

HoTT consultation comments on Kirklees Council proposals for Major Road Improvements to Holmfirth Town Centre

April 2019





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1. Introduction

Kirklees Metropolitan Council (the Council) has published their plans for **Major Road Improvements: Holmfirth Town Centre Access Plan** for addressing the traffic congestion in Holmfirth Town centre. In conjunction with the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA), they are consulting on their proposals (**the Proposed Scheme**), available for download at <https://www.yourvoice.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/holmfirth>, with comments due back by 5th April 2019.

This document sets out comments by **Holmfirth Transition Town (HoTT)** on the proposal, with our principal contact being Janet Williams, Chair of HoTT, 77 Totties, Scholes, Holmfirth HD9 1UJ, West Yorkshire.

HoTT, a community group with over 400+ supporters based in the upper Holme Valley, south of Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, UK, is part of the global Transition Town movement which promotes the building of resilient and sustainable local communities, a key part of which is encouraging self-sufficiency and a low carbon lifestyle. There are over 450 officially recognised transition initiatives worldwide in 34 countries. A transition initiative is run independently and is not affiliated to any faith group or political party.



Transition:

It's like change, only better.

HoTT was founded in 2010 as a community group to promote the building of a resilient and sustainable local community within the Holme Valley area, to counter the growing impact of climate change. We aim to encourage self-sufficiency and a low carbon lifestyle, focusing on the energy, food, waste, transport, housing and work aspects of everyday life within our local community.

Since its inception HoTT has initiated a number of projects in the Holme Valley including:

- installing a **community wind turbine** at Longley with surplus funds created being fed back into sustainable low-carbon projects in the Holme Valley.
- working with Yorkshire Water on a **feasibility study for water power** and promoting further energy saving projects
- working with Kirklees Council on their Warm Zone initiative and continues to offer **free advice on energy saving**, insulation and free curtain lining to reduce residential fuel consumption.
- setting up **community vegetable growing** areas within the town and as HoTT Edible we are working with Holmfirth Library to increase local vegetable and fruit growing areas.
- promoting more local **waste recycling** by publishing a Local Recycling Directory of where to recycle those wastes the Council's Green Bin collection service will not accept.
- **planting trees** in conjunction with Longley Farm to assist in alleviating carbon dioxide levels locally.

2. HoTT Commentary on the Proposed Scheme

HoTT are concerned about the impact of the scheme on the Holmfirth town centre environment and our comments are based on our aims as stated above, and the principles of reducing car dependency, encouraging cycling and walking, reducing our dependency on carbon fuels and creating a sustainable way of living in the Holme Valley

2.1 The Proposed Scheme

In their communications to residents, **the Council state "Holmfirth town centre can be very busy. Local roads in the town need to cope with the traffic using them. Delay and Congestions has become a common sight; in particular, the junction of Victoria Street and the A6024. Kirklees Council, in conjunction with the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, is developing proposals to ease congestion"**

The major road scheme now proposed is their low-cost option, involving routing traffic down Hollowgate and across a new road bridge over the river, in place of the existing Market Hall which will be demolished, to form a



one-way circular road around the centre of Holmfirth. The scheme involves the investment of some £5m in land acquisition and the construction the road improvements.

2.2 Motor vehicle traffic

Holmfirth Town centre, since the addition of traffic lights, often suffers from slow traffic flow, congestion and consequent air pollution. This is caused by the growth in through traffic and local traffic, hampered by narrow restricted roads in the Town centre. Traffic flows are predicted to increase through the Town centre for the following reasons:

Through traffic

The key Trans-Pennine routes, the A628, A62 and M62 are increasingly congested, increasing the use of the A635 through Holmfirth as an alternative by HGV's (heavy goods vehicles). When the A628 'Woodhead Pass' is closed by high winds or snowy weather, traffic is diverted through Holmfirth (via the A635) creating significant tail-backs and congestion throughout the valley. These diversions include HGVs which cause particular irritation and damage to street furniture. Recent incidents with large HGVs ignoring weight limit signs and getting stuck on Hollowgate in the centre of Holmfirth have damaged infrastructure, caused significant delays and added to local frustration. Without significant improvements to regional road networks, further increases in through traffic in Holmfirth appear inevitable

Local and commuter traffic

Travel to work data provided by Kirklees from the 2011 Census shows that 18.8% of people in the Holme Valley travel to work within the Holme Valley, whilst 35% travel elsewhere in Kirklees. As the Holme Valley borders Derbyshire, South Yorkshire and Greater Manchester, commuting outside of Kirklees is relatively high. The very limited public transport connectivity to these locations contributes to a high level of commuting outside of Kirklees by car.

To some extent traffic is always viewed negatively as it delays journeys and causes air pollution, but it is an inevitable result of dependence on private cars. According to the 2011 Census data on travel to work over 50% of people in the Holme Valley travel to work by car or van (either as the driver or a passenger) and this inevitably has consequences for congestion, particularly at peak times. According to the 2011 Census, over 85% households have a car or van with over 44% having two or more.

Parking

Traffic flows are impacted to by parked vehicles restricting our narrow roads. The parking bays in Victoria Street contribute to congestion as buses/HGV lorries cannot get along Victoria Street due to buses /HGVs in the opposite direction unable to get passed the parked cars. Similarly parking on Dunford Road restricts traffic movements, however this affords local residents of the many terraced houses, the only opportunity to park their cars close to their homes.

Whilst the arrival of autonomous vehicles over the next 5 to 10 years may radically change traffic patterns and flows, it is unlikely to significantly reduce car ownership and traffic flows in our rural area. It may however replace the need for Town centre street parking bays, with a corresponding need for town centre loading bays and additional accessible car parks for remote parking of autonomous vehicles.

Traffic volumes

Realistically, congestion, or the volume of traffic, around the Town centre can only be addressed by reducing the numbers of vehicles using the Town's roads or by diverting/bypassing the traffic around the Town centre.

As more houses are developed in the Holme Valley, traffic volumes will inevitably increase and, whilst it is recognised that there is a need to alleviate the impact of the numbers of cars passing through the area and reduce their journey times, routing traffic through the centre of the town does not appear to achieve these aims.



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The Council themselves recognise that the scheme proposed will not reduce traffic volumes or congestion below current levels and say, *“This option is unlikely to make any improvements to current journey time and as a consequence, journey times will continue to increase year on year.”*

The proposed scheme is therefore unlikely to reduce the traffic volumes flowing through the town centre and at best will just lower future rises in traffic volumes and reduce but not eliminate congestion in the Town centre.

2.3 Pedestrian Access

The proposed scheme appears to give little consideration to improved pedestrian access around the town centre and it is likely that such measures as routing through traffic down Hollowgate will make pedestrian access worse.

Access for people with disabilities will also become more difficult and there appear to be no measures offered to improve their access.

2.4 Walking and Cycling

The proposed scheme gives little consideration to improved access for walkers and cyclists in the area, whether local residents or the increasing number of sports cyclists who come to the area following the Tour de France in 2014.

The routing of motor vehicle traffic down our narrow town streets such as Hollowgate, does not create a pleasant environment for walking or cycling and the proximity to HGV's (heavy goods vehicles) will increase the risk of accidents to walkers and cyclists and may drive them away from visiting the Town centre and the local area.

2.5 Environmental

The increased traffic flows and the routing of this traffic through the town centre will inevitably increase air pollution due to dioxins and particulates from motor vehicle, with consequent reductions in air quality. Whilst air pollution in Holmfirth may not currently exceed permissible standards, with the increasing efforts being made nationally to improve air quality, particularly by reducing traffic pollution, a scheme which increases rather than reduces air quality does not seem to be in the interests of our local community.

As well as reducing air quality, the scheme encroaches on the public open spaces in the Town centre and does not appear to offer any significant environmental benefits to our local community.

2.6 Cultural Heritage

The town of Holmfirth has a long and varied history, reflected in the character of its buildings, roads, shops and other facilities including its two main rivers which join in the Town centre.

If the scheme requires demolishing historic buildings, this could risk damaging the very character of the town and, whilst making traffic flow through the town faster, could lead to increased speeds of traffic through the centre. Allowing the public realm to become dominated by traffic can sever connectivity for pedestrians and non-car users, reducing the quality of the environment and undermining the sense of place in a location.

The character of the old Town has also shaped the town's more recent cultural heritage – its festivals! The Town holds a number of festivals throughout the year, several of which are street festivals and rely on the use of the open spaces and streets in the Town centre. These Holmfirth festivals include: Folk Festival, Film Festival, Arts Festival, Art Week, Duck Race, and Food & Drink Festival and rely on the closure and full use of Hollowgate for the stalls for the weekend.

The scheme will severely impact on these open spaces and streets, initially by being closed off for a year for the construction of the Major Road works and then by restricted or reduced pedestrian access due to the proximity of the vehicular traffic, particularly down Hollowgate. Whilst being disruptive for residents, this may drive away



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tourists and festival goers. Consequently, the scheme will significantly impact the capacity of the Town centre to hold these festivals and may cause some of them to fold.

2.7 Jobs and businesses

As a small rural town, Holmfirth has to work hard to keep its town centre shops and businesses – in many similar rural areas around the country, town centres are failing. The success of Holmfirth as a centre has been due to the synergy between its popularity as a residential area and the vibrancy of its tourism, mainly due to the character of the town centre, the linkage with the long running ‘Last of the Summer Wine’ TV series and last but not least, a variety of popular local festivals, bars, restaurants and entertainments.

The tourism brings in significant economic revenues to the local area, which many local businesses depend on to survive. The proposed scheme is likely to have significant impact on these revenues, in the short term through the yearlong construction disruption in the centre of the town, and in the longer term from the reduction in tourism with the change in character of the town and fewer local festivals as discussed in 2.6.

2.8 Local Policies and Plans

The scheme appears to contradict the Kirklees own Local Development Plan (LDP) and the Holme Valley Draft Neighbourhood Plan (NP) as detailed below:

- The scheme contradicts the strategic objectives of the recently adopted Kirklees wide Local Plan and in particular those objectives listed in paragraph 4.5 of the plan which state that improvements to transport links should be ‘giving priority to public transport and to cycling and walking’(3), should be ‘promoting development that ‘helps to reduce and mitigate climate change’’ (7), and ‘protect and enhance the characteristics of the built, natural and historic environment’.(8).
- The scheme contradicts the recent Kirklees Council approved commitment to declare a Climate Emergency and the requirement in that declaration to ‘Consider Environmental Impact as part of any new policy.’ The potential to increase traffic by easing congestion should therefore have been analysed and published as part of this consultation.
- The scheme contradicts the Draft Holme Valley Neighbourhood Plan which places significant emphasis on retaining the character of local neighbourhoods in a way which is not consistent with easing the flow through Holmfirth for heavy lorries. The Neighbourhood Plan includes two specific draft objectives which are to:
 - ✓ **promote accessibility, infrastructure and movement around the Valley by promoting more sustainable transport choices.**
 - ✓ **promote sustainability, reduce impact on climate change and move towards a zero-carbon local economy.**

The Draft NP Policy 11: Improving Transport, Accessibility and Local Infrastructure is detailed in the Appendix and sets out the policies voted for at the Neighbourhood Plan Public Consultations.

The Neighbourhood Plan seeks to encourage a shift towards more sustainable use of public transport and promoting safer walking and cycle routes to encourage people to consider avoiding car use for short journeys. Creating a pleasant environment for walking or cycling is not purely a result of preventing vehicular access but rather changing the emphasis so cars are not seen as the priority in particular locations such as village centres or around schools.

The proposal to demolish several historic buildings could risk damaging the very character of the town and making traffic flow through the town faster, could lead to increased speeds of traffic through the centre. Allowing the public realm to become dominated by traffic can sever connectivity for pedestrians and non-car users, reducing the quality of the environment and undermining the sense of place in a location.



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An element of road infrastructure, such as a junction on a rural road, may be considered relatively low in impact when viewed only as the metalled road surface itself. However, once the need for road widening, signage, visibility splays, verges, drainage, fencing, and changes to boundary walls are considered, the overall result can be a significant change in the character of the place. The Neighbourhood Plan intends that any design process for highways should therefore be holistic and consider both the safety of road users and its specific location and sense of place.

The key principle which the Neighbourhood Plan wishes to highlight is that traffic flow is clearly important as it is a vital part of residents and businesses transporting themselves and their goods around the Valley. However, it must not dominate the environment and conflict with the character of the area which is so important to the community. Road widening to accommodate new vehicle movements should consider the aesthetic and traffic flow effect of the removal of verges and dry-stone walls and changes to the local character should be limited.

In the Neighbourhood Plan consultation, nearly 75% respondents to the consultation indicated that it was 'very easy' or 'easy' to move around the Holme Valley and further afield with only 4% saying it was 'very difficult'. It is suggested therefore that further detailed traffic surveys are required to ascertain the exact traffic movements in order to determine the best way to deflect the through traffic away from Holmfirth.

2.9 Conclusions

HoTT appreciate that the Council's proposals are intended to reduce congestion and increase traffic flows in the Town centre, and that the available budget is specifically for such schemes, however HoTT do not consider that the currently proposed scheme addresses the needs of Holmfirth Town centre. If implemented, it will make the A635 more attractive as an east to west trans Pennine route, therefore attracting more traffic, including more HGVs, through the town centre. This will have an adverse impact on Holmfirth unless diverted away from the town centre.

In time, the increase in traffic is likely to return congestion to present levels and beyond, thus negating any short-term traffic benefits of the scheme.

HoTT consider that Kirklees Council should not promote their major highway scheme through the Holmfirth town centre as proposed. The needs of Holmfirth town centre are such that a solution is required that seeks to both reduce and divert through traffic, with the purpose of improving:

- traffic flows
- town centre environment for the benefit of local residents, businesses, visitors, public transport users, pedestrians and cyclists, and
- local walking and cycling routes.

HoTT consider that any proposed transport planning for the future should therefore start from reducing the volume of motor vehicle traffic, not just mitigating the impact of it.

The proposal to use Hollowgate in the town centre as a major trafficked road is of particular concern. Currently, Hollowgate is a quiet road with easy pedestrian access to the shops and market. It is a narrow road unsuited for major traffic flow. Hollowgate is periodically closed to traffic from May through to September for various festivals which bring tourists to Holmfirth and are important for the town's economic survival. Hollowgate should be a quiet road with minimal traffic: it is part of the Holme Valley Riverside Way and could be enhanced as a largely pedestrian environment. It should not be permitted that HGVs can continue to use this route to bypass the traffic lights, get stuck and cause damage to the bridge and street furniture.



3 HoTT proposals for Alternatives

HoTT would encourage the Council to reconsider a different approach, centred on both reducing and diverting traffic flows away from the centre of Holmfirth, rather speeding up town centre traffic, as a means of reducing congestion. Taking a more holistic approach to needs of Holmfirth Town centre could result in benefits to pedestrians, cyclists and other town users as well as motorists.

Whilst localized traffic flows can be increased with reduced street parking, better junctions and other measures, road improvements generally result in increased traffic and reduced journey times, as confirmed by Kirklees own comments. Realistically, congestion in the Town centre can only be alleviated by measures which reduce or divert the number of cars and lorries / HGVs passing through the centre of Holmfirth.

For regional traffic flow improvements, the reduction in traffic volumes could be achieved by discussion with Highways England (and other interested parties) to agree a regional and inter regional HGV network which would exclude an HGV route through Holmfirth as its roads are unsuited to heavy goods vehicles. Consultation is also required to ensure that when main roads are closed, HGVs are redirected through more suitable road networks and not through Holmfirth Town centre.

For the town centre traffic improvements, HoTT would urge the Council to consider an alternative scheme which increases the pedestrianization of Holmfirth town centre by closing the Victoria Street as the main river crossing and diverting through-traffic north east of the town centre over a new bypass river crossing.

HoTT suggest the Council should be considering the following measures:

Regional traffic improvements:

- Lobbying, with other local authorities and organisations, for the improvement of the Woodhead trans Pennine route to a limited access dual carriageway standard.
- Working with other local authorities and Highways England to agree a regional and inter regional HGV network, and in the short term, prohibition of HGVs, except for access, on the A635 between New Mill and Woodhead Road Holmfirth.

Town centre traffic improvements:

- Hollowgate and Victoria Street to be pedestrianised, cycle friendly, with service/loading vehicle access only, with appropriate surfacing.
- Construction of a new two-way river crossing link road between Station Road and Huddersfield Road to the north east of Victoria Street.
- Demolition of the single storey extension and bridge to the Market Hall and opening up of the river and a river walk.

Other local improvements

- More long stay and visitor parking at Sands, consequent on the relocation of coach parking to the cattle market, and improvement of the riverside path to Bridge Street to an all-weather standard, suitable for pedestrians, cyclists and wheelchair users.
- Develop the Holme Valley Cycle Network, with priority to the Woodhead Road/Huddersfield Road A6024/A616 corridor.



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Any road scheme for Holmfirth should aim to have minimal impact on the town centre and its cultural heritage and should include consideration for cyclists, pedestrians and other town centre users in line with Kirklees Local Plan and the emerging Neighbourhood Plan.

Such a scheme should therefore:

- keep the town centre clear of traffic delays and congestion,
- pedestrianise Hollowgate except for service access,
- increase pedestrian and cycling access,
- maintain open spaces / parks
- maintain the character of the town buildings for cultural / heritage and tourism benefits
- seek to maintain the economic status of the town without disruption.

HoTT's vision for Holmfirth Town centre is for the town to become a resilient, sustainable and low-carbon community centred on the well-being of local residents. This is in line with the ambitions of the emerging Holme Valley Neighbourhood Plan and the need to preserve our cultural heritage and the enjoyment of the town centre by all.

We trust our comments are useful; HoTT representatives would be happy to meet with councillors to discuss these and our vision for Holmfirth Town centre.

Consultation comments by Holmfirth Transition Town (HoTT)

Date: 4th April 2019



Appendix – Holme Valley Neighbourhood Plan - Draft Policy 11

Draft Policy 11: Improving Transport, Accessibility and Local Infrastructure

Traffic Management and Design

1. Traffic management interventions should be managed on the basis of two principles:
 - a) a balanced approach, with pedestrians and cyclists treated with equivalent priority to vehicle users; and
 - b) minimal interventions, thereby enhancing the historic environment and public realm.
2. Any new schemes should aim to protect the key characteristics of transport corridors which contribute to the local distinctiveness of Holme Valley including grass verges, traditional road surfaces such as stone setts, and dry-stone walls as reflected in other policies within this NDP.
3. Widening roads or providing new footways should be considered on the basis of clear and compelling evidence of need on highway safety grounds.
4. Proposals to create 20mph speed limits in residential areas are encouraged.
5. Proposals to introduce weight limits on roads or access only for HGVs on the main through routes in the valley are encouraged.

Accessibility and Infrastructure

6. All development proposals should, where appropriate, include safe and legible access to local streets, footpaths, and publicly accessible spaces for all users to help support healthier lifestyles.
7. Layouts should be imaginative and adopt approaches that downplay the uninspiring, standard highway engineered standard by incorporating traffic calmed streets and nodal points, with frequent changes of direction, and introduce a sense of enclosure to reflect the traditional design and layout found in the Valley.
8. New vehicle and pedestrian route networks should be designed to link with routes and facilities adjacent to the site. A hierarchy of routes should be established.
9. Public transport, pedestrian and cycle routes should be incorporated in the layout wherever possible, especially where these can provide safe and convenient routes to schools, local shops and other facilities. The potential to connect the new development to the existing settlement by providing pedestrian and other non-vehicular routes through the site should be fully explored.
10. Major developments should consider opportunities to provide car share or car-pooling facilities.
11. Proposals to convert existing garaging into non parking provision is discouraged unless suitable alternative off road parking is available.
12. Proposals to develop new communal parking areas to reduce the amount of on-street parking will be encouraged where they are not in conflict with Green Belt or other NDP policies.
13. Proposals to develop 'park and walk' or 'park and ride' facilities to access Holmfirth Town Centre or festivals / events in the valley will be supported provided they comply with Green Belt policy and mitigate any detrimental impact on the landscape through appropriate surfacing and screening as necessary.



HoTT – Holmfirth Transition Town

Consultation comments on Town centre traffic plans

For further information on HoTT, please see our web site www.hott.org.uk or contact:

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