



PLANS TO RID HEREFORD OF ITS TRAFFIC BLACKSPOT

Hereford's inner ring road will be transformed into a pedestrian-friendly tree lined boulevard as part of ESG plans to revitalise the city centre.

The transformation of Newmarket Street/Blueschool Street into a continental style pedestrian friendly 'shared space,' will link the historic core of the city with the new homes, leisure outlets and shops on the 100 acre ESG site.

The vision is to create a 'shared space' boulevard as part of a vibrant and extended city centre, ending the 'barrier' mentality enforced by the inner ring road. People will flow freely and safely between the historic core and the new development of homes, shops and leisure facilities. Initial designs for the new look road were unveiled at the Shire Hall on Monday (February 8) as the first stage of a countywide consultation process.

These works to the inner ring road will be the first major city centre road improvement since the inner ring road was built almost half a century ago. Together with the proposed new link road, these plans will greatly benefit cross-city traffic flows; a significant amount of peak-time traffic now using the east/west cross-city section of the inner ring road will be switched to a new link road from Edgar Street to Commercial Street, by the Morrison's junction.

Jonathan Bretherton, chief executive at ESG said: "This stretch of road right through the centre of the city has long been a nightmare for motorists and pedestrians alike. Now, as part of the ESG plan to improve connectivity, we can look forward to both sharing the space in harmony. These are proposals I am sure everyone will welcome."

Cllr Roger Phillips, Leader of Herefordshire Council, said: "The inner ring road is well past its sell-by date. It slices through the city centre and adds to our traffic woes. Its

transformation will make Hereford a better, easier and calmer place for shoppers and tourists to visit.”

Funding for transforming the inner ring road into a pedestrian-friendly link between the city centre and the new development will be provided by Stanhope Plc, one of the UK's leading development companies, as part of their commitment to ensuring that the new retail and leisure facilities work in harmony with Hereford's current retail offer.

Alistair Shaw of Stanhope comments, “Stanhope has always believed that the long term success of the redevelopment of the former livestock market will depend on it being complementary to Hereford's existing retail offer. For the two elements to work together successfully it is vital that the ESG site is well connected to Hereford's existing retail offer, which is why the redesign of Newmarket Street and Blueschool Street is so integral to the project.

“Following the pedestrian-friendly redesign of Newmarket Street and Blueschool Street the proposed retail and leisure development will be just 200m from High Town, which is less than a five minute walk.

“However, it is important that we get the connectivity right, and some of the top international streetscape designers have worked on the road project, seeking inspiration from similar schemes in the UK and around Europe, and at Stanhope we are confident that when completed Hereford's new boulevard will rank amongst the best.”

Ben Hamilton-Baillie, internationally renowned for his work on urban street design has been working alongside Kelvin Campbell and his team at Urban Initiatives, responsible for the concept plans. Ben commented that the bleak dual-carriageway, punctuated by occasional cattle pen pedestrian crossings or dark subways, isolated the city both physically and psychologically from the railway station, the Courtyard theatre and the redevelopment opportunities now available to the east of Edgar Street.

Boldness, innovation and creativity are needed to overcome the mistakes of the 1960s, he said. Although high volumes of traffic would still use the road, the aim is to make it a civilised part of the city centre. The key to this approach, he added, was the creation of a streetscape which allows traffic to move slowly and steadily, in contrast to the current stop-start high speed movement. Reducing sign clutter and road markings, removing signals and barriers and replacing highway characteristics with qualities associated with Hereford lie at the heart of the emerging proposals. The design team has set out to create a 'sense of place' out of the bleak and inhospitable intersections along the road. It also envisages opportunities for new shop frontages, said Mr Hamilton-Baillie.

Importantly, the decision has been taken to incorporate Commercial Square and Commercial Road up to its junction with Union Walk in the new look streetscape designed to improve connectivity and give pedestrians and cyclists a new sense of ownership of the roads whilst continuing to allow public and private traffic to flow freely.

Following further public consultation by ESG, Stanhope's professional team will refine the plans as part of a masterplan for the redevelopment of the former livestock market site. The new link road is expected to be open late 2013, but work on the Newmarket Street/Blue School Street scheme, subject to planning approval, could well start earlier.

Key points in the plans

- Improved connectivity. Four main controlled pedestrian crossings along the route.
- Public transport improvements. Bus stops and taxi ranks provided. Potential for on -street parking in the evenings.
- Current two lane system remains.
- Traffic flow greatly reduced.. A calmer, more pleasant environment for those visiting the extended city centre. Less air pollution.
- Improved access to car parks. Cars leaving Maylord shopping centre would be able to go eastbound, using a gyratory system opposite the car park exit. West bound traffic can turn right directly into Widemarsh Street to enter Garrick multi-storey car park.
- Widemarsh junction, a former walled city gateway, becomes a major plaza style feature, an iconic public space between the old and the new, and the main link between the two. Work is about to start on a new-look Widemarsh Street, one of the main links to an extended city centre.
- Similarly, Commercial Square, another of the old gate entrances, will be sympathetically re-designed to create a sense of harmony between people and traffic, and creating lots of new opportunities for businesses in that part of the city.

- Provision is incorporated in the designs for the disabled and visually impaired.
- Allows Hereford city centre to build outwards with confidence for a new and prosperous future.