

SUBJECT:	MONNOW STREET PUBLIC REALM AND ACTIVE TRAVEL IMPROVEMENT SCHEME
MEETING:	PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
DATE:	19 APRIL 2023
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:	MONMOUTH

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND PURPOSE:

- 1.1 Design development and consultation on proposals for public realm and active travel improvements in Monnow Street has been underway since late 2020. A wide range of options was considered and consulted on at the beginning of the process, and a shortlist was presented for consultation in early 2022.
- 1.2 Over the last six months a concept design for a single preferred option has been developed, informed by an extensive consultation and engagement process. The proposed scheme will formalise an amended version of the current temporary layout in Monnow Street and is intended to create a pleasant and safe environment for people on foot or cycle which encourages people to visit and spend more time in Monnow Street while maintaining two-way vehicle traffic.
- 1.3 Public consultation in February and March 2023 showed support for most of the design aspects of the proposals. Targeted business consultation also found strong support for the proposals
- 1.4 The purpose of this report is to brief members and allow them to scrutinise the proposed design for Monnow Street and the process by which it has been developed, prior to the design being considered by Cabinet for approval and delivery, subject to funding.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That Scrutiny Committee scrutinises the work undertaken to date to arrive at the proposals for public realm and active travel improvements in Monnow Street, Monmouth, and endorses the scheme for adoption by Cabinet.

3 KEY ISSUES:

Background

- 3.1 Monnow Street is the main high street through the centre of Monmouth and is the town's primary shopping area. Monnow Street and the town centre as a whole provide a broad range of facilities and services and fulfil a function as a focus for both the community and public transport.
- 3.2 Although there has been relatively recent investment in the streetscape in other parts of the town centre – notably Agincourt Square, where footways were widened to create more space for pedestrians and high quality surfaces introduced – Monnow Street's public realm is tired and in places requires repair or renewal. Over time an accrual of street furniture and other items means that it has become cluttered and untidy.
- 3.3 In 2020, temporary measures were put in place in Monnow Street in response to Covid 19, creating more space for social distancing and to allow more outdoor trading for businesses. This was done by removing some parking spaces and narrowing the carriageway to allow temporary widening of pavements and the creation of areas for outdoor seating. Freestanding planters were later introduced for amenity value and to prevent illegal parking on footways.
- 3.4 Various iterations were trialled during 2020, including a one-way system and widening the pedestrian areas with railings, bollards or water-filled barriers. The measures were adjusted in response to feedback before temporary kerbing and tarmac infill areas were introduced in late 2020. These temporary measures were effective in supporting businesses to allow them to continue trading during Covid restrictions, and there is some evidence that they have been popular with users of the town centre: in a survey in October 2021¹, two thirds of respondents said that the measures had had a positive impact on the town centre.
- 3.5 However, the temporary measures have caused or exacerbated issues with drainage and flooding on the footway, and due to the camber of the carriageway have created uneven surfaces which make movement difficult for some people. The changes were not intended or designed to be permanent, and some elements are likely to deteriorate to the point where they require renewal or removal within the next 18 months.
- 3.6 Some degree of change and investment in Monnow Street is therefore likely to be required in the relatively near future, irrespective of any decision on the proposed public realm and active travel improvements set out here.
- 3.7 As part of the early stages of development which led to the current proposal for Monnow Street, the following problems were identified through consultation with stakeholders, on-site observation and analysis of traffic and other data as issues to be tackled through the scheme:

¹ Intercept survey interviews with 44 town centre users, conducted in Monmouth town centre by MCC Active Travel officers, 28 October 2021.

- Accessibility: lack of dedicated provision for walking and cycling, such as crossing facilities and safe connections into nearby routes, discouraging active travel.
- Congestion: reliance on car travel for local journeys causes congestion, negatively impacts air quality and causes nuisance to people visiting, working and living on Monnow Street.
- Economic: the need to enhance the town centre environment to sustain and support local businesses.
- Highway: the highway width varies significantly, encouraging excessive/double parking and increased traffic speeds and modal conflict.
- Road safety: Monnow Street is dominated by traffic and delivery vehicles resulting in actual and perceived safety concerns.
- Social/cultural: historical and archaeological importance of existing infrastructure needs to be protected.

3.8 The visual and functional dominance of cars and other motor vehicles in Monnow Street is a particular issue. Combined with the relative lack of formal places to cross, this makes it difficult and potentially dangerous for pedestrians to move around the street. The width of the carriageway encourages double parking and double loading, the latter currently exacerbated by insufficient provision of loading spaces.

3.9 There is widespread concern among stakeholders about the economic viability of Monnow Street and Monmouth town centre more widely. Many of the challenges which retailers in Monmouth face – increased competition from the internet and out-of-town shopping; changes in shopping behaviour during and since the pandemic; increased business rates and rent; the downturn in the economy and the cost of living crisis – are common to all towns and high streets in Wales and across the UK. However, Monmouth is perceived to be faring less well than other towns in the county, and this is borne out by some data.

3.10 The most visible and frequently cited indicator of Monmouth's economic fragility is the rise in vacant commercial units. As the chart below shows, this issue pre-dates Covid 19 but has continued to worsen during and since the pandemic. More recent analysis by officers in March 2023 found 32 empty units in the town centre, which is a vacancy rate of around 20%. This is the highest in the county and above the average for high streets in Wales of 16.2%. Vacancy rates are constantly changing, and we understand two new businesses are about to open on Monnow Street, which is positive news. However, it is clear that support and intervention is needed and the Regeneration team is working on this.

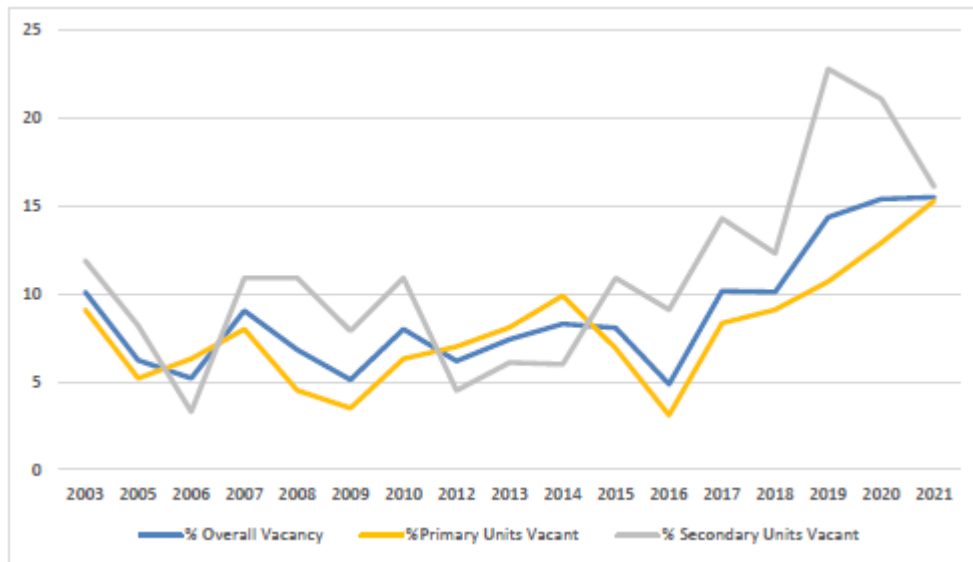


Figure 1: Vacancy rates over time within the Central Shopping Area

3.11 Data on footfall in Monmouth and other towns in the county is collected in an annual survey which includes pedestrian flow counts at key locations around the town centre, conducted on peak and non-peak days. The data shows considerable fluctuation in pedestrian flows in Monmouth between 2003 and 2021, the most recent year for which data is available. Footfall declined in 2014 and 2015, but then stabilised until 2019, when the survey recorded a sharp increase. Footfall fell again in 2020: this is likely to be due to the impact of the pandemic and associated restrictions and was reflected across all town centres in Monmouthshire. The 2021 footfall survey indicates a modest increase.

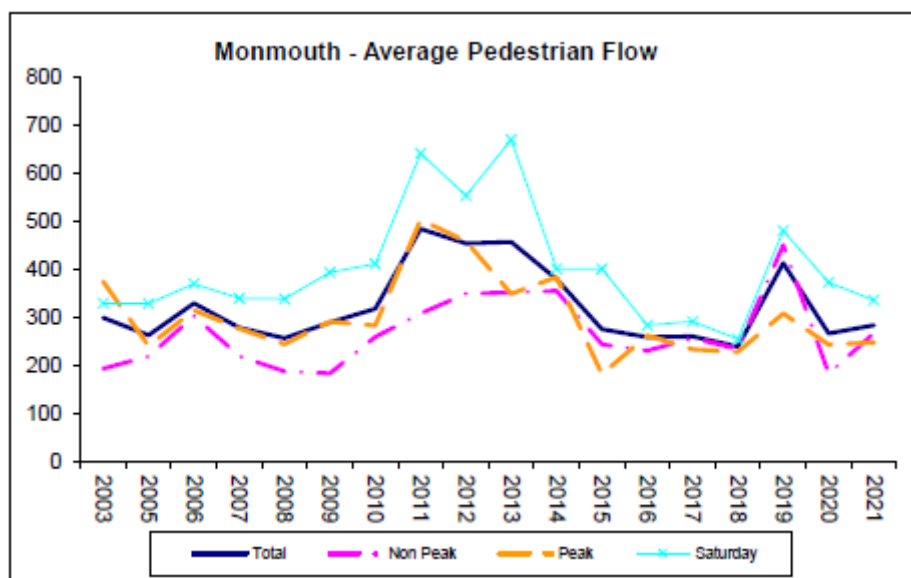


Figure 2: Average daily pedestrian flow rates over time

3.12 Anecdotally, some retailers report that footfall remains lower than before the pandemic, and that takings have fallen as a consequence.

3.13 Clearly no single intervention is likely to address all the challenges which a town centre may face, or to solve all the problems – in relation to traffic and active travel as well as

the town centre economy – that have been identified for Monnow Street. Discussions are underway with Monmouth town council on the joint production of a Placemaking Plan for Monmouth, which will provide an opportunity to consider these wider challenges – and opportunities – that the town centre faces and provide an action plan which sets out how the county and town councils and other stakeholders could most effectively intervene. It is expected that the Placemaking Plan will be commissioned in Q1 2023/24. The Placemaking Plan priorities open opportunities for Welsh Government grant funding via the Transforming Towns fund, a report on which came to this Scrutiny Committee on 30 June 2022.

3.14 However, there is a substantial and growing body of evidence that investment in high quality public realm which prioritises active travel modes is not only positive in terms of safety, health and wellbeing, but also delivers economic benefits.

3.15 For example, research carried out for TfL by University College London’s Bartlett School of Planning² compared locations that had benefited from street improvements with comparable locations that had not yet been improved. It found that investment in the public realm in high streets and town centres brought “substantial benefits to the everyday users of streets, and to the occupiers of space and investors in surrounding property in multiple ways”. This included:

- 96% rise in “static street behaviours” (e.g. standing, waiting, and sitting) and a 93% increase in active (e.g. walking) street behaviours in improved over unimproved areas
- 216% increase in “leisure based static activities” (e.g. stopping at a café or sitting at a bench) driven by improved quality of environment
- “Very strong perceptions amongst both everyday street users and local property occupiers that street improvement schemes significantly enhance street character, walkability, ease of crossing, opportunities for sitting, and general street vibrancy.”
- 17% per annum difference in vacancy rates between improved and unimproved street environments

3.16 A 2018 study published by Living Streets³ looked at the impact of “investment in better streets and places” and in particular “in the public realm and walkability”. Taking data from case studies around the world, it found:

- A £10m investment in Piccadilly, Stoke-on-Trent to make the area more walkable led to 30% more footfall.
- If more space is given for walking and cycling and less to cars, the absence of customers arriving by car is more than compensated by people arriving on foot or by bike. A scheme which reassigned highway space to pedestrians in San Francisco increased pedestrian traffic on weeknights by 37%. A similar scheme in London increased takings in an adjacent shop by 20%.

² <https://content.tfl.gov.uk/street-appeal.pdf>

³ <https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/media/3890/pedestrian-pound-2018.pdf>

- A review of a number of academic studies found that retail footfall increases by around a third and retail turnover by an average of 17% as a direct result of improvements to the pedestrian environment.
- The study found that there is “strong evidence” that pedestrians and cyclists spend more than people arriving by car.

The Proposed Design

3.17 A concept plan of the proposed design for Monnow Street, along with CGI before and after images, is provided at Appendix 1. A full design report which provides more detail about the proposal and its evolution as informed by consultation is provided at Appendix 2 Key elements of the design include:

- Extended pavements creating more space for pedestrians
- Areas for “dwell” creating places for pause and spending time in the street
- Space for businesses to spill out into the street
- More pedestrian crossings, located strategically to serve the whole street
- Trees and landscaping – for amenity as well as drainage and biodiversity
- Dedicated loading bays spread evenly along the street
- Short stay and disabled parking conveniently located along the street
- Seasonal café seating areas which can provide additional parking in winter
- Bike parking for a range of bikes, including those with buggies or carts attached
- Two-way vehicle traffic is maintained

3.18 The proposed design is the result of a process of scheme development and consultation which has been underway since late 2020. The process has followed the Welsh Government’s WelTAG framework for developing and appraising transport proposals and is described below.

WelTAG Stage 1: Longlist of Options

3.19 The first stage of options appraisal and consultation, WelTAG 1, was done in late 2020. It sought to assess the key issues of concern, explore the context for the scheme, and to consider a longlist of possible options for Monnow Street.

3.20 Capita were appointed as consultants to carry out the WelTAG 1 study. Through on-site observation, consultation with stakeholders and the public as well as desk-based research they made an assessment of the problems to be addressed and identified the following objectives for the scheme:

- To enable Monmouth to thrive as a vibrant destination place by creating a safe environment for all road users to stimulate the local economy;
- To encourage pedestrians, cyclists and wheelchair users (Active Travel modes) to use Monnow Street by reducing barriers to modal shift;

- To improve connectivity and accessibility to trip attractors by Active Travel modes from the existing local active travel routes.
- To increase levels of physical activity, encourage healthier lifestyles and improve well-being for residents and visitors to Monmouth; and
- To contribute to the carbon reduction agenda by reducing emissions from transport and improving air quality in Monmouth town centre.

3.21 Seven potential options for Monnow Street were identified to be considered at this stage. These were:

- **Do minimum:** Improve condition of carriageway and footway with no changes to layout
- **One way system options:**
 - One-way traffic in the southwest bound direction only; segregated cycleway for cyclists travelling northeast bound; widened footways
 - As above with additional alternative cycleway and footway from Monnow Street through Chippenham Fields to Chippenhamgate Street
- **Two way system options:**
 - Maintain two-way traffic flow; segregated cycleway for cyclists travelling northeast; widened footways
 - As above with additional alternative cycleway and footway from Monnow Street through Chippenham Fields to Chippenhamgate Street
 - As above with one-way loop at pinch point (one-way northbound on Monnow Street between St John's Street and Agincourt Street, and one-way carriageway on Agincourt Street/St John's Street)
- **Pedestrianisation:** Pedestrianise Monnow Street from St John's Street to Monnow Keep exit, with limited northbound only access to deliveries, buses and taxis before 10am and after 4pm. Allow 'right turn only' movement for vehicles exiting St John's Street.

3.22 These options were assessed against the objectives and goals of key national and local strategies and plans, as well against the identified problems and the objectives agreed for the scheme. The options appraisal also considered the deliverability of each option, in terms of feasibility, likely public and stakeholder acceptability, timescales and risk.

3.23 Following this initial options appraisal, five potential schemes were taken to public consultation. Because of concerns about deliverability and likely public and stakeholder acceptability, the two-way option with a one-way loop at the pinch point and the pedestrianisation option were not carried forward to the public consultation.

3.24 The public consultation therefore sought respondents' views on a "do minimum" scheme and four options that would bring change and in particular improvements for pedestrians and cyclists.

- 3.25 The consultation was carried out via online survey, made available on the Council's website and promoted via social media channels in November and December 2020. Covid restrictions at the time prevented any in-person consultation.
- 3.26 561 people completed the online questionnaire. Respondents were invited to choose their favourite and least favourite of the five options.
- 3.27 56% of respondents chose as their preferred option one of the four potential proposals delivering change and improvement for pedestrians and cyclists. 32% chose one of the two-way options as their favourite, and 24% chose one of the one-way options.
- 3.28 The remaining 44% of respondents chose the "do minimum" as their favourite option. However, at the time of the survey, the temporary Covid measures on Monnow Street – including widened footways and a reduction in parking – had recently been put in place. The survey did not explain whether the baseline for the proposed "do minimum" option, described in the survey as "*Improve the condition of footway and carriageway with no changes to the layout.*", was the pre-Covid layout or the temporary arrangement. It is therefore unclear whether respondents who chose this option were expressing support for a formalisation of the temporary layout that was in place at the time or for a reversion to the pre-Covid layout.
- 3.29 When asked about their least favourite option, the one-way options were the most commonly chosen proposals: 62% selected one of the one-way options as their least favourite.
- 3.30 Based on the Weltag 1 options appraisal as well as stakeholder and public consultation, three options were shortlisted to be taken forward for further appraisal at WelTAG stage 2:
- **Do minimum:** improve condition of carriageway and footway with no changes to layout (now explicitly described as reversion back to the pre-Covid layout).
 - **One way system:** one-way traffic in the southwest bound direction only; segregated cycleway for cyclists travelling northeast bound; widened footways.
 - **Two way system:** maintain two-way traffic flow; segregated cycleway for cyclists travelling northeast; widened footways
- 3.31 The variants on the one- and two-way systems which included an alternative cycleway and footway across Chippenham fields were not eligible for Welsh Government Active Travel, so these options were not taken forward for consider at Weltag 2 so as to avoid any delay to the changes on Monnow Street being implemented.

WelTAG stage 2: shortlist of options

- 3.32 Capita were reappointed as consultants to support the Council in the second stage of the WelTAG process for Monnow Street, which entailed further analysis of the shortlisted options as set out at 3.30 above, as well as further stakeholder and public consultation. Separate consultation of businesses was also introduced at this stage.

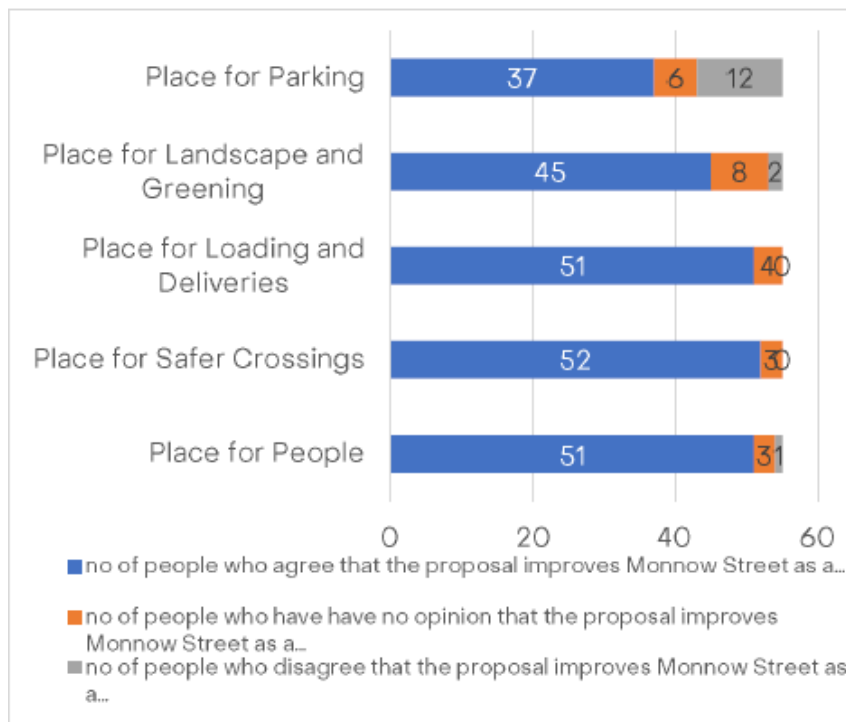
- 3.33 MCC highway design officers developed the two-way system options in greater detail at this stage, in response to public and stakeholder comments received during the first round of consultation. The following sub-options were proposed:
- Two-way option A: formalisation of temporary Covid measures.
 - Two-way option B: as option A but with a segregated cycle lane incorporated within the footway width on the north-western side of the road, accommodating cyclists travelling in the northeast bound direction.
 - Two-way option C: retain only loading and disabled parking along Monnow Street, allowing more space for pedestrians and cyclists to provide either shared space or a segregated cycle lane on the north-western side of the road.
 - Two-way option D: as Option A, but with shared space for pedestrians and cyclists on the north-western side of the road. Cyclists would be able to choose whether to travel on road with traffic or to use the footway.
- 3.34 As at WelTAG stage 1, the shortlisted options (including the various two-way proposals) were assessed against the objectives and goals of key national and local strategies and plans, against the identified problems and the objectives agreed for the scheme, and in terms of deliverability.
- 3.35 Two-way option C (retain only loading and disabled parking) scored the highest in this process, followed by two-way option B (segregated cycle lane), two-way option D (shared space) and two-way option A (formalisation of Covid layout).
- 3.36 The one-way system and reversion to the pre-Covid layout both scored poorly in the stage 2 options appraisal.
- 3.37 On the basis of this analysis and considering the negative response both to the one-way option in consultation at stage 1 and when a one-way system was trialled in 2020, the public and business consultation at WelTAG stage 2 focused on the four two-way system options.
- 3.38 Public consultation at this stage ran for six weeks from January to March 2022. As at stage 1, a questionnaire was made available on the Council's website and was promoted via its social media channels.
- 3.39 435 people completed the stage 2 questionnaire. Respondents were asked to rank the four options in order of preference.
- 3.40 43% of respondents chose two-way option A, formalisation of the existing Covid layout, as their first preference. Option C, retaining only loading and disabled parking, was the next most popular first choice, selected by 26% of respondents.
- 3.41 12% of respondents chose option B, with a segregated cycle lane, as their first preference. Only 4% of respondents identified option D, shared space, as their first preference.

- 3.42 In addition, a separate business consultation questionnaire was made available online on MCC's website. A Capita representative visited businesses in Monnow Street and Agincourt Square to notify them of the consultation.
- 3.43 27 responses were received to the online business questionnaire. The relatively small sample size means that results from this element of the consultation should be treated with caution.
- 3.44 Among business respondents, the top two options in terms of first preferences were the same as in the wider public consultation: 67% of business respondents chose option A, formalisation of the existing Covid layout, as their first preference, and 22% chose option C, retaining only loading and disabled parking. 7% chose option D, shared space, and 4% chose with option B, segregated cycle lane.
- 3.45 Option A, formalisation of the existing Covid layout, was therefore the most popular of the options in both the public and business consultation. A stakeholder workshop attended by MCC officers and members, representatives of disability groups, representatives from local schools and the Chamber of Commerce identified Option C, retaining only loading and disabled parking as the preferred option for that group.
- 3.46 Options A and C were taken forward for further consideration at the next stage of scheme development, having been selected as the preferred options by both the public and business consultation.

WelTAG 3: Development of Preferred Option

- 3.47 The third WelTAG stage of design development was undertaken from October 2022 to March 2023. Roberts Limbrick Architects and Urban Designers were appointed to develop the design principles established through previous WelTAG stages and consultation into a concept design.
- 3.48 The objective of this part of the process was “to reach consensus on a place-based design that is focussed on a two-way street environment that is vibrant, welcoming to all modes of travel and ensures exploration and activity across the whole town.”
- 3.49 An extensive programme of engagement and consultation was central to this stage of process, to ensure that the final design was based on a clear understanding of the needs and preferences of the widest range of stakeholders and with the aim of building a consensus around the proposed scheme. This process was co-designed with the ward member and relevant Cabinet Members. The consultation process and its findings are described in detail in the Report of Consultation provided at Appendix 3. It included:
- A series of design workshops with stakeholders
 - Two rounds of one-to-one consultation with businesses on Monnow Street and elsewhere in the town centre
 - Public consultation with drop-sessions, a design exhibition, and a survey available online and at locations in Monmouth

- Targeted consultation with the Chamber of Commerce, school pupils, and other community and stakeholder groups
- 3.50 Three design workshops were held with invited stakeholders, including county and town councillors, the Chamber of Commerce, local businesses, and community and interest groups. The first workshop, in early November 2022, focused on reviewing and agreeing core design principles. These were:
- Improving the quality of the environment for people walking and accessing Monnow Street
 - Accommodating cycling through the street
 - Maintaining a two-way street for vehicles
 - Accommodating loading/unloading
 - Provision for disabled parking
 - Consideration of on-street short stay parking
- 3.51 A number of design considerations and wider issues were identified through discussion in the first workshop, which informed the initial design. Stakeholders gave feedback on the initial design at a second workshop in late November 2022.
- 3.52 In parallel with the first two workshops, officers and representatives from the consultant team made a series of one-to-one visits to businesses in Monnow Street and elsewhere in the town centre. This engagement was in two phases:
- Phase one, November 2022: understanding specific business requirements such as loading/unloading, type of customer (popping in or longer stay), outdoor licensing needs and other requirements.
 - Phase two, December 2022/January 2023: sharing the draft design proposal with businesses to get feedback and make changes.
- 3.53 The team successfully engaged with 75 Monnow Street businesses (89%) in phase one and 65 (77%) in phase two, as well as other businesses in the town centre. Multiple visits were made to businesses to maximise the response rate, and among Monnow Street businesses those who did not engage were either too busy or otherwise unavailable. 55 Monnow Street businesses gave detailed feedback on the initial design. As well as providing individual qualitative feedback, businesses were asked to rate the proposal on five core aspects of the design. The chart below shows the numbers of businesses who agreed (in blue) or disagreed that the proposal would improve Monnow Street for each element of the design.



- 3.54 67% of businesses agreed that the proposals would make Monnow Street a better place for parking, 82% agreed with the landscaping and greening, and 93% agreed that the scheme would create a better place for people.
- 3.55 Following the first two workshops and the engagement with businesses, the initial design was revised to reflect feedback received. This revised design was presented at a third stakeholder workshop, as well as at an additional workshop with the Chamber of Commerce held at their request. After each workshop a note of the key issues discussed and points raised was circulated to invitees.

February/March 2023 Community Survey Results

- 3.56 After further revisions in response to feedback at the final workshops, the design was presented for public consultation in February and March 2023. Two face to face consultation events were held in a vacant shop in Monmouth town centre, attended by 484 people in total. The design was then displayed in a 19 day exhibition at Monmouth Community Hub. The design was also available to view on the Council's website.
- 3.57 A survey was made available via the Council's website, with paper copies and a post box for completed surveys provided at the Community Hub, Shire Hall and Monmouth Leisure centre.
- 3.58 521 people completed the survey. The full results of the consultation are provided in the Consultation Report at Appendix 3.
- 3.59 65% of respondents live in Monmouth, with a further 21% living in the Monmouth area. 9% of respondents work in town, 3% own a business in Monnow Street and 4% own a

business elsewhere in the town centre. (These and other figures presented here may add up to more than 100%, as for several questions respondents were asked to select all options that applied to them. Full details are available in the Consultation Report.)

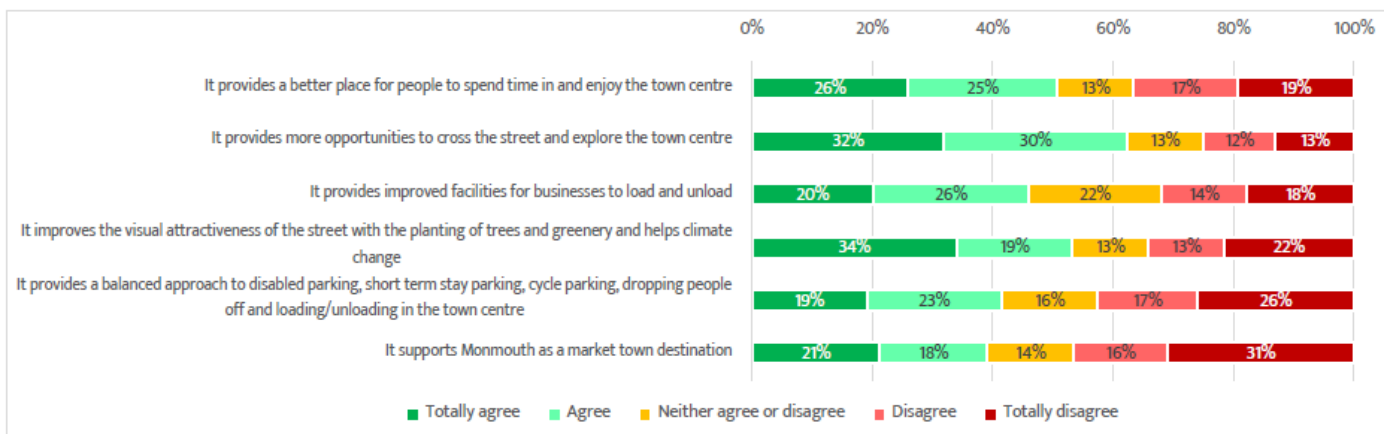
3.60 Respondents were asked how they travel to Monnow Street.:

- 84% travel by car
- 61% walk
- 14% cycle
- 8% use public transport

3.61 46% of respondents visit Monnow Street daily, and a further 43% visit at least once a week.

3.62 The most common reasons for visiting Monnow Street were a top-up/basket food shop (67%), meeting family and friends for a coffee (54%), spending a few hours shopping (44%), doing the main weekly food shop (42%) and having a meal out (39%).

3.63 Respondents were asked their opinion of the proposal in relation to a number of elements of the design and its impacts. The chart below summarises the responses.

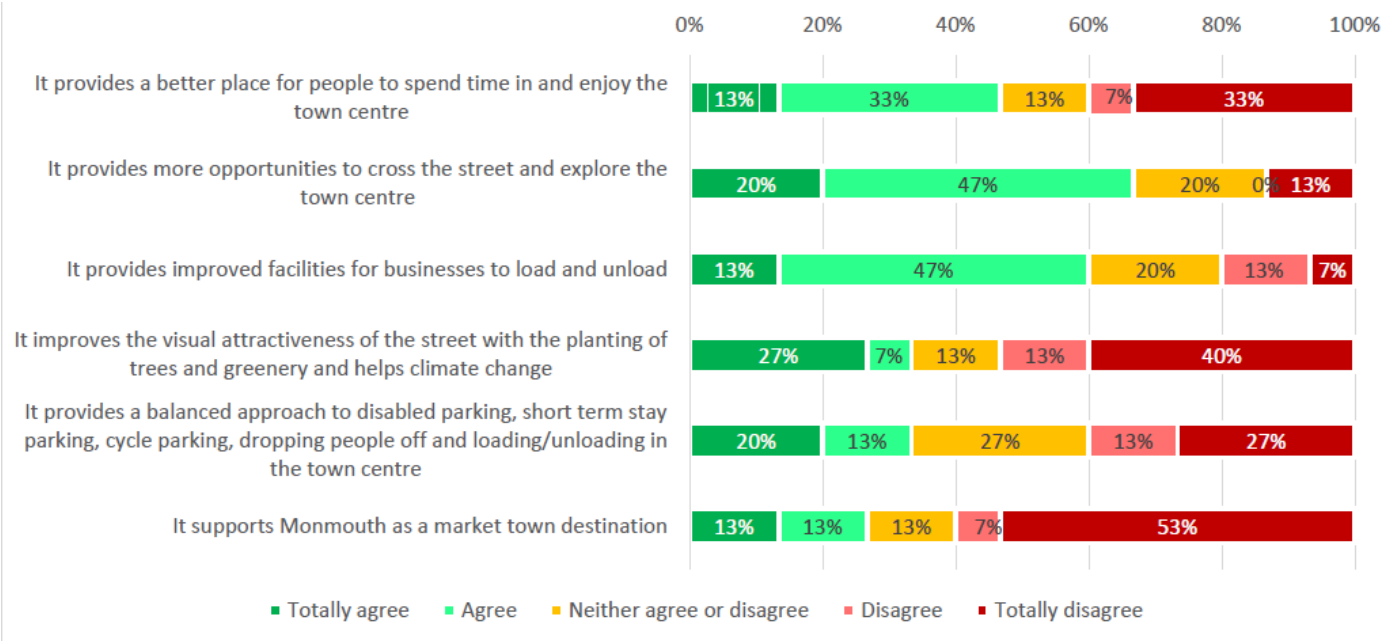


3.64 When rating the design proposal:

- 51% totally agree or agree that it provides a better place to spend time in, compared to 36% who disagree or totally disagree;
- 62% totally agree or agree that provides more opportunities to cross the street and explore the town centre, compared to 25% who disagree or totally disagree;
- 46% totally agree or agree that it provides improved facilities for businesses to load and unload, compared to 32% who disagree or totally disagree;
- 53% totally agree or agree that it improves the visual attractiveness of the street with the planting of trees and greenery and helps climate change, compared to 35% who disagree or totally disagree;
- 42% totally agree or agree that it provides a balanced approach to disabled parking, short term parking, cycle parking and dropping off, compared to 43% who disagree or totally disagree;

- 39% either totally agree or agree that it supports Monmouth as a market town destination, compared to 47% who disagree or totally disagree;
- 3.65 Positive responses to most of these questions therefore outweigh negative responses by a significant margin (approx. 60% to 40%).
- 3.66 The responses to the question on parking are evenly balanced, with 42% positive and 43% negative. Discussions at the drop-in consultation events and open text comments on the survey suggest that some respondents would prefer to see no parking at all in Monnow Street other than disabled parking and loading, while there are clearly also those who would prefer more parking to be available. It is likely that both groups are represented among the negative respondents on this question.
- 3.67 For the final question in this group, on the extent to which the proposal supports Monmouth as a market town destination, responses are more negative. This may reflect the view expressed by a number of attendees in the stakeholder workshops and the public consultations sessions, that public realm and active travel improvements in Monnow Street will not in themselves tackle all the challenges that Monmouth faces. This is not disputed, and officers agree that the public realm improvements alone will not solve the problems affecting Monnow Street. The forthcoming Placemaking Plan will provide an opportunity to consider these wider challenges and the interventions that may address them, and this Plan opens opportunities for accessing Welsh Government Transforming Towns funding. Other wider proposals remain under development for the town, including relocating an improved and modernised museum offer in Shire Hall, repurposing and refurbishing the indoor market building, and refreshing and progressing proposals for a visitor centre and café as an arrival point to Monmouth at Blestium Street. In combination, these proposals together with the Monnow Street public realm improvements and Transforming Town grant opportunities present the opportunity for impactful and positive change to revive the vitality and attractiveness of this important market town to the benefit of businesses, residents and visitors.
- 3.68 Local businesses have been an important stakeholder in this project, and paragraphs 3.50 to 3.55 summarise some of the ways the project team and Elected Members have sought to engage with businesses and the Chamber of Commerce.
- 3.69 In addition to that engagement, businesses were invited to complete the survey. The response from businesses to the survey was relatively small: 18 businesses in Monnow Street completed some part of the survey, and only 15 responded to the questions about the design and its impacts. This may be because most Monnow Street businesses had already given detailed information on their needs and expectations for Monnow Street, as well as their feedback on a slightly earlier version of proposed design, in the one-to-one business consultation described above in paragraphs 3.52 - 3.55.

3.70 The chart below shows Monnow Street businesses' responses to the questions on the design and its impacts. The small sample size means that the results should be treated with caution.



3.71 The businesses' responses to the questions on opportunities to cross the street and on facilities for loading and unloading were positive: 67% strongly agreed or agreed that the proposed design brings improvement on crossings, and 60% on loading and unloading. Difficulties with loading in the current layout were raised by numerous businesses as an issue.

3.72 Businesses' views on whether the proposal provides a better place for people to spend time in the town centre were also positive but more evenly balanced, with 46% strongly agreeing or agreeing with the statement against 40% disagree or strongly disagreeing.

3.73 Business responses to the questions on parking, and on the benefits for Monmouth as a market town destination, were more negative. For parking, 33% agreed or strongly agreed that the proposals provide a balanced approach, against 40% who disagreed or strongly disagreed. More than a quarter of business respondents – 27% – neither agreed nor disagreed on this question. 60% disagreed or strongly disagreed that the proposal supports Monmouth as a market town destination.

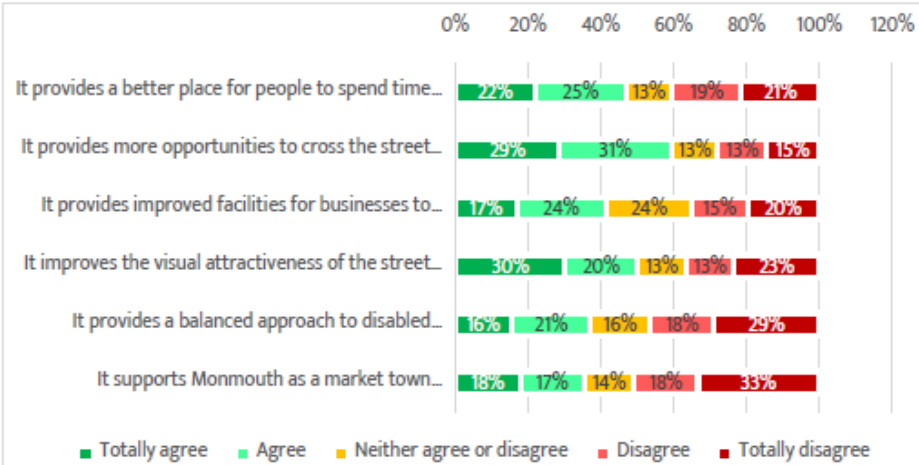
3.74 The feedback from the 15 businesses that responded to the key questions in the community survey was therefore mixed. This is in contrast with the very positive response to the proposals in one-to-one consultation with businesses, described in paragraphs 3.52 - 3.55, which had a significantly larger sample size.

- 3.75 Monmouth Chamber of Commerce have been consistently opposed to the proposals and seem to favour a return to the pre-Covid layout. Officers and the consultant team have sought to engage with the Chamber of Commerce positively throughout the process and particularly in the most recent stage of design development, including the addition at their request of a specific business workshop as an extra to the wider stakeholder workshops. At a meeting with officers and the Cabinet Member for a Sustainable Economy in July 2022, the Chamber of Commerce set out their “red lines” for the scheme: road closure or pedestrianisation; a one-way system; and a dedicated cycle lane. None of these now form part of the proposals.
- 3.76 The Chamber of Commerce advises that its opposition to the proposals reflects feedback from its membership. The 12 businesses who attended the Chamber of Commerce workshop event were predominantly opposed to the proposed changes. However, the feedback from the 15 Monnow Street businesses who responded to the community survey’s questions about the design (outlined above) was relatively balanced, albeit with a small sample size. As noted in paragraphs 3.50 - 3.55, there was a very positive response to the proposals in the one-to-one consultation in December 2022 and January 2023, which reached three quarters of businesses in Monnow Street, with further adjustments made to the proposals in response to feedback received.

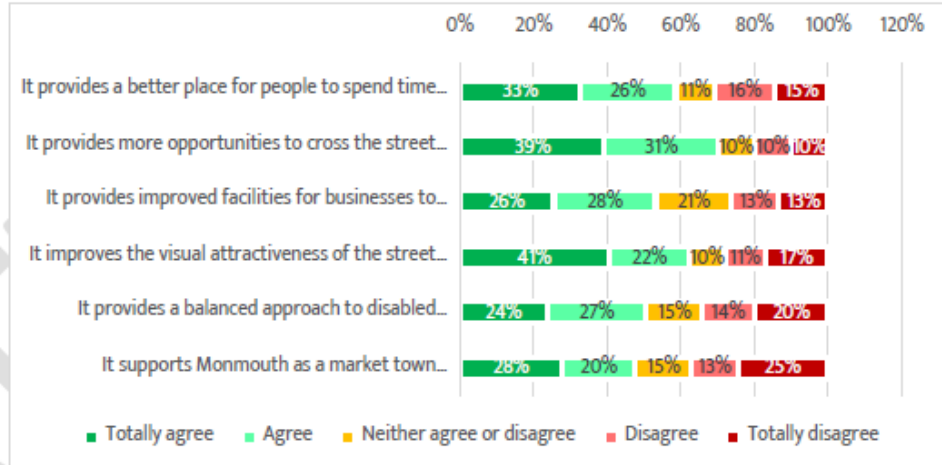
Analysis by Mode of Transport

- 3.77 Among other groups of respondents there were some notable variations in responses. The charts below show responses to the core design questions from respondents who said they used various modes of transports. People who walk, cycle or use public transport to travel to Monnow Street were more positive about the proposed changes than those who drive:

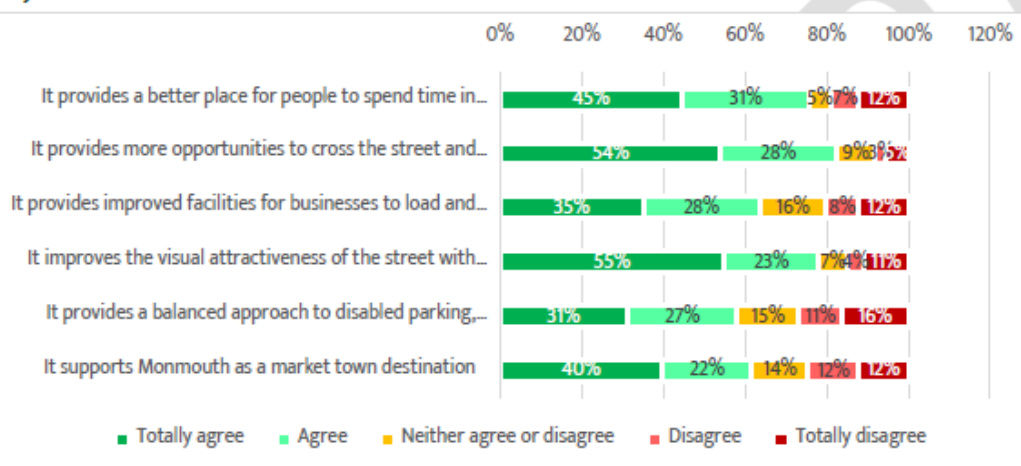
Drive



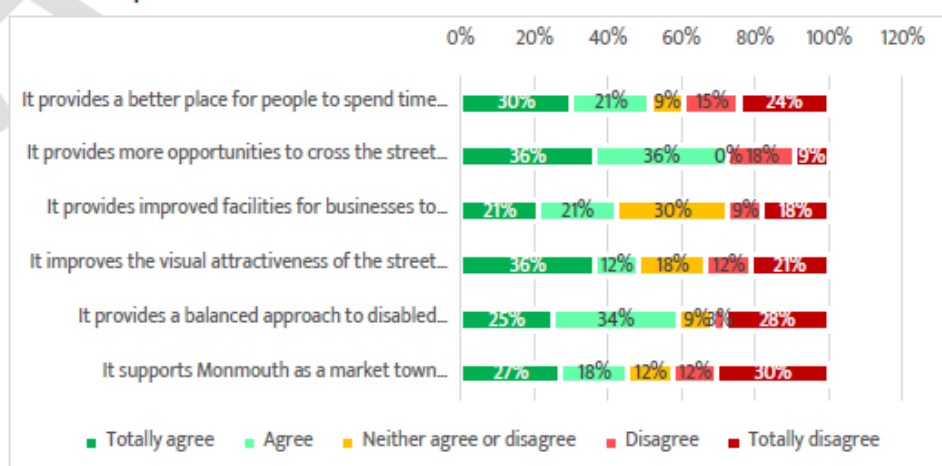
Walk



Cycle



Public Transport

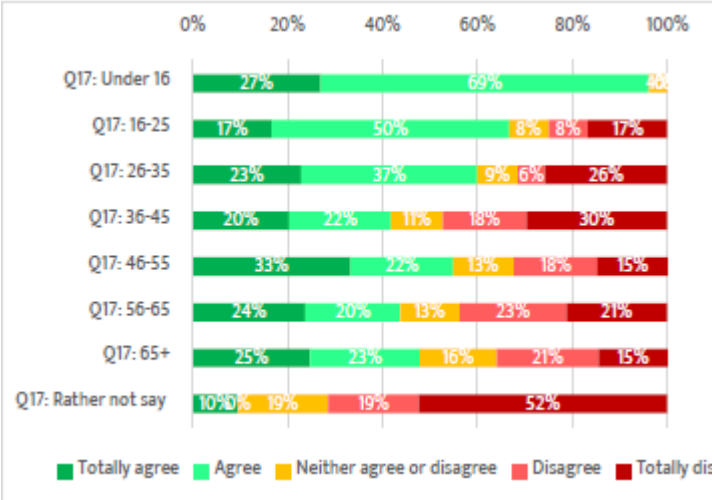


- 3.78 On the first question, for example, about whether the proposals would make Monnow Street “a better place for people to spend time”, 47% of drivers agreed or strongly agreed, compared to 51% of people who use public transport, 59% of people who walk and 76% of cyclists.
- 3.79 For the parking question, 37% of drivers agreed that the proposal “provides a balanced approach to disabled parking, short term parking, cycle parking and dropping off”, against 51% of people who walk, 58% of cyclists and 59% of public transport users.

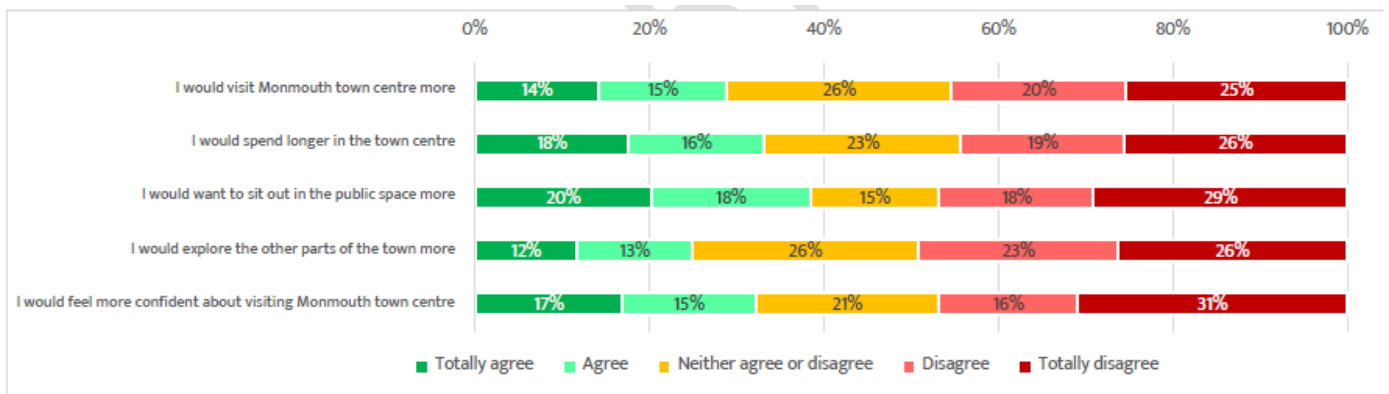
Analysis by Age and Gender

3.80 The analysis shows no significant differences in responses by gender. However, there was also significant variation in responses by age (although there were small sample sizes for some age groups, particularly 16-25 year olds). The chart below shows responses by age group to the first question. 96% of respondents under 16, 67% of 16-25 year olds and 55% of 46-55 year olds agreed or strongly agreed that the proposal “provides a better place for people to spend time”. This compares to 48% of people aged 65 and over, 44% of people aged 56-65 and 42% of people aged 36-45.

It provides a better place for people to spend time in and enjoy the town centre.



3.81 Respondents were also asked their views on the longer-term outcomes of the scheme in terms of its effect on their own use of the town centre. Answers to these questions are shown in the chart below.



- 3.82 Responses to these questions are more negative than those on specific design elements shown above. Between 45% and 49% disagree or totally disagree on each question, and the numbers who neither agree nor disagree are higher than for the design-specific questions.
- 3.83 This is at odds with the generally positive responses to the questions about elements of the design. This may reflect the fact that 89% of respondents already visit Monnow Street either daily or at least once a week: given that respondents' visits are already very frequent, it may be unlikely that any changes to Monnow Street would attract them to spend more time there or use it more extensively. This is particularly the case for the first two questions ("I would visit Monmouth town centre more" and "I would spend longer in the town centre").
- 3.84 These responses may also reflect the wider concerns referenced above, about the challenges which Monnow Street faces and the limitations of public realm and active travel improvements in addressing these challenges. As noted, the forthcoming Placemaking Plan will offer a mechanism to consider these issues.

4 EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

- 4.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment (incorporating equalities, future generations, Welsh language and socio-economic duty) is attached at Appendix 4.
- 4.2 The main impacts of the proposal identified in this impact assessment are:
- Positive impacts on the protected characteristics of age, disability, and pregnancy/maternity arising from the proposed improvements to the public realm in Monnow Street
 - Positive impacts in relation to socio-economic duty and social justice relating to the role public realm improvements which support walking can play in increasing inclusion and reducing inequality.
 - Positive impacts on all the well-being goals.
 - The development of the proposal meets the sustainable development principles.
 - No impact on safeguarding or corporate parenting.

5 OPTIONS APPRAISAL:

5.1 The table below provides an options appraisal for the proposal.

Options	Benefits	Risks	Comments/mitigation
Do nothing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No implementation costs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likely to be opposed by some stakeholders. Identified problems would not be addressed. Scheme objectives would not be met. Existing issues with temporary arrangement (eg in relation to drainage, uneven surfaces) will persist. The existing temporary measures have a limited lifespan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not likely to be sustainable beyond the short term.
Revert to pre-Covid layout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower implementation costs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likely to be opposed by some stakeholders Identified problems would not be addressed and would be likely to be exacerbated compared to current layout. Scheme objectives would not be met. No grant funding likely to be available for implementation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although some stakeholders would support this position, there is no evidence that it would address any of the identified issues and significant evidence from elsewhere to the contrary.
Develop alternative design solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May be possible to develop stronger consensus on proposals by restarting design process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likely to be opposed by some stakeholders. No funding available for design. Active Travel funding not likely to be available. Current proposal has been subject 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not clear that an alternative proposal would in reality attract greater support.

		<p>of extensive consultation – risk of consultation fatigue.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process would need to begin again – 2-3 years until design complete. 	
<p>Adopt the proposed design as recommended in this report</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses the problems and meets the objectives identified through the Weltag process • In line with community consultation which shows support for most design aspects of the proposals, and with business consultation which was strongly supportive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likely to be opposed by some stakeholders. • Significant funding required for implementation. • Longer construction period than doing nothing or reverting to pre-Covid layout, with some disruption for businesses and others who use Monnow Street. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential funding for implementation will be considered in a future report to Cabinet on regeneration priorities. See also section 7. • Programme will be carefully managed to minimise disruption.

6 REASONS:

- 6.1 The reasons for developing the proposed public realm and active travel improvements for Monnow Street, and for recommending their adoption as the Council's preferred scheme for Monnow Street, are set out in section 3.
- 6.2 It is acknowledged that public realm improvements in Monnow Street will not in themselves address all the challenges that Monmouth faces. The forthcoming Placemaking Plan will provide an opportunity to consider these wider challenges and the interventions that may address them, and this Plan opens up opportunities for accessing Welsh Government Transforming Towns grant funding. Other wider proposals remain under development for the town, including relocating an improved and modernised museum offer in Shire Hall, repurposing and refurbishing the indoor market building, and refreshing proposals for a visitor centre and café as an arrival point to Monmouth at Blestium Street. In combination, these proposals together with the Monnow Street public realm improvements and Transforming Town grant opportunities present the opportunity for impactful and positive change to revive the vitality and attractiveness of this important market town to the benefit of businesses, residents and visitors. The Monnow Street public realm works form an important and urgently needed intervention and it is therefore recommended that Scrutiny Committee endorses the proposals for Cabinet to proceed, subject to funding being identified.

7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 7.1 Significant funding would be required to implement the proposal. High level cost estimates for a broadly similar scheme, prepared to inform the Council's Round 2 Levelling Up bid, suggested construction costs of £6.1m. It is considered that this investment would improve Monmouth's attractiveness as a key market town to both residents from Monmouth town and its hinterland and tourists, helping to make Monnow Street an attractive place to dwell, supporting vitality, footfall and local businesses.
- 7.2 There is potential to secure funding to support the delivery of this scheme from the Welsh Government's Transforming Towns programme and/or from Round 3 of the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund. Welsh Government Active Travel funding may also offer some potential funding although this is likely to be limited relative to the total construction cost. Most grant funding streams require an element of match funding, which would be a financial implication for MCC. Project delivery would be led by existing staff resources within the Regeneration team.
- 7.3 Most grant funding streams require an element of match funding, which would be a financial implication for MCC, requiring approval as a capital expenditure commitment. A report considering regeneration funding and priorities across the county is expected to be presented to Cabinet on 7 June 2023.
- 7.4 Project delivery would be led by existing staff resources within the Regeneration team.

8 CONSULTEES:

- 8.1 There has been extensive public and stakeholder consultation throughout the three stages of project development for the Monnow Street proposals. This is described in section 3.
- 8.2 In addition, the following have been consulted:
- Cabinet
 - County councillors in Monmouth and adjacent wards
 - Monmouth Town Council
 - Officers in Active Travel, Highways Management, Highway Operations, Planning/Heritage/Urban Design, Transport Planning & Policy, Passenger Transport, Civil Enforcement, Green Infrastructure.

9 BACKGROUND PAPERS:

- 9.1 Monnow Street Weltag Stage 1 Study: Final Report, January 2021
- 9.2 Monnow Street Weltag Stage 2 Study: Final Report, April 2022

10 AUTHOR:

Daniel Fordham, Regeneration Manager

11 CONTACT DETAILS:

danielfordham@monmouthshire.gov.uk, 07890 024489

Appendix 1: Monnow Street proposed concept design and artists' impressions

Appendix 2: Monnow Street design report

Appendix 3: Report of consultation (WeITAG stage 3)

Appendices:

- a) Community survey & exhibition results
- b) Stakeholder co production workshop notes
- c) Comprehensive School & Social Circles workshop notes

Appendix 4: Integrated Impact Assessment (incorporating equalities, future generations, Welsh language, and socio-economic duty)