

Title: Covent Garden Update

Lead Officer: Chris Elliott/Heather Johnson

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Grainger; Councillor Falp; Councillor Matecki;
Councillor Hales

Wards of the District directly affected: Clarendon

Approvals required	Date	Name
Portfolio Holder	30 January	Councillor Grainger; Councillor Falp; Councillor Matecki; Councillor Hales
Finance	As above	Andrew Rollins
Legal Services		
Chief Executive	As above	Chris Elliott
Head of Service	As above	Steve Partner, Marianne Rolfe
Section 151 Officer	As above	Andrew Rollins
Monitoring Officer	As above	Andrew Jones
Leadership Co-ordination Group	As above	Andrew Day
Final decision by this Committee or rec to another Cttee / Council?	Yes	
Contrary to Policy / Budget framework?	No	
Does this report contain exempt info/Confidential? If so, which paragraph(s)?	No	
Does this report relate to a key decision (referred to in the Cabinet Forward Plan)?	Yes, Forward Plan item	
Accessibility Checked?	Yes/No	

Summary

The purpose of this paper is to set out a 3-step approach to the future of Covent Garden Multi Storey Car Park:

1. To report to Cabinet on the Emergency Decision to close the multi storey car park (MSCP) at Covent Garden and the arrangements for doing so.
2. To provide further information in respect of the second phase of the work, to demolish the MSCP later in the year, and to approve the release of funds.
3. To update Cabinet on the progress for the design and feasibility work for the Covent Garden site.

Recommendations

- (1) That Cabinet notes the decision made on 23rd December 2022 under the Chief Executive's Emergency Powers, in consultation with Group Leaders, to close Covent Garden MSCP from 12th February 2023 at 6pm, and the release of £20k from the Service Transformation Reserve for works to ensure the secure closure of the car park. Appendix 1 sets out the detail behind this decision.
- (2) That Cabinet notes that Pick Everard were commissioned to complete a report in respect of the demolition of Covent Garden MSCP. The report is attached at Appendix 2.
- (3) That Cabinet agrees to make provision for the estimated sum of up to £1.2 million within the budget for 2023/24, in order to implement the demolition of Covent Garden MSCP, and to delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Head of Neighbourhood and Assets, Head of Finance, Head of Safer Communities, Leisure and Environment, Group Leaders and the Portfolio Holders for Resources, Neighbourhood Services and Safer Communities, Leisure and Environment, to agree the options and the Programme for demolition having consulted locally on timing with businesses and residents, and then to make arrangements necessary to enable the demolition to happen at an appropriate time.
- (4) That Cabinet agrees the Displacement Plan at Appendix 3 and notes the MSCP Closure Communication Plan at Appendix 4 which provides for proactive stakeholder engagement.
- (5) That Cabinet notes the risk register in respect of the future demolition of the MSCP at Appendix 5.
- (6) That Cabinet notes that the previously agreed design and feasibility work for the Covent Garden site is now underway, with an update report scheduled to come to Cabinet in Spring 2023.

1 Reasons for the Recommendations

1.1 Emergency Decision to close Covent Garden MSCP

- 1.1.1 A short paper was circulated to the Leadership Coordinating Group (LCG) on 21 December 2022 in respect of the future of Covent Garden MSCP.
- 1.1.2 The Cabinet had already made an in-principle decision late in 2022 that because of the structural issues of the car park it has no long term future and indeed it would be costly to simply to patch up and repair, but it would not be

possible to resolve the structure's underlying problems. On top of this issue, anti-social behaviour has become a significant issue in the car park, and this has increased recently, resulting in further costs and resource, and increasingly, risks to the public. Recently in November, there was a major incident within Covent Garden car park, and there are also other weekly, and even daily occurrences of other types of anti-social behaviour and dangerous incidents. Further detail is set out in the report in Appendix 1.

- 1.1.3 Based upon the history and recent escalations and concerns, the Chief Executive consulted with the LCG to agree to an emergency decision on 23 December 2022, to close the MSCP from before the February half term break. This was agreed.
- 1.1.4 Indicative costings of securing the MSCP to close it completely, based upon provision of a three-metre-high anti-climb mesh being supplied and fitted is £15,218.00. It can be installed over a period of 1 week with a delivery period of 4 weeks likely (ready to be delivered week commencing 13th February). There may be further smaller costs involved in shutting down services within the car park and therefore £20k in total was suggested to cover such eventualities.
- 1.1.5 Since the decision to close the car park was made, a closure plan and communication plan have been developed to enable the MSCP to be securely closed the week beginning 13th February and to be completed by 17th February 2023. This will be prior to the half term break in February 2023. At the time of writing this report these plans are in progress, including stakeholder engagement and regular updates.

1.2 **Pick Everard work**

- 1.2.1 Following the Cabinet's previous decision in September 2022 that the Covent Garden MSCP should be demolished, Pick Everard was commissioned to establish the cost and potential programme for demolition of the MSCP at Covent Garden. This report is attached at Appendix 2. The report sets out 3 possible options and as this has only been recently received it is suggested that the delegation sought at Recommendation 3 includes authority to determine the appropriate option. The report sets out the high level of details for the demolition of the MSCP but has differing options of how to treat the resultant footprint of the MSCP. The more expensive option allows for a tarmac treatment which would better enable the area to be re-used at least in the short term as a car park and that would enable some 120 car parking spaces to be provided. This would be helpful to the town centre in the period until the future of the site is determined and work begins on site which might be a little while given the processes to go through.
 - 1.2.2 Therefore, Cabinet is asked to agree for the release of up to £1.2 million for the demolition of the MSCP and of the connecting bridge to the Parade and to delegate authority to officers to seek any consents and arrangements necessary to enable the demolition to happen at an appropriate time, as set out at Recommendation 3.
 - 1.2.3 Demolition will be planned to ensure as little disruption as possible around the site. There is a risk in leaving the structure standing for any length of time, both in terms of the structure itself and other types of anti-social behaviour. In addition, the feasibility and design work that has been commissioned will have been reported upon by then, with next steps for approval by Cabinet.
- 1.3 Communication and Displacement Plan

- 1.3.1 There is a challenge in taking this action that it creates confusion or concern for visitors and residents as to where to park when the MSCP closes. This concern is proposed to be mitigated through a Displacement Plan attached at Appendix 3. The information within the Plan clearly shows that the car parks over the past 4 months have been operating overall significantly under capacity meaning that there will be enough space in other car parks in Leamington town centre for car park users and current permit holders, to be accommodated. In seeking to reassure the community it is also proposed to allow the car park at Riverside House to be used for long stay car parking which will add capacity for 2023 at least (see another report on this agenda). Overall, this capacity will also allow for any impact at Station Approach because of SWT's proposed works in late 2023/early 2024 and once the demolition works are complete circa 120 spaces can be re provided on site at least for a short period of time. In the medium to longer term the Asps park and ride scheme with 500 spaces will come on stream.
- 1.3.2 Sitting alongside this Plan will be an active communications plan as set out at Appendix 4.
- 1.3.3 The Displacement Plan provides potential parking options around the town centre, and there is evidence that there is capacity for doing so. The pandemic has changed the ways many people work, with home/agile working being seen as the norm for many companies. This has resulted in less parking need within the town centre, and Covent Garden MSCP parking has seen reductions in capacity. Therefore, based on current understanding, the alternative parking options proposed are that the other car parks around the town centre will be able to take up the current MSCP usage.
- 1.3.4 The Displacement Plan at Appendix 3 sets out alternative parking options which will help to manage the current MSCP usage in car parks either within or near to the town centre. Many of these options have had significant improvements, and walking times and distances to each of them are also covered in the Displacement Plan. However, what it is not possible to do is to provide the same amount of car parking in the same place so some changes of usage patterns will need to be encouraged of current car park users.
- 1.3.5 Existing Covent Garden MSCP season ticket holders can continue to use them at long stay car parks at St Peters MSCP, Upper Grove Street and Adelaide Bridge. Existing 'The Space' resident season tickets can be used in Covent Garden surface car park overnight between 5pm and 9am 7 days a week. There are no plans to enable these tickets to be renewed for the time being but the number of season tickets able to be issued in other car parks will be reviewed to prevent existing ticket holder being denied access elsewhere.
- 1.3.6 There are plans to develop a 'Park and Ride' car park on the outskirts of town at the Asps. This will also assist with reducing congestion, pollution and improve the air quality in the town centre.
- 1.4 **Design and Feasibility Work at Covent Garden**
 - 1.4.1 The October Cabinet agreed to commission a feasibility study on the development of the Covent Garden site as a Community Well-being Hub. Cushman and Wakefield have now been commissioned to provide design and feasibility advice for the potential Wellbeing Hub to be built on the Covent Garden site.

1.4.2 This work is expected to continue through the next few months, working closely with the Council and partners. This work will be reported to the Cabinet in the Spring of 2023.

2 **Alternative Options**

- 2.1 The alternative option would have been to leave the car park open until demolition begins. However, this would have required further expenditure for repair and maintenance work, further resource time, and increased risks to the public around health and safety, from the structure itself and the increased daily episodes of anti-social behaviour on the site.
- 2.2 Equally closing the MSCP but not demolishing it until a decision had been made on the future of the site or indeed until works on the future use of it began would leave a building unused and increasingly dilapidated. The surface car park only can at least be used beneficially as a car park until such time as works begin on site for a new scheme.
- 2.3 The other options would have been not to close or demolish the MSCP, but this would have involved significant costs without resolving the inherent structural problems of the MSCP.

3 **Legal Implications**

- 3.1 A car park displacement plan has been prepared for both the closure and the demolition period particularly for those with annual car park permits and who regularly use the car park. Work publicising the Displacement Plan is underway with further detail on the Council's website and in the local press. The Displacement Plan is set out at Appendix 3. An Equality Impact Assessment is set out at Appendix 6 which considers the implications of the Displacement Plan.

4 **Financial**

Closing the car park:

- 4.1 The financial implications are set out below. The costs of closing the MSCP using the anti-climb mesh are likely to be up to £20k, which will come from the Service Transformation Reserve. These costs will include site signage.
- 4.2 Demolition of the car park: The report on the Budget for the Council for 2023/24 elsewhere on the agenda makes provision for £1m to demolish the MSCP and the bridge but will need to be amended to allow for a cost of up to £1.2m. Assuming that this is agreed there will need to be provision within the budget to afford this anticipated cost.
- 4.3 **Income from MSCP:** Based on the year (2022) to date, the MSCP generates income of £16k per month, which will be lost upon closure, but it is anticipated that car park users will use our other car parks, and therefore the income will be made up in this way. In addition, once the demolition works are complete there will at least in the short term be additional car parking spaces that could generate income.
- 4.3 **Displacement income:** Recent vehicle counts indicate that during the week, there were occupancy levels of only 40% in the MSCP and 52% in the adjacent surface car park.

When the MSCP closes, the Displacement Plan aims to support the displacement of existing car park users to other car parks in and near to the town centre.

4.4 **Future Savings:**

Business rates are currently charged at £90,624 per annum, and upon demolition, this will be a saving. Additional savings will arise from:

- An electricity cost of around £2k per month. There is a need to keep the surface lights on, although the main lights internally will be switched off, except for fire emergency lighting.
- Water rates
- Lift maintenance will cease

CCTV will continue to run internally to anticipate break-ins and the external staff toilet will be kept on until demolition occurs.

5 **Business Strategy**

5.1 **People – Health, Homes, Communities**

5.2 Closure of the MSCP may have some impact on residents, business users and season ticket holders that park in the MSCP for long stay parking. However, as detailed at paragraph 10, the Displacement Plan mitigates this impact through other parking options within walking distance, and with no further financial outlay for ticket holders. Parking figures show that there is capacity within other car parks in Leamington to support the closure. In addition, the surface car park at Covent Garden remains open for short stay customers. Signage and signposting on site, via the website and other media channels will also help to inform people.

5.3 Demolition of the MSCP will impact local businesses whilst it continues, and the Council will engage with the businesses in Covent Garden and at the northern end of the Parade to ensure that they are fully informed as to timescales for disruption in the area and the other parking options available for staff and customers.

5.4 The design and feasibility work to enable a Wellbeing Hub to be built will deliver options for an exemplar design for development on the Covent Garden site, taking account of the town centre area in which, it is located. It aims to enhance accessibility to community services and to other town centre services for the residents, businesses, and the wider community, bringing facilities closer for all people and connecting the town.

5.5 **Services- Green, Clean, Safe**

5.6 Closure of the MSCP is necessary for the health and safety and wellbeing of the community. Concerns have significantly increased about the level of anti-social behaviour that occur on the site, and this is now considered a danger to others following recent particularly concerning events. This is in addition to the structural issues that have been regularly monitored and reported upon, and which continue to decline. It is therefore necessary to close Covent Garden multi storey on this basis.

5.7 Demolition of the MSCP is necessary as soon as possible so that any remaining risk to the public is removed, and the site is made safe. This will be done in a controlled way and as cleanly and safely as possible.

- 5.8 The design and feasibility work for options for a wellbeing hub on the site will comply with the policies set out in the draft Net Zero Carbon DPD, and will, as a minimum, achieve net zero carbon in operation. In addition, the Council will seek to bring forward a scheme that minimizes embodied and construction carbon emissions.

The scheme will seek to locate important public services in a town centre location that is accessible for all and is not reliant on access to private vehicles. To minimise carbon emissions, its location close to public transport will be supported by on-site cycling infrastructure and EV charging.

5.9 Money- Infrastructure, Enterprise, Employment

- 5.10 Closure of the MSCP will have some impact on the local infrastructure as cars will park in other areas of the town centre.
- 5.11 Demolition of the MSCP will have some impact on local business trade but we will work with businesses to ensure that any disruption is minimised.
- 5.12 The feasibility work for options for a Wellbeing Hub to re-develop this site will contribute towards local jobs, health services and the local economy.

5.13 Effective Staff

- 5.14 Not applicable.

5.13 Maintain or Improve Services

- 5.14 Closure of the MSCP will be a positive change as the public will be signposted to improved and more up to date services at other car parks in the town centre.
- 5.15 Demolition of the MSCP will be a positive change in the longer term as it will enable longer term parking services to be improved for the public, as this will be integral to any future Community Hub on the site.

In the longer-term services will be improved in this location with purpose built, modern space to provide community services for residents. A purpose-built town centre Hub for front line services, within the town centre would be accessible for members of the public and staff.

5.16 Firm Financial Footing over the Longer Term

- 5.17 Closure of the MSCP will save on resource costs as well as repair and maintenance work of the car park, which have been increasing over time.
- 5.18 In the longer term, savings will be made through demolishing the MSCP, in terms of removing the increasing costs of the repair and maintenance of it. Assessing options for the car park demonstrates that the Council is evaluating its options over the long term as well as in the immediate term. This is part of a more robust consideration of the financial implications of options for the site. The feasibility study would further demonstrate whether the concept is plausible.

6 Environmental/Climate Change Implications

- 6.1 The demolition of the MSCP will give rise to potentially valuable materials that contain substantial amounts of embodied carbon. Recognising that it will be a challenge to recycle this material, a report will be commissioned to explore opportunities to re-use this material, so that, if possible, disposing of it at landfill is avoided.

- 6.2 The development of the site will comply with the policies set out in the draft Net Zero Carbon DPD, and as a minimum will achieve net zero carbon in operation. In addition, the Council will seek to bring forward a scheme that minimises embodied and construction carbon emissions.
- 6.3 The Community Well Being scheme will seek to locate important public services in a town centre location that is accessible for all and is not reliant on access to private vehicles. To minimise carbon emissions, its location close to public transport will be supported by on site cycling infrastructure and EV charging.

7 Analysis of the effects on Equality

- 7.1 In summary, Covent Garden multi storey car park is closing because of the well documented structural issues, which pose a health and safety risk added to by the high levels and frequency of anti-social behaviour which are also a danger to the public. This threat to safety impacts on all members of the public and is mitigated by the availability of other town centre car parking, as set out in the Displacement Plan. The Impact Assessment is set out at Appendix 6.

8 Data Protection

- 8.1 There are no data protection implications associated with the proposals in this report.

9 Health and Wellbeing

- 9.1 Closing the MSCP is a positive step to reduce the risks to the public, both in terms of the health and safety structural concerns of the building, in addition to the increased concerns around anti-social behaviour on the site.
- 9.2 Other car parking sites are within walking distance of Leamington Spa town centre, including, for example, use of the Riverside House car park which will be available in the short term as a further option for permit holders.
- 9.3 The concept of a Community Wellbeing hub should set out to deliver an exemplar design for development on the Covent Garden site. In doing so, it aims to incorporate accessibility to a range of essential services including health services for the community through bringing services closer for people in a well-connected town centre location. This impacts positively on health and wellbeing in the community providing related community services in one location and draws the community into the town centre which will increase footfall in nearby shops and services. Enlarging GP services and other health related offerings in the district focuses on the future of the district and provides room to grow. It also links with the promotion of a fit and healthy community.

10 Risk Assessment

- 10.1 The main risk posed, is by the continued likely deterioration of the MSCP structure over time, which should the Council do nothing, will increase in probability over time. Deterioration may cause some, or all the structure to fall, causing a high risk to public safety. This risk would also impact the Council reputationally as well as upon the town centre. This risk is reduced and managed through closing the car park and the risk will be terminated through demolition of the current structure and redevelopment of the site.
- 10.2 The additional risks in not taking the action to close the multi storey car park are that anti-social behaviour continues at the current level or increases further, with significant dangerous incidents causing high risks to the public in terms of health, safety, and wellbeing. A further risk is in relation to the resources available to address the issues of anti-social behaviour when they

arise, both from the Council, and from health and police services. The recording of these incidents to date would suggest that the likelihood of them continuing is high, and that the impact when they do occur is also high.

- 10.3 There is a risk that the cost of the works is greater than forecast. The mitigation for this is the work that has been commissioned from Pick Everard who are a leading company with this type of work to assist the Council in making a proper estimate of the works involved.
- 10.4 It should be noted that the WDC District wide CCTV scheme places reliance on a mast which is currently located on the top of the MSCP, and this will need to be re-located prior to demolition.
- 10.5 There is a high risk posed by the multi-partner approach that the Council is potentially looking to take for the future of the site, in terms of the number of stakeholders involved. This is a necessary risk for the type of development envisaged, and it can be managed through regular relationship management with all parties.
- 10.6 A risk register in relation to the proposed demolition of the MSCP is attached at Appendix 5.

11 Consultation

Officers have briefed Leamington BID and Leamington Spa Town Council and have also communicated the closure with local businesses and residents. Partners involved with the potential Community Well Being Hub have also been advised.

Background papers:

Covent Garden Car Park Cabinet Paper 29 September 2022

Supporting documents:

Appendix 1: Covent Garden Multi Storey Car Park Closure Paper dated 21 December 2022

Appendix 2: Report from Pick Everard dated 20 January 2023

Appendix 3: Covent Garden MSCP Displacement Plan

Appendix 4: Communication Plan

Appendix 5: Risk Register - Demolition of Covent Garden MSCP

Appendix 6: Impact Assessment