

Zero Carbon Harrogate Response to the Harrogate Station Gateway Consultation

1. About Zero Carbon Harrogate

1.1. Zero Carbon Harrogate is a local charity with the aim of making the Harrogate District a net zero carbon community by 2030, in order that we play our part in the global effort to limit the most destructive aspects of climate change. We undertake advocacy work with both the general public and decision makers to promote behaviour and policy change to this end.

Change is needed in three areas: significantly reduced energy demand; increased production of renewable energy; and restoration of natural carbon sinks such as woodland and peatland. All three areas must be addressed to achieve sustainability, i.e., the ability to meet our current needs and wants without compromising the ability to do so in the future.

2. Local Transport

2.1. Transport is the greatest contributor to climate change in our district, being responsible for almost 50% of our carbon emissions. There is therefore an urgent need to reduce the energy demand associated with it. Improved efficiency of vehicles in manufacture and in use will provide a useful contribution but this will prove insufficient in isolation; we must also work toward a lower traffic future. These thoughts underpin our response to the Harrogate Station Gateway consultation.

2.2. Zero Carbon Harrogate would like to congratulate North Yorkshire County Council for working with other relevant authorities to not only secure funding for this project but to also provide such exciting possibilities. We would also like to formally thank the project team for the extremely constructive meeting we had with them on 11 March, 2021.

3. Our Support for Reduced Traffic Options

3.1. We support the one-lane option throughout the study area and the full pedestrianisation of James Street. We believe these options will maximise the potential for traffic reduction by rebalancing the relative attractiveness of making personal journeys by car compared to those made by more sustainable means (i.e., active travel or public transport). Sustainable travel will become safer, more convenient and more pleasant, whilst travel by private car will become a little less convenient. We anticipate that the latter point will generate some opposition but believe that both sides of the equation must be addressed in order to achieve traffic reduction. Simply inconveniencing the motorist will lead to resentment and in the absence of attractive alternatives may not reduce car use. However, simply providing such alternatives may not tempt sufficient people from their vehicles, given the high embedded costs associated with car ownership and the convenience of use.

3.2. The greater improvements in the public realm associated with the lower traffic options would be expected to increase Harrogate's attractiveness to residents and visitors. Logically this would be expected to lead to more visitors, more frequent visits and longer visits, all of which should benefit the economy. This is borne out by evidence from London <http://content.tfl.gov.uk/walking-cycling-economic-benefits-summary-pack.pdf> and elsewhere in this report:

3.3. We would like to comment on some specific proposals, some of which were discussed at our meeting:

- 3.3.1. We are supportive of the possibility of a wayfinding strategy as being beneficial to individual pedestrians and also to the town as a whole. The route from the station to the convention centre would be an excellent starting point for this and could prove akin to Sheffield's successful Gold Route.
- 3.3.2. We understand that the proposed scheme focuses on core cycle infrastructure in the town centre in order to improve cyclists' confidence in previously hostile areas and agree that given constraints of funding that this is the right approach. To ensure that the whole of the town centre is cycle and pedestrian friendly, we propose that the whole area bounded by West Park, Parliament Street, King's Road, Cheltenham Mount, Bower Road, East Parade, Station Bridge, Station Parade and York Place be designated a 20mph speed limit. A compromise could be to impose the 20mph only on those roads with no segregation between motor vehicles and cyclists, though the resultant frequent changes of speed limit could prove more confusing than beneficial. If such speed limits are put in place, together with any other measures helpful to prioritise cyclists on shared town centre roads, we would be supportive of a no cycling policy on a pedestrianised James Street.
- 3.3.3. We are very happy with the idea of linking the Nidderdale Greenway to the town centre by a quiet route connection involving the One Arch underpass, and given that the One Arch will thus become a key part of the cycling infrastructure we were happy to hear that there will hopefully be fewer bollards than indicated on current visuals. In order for this link to be effective, it is important that the route be both safe and convenient. Particular consideration must be given to the means of crossing Bower Road and the route from there to the existing Greenway. Assuming it will pass through the Asda car park, it is likely that changes will need to be made to vehicle access at Bower Road,

such as making it a one-way system. We appreciate that this is geographically outside the project area but hope that you will be able to facilitate liaison between all appropriate parties.

- 3.3.4. We would welcome any increase to the number, visibility and convenience of locations for car club vehicles to promote car sharing rather than direct ownership for those who do drive. Car clubs are a potentially very useful tool to benefit drivers while reducing car use. They have the potential to reduce overall costs of motoring while increasing the cost at point of use, thus rebalancing the individual's decision-making process in favour of sustainable travel.
- 3.3.5. In the "Zone 2: Station Square one lane option visualisation", it is not clear why the give way lines for southbound cyclists are set so far back from the crossing outside the station. Also, the change of the northbound cycle lane from the left to the right side of the road at this point, which is a very busy crossing point for pedestrians too, could prove chaotic to cyclists and pedestrians alike. Presumably this design was to avoid a cycle lane between the main carriageway and the taxi rank. Might it be better for the northbound cycle lane to remain on the left with a dropped kerb for taxis entering and leaving the rank? It would be easy enough for taxis to give way to oncoming cyclists, and there should be frequent breaks in vehicle traffic coming from behind, due to the operation of the pedestrian crossing at the bus station.
- 3.3.6. Zero Carbon Harrogate supports the project team's efforts to communicate that the proposals are not anti-car, although a reduction in traffic should be a stated aim. We have heard opposition based around the premise that not everyone can cycle or that some people need to drive. Although it may seem too obvious to need stating, we believe it should be strongly emphasised that the proposals are not premised on everyone cycling and nobody driving!

It probably needs to be made explicit that everyone who needs to, or even wants to drive will still be able to do so.

4. Opposition

4.1. We have become aware of opposition to the proposals based around people's perceived right to drive, often combined with the idea that we don't need to worry about the local and global effects of vehicle pollution, given the anticipated rapid uptake of electric vehicles over the next decade. We would strongly counter these points.

4.1.1. Given the large numbers of pedestrians in the project area, we believe the right to breathe clean air should be given higher weighting than the right to drive.

4.1.2. Electric vehicles should be seen as a modest improvement at best over petrol and diesel vehicles and certainly not as a panacea. Fifty per cent of local pollution comes from tyre and brake wear and electric vehicles will still produce this pollution. They are heavier and will therefore contribute more to road surface degradation. Regarding global pollution, about half of a conventional car's life-time contribution to climate change is associated with its manufacture and half is associated with use. Electric cars will therefore still contribute significantly to climate change and this will remain the case until all our energy is produced by non-polluting means. Given the number of other sectors needing to also decarbonise (cement and steel manufacture, heating, hydrogen production and aviation to name just a few) this will not be any time soon. As such, our focus must remain firmly on reducing traffic levels.

5. Communication

5.1. Zero Carbon Harrogate is used to the idea of meeting resistance to change and appreciates that this project will generate a mixed response. The key in our opinion is excellent communication to explain the reasons why change

is needed and also, importantly, how individual changes fit in with a wider plan. We appreciate that a wider plan can't all be introduced at once due to funding constraints, but we feel that the public are more likely to accept individual transport schemes if they see them as small pieces of a bigger plan, an overarching and well communicated transport vision for the district. It would be excellent if the Station Gateway project could prove the catalyst for the development of such a vision.

6. Opportunity

6.1. The project could certainly provide the opportunity to trial some positive changes which would be expected to be part of an overarching plan. The construction period of the project is likely to cause some disruption and congestion. It would seem to be both prudent and opportunistic to seize the chance to trial some congestion reduction measures during this time such as; initiatives to encourage sustainable travel to school (e.g., a publicity campaign and timed road closures outside schools); targeted promotion of car club and car share; and ideally trials of lower fares on public transport.

7. Conclusion

7.1. Zero Carbon Harrogate supports the lowest traffic options presented in the Harrogate Station Gateway consultation as we believe the result will be a more vibrant, pleasant and prosperous town. They will also best meet the wishes expressed by around 15,000 respondents to the Harrogate Congestion Study in 2019, who overwhelmingly supported measures to increase active travel and public transport. Finally, and crucially, they will be the best options to help tackle our increasingly urgent climate crisis.