

Title: Covent Garden Car Park

Lead Officers: Chris Elliott, Heather Johnson

Portfolio Holders: Councillor Bartlett, Councillor Grainger, and Councillor Falp, Matecki

Wards of the District directly affected: Leamington Clarendon

Summary

The purpose of this report is:

To enable Cabinet to be informed of the current state of Covent Garden Car Park, following recent detailed structural survey work;

To re-confirm that the Council should demolish the existing multi-storey car park;

To agree that the future use of the site is proposed as a Community Wellbeing Hub;

Based on the above, to agree the preparation of a feasibility study on the future use of the site following engagement with local community, businesses, and partner organisations.

Recommendations

- (1)** That Cabinet notes the outcome of the structural report for Covent Garden multi storey car park and the associated options for the future of that car park attached at Appendix 2.
 - (2)** That given the recommendations within the structural report, Cabinet re-commits to demolishing the current multi-storey car park on the Covent Garden site.
 - (3)** That Cabinet supports the principal future use of the site as a Community Wellbeing Hub as guided by the principles referred to in paragraph 3.2 of this report, with consideration to be given to the volume and quantity of parking offered alongside.
 - (4)** That Cabinet agrees to commission a feasibility study based on the brief at Appendix 4 and that the study is finalised following comprehensive engagement with stakeholders.
 - (5)** That Cabinet agrees the funding of the feasibility study of up to £50k to be funded from the Service Transformation Reserve.
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1 Background/Information

- 1.1 The redevelopment of the Covent Garden car park site was previously considered as part of a proposal in 2016. The proposal included the demolition of the multi storey car park and relocation of Council offices and a new multi storey car park on the site. However, that proposal was halted in 2019 and is no longer being pursued.

- 1.2 The structure is a nine level multi storey car park, built c.1960. It currently has 355 regular bays and 36 parent/child bays available for use. The original capacity was 516 bays in total, but 125 bays are unavailable due to the closure of levels 7 and 8 of the car park. The adjacent surface car park currently has 72 regular bays, 8 mobility bays and 2 EV charge point bays.
- 1.3 The multi storey car park has significant structural issues. Surveys show that the car park, the structure of which is predominantly concrete, is subject to Alkali Silica Reaction (ASR). In February 2016, a report to the then Executive confirmed that: *"ASR is present throughout the building but at a lower risk than first considered and can be managed in the short term. There are, however, substantial costs associated with maintaining Covent Garden for any length of time"*.
- 1.4 Monitoring has continued since that date and the Pick Everard structural investigation report dated 7 May 2021 provided an updated view of the structure of the car park. This has been followed up more recently this year with a more detailed structural investigation and technical assessment of the structure, together with recommendations, so that a clear decision on the future of the car park can be made. These two reports are attached at Appendix 1 and Appendix 2, respectively.
- 1.5 The structural analysis included concrete investigations and a ferrous scan with intrusive investigation to confirm the results and to establish reinforcement details of the structural elements. The findings have since been analysed and recommendations are set out in the final report dated July 2022, attached at Appendix 2.
- 1.6 In summary, the findings of the structural work around the cracking in the beams is that the car park is significantly under-designed. Under current codes of practice, the car park can only support a uniform distributed load of 0.629kN/m squared, which is approximately 64kg/m squared spread uniformly over the deck. A typical car has a load of at least 90kg/m squared. This would explain why additional columns have been added previously and why cracking has appeared in the beams supporting the structure. Larger SUV's and heavier electric cars are also likely to increase the cracking issue. Whilst the car park is unlikely to collapse imminently, it will continue to deteriorate if no action is taken soon. The Council therefore needs to consider the options on what it can or should do in response to the findings of the survey.

2. Options for the car park

- 2.1 The structural report attached at Appendix 2, outlines the options available for the car park going forwards as follows:
 - 2.1.1 **Option 1: No structural repairs/operational repairs** and close the multi storey car park. The Council would incur costs in terms of increased security provision for the site whilst closed, and there would be no revenue from the closed multi storey car park. The short stay surface car park would remain open for use, but the parking provision of over 300 spaces in the multi-storey element would be lost to town centre users. With no action other than closure the building would continue to deteriorate, aesthetically it would undermine the town's attempts to regenerate and could, as is already happening to a degree,

attract further anti-social behaviour. Eventually the building would need to be taken down as a safety measure leaving open the question as to what the Council then does with the land.

- 2.1.2 **Option 2: Repairs every 10 to 15 years:** This option would involve restricting the weight of the vehicles coming into the multi storey car park through limiting access by vehicle height and increasing parking bay widths. This would also require regular monitoring of structural behaviour, and concrete repairs would need to be carried out, together with the application of carbonation painting and deck coating. Costs specifically associated with this option would be in the region of £1,600,000 to £2,500,000 every 10 to 15 years (the costs will of course increase at each intervention over a 50-year period). There would also be a reduced revenue due to reduced capacity in the car park.
- 2.1.3 **Option 3: Strengthen the structure and carry out repairs:** This option will involve strengthening the multi storey car park structure through additional columns along the length of the primary beams; carrying out concrete repairs, carbonation coating and deck coating. However, additional columns would also reduce parking bay widths which would reduce the capacity of the car park further and so reduce the offer to town centre users. The cost would likely be more than £2,500,000, and there would also be lost revenue due to reduced capacity. As with option 2 above the costs would increase at each intervention over a 50-year period.
- 2.1.4 **Option 4: Demolish the car park and re-build it.** This option would involve demolishing the multi storey car park and re-providing a multi storey car park. Demolition costs are in the region of £66.84 per metre squared, equating to around £830,000 for the demolition of the existing structure. The costs of re-build are anticipated to be between £7,315,000 and £10,010,000, based on a similar capacity as the current structure, with a 50-year design life. However, these costs would be reduced for a reduced capacity provision on the site. It is suggested that if a feasibility study is agreed that it be used to help determine the number of spaces to be provided. The new build cost per parking space is in the region of £19,000 to £26,000. Revenue would be lost from this car park over the demolition and re-build timeframe, which could potentially be 18 months, but with an appropriate displacement strategy in place, this could be mitigated space provision wise but there would still be likely to be a net loss of income.
- 2.2 In addition to the usual annual maintenance costs, and the costs of the options set out above, there are also some further costs expected to bring the existing car park up to currently required standards, should the car park remain open. These works have been put on hold, pending the outcome of this report, since the costs are now becoming significant. The required works include:
- Replacement accredited fire safety doors on each level: £36k total
 - Bay line and carriageway markings: Estimated £15k - £30k, plus 1 week closure of the car park and loss of earning to complete it as it causes significant disruption.

- 2.3 Members will be aware that the car park has been suffering from increased anti-social behaviour over the last few years, from issues of graffiti, and fires, to criminal damage. The car park is also regularly used as a shelter by some homeless people, particularly during the winter months. Responding to these issues puts strain on other internal and external resources to help to maintain the car park and from a safety perspective for car park users.
- 2.4 Option 1 is not a reasonable option to support, given the inherent health and safety risks, let alone the reputational risks. Options 2 and 3 only give a limited extra lifespan for the carpark, but with costs and risks increasing over time and no other real opportunity to improve what is on offer. Option 4, to demolish the car park and construct a modern, fit for purpose car park that caters for the current and future needs, and for the north of the town centre, is timely. This option offers an opportunity to update the current provision on site by making it suitable for electric vehicles, and for cyclists. It also provides for an opportunity for the site to play a wider contribution to the transformation of Leamington Town Centre by considering a wider range of uses on the site.

3. Future Use of the Site

- 3.1 Since the previous development scheme which was to be undertaken was paused, and subsequently halted in 2019, there have been discussions with a variety of partners around other possibilities for redevelopment on the site to help inform the Council's view going forward. These discussions were informed by guidance from Cabinet and Group Leaders.

- 3.2 A discussion with all Group Leaders identified the following key principles to guide a potential redevelopment scheme on the Covent Garden site:

Climate Action and delivery of our carbon goals for 2025 as a Council; and Warwick District by 2030.

High quality, agile services that meet the changing needs of our residents and support a modal shift in the way the Council operates, enabling flexible working with enhanced connectivity and digital resources.

Income generation, to strengthen our financial resilience, diversify income risk and provide sustainable cash-flows to strengthen the General Fund.

Community value, delivering maximum benefits around place shaping for the local community, increasing footfall, and positively contributing to and promoting the well-being and future needs of the town centre, and responding to community needs.

- 3.3 At that time Group Leaders supported demolition of the multi-storey car park but wanted to be sure this in principle view was supported by the outcome of the survey report. It was agreed at that time to re-provide 600 parking spaces, subject to change though, if it would limit the 'best' options for comprehensive development; and futureproofing with EV provision was key as well as extensive cycle parking. Group Leaders ruled out piecemeal development.
- 3.4 Whilst there is a need for some parking alongside any development, the climate emergency has highlighted the need to reduce car usage generally, and indeed the change in office use following the pandemic supports this case.

There are also concerns also about town centre air quality and its impact on health which have increased both in awareness, and as an issue to be resolved. This may therefore be an opportunity to re-consider the car parking needed in the town centre, which may mean reducing the quantity on site, but enhancing the quality. This is also subject to an affordability assessment.

- 3.5 Officers have been considering potential options for a development scheme at Covent Garden in line with the guiding principles. A decision on the car park is critical therefore, as this will help to identify the developable area for the scheme. Such an approach also fits with the vision of the Leamington Town Centre Transformation Framework, in considering how the town overall will respond to present and future challenges based on a vision and validate approach, rather than a predict and provide approach.
- 3.6 In the context of the principles set out at paragraph 3.2 and the responses from a range of partner organisations, there is a potential development scheme for the Covent Garden site based around a theme of health and wellbeing in the community. Key to this focus is the concept of bringing both services and the community together, through provision of a broad range of services in one location. This focus is in line with the intention of improving health and well-being in the widest sense, and of supporting town centre health provision and the positive influence this may have on both individuals and the health of the town centre itself. It also provides a practical way of delivering a strategy of re-establishing the town centre as the heart of the local community with a diversity of uses.
- 3.7 Critically, it is recognised that health and wellbeing have an important role to play in the town centre, in supporting both social and economic recovery on the high street, particularly in response to the pandemic. In making these services accessible within the town, it could help to regenerate the northern end of the Parade and drive footfall, providing economic benefits for other businesses nearby.
- 3.8 The Council has a key role in helping to shape the town centre beyond the pandemic, and in bringing community and services together. A local GP practice has expressed interest in expanding, in line with the increasing population in the area, and these services sit well with other community and health-based services. Other health bodies have expressed interest in co-locating, and there is also scope for community focussed, but non-NHS activity e.g. the Post Office; Job Centre. There is clear evidence of a willingness for these partners to come together, collaborate, and to re-develop the site with a community focus, in a scheme that is vastly different to the previous scheme for the site.
- 3.9 There have been discussions with health providers and community-focussed businesses to understand both current and future needs in Leamington and within Warwick District. This discussion has been held in the context of the pandemic having demonstrated a change in how the community use the town centre and its services. The Council needs to consider how to support both services and the town centre in the future in this changed context. The opportunity is that by bringing services together in the town centre to form a "Community Wellbeing Hub," it can make these services accessible for the whole community, positively promoting wellbeing, and it can also help to drive footfall for businesses nearby improving income generation.

- 3.10 An exercise to understand the high-level potential requirements from interested parties has been completed and the requirements have been collated. This is the first step in understanding the potential space required, and other needs, and whether the concept of a Community Wellbeing Hub could accommodate such needs into a workable design on the site; and if so, the types of considerations that need to be prioritised. These high level requirements are attached at Appendix 3.
- 3.11 The organisations that have expressed an interest in floorspace on the site, alongside good parking on site include:
- GP services: There is potential for expanding a local GP surgery into a new, purpose-built town centre surgery.
 - Associated health services: Other services that sit alongside GP services, including options around mental health support. This would provide accessible health services in the community, in one place.
 - South Warwickshire Citizens Advice: There is potential for co-locating this advice service on the site.
 - Job Centre: There is potential for the Job Centre to re-locate to the site.
 - Post Office: The Post Office has a strong interest in space on the site, for an additional offering in the town centre. It would need to include space for deliveries, and there is also potential for them to include a retail offering.
 - Warwick District Council: There is potential for a Hub for front line services, dependent upon the outcomes of the separate future accommodation needs report for WDC.
 - Warwickshire County Council: There is potential for the provision of certain services to be in the town centre location.
- 3.12 However, to take forward a development scheme at Covent Garden, a decision to commit to demolish the car park is required. Once agreed, this will help to determine if there is a developable area on the Covent Garden site. A strategic decision is needed to now take this potential scheme further, or not, both for the Council, and for our partners.
- 3.13 Assuming the principle is agreed by Cabinet, the next step is to commission a feasibility study to understand the options for the scale, form, content, and design for the scheme and then to focus on options including the financial options for bringing the site forward for development in a timely manner. To complete the feasibility work, up to £50k is required from the Service Transformation Reserve. A brief for the feasibility work has been prepared at Appendix 4. Importantly the feasibility study should also include a strategy to engage with the local business community; partner agencies; and residents to help shape proposals coming forward. Such an approach would help to avoid many of the issues that the previous scheme on site raised.
- 3.14 Alongside and as part of the feasibility study, there also needs to be a car park displacement strategy that will need to be in place during the demolition/construction work period on site.

4 Alternative Options available to Cabinet

- 4.1 This report sets out the options that the Council has realistically in relation to the car park and they have been evaluated in the report. Doing nothing is not realistically an option. The car park will continue to increase in both maintenance and repair costs, and the risks to public safety will continue to increase as the structure deteriorates. In following this option, it postpones the decision to demolish and to rebuild to a future date, when the costs of doing so are likely to have increased further.
- 4.2 Cabinet could decide to only repair the multi storey car park. This option though feasible, does not demonstrate good value for money as costs will continue to escalate over time and the building will continue to deteriorate in appearance and fabric. This would represent an opportunity lost for the future of the town centre.
- 4.3 The Cabinet could decide to change the guiding principles that officers have up to now been working to, and to evaluate the options for the site going forward based upon new and different guidelines. Officers are not aware of what those might be, so cannot at this stage offer a view on their appropriateness.
- 4.4 Cabinet could decide to simply dispose of the site. This could generate a capital receipt and reduce running costs, but it would also lose revenue and the Council would lose a significant degree of control over what happens to the site and when. The Council's aspirations for the site may not prove to be deliverable via this method, if it does not stipulate what it wants the site to be used for via the brief that the proposed feasibility study would give rise to.

5 Consultation and Member's comments

- 5.1 A range of potential partners have been engaged and their responses have been incorporated into this report. However, if the scheme is to be progressed the Council needs to carry out more involvement hence the reason for the recommendation for engagement set out at Recommendation 4.

6 Implications of the proposal

6.1 Legal/Human Rights Implications

- 6.1.1 Early consideration needs to be given to the need for a car park displacement strategy, particularly for those with annual car park permits, and who regularly use the car park.

6.2 Financial

- 6.2.1 The costs of a feasibility study are likely to be up to £50k, which will come from the Service Transformation Reserve. The study would be tendered.
- 6.2.2 The recommendations in the structural report indicate that to be cost effective and to reduce the risk of safety issues occurring, that Option 4, set out at 2.1.4 would be the best option for the Council to support. Table 1 below supports that view as it shows a cost comparison of demolition and re-build, against repair and maintenance over the same period. It should also be noted that the cost of a new car park also needs to be factored into the costs of each option when repairs are no longer advised or appropriate.

6.2.3 Table 1: Cost Comparison of Options

<i>Demolition and Re-development (50-year life)</i>	<i>Repair (Either option 2 or 3) over the same period</i>
£830,000 demolition and build of £7,315,000- 10,010,000	£8,000,000 to £12,500,000
Total: £8,145,000 – £10,840,000	£8,000,000 – £12,500,000

6.2.4 Covent Garden Car Park current cost and usage

The surface car park is a short stay car park, which is often full. The multi storey is a long stay car park. Current tariffs are in line with other Leamington Spa car parking:

£1.30 – 1 hour - Short & long stay

£2.50 – 2 hours - Short & long stay

£3.80 – 3 hours - Short & long stay

£5.00 – 4 hours - Short stay

£7.00 – day rate (8am-6pm) - Long stay

£2.00 - overnight charge (6pm to 8am) – Short & long stay

6.2.5 An annual permit for the year costs £390, from January 2022. Of the 250 permits available, there are currently 183 permits issued for the car park. Residents of the Space also have the option to buy discounted permits, and there are currently a further 10 permits in use by them.

6.2.6 Revenue for the year 2021-2022 amounted to approximately £216,366 for the multi storey car park and £176,627 for the surface car park. For the current year to date £61,908 and £61,649 (April to July 2022).

6.2.7 Options set out would result in a similar amount of lost revenue through closure of the car park, but this could be offset by a well thought out displacement strategy.

6.2.8 For the year April 2021 to March 2022, with current capacity for Covent Garden multi storey car park being 391 spaces, 62,127 tickets were sold. This averages out at 170 tickets per day, and therefore capacity over this period reached up to 44% on average per day. For the first third of the year from April 2022 to end of July 2022, 14,372 tickets were sold, averaging out at 118 per day, and therefore capacity over this period reached up to 30% on average per day. This may reflect the time of year.

6.2.9 Consideration needs to be given to ensuring CCTV coverage across the area whilst the building is not available, and the costs of identifying a suitable alternative to ensure continuation of service need to be factored in. In the shorter term, whilst the car park is still functioning, there is a need to replace the existing 29 CCTV cameras with a cost of £67,517, and a further £30k is needed for additional cameras in the stairwells, to cover all necessary areas as there is a risk that anti-social behaviour will not be recorded.

The existing CCTV system and costs are untenable, and these risks need to be very carefully weighed up if the Council does nothing and leaves as is.

6.3 External impacts of the proposal

People - Health, Homes, Communities

The concept for a Wellbeing Hub would be to deliver an exemplar design for development on the Covent Garden site, taking account of the town centre area in which it is located. It should aim 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.

Services - Green, Clean, Safe

The development of the site should 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 minimises 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 supplemented by on site cycling infrastructure and EV charging.

Money- Infrastructure, Enterprise, Employment

Re-development of this site will contribute towards supporting businesses, job creation and the wider town centre and the local economy.

6.4 Internal impacts of the proposal

People - Effective Staff, Services

There is the potential for a Hub for front line services, dependent upon the outcomes of the separate future accommodation needs report for this Council. This would support the new ways of working being embraced by WDC.

Maintain or Improve Services

A purpose-built town centre Hub for front line services, within the town centre would be more accessible for members of the public and staff.

Money - Firm Financial Footing over the Longer Term

Assessing the 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.

6.5 Environmental/Climate Change Implications

- 6.5.1 The development of 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 minimises embodied and construction carbon emissions.
- 6.5.2 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 supplemented by on site cycling infrastructure and EV charging.

6.6 Analysis of the effects on Equality

There are no equality impacts associated with the proposals in this report at this stage.

6.7 Data Protection

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

6.8 Health and Wellbeing

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 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 in to the town centre which will increase footfall in nearby shops and services. Enlarging GP services and other health related offerings in the town focuses on the future of the district and provides room to grow. It also links with a fit and healthy community.

7 Risk Assessment

- 7.1 The key risk at this point is posed by the likely deterioration of the multi storey car park structure over time, should the Council choose to do nothing. This risk 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. The risk can be managed by the Council opting to demolish the current structure and to redevelop the site alongside other partners, as recommended, and this would eventually terminate the risk.
- 7.2 There is also a high risk posed by the multi-partner approach that the Council is potentially looking to take, in terms managing the number of stakeholders involved and the risk of potential fall out along the way with partners. This is a necessary risk for the type of development envisaged, but it can be managed through regular relationship management with all parties and investment of time.
- 7.3 A more detailed and expansive risk register for this scheme will be prepared, should the Cabinet agree to commission the feasibility report.

9 Conclusion

- 9.1 In conclusion, the structural report highlights the continued deterioration of the car park and the risks to public safety, along with the mounting costs of repair. It is concluded therefore that the Council should re-confirm its intent to demolish the current car park structure.
- 9.2 Given the level of interest demonstrated in the site as a Community Wellbeing Hub, the Council should agree to redevelop the site and commission a feasibility study to help better shape the proposal.

Supporting documents:

Appendix 1: Structural report on the Re-inspection of Covent Garden Car park: May 2021

Appendix 2: Structural report: July 2022

Appendix 3: High level collated requirements for Covent Garden Scheme

Appendix 4: Feasibility Study Brief

Report Information Sheet

Please complete and submit to Democratic Services with draft report

Committee/Date	29th September 2022	
Title of report	Covent Garden Car Park/Community Wellbeing Hub	
Consultations undertaken		
Consultee *required	Date	Details of consultation /comments received
Ward Member(s)		
Portfolio Holder WDC	05.09.22	Jan Matecki; Judith Falp; Liam Bartlett; Moira Ann Grainger
Financial Services *	22.08.22	
Legal Services *		
Other Services	22.08.22	
Chief Executive(s)	23.08.22	
Head of Service(s)	25.08.22	
Section 151 Officer	25.08.22	
Monitoring Officer	25.08.22	
SLT	30.08.22	
Leadership Co-ordination Group (WDC)	05.09.22	
Other organisations	15.09.22	Shared with potential partner organisations
Final decision by this Committee or rec to another Ctte/Council?		Recommendation to: Cabinet
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 – scheduled for 29th September 2022
Accessibility Checked?		File/Info/Inspect Document/Check Accessibility