



# The Chepstow Society

*Secretary*  
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15 May 2021

Dear Councillor

I understand that Chepstow Town Council is holding an extraordinary meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> May to consider the current situation regarding the pedestrianisation of the High Street.

Unfortunately, the date and time of the Council meeting coincide exactly with the long-established date and time of the Chepstow Society's Annual General Meeting, also via Zoom on 19<sup>th</sup> May, so that we will be unable to observe or take part in the Council meeting.

The Chepstow Society is the long-established civic, amenity and historical society for the whole of Chepstow and its environs, and we actively support measures to maintain and improve the town's amenities and environment. We would be grateful if you could consider these comments in your discussions.

Given the COVID-19 pandemic, we support many of the actions of the County Council and Town Council in making the town centre safer and more attractive for residents and visitors, and we share the widespread concerns over the future economic viability of the High Street and its businesses.

When the temporary measures to close the Arch and the High Street to non-essential traffic were introduced, we had no objection, although we shared what we understood to be the Town Council's concerns over the lack of proper consultation beforehand by the County Council.

However, we are concerned about some of the more recent developments, including the removal of the pelican crossing and what appear to be the aspirations of the County Council to make the highway and environmental changes permanent, without going through adequate public consultation with residents and businesses in the town.

## **Station Road and High Street**

We are concerned that the removal of the pelican crossing in Station Road (Superdrug / Coffee#1) may present dangers to pedestrians, particularly those with limited mobility including the elderly; parents with young children; and those with limited sight. We welcome the narrowing of the road, but we fear that some vehicles will continue to turn into the road from the A48 at an excessive

speed, and that the absence of a stop signal and safe crossing place is likely to result in injuries to pedestrians. The Equality Impact Assessment report to the County Council in September 2020 noted that the change would be “likely to disproportionately affect disabled people especially people with visual impairments”. This should not be an acceptable approach.

It remains unclear whether zebra crossing markings are to be added at that crossing – the most recent town centre leaflet simply refers to “zebra crossing(s)” without being specific. The diagram in the leaflet appears to show one zebra crossing, east-west from St Mary Street to the bus stop area. That is desirable, but the main desire line for pedestrians will continue to be the crossing of Station Road, between the High Street and St Mary Street.

The scale of the current works, and the time being taken over them, suggest that the County Council see the changes in the High Street, as the first step towards permanent pedestrianisation. We note that the most recent leaflet states that: “If some of the changes are successful, we will consider making them permanent, following future consultation.”

Such consultation needs to involve the community as a whole – rather than, as we fear, being a notional and partial “consultation” solely with long-established stakeholder bodies.

### **Closure of Town Arch and effects on road system, including Moor Street / Hardwick Terrace**

We are also concerned about the apparent intention of the County Council to encourage even more traffic onto the A48, a road which is already known to be inadequate, heavily congested at times, a serious contributor of air pollution in the area, and yet the only east-west road through the town.

The closure of the Arch, and to a lesser but significant extent the reduction in capacity envisaged at the old Chepstow Bridge, will add to the existing problems of traffic movement within and around the town. Requiring more local traffic to use a trunk road for short or medium-length trips is contrary to what we understand to be good practice.

We recognise the desire of the County Council to prioritise other means of transport. However, decisions on road closures need to be based on practicalities – how people will behave, not on abstract aspirations as to how they *should* behave. The extent to which road traffic will return to pre-pandemic levels is uncertain, but the scale of ongoing and future committed and planned housing development in Chepstow and the Forest of Dean means that it is likely that road traffic on the A48 will grow rather than fall in the future.

Closing the Arch means that all vehicles moving between the eastern side of the town (including Lower Chepstow and Tutshill) and the northern side (including the Danes, the school and leisure centre, and the roads towards Monmouth and Usk) will have to use the A48. When that road is blocked – whether through sheer volume of traffic, road works, a breakdown, or an accident, as happens on a regular basis– there is no alternative route. The nearest route that people would consider using is via the narrow and winding minor roads between Hewelsfield and Brockweir.

Much of the traffic that previously passed under the Arch will also have to use Moor Street, in both directions. The junction between the A48 and Moor Street / Hardwick Terrace is often dangerous for users, because of its gradient and the speed of traffic on the A48, and generates congestion. Moor Street itself is a shopping street, part of the town centre, where environmental improvements to benefit businesses and shoppers also need to be considered. More vehicle traffic on the street would be detrimental to the area.

If the intention is to open up access in cases of emergency, such as a blockage on the A48, this would inevitably take some time to implement and would not have an immediate effect.

If measures are put in place to limit access through the Arch to certain times, it is not clear how that would be managed, given that, if the road is physically open outside those times, there is a danger that some motor vehicles may continue to use it even if lights are set at red. Already, the road through the Arch has been partly opened on occasion. This presents dangers to pedestrians walking beneath the Arch.

It is worth noting that previous attempts to set up a one-way system in and around the High Street resulted in gridlock, and were ended within weeks. As road traffic increases with pandemic restrictions being eased, we are concerned that this may be repeated.

### **Alternatives**

Clearly there are some advantages, to pedestrians and to businesses, in reducing the amount of traffic in the High Street, and in the environmental improvements. But, given the notorious lack of alternative routes through and around the town, there needs to be a balance between those improvements and the need to cater for the continuing needs of road users.

Intermediate or alternative measures seem not to have been considered in this exercise. For example, allowing access through the Arch from both directions, but changing the priorities of the traffic lights, could be used to discourage unnecessary traffic while permitting essential access and allowing a one-way system in the High Street and Bank Street.

Similarly, no consideration seems to have been given to replicating the High Street / Bank Street system to the west, by making Moor Street one-way westwards (uphill) and Thomas Street one-way eastwards (downhill).

### **Conclusion**

The Society hopes that the points in this letter will be carefully considered by the Town Council, and in turn by the County Council.

We hope that there will be further discussion of these and other matters at our next Chepstow Society Civic and Amenity Zoom meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> June, to which all town and local county councillors will of course be invited, along with Society members and others.

I look forward to hearing the outcome of the Council meeting, and for continuing good liaison between yourselves and the Society in progressing our shared objectives for the town's future.

Yours sincerely

Guy Hamilton  
Secretary, The Chepstow Society