

Report of the Director of Environment, Transport and Planning

City centre access: reviewing the implementation / restoration of access for blue badge holders; including data on the numbers/types of vehicles accessing during foot street hours. Plus looking at faults with HVB

Summary

- 1 This report presents an overview of the process to permit Blue Badge holders to drive on some streets in the city centre during pedestrianised hours.

Background

- 2 The Council Plan approved by executive in September 2023 commits to review Blue Badge access.
- 3 Between 7 August and 18 September 2023 the Council consulted on a set of principles to underpin any decision to permit Blue Badge holders to drive during pedestrianised hours on some streets.
- 4 These principles were
 - **Principle 1 - Return to previous access**

This principle aims, subject to full consultation, to revert to the Blue Badge accessibility measures that were in place before the emergency COVID measures and the Council's decision of November 2021 to make them permanent.
 - **Principle 2 - City centre events**

Some events, as prior to the November 2021 decision, may require Blue Badge access to be suspended at times (for example during the Christmas Markets).

- **Principle 3 - Recognising Security Risks**

In light of any security risk intelligence, the Police will have the power to lock down all access to the City Centre under an Anti-Terrorism Traffic Regulation Order, a counter-terrorism measure under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

- **Principle 4 - Finding solutions**

the Council Executive agrees to restore Blue Badge access through the new hostile vehicle barriers, then the council will work with Blue Badge holders on the detailed ways to achieve this

- **Principle 5 - Longer term improvements**

The Council is committed to considering and implementing longer-term improvements to accessibility in the city, taking into consideration the needs and opinions of the community on an ongoing basis, including in the development of its Transport Strategy

- 5 Each of the principles were endorsed by the respondents with differing levels of support. Based upon these principles Executive made the decision in October 2023 to continue the delivery of the Hostile Vehicle Mitigation Measures, and that Blue Badge Access will be permitted through those measures during pedestrianised hours. This provided Blue Badge holder access to Blake Street, Lendal, St. Helen's Square, Goodramgate (between Deangate and King's Square), Church Street, Kings' Square and Colliergate.
- 6 Executive recognised that at some points during the year access maybe restricted for an event to take place in the pedestrianised are (particularly in Parliament Street). They also agreed to start the process and consultation of developing an Anti-Terrorism Traffic Regulation Order.
- 7 Access for Blue Badge holders to the city centre was reinstated for Goodramgate to Colliergate in January 2024, with Blake Street to Lendal opening following the completion of the hostile vehicle mitigation measures in March 2024, the same streets that Blue Badge holders had access to prior to covid.

- 8 This has been facilitated by staff at the two entry points who enable access for Blue Badge holders but prevent other unauthorised access.
- 9 When ever the reinstated access is restricted e.g. through road works, failure of an HVM bollard or during an event Blue Badge holders are contacted in advance (where possible) via email or letter. Letters and emails for the Christmas Market have been issued to Blue Badge holders. The Goodramgate bollards failed on the 24th September, emails were sent to our contacts and distribution lists. The barriers were then opened from early afternoon on the 25th September after the manufacturer had repaired.
- 10 The Council have been approached by the police to develop a Anti Terrorism Traffic Regulation Order, as agreed in the Executive Report of October 2023. Work is ongoing and public consultation on the proposed draft will happen in the near future.
- 11 In developing a New Local Transport Strategy the Executive first adopted a series of Policy Focus Areas, The first one is Improving accessibility - to shape a city that is accessible to everyone – so that everyone, including young people, women, disabled people and anyone with a protected characteristic, is able to access all the facilities which they need, and all areas of the city, and its villages, have accessible, reliable and affordable bus services to key destinations.
- 12 In response the council commissioned independent accessibility consultants, MIMA, and the Centre for Applied Human Rights to work together and co-design a series of recommendations setting out the requirements of the disabled community to help inform Executive consider subsequent decisions to develop a more accessible city centre
- 13 By listening to and learning from the disabled community, though a series of workshops, drawing on feedback collated during the removal and reinstatement of Blue Badge holder access and from Our Big Transport Consultation, the recommendations are rooted in rich and valuable insight that will inform the development of both movement (transport) and place (regeneration) schemes. For example, the recommendations helped inform aspects of the development of the Acomb Front Street scheme.
- 14 In addition, MIMA provided a report setting out best practice from cities, showing how it is possible to continue to protect the city with hostile vehicle measures, whilst still remaining accessible and welcoming.
- 15 Both of the above documents were adopted at Executive in July 2024.

- 16 Part of MIMA's commission was to explore if there was a better way to permit Blue Badge access. They identified that Chester were permitting access in the same way as York. In addition, the consultation with the disabled community demonstrated there is no one clear solution to providing access using technology alone options such as a booking system or showing the Blue Badge to a camera raised issues that need further work.
- 17 The number of vehicles using a Blue Badge to access the pedestrianised area is published on the open data platform, the current average is just over 18 people accessing per day. It is noticeable that more people use the Blue Badge for vehicle access during the week than at weekends. We have ensured Blue Badge holders can also gain access via a taxi, although this is low at just 4%. Approximately 80% of those accessing are residents. <https://data.yorkopendata.org/dataset/blue-badge-city-centre-access-points-usage>

Consultation

- 18 The consultation took place over several months. The council wish to thank everyone who took part (either in the workshops, or responding to the surveys) and to those who contributed their lived experience to help both lift the restrictions and develop the Local Transport Strategy and subsequent implementation plan.
- 19 In August-September 2023, as detailed in the report above, first the council consulted on the principles of blue badge access being reinstated.
- 20 The consultation approach to both understand how best remove the restrictions and then understand how to shape a more accessible city centre was shared with community groups to invite them to consider how the council could encourage as broad representation as possible.
- 21 In December 2023, drop-in sessions and an on and offline survey encouraged Blue Badge Holders to share their thoughts about how access could work in practice.
- 22 In the meantime, to support the longer-term intention to shape a more accessible city centre, MIMA independent access consultants and the Centre for Applied Human Rights, were commissioned to run a series of workshops with the disabled community and local city centre businesses including café licence holders. The workshops were in two phases, first to

inform the development of the recommendations then to test the recommendations. Feedback was also collated from the Big Transport Conversation that took place during the same period and shared with MIMA to further inform the recommendations.

23 These recommendations were approved by Executive in July 2024.

Options

24 No options are identified as this report provides an overview to the Economy, Place, Access and Transport Scrutiny Committee.

Analysis

25 As above, no options are identified in this report to the Economy, Place, Access and Transport Scrutiny Committee.

Council Plan

26 Blue Badge access is intrinsically linked to our four key commitments particularly the commitments on Equality and Human Rights and the Health and Wellbeing. Listening and learning from the disabled community and reviewing Blue Badge access was a specific commitment of the Council Plan as part of making the city accessible for all.

Implications

27 The following implications have been identified. This is an overview report and no implications have been identified from updating the committee. However, detailed implications particularly equalities, legal and financial were considered at each decision point and detailed equalities impact assessment prepared and reviewed

Risk Management

28 No risk identified linked to this report to the Economy, Place, Access and Transport Scrutiny Committee.

Recommendations

29 No recommendations are identified as this is an overview report to the Economy, Place, Access and Transport Scrutiny Committee, providing background information on Blue Badge access.

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Report
Approved

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Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

Key background Papers are

Consideration of changes to the City Centre Traffic Regulation Order (Footstreets) – October 2023

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=733&MIId=13931>

Local Transport Strategy - July Executive 2024

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=733&MIId=14499>

Each of these has its own background papers and annexes.