

Appendix 1

Covent Garden Multi Storey Car Park Closure

In September 2022, Cabinet considered a report on the future of the Covent Garden site following the outcome of a further structural survey on the multi storey car park. Cabinet concluded that the way forward was for the car park to be demolished and supported the principal future use of the site as a Community Wellbeing Hub with some replacement car parking.

Cabinet agreed to commission a feasibility study to consider next steps, including the creation of a Community Wellbeing Hub in Leamington town centre, bringing together amenities such as a GP surgery and other connected health services, as well as a citizens' advice centre and post office.

Since then, a rise in the level of anti-social behaviour in and around the multi storey car park means that secure closure of the car park is needed now from a safety perspective. Cabinet has previously agreed the demolition and future use of the car park, and to do so would mean early closure, in advance of demolition later in 2023.

Background

The nine level multi storey car park at Covent Garden was built c.1960, and it is in decline. Surveys have shown that it has been subject to Alkali Silica Reaction (ASR) and other structural issues that continue to be structurally and visually monitored on a regular basis by industry experts. Councillors have previously received reports based on structural surveys by Pick Everard, and these are available to view if required. Recent inspections have highlighted the increasing maintenance and repair costs associated with it and the related safety concerns.

In March 2019, WDC closed the top two outer parking levels, due to both structural and safety concerns. More recently the decision was taken in December 2022 to close levels 5 and 6 following significant amounts of anti-social behaviour. Together, this has increased the overall loss of parking to 48% of the original parking design capacity.

Anti-social behaviour

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, 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 that have been noted, including the following:

- Rough sleeping, within the carpark with belongings left in the stairwells.
- Drug use and paraphernalia is often found by rangers and CCTV operators often witness drug use in stairwells. Alongside this there is casual drug use in the area at weekends
- Damage to WDC assets, including CCTV cameras from level 5 upwards. Despite not being covered by the maintenance contract the engineer attended to replace some damaged equipment but within days there was further

damage beyond repair. The cleaning cupboard door kicked in twice (police crime No – 23/31739/22).

- Possible drug dealing
- ASB/nuisance behaviour is much higher during school holidays and weekends with young people gathering within. This has resulted in calls from the police about objects being thrown from the upper levels, casual drug use, skateboarding and small fires. The car park also attracts ASB vehicle related issues.

Costs of closing the car park

Closure of the multi storey car park means that it needs to be fully secured, in order to prevent further episodes of anti-social behaviour, until such time as the demolition can take place.

Indicative costings of securing the multi storey car park to close it completely, based on 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. Works would therefore need to be confirmed soon.

There may also be some further small costs in relation to shutting down services such as lighting or water and therefore £20k is suggested to cover all eventualities.

Summary

Based on the information above, senior officers have discussed the situation and unanimously agree the recommendation to close the multi storey car park as soon as practically possible. There would be additional benefits in closing the car park securely prior to the half term break in February 2023.

A decision by Councillors to permanently and securely close Covent Garden multi-storey car park from a date to be determined, but before the mid-February school holidays is now needed to proceed.

Next Steps

The Council appreciate that this decision may not be popular but due to both health and safety factors, it is felt to be the best way forward.

In preparation for the closure, the Council is putting in place plans to reduce the impact of the loss of the car park and to minimise any disruption to residents, businesses and visitors to the town.

Displacement Parking

The well-used, and popular short-stay surface car park alongside the multi storey car park at Covent Garden will remain open.

Riverside House car park will also be made available for further alternative town centre parking in the short term, (potentially for a maximum of 6 months) to assist with capacity.

The recently refurbished Victoria Park car park off Princes Drive is a further alternative.

There are currently 193 season ticket holders and Permit Holders, including 12 residents of the Space, will be contacted separately and in further detail as a full plan is put together. It is also an opportunity to promote greener travel and reduce air pollution in the town centre by utilising car parks at the edge of the town centre.

Demand

Since Covid, demand for this car park has generally reduced. The most recent snapshot data shows that the multi-storey car park has had average occupancy in November 2022 of around 35% to 40% on weekdays, and just 19% to 25% occupancy at the weekend. Whilst this may increase in the short term over the holiday period, it is not likely to do so in the longer term.

Summary

Due to recent increased anti-social behaviour, increasing maintenance and repair costs and other structural and safety concerns about the multi storey car park, a decision needs to be made to close the car park from the end of February 2023.

Recommendation:

The carpark is permanently closed as soon as possible, so that the site can be made secure. It will then be demolished as soon as practicable, and then redeveloped in line with the principles agreed by Cabinet in September 2022, for a community wellbeing centre, with some parking alongside.

Alternative Options Rejected:

Leave the multi-storey car park open until demolition begins. However, this will require further expenditure for repairs and maintenance, further resource time, and increased risks to the public around health and safety, in terms of the structure itself, and the increased daily episodes of anti-social behaviour.

Closure Approach

It is recommended a phased closure of the carpark begins as soon as is practical, working closely with stakeholders and the media team as follows:

Phase 1 (January 2022 onwards)

- Carpark closed to the general public. P&D machines removed, RingGo location removed from use, advisory notices put up
- Season ticket holders written to, offered a refund or alternative carpark access
- Space residents contacted to notify carpark will be closing in the near future
- Construct secure compound at Covent Garden multi storey car park

Phase 2 (potentially early Summer 2022)

- Potentially start demolition process– it should be noted that regular inspections will need to continue to be carried out when the carpark is closed until it is demolished as water will continue to weaken the unprotected concrete

Next Steps

- Engage with Leamington BID, Season Ticket Holders and members of the public to advise of the decision
- Create a communication plan to notify car park users of the planned change to parking in the town. Emphasis will be placed on parking opportunities at Riverside House which is only a short walk away from the town centre, and on the surface car park alongside the multi storey car park at Covent Garden and Victoria Park car park. The plan will use social media, website, local press, posters in carparks
- Close the multi storey car park securely

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