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UPDATE: BRTC's consideration of a request to relocate bench from High Street to replace two older style benches in York Road, Bognor Regis.

Submitted by: Heather Allen, BR BID COO, 15.11.23

For final consideration by: Elected Members of BRTC Communities Engagement and Environment Committee.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following requests for support from businesses in the eastern end of High Street, the Bognor Regis Business Improvement District (BRBID) has carried out extensive background research and consultation around the potential relocation of a bench associated with anti-social behaviour (ASB) to submit to Bognor Regis Town Council's Community Engagement & Environment Committee.

This paper acts as an update to the extensive document shared with Elected Members in September, primarily focused on reporting the additional consultation carried out by BR BID in the interim period between CE&E Committee Meetings. For ease of reference, this document also provides a recap of the key issue, site-specific information, and ownership and maintenance responsibility for the benches at both High Street and York Road.

Following support from BRTC's CE&E Committee (02.10.23) for the BID proceeding with further action to progress the matter, the BID carried out further consultation with the wider community to fully satisfy WSCC Highways requirements. The nine days of public consultation resulted in seven individual responses, with 3/7 responses objecting to the relocation of the bench. WSCC Highways stipulate that evidence must be provided that each objection received has been considered on its own merit, and that individuals are invited to speak on the issue at the meeting where the decision will be made.

The BID Board of Directors therefore respectfully asks Elected Members of BRTC's CE&E Committee to allow representation from the public about this issue at its meeting on 4th December 2023, that Members carefully consider each of the individual objections presented through the various consultation exercises, and makes the final decision regarding the potential relocation of the bench. No funding commitment is requested or attached to this decision.

Having robustly followed through on a request from businesses located in East End, and met all requirements of WSCC Highways with respect to consultation, the BID accepts BRTC CE&E Committee's decision as final, and offers its ongoing support.

THE ISSUE

The BID's activity follows complaints from businesses about the use of the bench at High Street (east) for highly visible drug taking, drug sales, street drinking and anti-social behaviour. Businesses also report litter gathering around the base of the bench. This combination of factors is reported to deter footfall and create an unpleasant environment for the people that work and live there.

The BID has no responsibility for the bench in its current location, nor does it seek to represent any particular position on the future of the bench. All BID activity to date has been to progress concerns raised by businesses directly to the BID, (rather than any other organization), and all future BID activity will be determined by the decision of Elected Members of BRTC's CE&E Committee, following consideration of responses to the public consultation exercises.

WHAT IS THE BID ASKING OF BRTC'S CE&E COMMITTEE?

Following initial consideration of the issue at the CE&E meeting of 2nd October 2023, Elected Members of BRTC's CEE Committee are now respectfully asked to allow representation from the public at its meeting on 4th December 2023, carefully consider each of the individual objections presented through the various consultation exercises and make the final decision regarding the potential relocation of the bench. No funding commitment is requested or attached to the decision.

Having robustly followed through on a request for support from businesses located in East End, and met all requirements of WSCC Highways to reach this stage, the BID accepts the Committee's decision as final, and offers its ongoing support.

HIGH STREET BENCH: SITE DETAILS RECAP

The bench on High Street is positioned on the southern side of the road, outside the ex-Post Office building which has been closed for at least five years. The absence of people going in and out of or inhabiting the building make it more attractive for anti-social uses as it is relatively undisturbed.

Aside from the 360 degree CCTV camera at the junction of High Street and Clarence Road, there is no additional CCTV facing onto the public realm at High Street (east), or specifically capturing activity at the bench.

The bench is the only seating in the public realm in High Street between the northern entrance of The Arcade and the junction with Clarence Road.

The bench is close to the bus stop located at the junction with Sussex Street. However, unlike a purpose-built bus shelter with seating, the distance from the bench to the bus stop suggests they are unconnected. As an observation, the existence of a loading bay directly in front of the bench may obscure any waiting bus passengers' view of the road, and equally obscure any potential passengers waiting on the bench from the view of the bus driver.

HIGH STREET (EASTERN END) : UPCOMING PROJECT DELIVERY

The eastern section of High Street has been identified as a key route in the multi-stakeholder Wayfaring Strategy initiative. As a result of funding secured by the BR Regeneration Board on behalf of stakeholder partners, this section of High Street (east) will benefit from a major investment in signage and visual enhancements in the financial year 2024-25. The identification of High Street (east) as a key route between the Train Station and Butlin's will undoubtedly raise its profile and contribute to the perceptions visitors form about Bognor Regis. The formal identification and signposting of the route from the Train Station to Butlin's via the eastern end of High Street may result in additional footfall.

RESPONSIBILITIES & PERMISSIONS FOR THE BENCHES

- The street furniture in both High Street (east) and York Road is owned and maintained by ADC (Property & Estates). *(source: Property & Estates LW email to HA 05.05.23)*
- The benches are positioned on the Highway in both locations under a licence issued by WSCC Highways. *(source: WSCC Highways Manager email to HA 11.05.23)*
- For transparency in decision making, if the bench is relocated as described, WSCC would issue a new S115 license to Arun District Council to position the “new” bench at York Road. *(source: WSCC Highways Manager email to HA 11.05.23)*

UPDATE: REPORTED INCIDENTS OF ASB LINKED TO THE BENCH:

The BID’s previous paper noted 18 incidents of anti-social behaviour related to the bench reported via the DISC app for the period 28.06.23 – 18.09.23.

One (1) further report has been submitted via DISC with respect to the bench during the period 19.09.23 – 15.11.23.

CONSULTATION ACTIVITY TO DATE:

CONSULTATION: BOGNOR REGIS STAKEHOLDER PARTNERS

- ADC Property & Estates supports the final decision of local stakeholders, reached following the required public consultation. *(source: LW email to HA 05.05.23)*
- WSCC Highways supports the final decision of local stakeholders, reached following the required public consultation, including notification of a public survey and the opportunity to present objections in person at a public meeting. *(source: MT email to HA 11.05.23 and 05.10.23)*
- Sussex Police supports the final decision of local stakeholders: *(source: SgtSF email to HA 11.05.23)*
- BR BID respects the final decision of local stakeholders, reached following consultation.

CONSULTATION: PUBLIC CONSULTATION ACTIVITY

To protect personal data, the following survey responses have been anonymised. Full details will be made available to Officers of BRTC, ADC and WSCC for verification of data, on request

CONSULTATION 1 : BUSINESS IN HIGH STREET (EAST) (MAY 2023)

The BR BID carried out a consultation with the 13 businesses in the section of High Street that are most impacted by activity taking place at the bench and would be most impacted by the bench's removal. Consultation was by means of a survey, which was hand delivered to the 13 business in May 2023, with an online version available via a QR code on the hard copy. A series of in-person follow-up visits from the BID Ambassador encouraged businesses to complete the survey.

Following three weeks of in-person visits, a total of eight business surveys were completed and returned.

CONSULTATION 1: RESPONSE SUMMARY:

- Total responses to survey: 8
- No. respondents requesting bench remain: 4
- No. respondents requesting bench removal: 4

CONSULTATION 1: RESPONSE DETAIL:

The Highways Manager has stated that, for any further action to take place, WSCC Highways require evidence that each **objection** received has been considered on its own merit. All (optional) additional comments submitted to the survey are therefore reproduced here for consideration by BRTC CE&E:

CONSULTATION 1: OBJECTIONS TO MOVING THE BENCH:

"After discussing with the staff in the shop, we feel the bench should stay as it helps the elderly."

"This bench is the only one to provide rest for the elderly etc whilst waiting for the bus or a lift. The dealers will move on to another bench. Maybe the towns wardens could patrol better the area. It has been more common to witness anti-social behaviour outside The Punch & Judy pub on that bench. Maybe the school could patrol parents waiting for their children if it is problem for them. Ultimately moving a bench is not the problem!

"A number of customers use the bench, we do not feel removing it will in anyway tackle the issues listed above. Having been a victim of vandals and anti social behaviour, we feel a better use of the money and resources would be to invest in CCTV on our end of the High street and more visible Police & Community Wardens"

"The bench outside the post office provides a welcome place to sit, especially for the elderly people, or people waiting for the bus. All benches wherever they are located will always be used in an anti-social way. The answer is better security and better policing."

CONSULTATION 1: SUPPORT FOR MOVING THE BENCH:

"Regular anti-social behaviour. Groups of adults drinking all hours of the day, which we believes puts people o walking down this end of town"

"Bench is used for drug dealing and taking, used by large amounts of drinkers which causes fights and anti social behaviour, Drugs smoked and needles used on the bench, Drunks sleep and urinate next to the bench."

"The bench needs to go."

CONSULTATION 2 : PUBLIC CONSULTATION (NOVEMBER 2023)

Having agreed the proposed approach with WSCC Highways Manager, BR BID carried out a public consultation to seek wider feedback on the bench in November 2023. Consultation was via an online form, which could be accessed via a QR code displayed on three prominent A3 sized posters displayed around the bench from 3pm on Monday 6th November to the survey close time of 12 noon on Wednesday 15th November 2023. Survey and signage evidenced at Appendices 1 and 2. The signage also included details of a telephone number and email address for people to contact for alternative methods of completing the survey. In addition, a letter providing a written progress update, plus details the QR code and alternative ways to access the survey was hand delivered to the 13 businesses in the section of High Street that are most impacted by activity taking place at the bench and would be most impacted by its bench's removal.

Following the nine day consultation period, a total of seven surveys were completed.

CONSULTATION 2: RESPONSE SUMMARY:

- Total responses to online survey: 7
- Total requests to submit response by other means: 0
- No. respondents requesting bench remain: 3
- No. respondents requesting bench removal: 4

CONSULTATION 2: RESPONSE DETAIL:

The Highways Manager has stated that, for any further action to take place, WSCC Highways require evidence that each objection received has been considered on its own merit. All (optional) additional comments submitted to the survey are therefore reproduced here for consideration by BRTC CE&E:

CONSULTATION 2: OBJECTIONS TO MOVING THE BENCH:

“There is nothing else available for people to rest on or wait for appointments in local businesses or collection by relatives or buses, in the area. I have more concern with the state of the outside of local businesses and the fact that their goods and visitors hinder the flow of access to pavements during opening hours and pose a fire hazard when goods and furniture is left outside overnight. “

“There are a number of reasons the bench should stay. (1) People do use it when waiting for the bus, despite some people answering this question, say they don't. (2) The pavement is plenty wide enough to accommodate the bench. (3) It is the only public bench in the area, East end of town. (4) 99% of it's use is done by normal people, especially people with disabilities or the elderly. (5) Any public bench, in any location, is open to public abuse or anti social behaviour, not just this one. (6) In the twenty years we have been in this location, I can count on my hand how many anti social behaviours witnessed. “

“So, let me get this right - one bench causes anti-social behaviour so the public are being asked if it should be moved (even though it is near a bus stop), yet in Station Square anti-social behaviour is rife and all day every day, yet the public are not being asked if that seating should be removed? Can someone explain why this bench, in this location seems to be being given a higher priority that other areas of the town which are subjected to far worse? And are BID going to be asking the public the same question about Station Square, or is it just going to be about this bench ONLY? Also, are the Town Councils Community Engagement & Environment Committee going to give the same consideration to the anti-social behaviour in Station Square, or are they also only interested in acting on this one bench? And if yes, why only this bench? Could it be because it is near/ouside a town councillors bussiness?”

CONSULTATION 2: SUPPORT FOR MOVING THE BENCH:

“We have regularly seen a mixture of drug related activity, day time drinking, fighting, shouting/swearing and just general anti-social behaviour.”

“All the drunk people sitting there in the night not safe for the shop”

“I am tired if witnessing anti social behaviour on an almost daily basis on this bench and the smell of urine can be overpowering”

Submitted for the consideration of BRTC Community Engagement & Environment Committee, 4th December 2023.

Heather Allen
BR BID COO
15.11.23

APPENDIX 1: PUBLIC CONSULTATION SURVEY (NOVEMBER 2023)

Your thoughts on moving the bench at High Street (by the Post Office)

Please share your views

In response to complaints about anti-social behaviour taking place there, the Bognor Regis Business Improvement District is working with partners at Arun District Council, Bognor Regis Town Council, West Sussex County Council and Sussex Police to explore moving the bench outside the old Post Office at the eastern end of High Street.

It's really important that everyone in the community has an opportunity to share their views before any changes take place. Any information you provide will be treated in confidence, and we won't share your details in any public facing documents. You can choose to read the full statement about how your information will be used below.

This survey will close at 12 noon on Wednesday 15th November.

The results of the survey will be shared at the next Bognor Regis Town Council Community Engagement & Environment Committee on the **Monday 4th December**, and a decision will be made about the bench at that meeting. As well as giving feedback through the survey, you are welcome to attend the meeting to share your views in person. The meeting will take place at Bognor Regis Town Hall, starting at 6.30pm.

1. How we'll use the data provided on this form

- Read data statement
- I'd rather go to next question

Submit

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2. Your name *

Enter your answer

3. Your business name (if relevant)

Enter your answer

4. Your email address *

Enter your answer

5. Your address / your business address *

Enter your answer

6. Do you want the bench to stay or be removed? *

I want the bench to stay

I want the bench to be removed

7. Is there anything you'd like to tell us to in support your answer?

Enter your answer

8. Thank you for taking the time to share your view.

Submit

APPENDIX 2: 3 x A3 POSTERS SECURED ADJACENT TO BENCH



SHARE YOUR VIEWS ON THIS BENCH

In response to complaints about anti-social behaviour taking place, the Bognor Regis Business Improvement District is working with partners at Arun District Council, Bognor Regis Town Council, West Sussex County Council and Sussex Police to explore moving the bench outside the old Post Office at the eastern end of High Street.

It's really important that everyone in the community has an opportunity to share their views before any changes take place. Any information you provide will be treated in confidence, and we won't share your details in any public facing documents.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT?

The results of the survey will be shared at the next Bognor Regis Town Council Community Engagement & Environment Committee on the **Monday 4th December**, and a decision will be made about the bench at that meeting. As well as giving feedback through the survey, you are welcome to attend the meeting to share your views in person. The meeting will take place at Bognor Regis Town Hall, starting at 6.30pm.

HOW TO SHARE YOUR VIEWS:

Your thoughts on moving the bench at High Street (by the Post Office)



You can respond to the survey online using the QR code to connect to the form.

If you would prefer to complete the survey another way, please telephone Bognor Regis BID on **01243 256995** or email info@brbid.org and we will help you access the survey.

The survey will close at 12 noon on Wednesday 15th November.

