

The Canterbury Society

CONSULTATION RE WESTGATE AREA TRAFFIC SCHEME

We are writing to urge that the Westgate Towers traffic experiment should be re-considered, not abandoned. Clearly the scheme created some problems over the past few months, but it also demonstrated many gains, not least in a reduction by 15 per cent of traffic in the St Dunstan's area.

The coming of the high speed train has meant that the route through St Dunstan's and the Westgate is now a key entry point to the city, both for tourists and for those who live and work here. We should surely aim to make this part of the city as pleasant and traffic free as possible?

The experiment will not have been wasted if we can use the lessons learned to develop traffic arrangements which protect the gains while minimising the losses. In re-considering the scheme, there are three key issues.

First, much of the early antagonism to the scheme resulted from problems with pedestrian crossings. In particular, parents taking children to school in the city centre felt that they and their children were seriously at risk. So as well as plotting traffic flows, it will be important to consider where pedestrians walk. While the experiment is still going on it would be possible to monitor these flows.

Secondly, much of the congestion resulted from traffic backing up at key points. Traffic lights at the London Road roundabout were to have been installed, in order to ease the flow of traffic onto the ring road. Sadly these will not now go in, but should be part of any new scheme. Some of the congestion in Station Road West might have lessened if cars had been allowed along North Lane towards the Westgate.

Thirdly, much more could be done to reduce air pollution in the area. Experiments carried out by the University of Kent showed that motorists could be encouraged to turn off their car engines while waiting in traffic jams. In any future scheme reducing air pollution should be a central goal.

Sadly, in any planning change there are likely to be winners and losers. Recognising this might mean offering those most affected by extra traffic help with the costs of double glazing their windows. It may also mean recognising that a house in a city is likely to experience some traffic noise.

The long term aim must be to reduce the overall burden of traffic in Canterbury city centre. Ideas about how this might be done were the focus of the excellent report by Lynn Sloman, *Sustainable Transport: Blueprint for Canterbury*. You can see Lynn's talk, and read her slides at: www.canterburysociety.org.uk