



AGENDA ITEM:

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

8TH SEPTEMBER 2010

WINTER MAINTENANCE: A TOWN CENTRE PERSPECTIVE

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SUMMARY

1. The weather conditions during Winter 2009/10 were undoubtedly some of the worst experienced in Middlesbrough, and indeed the UK, for over 30 years. The unpredictability of the weather means it could be another 30 years before we see similar prolonged conditions again, but equally we could see those conditions repeated in the coming Winter of 2010/11.
2. Therefore, it is important that the Winter Maintenance plan deals with the effects of adverse weather to minimise the economic and social impact and enable Middlesbrough Town Centre to continue to perform it's key role as the sub-regional centre for shopping and education and act as a major hub for cultural, social, business and community life.
3. This report is to provide the Overview and Scrutiny Board with views from the Town Centre business community on 2009/10 Winter Maintenance operations and identify issues and concerns, which should be considered in the development of the 2010/11 and future Winter Maintenance Plans.

INTRODUCTION

4. Weather conditions between mid-December 2009 and mid-January 2010 were severe and prolonged and the performance of the town centre economy consequently suffered.
5. In January 2010 the number of people in the town centre (referred to as footfall) was down 5.3% compared to January 2009 and compared to a 2.6% decrease nationally. This was partly attributed to the severe and prolonged bad weather at the start of the month. Performance during December, through the last days of pre-Christmas trading and the commencement of the sales period, was similar with fewer people in the town centre.

6. Although despite this it is important to recognise that there were still a substantial number of people in the town centre during this period (for working, shopping or leisure purposes) and the majority were able to continue their normal activities, albeit with added inconvenience. The implementation of the Winter Maintenance plan ensured that the town centre coped reasonably well with the adverse weather.
7. However, learning lessons from the experience and improving the Winter Maintenance plan for 2011/12 and future years will ensure that the town centre is more resilient if similar weather conditions persist in the future.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

8. During this period, a number of key issues were observed and reported by the Town Centre Management Team. Subsequently, after the events, discussions have taken place and feedback gathered from town centre businesses and representatives of the Town Centre Partnership to identify other issues.

Highway Routes

9. Key highway routes into and out of the town centre, including key bus routes, were generally kept clear and free running and this assisted with ensuring that the town centre was accessible.

Middlesbrough Council Car Parks

10. Particularly in the busy pre- and post Christmas trading periods, car parking capacity is always limited but this was exacerbated by snow and icy conditions on the top floors of the multi-storey car parks and the access / exit ramps. This necessitated the top floor of Captain Cook Square car park being closed for periods on a number of occasions.

Private Sector Car Parks

11. Although also accessed and exited by ramps the Mall and Hillstreet Shopping Centre car parks remained open and accessible for the majority of the period. Snow was cleared using snow ploughing and gritting equipment. As elsewhere concern was expressed about the ability to access rock salt supplies.

Pedestrian Routes

12. The Winter Maintenance plan identifies that within the road hierarchy the first priority for gritting includes:

“Footways serving town centre shopping precincts, major routes to commercial areas and routes to and from transportation centres (These will only be pre-treated on receipt of adverse weather reports e.g. snow, freezing rain).

13. It also identifies that when snow clearance is necessary:

“Removal of snow from footways shall only be undertaken by labour employed on the highway in their day to day activities, but only when conditions are such that they cannot undertake their normal duties. ... Activities initially shall be confined to

those areas defined in Appendix 7 and in extreme circumstances will be approved to extend to locations shown in Appendix 7a.”

14. Most key routes within the town centre are listed in the appendices of the Winter Maintenance plan (extracts detailing the priority pedestrian routes for gritting and snow clearing are detailed in Appendix 1 of this report).
15. However, during the period of adverse weather there wasn't an apparent hierarchy of routes amongst the identified footways. This seemed to lead to some disparity in the treatment of pedestrian routes with some pathways with relatively low use cleared, e.g. Centre Square Boulevard, whilst some areas with high levels of footfall were seemingly lesser priorities and left untreated, e.g. Gilkes Street with around 10,000 people passing through per day.
16. Initially there was seemingly very little gritting on some of the key routes, e.g. Corporation Road, Linthorpe Road and the repeated melting and re-freezing of the snow created difficult slippery conditions underfoot.

Pedestrian Routes - Captain Cook Square Shopping Centre

17. The Captain Cook Square Shopping Centre is an outdoor shopping centre providing a key pedestrian link between the bus station / Captain Cook Square car park and Linthorpe Road. The Centre is in private ownership (part of the Aviva Investment portfolio) and therefore treatment of the pedestrian routes is the responsibility of the shopping centre's management. The route through the Centre was generally kept clear through the period although onward routes to other area, e.g. through Gilkes Street as detailed above, were sometimes difficult.
18. Concern was also expressed by the manager of the Centre about the lack of availability of salt / grit to the private sector and the impact had on ensuring this key route was cleared. Indeed fresh snow was left uncleared as this provided an easier walking route than ice and compacted snow beneath.
19. During discussions, the Centre Manager suggested that if additional salt / grit had been available they could've assisted the Council by helping to clear the adjacent areas of the pedestrian highway adjacent to the Shopping Centre.

Salt / Grit Bins

20. When the adverse weather commenced there was no provision of salt / grit bins within the town centre for use by businesses to help them clear ice within the vicinity of their premises. As this was likely to have a major impact on pre- and post Christmas trading, the Town Centre Management Team, on behalf of the businesses, purchased a salt bin, which was located near BHS at the junction of Corporation Road and Linthorpe Road. This allowed some retailers to be pro-active and help with the efforts to clear the ice outside of their premises.
21. However, some retail stores may have been reluctant to help clear pavements outside of their premises as a result of confusing press coverage suggesting that businesses could be held liable for any injuries claim that individuals may pursue resulting from snow clearance.

Communication

22. Whilst a Winter Maintenance plan has been produced for a number of years it is clear that knowledge of this document amongst town centre businesses was limited. It is therefore important to raise awareness of the Winter Maintenance plan that the Council produces to ensure that town centre businesses understand the measures put in place during severe and prolonged adverse weather conditions.
23. Improving communication will not only help to manage expectations and reduce the number of complaints / comments from the business community but will also ensure that town centre businesses have effective plans in place to help the Council to deal with the situation within a clear and transparent framework.

CONCLUSIONS

24. The adverse weather during December 2009 and January 2010 was undoubtedly exceptional and something which had not been seen in a very long time in Middlesbrough.
25. The Winter Maintenance plan helped to minimise the impact of the adverse weather but inevitably there was some disruption to the Town Centre economy caused by the difficult conditions.
26. Feedback from town centre businesses and observations by the Town Centre Management Team have highlighted a number of issues and these have been highlighted to the Highway Services Manager for consideration in the development of the Winter Maintenance Plan 2010/11 and future years.
27. From a Town Centre business perspective the key issues to be encompassed within a Winter Maintenance plan are:
 - need to ensure highway routes into the town centre are clear and accessible
 - need to ensure pedestrian routes between key arrival / gateway points and key destinations are cleared for workers / shoppers and visitors
 - need to ensure that the grit bins are provided to help businesses take action outside their own premises
 - need to ensure that businesses are clear what action they can take
 - need to ensure that the plan is implemented and the town centre can continue to function despite prolonged periods of adverse weather

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Minutes of the Town Centre Partnership Meeting – 28th January 2010

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Appendix 1 - Extracts from Winter Maintenance Plan 2009/10

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PRIORITY ONE GRITTING ROUTES

APPENDIX 5 Cont

Footways:

1. Linthorpe precinct – Corporation Rd
2. Linthorpe Precinct – Linthorpe Rd
3. Zetland Place – underpass and approach to Railway Station
4. Bus Station - Entrances and approaches
5. Town Hall – Albert Rd approach
6. Town Hall – Corporation Rd approach
7. Corporation Rd – Footpaths in front of Vancouver Hse
8. Corporation Rd – Footpaths in front of Teesside Crown Court
9. Boulevard – Area around Town Hall and Municipal Buildings

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APPENDIX 7

FOOTWAY SNOW CLEARING PRIORITY

Areas to be cleared of snow, as instructed by Client Duty Officer.

1. Newport Road both sides from Binns corner to Infirmary.
2. Corporation Road both sides from Binns corner to Marton Road.
3. Albert Road both sides from Railway Station to Borough Road.
4. Linthorpe Road both sides from Wilson Street to Parliament Road.
5. Linthorpe Road both sides from St Barnabas Road to Devonshire Road.
6. Borough Road both sides from Union Street to Albert Road.
7. Grange Road both sides from Albert Road to Linthorpe Road.
8. Dundas Arcade.
9. Kings Road, North Ormesby both sides from James Street to Beaumont Road.
10. The Boulevard.
11. Town Hall Quadrangle.
12. Walking bus routes
13. High Street Ormesby.
14. Neighbourhood Shopping Areas - listed separately in Appendix 4a.
15. Old Persons Homes/Sheltered accommodation.
16. School/Hospital approaches.
17. Bus Stops.