would require minimal outlay to re-purpose and maintain it. Young people we have consulted say they would find it an attractive location. There is at present no planned alternative use of the site. In view of the benefits outlined below in this report, an imminent decision to commence demolition has been halted whilst this proposal is decided.
- 2.3 It is proposed that Morecambe bus station be established as a hang-out area for young people. This presents an opportunity for the council to make a positive contribution to address ASB by providing a pre-planned, well managed and relatively safe location that is close to existing amenities and travel connections. This serves to divert young people away from alternative less safe or more sensitive locations which young people have frequented, causing ASB problems, helping to reduce potential ASB community impacts elsewhere. Creating a facility which reflects community needs at little cost.
- 2.4 Requirements have been identified for fitting replacement polycarbonate windows, lighting and free wi-fi connectivity. Also to reposition the existing bench seating. These would be funded at an estimated cost of around £6-7k and at the same time would prevent the need for current demolition-related expenditure of around £10-12K.
- 2.5 The proposal has low level implications for ongoing repair, maintenance and health and safety. Some low level damage might arise from time to time – most likely to polycarbonate windows and it is possible that the current cleansing schedule may need to be increased. However the proactive creation of a place that young people can congregate would promote a positive sense of stewardship and should mostly be self-managing. Any ongoing repair and maintenance, Wi-Fi connectivity and additional cleansing

costs are proposed to be met from within existing public realm budgets.

3.0 Details of Consultation

- 3.1 In 2017 coordinated research into young people related anti-social behaviour was conducted by the council's ASB team in consultation with partner services and agencies. This research has identified a range of local community experiences, views and needs that are positively addressed in this proposal.
- 3.2 Partner agencies directly concerned with ASB, including Morecambe Town Council through its Community Safety Committee, have demonstrated strong support for the principle of establishing youth hang-out areas locally to meet young people's needs whilst helping to combat young people related anti-social behaviour.
- 3.3 Whilst no formal public consultation has been carried out in relation to this specific proposal, the town centre public locations chosen originally for both Morecambe bus station and the adjacent skate park balance high community needs for public facilities against low risks of serious disturbance to residents. Informal soundings about this proposal have been taken on the street with young people, who have confirmed their support for it.
- 3.4 Lancashire Police's neighbourhood policing team (which originally suggested this proposal during operational meetings with the council), the council's ASB team/Children & Young People Officer/Safeguarding Officer and Morecambe Town Council's community safety committee are supportive of this proposal, believing that it would be significantly beneficial to the reduction of young people related ASB in Morecambe. The bus station site falls within Poulton neighbourhood policing area and will be patrolled by PCSOs. It will also be monitored by the council's ASB team when patrolling in Morecambe.

4.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

	Option 1: Approve the re-purposing of Morecambe bus station as proposed.	Option 2: Do not approve the proposal.
Advantages	<p>Establishing a dedicated youth hang-out area meets clear and established community needs: (a) helping protect resident and business communities to be protected from anti-social behaviour, (b) meeting the needs of young people to congregate socially in a suitably safe, well managed space.</p> <p>Doing so without major costs of new-build would give new life to an existing public facility at lower cost than demolishing it.</p>	Any logistical issues and complexities arising from an established youth hang-out area would be avoided, noting that young people related ASB would continue to be responded to in existing ways.
Disadvantages	Essential repair and maintenance costs, Wi-Fi connectivity and	This possibly rare opportunity and attendant benefits listed

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	<p>additional cleansing costs (met within existing Public Realm budgets).</p> <p>Health & safety incidents or safeguarding issues may arise from time to time (managed by further considerations putting appropriate risk assessments and safety controls in place).</p> <p>The opportunity to relieve the council of the financial liability for this building would be lost.</p> <p>It would be necessary to identify further financial provision to demolish the building if the initiative is unsuccessful or, given its location within the Morecambe Area Action Plan, in the event that a significant development/ regeneration proposal is brought forward.</p>	<p>under Option 1 would be missed.</p>
Risks	<p>The bus station serving as a hang-out area could potentially become a location of ASB incidents, however the assessment of the police and council ASB team is that on balance a positive impact would be made on ASB levels overall in the locality and the behaviour of young people using the hang-out area would be monitored.</p> <p>In the normal way of public facilities, and due to the intended attraction of young people to the building, personal injury insurance claims might occasionally arise. The council's Insurance Officer has been notified of this proposal.</p>	<p>Avoidable levels of young people related ASB would continue to manifest in Morecambe town centre facilities, residential areas and public open spaces that a hang-out area could have prevented.</p>

5.0 Officer Preferred Option (and comments)

The officer recommendation is Option 1, subject to residual risk being deemed as acceptable (i.e. medium risk) and the financial implications being in line with those identified within this report. It is expected that the potential risks as highlighted can be successfully managed through careful monitoring and intervention by the Council's ASB team in conjunction with other partner agencies such as the Poulton neighbourhood PCSO team. A review would be undertaken in due course, to evaluate the initiative's success.

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 Morecambe bus station presents a possibly rare opportunity to positively address young people's needs and create a youth hang-out area making use of existing premises having no identified alternative uses, which is readily available at low cost, and in doing so to meet a clear community need for action to address an anti-social behaviour priority. Any incidents of ASB arising from the use of Morecambe bus station would need to be responded to, managed and kept under review, however such incidents are likely to be fewer than existing at present.

RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK

The Local Plan provides the planning context as the Morecambe Area Action Plan adopted in 2014. The Morecambe bus station building is just within the defined Town Centre, within Development Opportunity Site 5 and actions contained in Action Set 8 apply. The purpose of the Local Plan Policy is to encourage beneficial investment and development within this central area.

Given the planning Policy framework any use of the building should be readily terminable in the event that significant development/regeneration proposals are brought forward.

Specifically, Policy DO5 references the need to improve the legibility of pedestrian routes to and from the train station. It is important that use of Morecambe bus station and activity there does not to impair or deter local pedestrian movement. As an important point of arrival in Morecambe, the location should present the town well. This raises needs for monitoring and management should the proposed hang-out area be approved.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Health & Safety, Equality & Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, HR, Sustainability and Rural Proofing):

Equality & Diversity – No foreseeable equality or diversity impacts arising.

Community Safety – The prevention where possible or reduction of ASB is a key community safety objective. As noted in this report, the council's ASB research has identified a strong need for places where young people can hang out safely. Morecambe's neighbourhood policing team and council ASB team are satisfied that encouraging Morecambe bus station's greater use by young people as a hang-out area will be beneficial to community safety outcomes. Firstly, in helping to reduce prevailing risks to communities experiencing pre-existing gathering places and occasional adverse behaviours there of some young people. Secondly, in encouraging the use of a hang-out area which is lower in community sensitivity and much more highly visible in terms of passing public and patrols. For these reasons, and whilst recognising that no young people's facility will be immune from occasional adverse behaviours, members of Morecambe Town Council's Community Safety Committee have voiced strong support for this proposal. The council's lead Safeguarding Officer has identified no significant safeguarding issues arising from this proposal, however this will be kept under review during the operation of the hang-out area.

Health & Safety – Morecambe bus station offered a suitably safe and sheltered building for public use. Re-purposing it as an unsupervised hang-out area for young people will not adversely affect its suitability as a place of public resort in terms of location and physical

design and fabric. The bench seating layout has been improved, and safer polycarbonate windows and tamperproof electric lighting will be installed. It is never possible when providing and promoting a public facility to guarantee there will be no accidents or potential claims against the council as a result of its legitimate use or foreseeable misuse. For example a person using it falling over, being assaulted, attempting to climb onto the roof, or running out into the highway. However the hang-out area will operate under a site-specific risk assessment ensuring that risks are minimised and full and proper attention is maintained to any necessary safety controls. Being highly visible in Morecambe town centre the hang-out area lends itself to patrolling under the prevailing neighbourhood policing presence and to ad-hoc monitoring by the council's ASB team, both of which with local public safety/reassurance in mind will be responsive to the risk of incidents arising. Issues arising from any insurance requirements will also be taken into account although it is expected that insurance issues will be similar to our other spaces where young people frequent such as playgrounds.

HR - None arising directly from this report.

Sustainability - None arising directly from this report.

Rural proofing - None arising directly from this report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

This proposal acknowledges younger persons are likely to congregate at this location and a duty is placed on the council to ensure adequate safeguards for welfare are in place. Liability should be managed through adequate insurance and other safeguards. The City council may not promote unlawful or criminal behaviour. This proposal provides a potential opportunity for behaviour to be diverted to a more acceptable venue.

The bus station is situated on a public highway, and consideration must be given to the safety, welfare and rights of all potential users of the site.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Whilst it was originally intended for Morecambe Bus Station to be demolished using existing R&M budgets within Property during 2017/18, as this has now been put on hold pending the outcome of this report, it would be more appropriate to use the Corporate Property Reserve to fund the re-fit costs for the re-purposing of the bus station due to the timing of the Final Accounts process. This is currently expected to be around £6-7K as opposed to £10-12K for demolition.

It is proposed that ongoing repair and maintenance, Wi-Fi connectivity and other associated costs such as additional cleansing will be met from within existing Public Realm budgets. As an indication, these are currently expected to be no more than £2-3K per annum, although this is subject to confirmation as some aspects, such as the Wi-fi connectivity, still need to be determined. As this will be an additional call on these budgets, this will be need to be prioritised alongside all other existing commitments arising. Responsibility (and the budget) for the hang-out space will rest with Environmental Services.

In light of the need to confirm risk and estimated costs, an in-principle decision is being sought at this stage, with delegated authority to implement the proposal should costs and risks be deemed manageable.

In consultation with the Council's insurance provider, it is not anticipated that there will be any initial increase in the council's insurance costs/premiums. It is re-iterated however, that

any risk assessment needs to take on board the potential for additional public liability claims arising, due to proximity of the shelter to a busy main road, noting that under current policy terms, the Council would be liable for paying the first £25K of any successful claim against us, which in turn would have a negative impact on future premiums.

It is further re-iterated that the re-purposing of the shelter should not impair local pedestrian movement, or given its location within the Morecambe Area Plan, deter any future plans for any significant development / regeneration plans being brought forward.

The financial implications will need to be kept under review and this is provided for within the Officer preferred option. Should any specific financial implications or operational sensitivities arise in the meantime, then these will be reported through the Council's normal corporate monitoring process or directly to Cabinet in the usual way.

OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS, such as Human Resources, Information Services, Property, Open Spaces:

Property Group has serious concerns about the building compliance requirements needed to support the use being proposed, particularly with regards to its unsupervised nature and would recommend comprehensive risk assessments are undertaken by the supporting Service. This is by no means comprehensive but risks include rough sleeping, the introduction of fuel hazards including gas canisters to keep individuals warm at night and drug taking. Furthermore, polycarbonate is highly flammable with the introduction of an accelerant such as lighter fluid.

There are three rooms inside the building, two former wc's and a cleaners cupboard and it would be preferable to remove these and create an open plan space or simply brick up the entrances to prevent break in. Doing so would add to the conversion cost but reduce potential risk by removing uncertainty around the need to install fire detection and fighting equipment. As things stand should someone break into one of these rooms to sleep and die in a subsequent fire then it could be seen by the Health and Safety Executive as a foreseeable event and the Council held liable.

The electricity has been disconnected so reconnection for lighting and wifi would be required at additional cost (potentially several hundred pounds). ICT have confirmed that the cost of setting up public wifi in the building will be in the region of £700.

The building would require an annual fire risk assessment and as it isn't open on 3 sides would need to be designated as non-smoking but the unsupervised nature of this proposal brings into question how that would be policed.

Daily safety checks would be advisable and adding electricity would also entail regular inspection to the electrical installation plus the ongoing cost of electricity.

Encouraging the use of this building as a youth hang out zone would potentially intensify vandalism and graffiti in the area requiring regular maintenance and it would likely be used as a public toilet increasing the need for regular cleaning.

If the proposal is a success then given its location within the Morecambe Area Action Plan we may encounter public resistance should a significant development for the area be identified and if unsuccessful then further financial provision to demolish the building would be required.

Property Group's preference would be for the building to be demolished so the associated liability and ongoing costs can be eliminated permanently.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS
The s151 Officer has been consulted; the recommendations provide for suitable assurances to be gained prior to implementation of any in-principle decision.
MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS
This report articulates that an opportunity has arisen for managing antisocial behaviour. The risk assessment must be concluded and an acceptable level of risk evidenced. The review of the effectiveness and associated risks of this proposal should be carried out and to ensure it is safe and meets the stated objectives.
BACKGROUND PAPERS
None
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