

To: THE EXECUTIVE
Date: 18 July 2023

High Street Multi Storey Car Park – Structural Issues
Executive Director: Delivery

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To provide an update summarising the findings of structural inspections and intrusive surveys completed on the High Street Car Park by the Council's appointed Structural Engineers, May 2023.

2. Recommendation(s)

That the Executive agrees:

- 2.1. That the High Street Car Park be closed at the end of October 2023, following the recommendation made by Structural Engineers.
- 2.2. That the Assistant Director, Property engages with stakeholders affected which includes the commercial unit tenants (9), Council staff, season ticket holders, Town Centre partners and other parties that have an interest to ensure the implications of this decision are understood.
- 2.3. Savings that will be realised in expenditure budgets in the current year from the mid-year closure be used to fund decommissioning work including erecting hoarding, securing the site, and commissioning pre and post decommissioning structural surveys.
- 2.4. To add the High Street Car Park site to the Bracknell Town Centre Southern Gateway site masterplan area. Outline plans for which will be presented for consideration to the Executive in Autumn 2023.

3. Reasons for Recommendation(s)

- 3.1. The Council's structural engineers, advised the council in December 2022 to reduce the number of available spaces in the High Street Car Park by closing every 3rd parking space, which was implemented. A further structural survey was commissioned and undertaken by the structural engineers in May 2023, which with a recommendation that the car park be closed no later than December 2023, as it has reached the end of its design life.

4. Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1. The structural engineers report sets out a number of options that could be pursued. The only viable alternative presented was that loading (usage) of the site could be further reduced from 60% of bays available to 30%. This could extend the life beyond the December 2023 date. However, an increase regime of monitoring would be needed to offset the increasing risk of structural failure. This was therefore rejected as an option.

5. Supporting Information

Background

- 5.1. High Street Car Park, was built in the 1970s and is constructed as a reinforced concrete structural frame. It spans a split level of 9 floors, over 23,000m² with a total of 980 parking spaces. The upper levels are accessed from The Ring, with the industrial units located at Ground level and lower ground level accessed via Market Street. Additionally, there is a large underground surface water attenuation chamber which covers the majority of the above ground structural area and part of the concrete apron within the Market Street section of the building.
- 5.2. Since 2018 there has been an annual programme of re-covering the top surface of the car park floor after sections had started to show signs of wear and cracking. The first year's programme showed a number of variations during the project. After stripping the surface back to exposed concrete, the number of concrete repairs works from the deck were found to be larger than first anticipated.
- 5.3. As a result, specialist structural engineers, were commissioned to initially look at the areas of concern. However, this review was expanded to the whole structure following their on-site investigations. A series of inspections were then undertaken between October 2020, to date.
- 5.4. A report received from the structural engineers on the 20th December 2022 advised that the council should immediately reduce the current load per floor. This was actioned on the 21st December 2022 (as per the below image). A further survey was undertaken in May 2023 with a recommendation stating the car park will be required to be closed no later than December 2023, due to the level of corrosion within the concrete reinforcement, which cannot be reversed or remedied.
- 5.5. Further, the structural engineers report indicated that the car park is now unlikely to meet current Building Regulations and requires risks to be controlled to a standard that is "as low as reasonably practicable". Calculations indicate the structure to be below the required standard of reliability and that loss of strength is ongoing due to active corrosion.



- 5.6. Below the High Street Car Park, there are 9 commercial units. These yield income of £194,123 2022/23. In addition, within the 9 units, 2 are leased for council services (New Hope and Tuition Services). A visual inspection of the lower ground

commercial units, under the car park, was carried out by the structural engineers on 26 January 2023 to determine the structural condition. At that stage, it was considered by the structural engineers that the 9 commercial units could stay operational until the end of 2025. This with a view that if any further significant structural issues were highlighted with the building, this date would need to be revised.

- 5.7. The table below shows the expenditure and income for the High Street Car Park in the current and previous financial year, excluding the commercial units.

	2022/23 Budget (£000)	2022/23 Actuals * (£000)	2023/24 Budget (£000)
Income Total	-545	-399	-528
Expenditure Total	380	339	488
Surplus	-166	-60	-40

* An allocation was made from the corporate contingency at the end of 2022/23 to mitigate the shortfall in parking income, which had been identified as a corporate risk in the approved budget

Current Position – Case for Closure

- 5.8. Within the May 2023 report from the structural engineers, there was a recommendation that regular inspections of the car park would be required, whilst the car park remains operational. Ongoing inspections have been scheduled.
- 5.9. An option to reduce the load on the structure further, to increase the duration of use was discounted, on the basis that the car park would be practically unusable and expenditure would continue to be incurred. Closing the car park would enable some of the budgeted costs to be avoided, including business rates, utility costs and repairs and maintenance, although others such as car park operator costs would continue to be incurred with staff deployed to other facilities. To comply with recommendations the car park is required to be closed by December 2023. It is proposed to close the car park to vehicles by the end of October 2023 to allow the decommission works and hoarding to be erected. Closure at this point would enable cost savings of around £130k to be realised in the final 5 months of the current financial year. In addition closing the car decks will enable the commercial units underneath to continue to operate safely.
- 5.10. The decommissioning work will take approximately 10 weeks to complete. The high level cost estimate for decommissioning the building and securing the site are in the region of £100k. In addition, there may be a requirement for ongoing site security, costing in the region of £500 per month, plus costs to service the fire alarm of £2,000 per quarter, which is expected to be a requirement of the Council's insurers. At this stage, it is estimated that costs totalling around £106.5k will be incurred during the current financial year, after the car park is closed to customers. These costs can therefore be contained within savings on the existing expenditure budgets realised by an October closure. There will be a requirement to carry out regular structural inspections on a quarterly basis while the commercial units continue to be occupied, currently until the end of 2025. Further discussions will also be required with the Council's insurers to ascertain the ongoing level of security and maintenance that

would be required, until the building has been demolished. An appropriate provision for on-going costs will need to be included in the 2024/25 budget.

- 5.11. A section at the southern end of the car park is owned by Columbia Bracknell Ltd (110 spaces across 3 floors), who have a flying freehold over the access roads that the Council own on the ground level. Initial research shows the section of the car park owned by Columbia Bracknell Ltd and the Council appear to be 2 separate structures, however at this stage further surveys will be required to ascertain if they share the same foundations and floor slab. Columbia house have commissioned their own survey, the results of which are currently awaited. Once known, Columbia House will advise the Council how they will be progressing with their car park.

Mitigation for Loss of Parking

- 5.12. The High Street Car Park has traditionally been used as the car park of choice for season ticket holders and BFC staff parking. There are currently 44 season ticket holders. There is a requirement for BFC to give season ticket holders 1 months notice, where they can either surrender their ticket, or move to Braccan Walk Car Park.

Across the town centre parking portfolio there are more than 3,000 spaces. Even prior to Covid-19 there has always been surplus space.

- 5.13. The Avenue car park has 1,200 spaces and became operational in September 2017. This is the shoppers' car park of choice, which rarely reaches capacity except in the pre-Christmas period. High Street Car Park has been particularly affected by a reduction of season ticket users and staff usage, now that working from home, for part of the week, is the norm in both the public and private sectors. It is the least used site of the 3 multi storey car parks. In September and October 2020, vehicle numbers were less than 8,000 per month with the number of spaces and space turnover at near full capacity you would be expecting to see 1,500-2,000 vehicles per day. Prior to Covid-19 the average monthly usage was in the region of 20,000 vehicles.
- 5.14. There is sufficient capacity in the town centre car parks to support current usage levels, therefore the potential exists to re-capture a large part of income currently being generated. However, the Princess Square Car Park, being the closest to High Street, is not owned by the Council. Work is in progress to estimate the potential loss of car parking income to BFC overall when the High Street Car Park is closed.
- 5.15. There are currently 6 EV charging points in High St Car Park, which are expected to be relocated to Braccan Walk, once the electrical loading capacity has been confirmed adequate.

Staff

- 5.16. Within Time Square ground floor and lower floor car parks, staff currently have 147 car parking spaces, which includes 9 disabled parking bays. There are currently 317 essential car users, who park at Time Square. Therefore, overflow needs for all staff will move from High Street Car Park to Braccan Walk Car Park, which has capacity.

Demolition and Future Plans

- 5.17. The high level costs to demolish the car park are in the region of £4.2m. A project team has been established and will report later in the year, on the details of such a

scheme and estimated costs. In anticipation that demolition of the High Street Car Park will be required at some point, a submission has been made to the Brown Field Land Release Fund, to request grant funding of £2.75m, to assist with these costs. Results of the funding request are expected to be announced during late Summer 2023.

6. Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

- 6.1. The Council's registered title to the High Street Car Park is complex. There are rights granted to the Property and rights reserved out of it over adjacent properties that will need to be considered in any future dealings with the car park. The title includes the northern footbridge over the Ring which must be maintained by the Council, and contains obligations for maintenance of the south end lifts and lift wells and lobby in the southern part of the Car Park. There are also clawback provisions resulting in a payment to Homes England if the property is to be used for a different purpose or transferred, and any disposition would require the consent of BRP.
- 6.2. Moving the development forward, legal advice will be required to cover the following elements:
1. Procurement of a contractor for a significantly sized development.
 2. Requirements under the Party Wall Act, especially if new piles are to be used as part of the design.
 3. Displacement of retail units, including cessation of tenancies.

Financial Advice

- 6.3. The anticipated financial implications of the proposal in the current financial year are included in the body of the report. Detailed consideration will need to be given to future expenditure and income budget requirements as part of the 2024/25 budget preparations.

Other Consultation Responses

- 6.4. Contract Services – Parking management and enforcement

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.5. There are no equalities issues arising at this stage.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.6. Not considered at this stage.

Climate Change Implications

- 6.7. Not considered at this stage.

Background Papers

Appendix A – Structural Engineer Executive Report – Dated 16 May 2023 (Confidential)

Contact for further information

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