

Committee(s):	Dates:
Streets and Walkways Sub Committee	15 February 2022
Subject: Widegate Street – Proposed Timed Closure	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	1, 9, 10, 12
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?	N/A
Report of: Executive Director Environment	For Decision
Report author: Clive Whittle – Environment Department	

Summary

This report proposes to promote measures to restrict all vehicles including cycles from entering Widegate Street from 11.30am to 9pm each day. This is to provide more space and priority for people walking and a vehicle free environment to improve safety and comfort. This will improve the experience of people using of this street, deliver public amenity benefit and preserve and enliven the character of street environment.

The restriction will be introduced using an Experimental Traffic Order (“ETO”) to enable the arrangements to be tested before a decision is made whether it should be made permanent.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Agree to commence the promotion of an ETO for the proposed introduction of a timed closure to restrict vehicles using Widegate Street for part of the day to improve the amenity and use of this street for the benefit of the public.
- Authorise the [Executive Director Environment] to consider responses to consultation and statutory notices and the results of pre-implementation traffic surveys and, if there are no objections and they consider it appropriate, to make the ETO.
- Authorise the Executive Director Environment to consider the outcome of the experiment including any objections and subject to being satisfied no public inquiry should be held and no significant issues arise, to make the ETO permanent.

Main Report

Background

1. Widegate Street is a one-way local access street, which runs between Middlesex Street and Sandy's Row, and has several shops, and eating and drinking establishments along its length. The carriageway is very narrow and was recently enhanced to improve the character of the street with granite setts raised to the same level as the adjacent footways. There are 'at any time' waiting restrictions running the full length and it is difficult for vehicles larger than a small box van to turn at the junction with Sandy's Row. This means that the number of vehicles using Widegate Street is very low and mostly only for servicing.
2. Pavements on Widegate Street are very narrow with some parts less than a metre wide. Many people use Widegate Street for its retail and leisure offer and as a route to other destinations in the surrounding area, including Petticoat Lane Market. Due to the high pedestrian volumes, narrow pavements and other obstructions on the footway, many people walk in the carriageway, potentially putting themselves at risk of injury. Appendix 1 provides an image of the existing street environment in Widegate Street and a location plan.
3. Widegate Street previously had a temporary access restriction (implemented under an 'events' order) in place covering the full length of the street prohibiting traffic between the hours of 11.30am and 9pm each day from June to the end of October 2021. This restriction was introduced to facilitate local businesses to utilise the outdoor space for 'al fresco' dining and drinking, supporting businesses in their recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.
4. Pedestrian movements on Widegate Street were not affected when the previous restriction was in place and vehicles could use alternative routes. Servicing could take place outside of the restricted times or from other nearby locations. These arrangements have appeared to work very well without issue.

Current Position

5. The temporary events restriction, which was supported by local businesses provided significant additional benefits particularly for safety and public amenity in Widegate Street. Unfortunately, these benefits lapsed when the events order ended in November 2021. However, officers have completed the investigation to reintroduce the restrictions so that these benefits can be re-provided.
6. To re-introduce timed restrictions on vehicular access on Widegate Street a new traffic order is required. Restricting traffic at the busiest times between the hours of 11.30am and 9pm each day could also facilitate other functions or events to take place, such as for outdoor dining and drinking and would be subject to separate approvals and Order considerations.

Options

7. Various options to restrict motor vehicles accessing Widegate Street are available. These include restricting part or all of the street, or variations on the time and day and classes of vehicles restricted. There are also options around installing physical measures such as gates, bollards, cctv or just signage.
8. However, based on the feedback on the temporary events order, which covered the busiest times and has worked well and with no issues on access or movement, it is proposed to replicate this arrangement using an Experimental Traffic Order (ETO) under s.9 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1986. Using an ETO will allow the changes to be introduced and to test the operational arrangements before a decision is made whether it should be made permanent. The ETO also provides a 6-month statutory consultation period for feedback, which will also be used to inform any future decision.
9. Physical measures such as gates, bollards or marshalls would require resources each day to be present to open and close the streets, which would not be cost effective or sustainable in the long term. Installing cctv would be costly to install and is not considered appropriate as it is unlikely that there will be many vehicles contravening the restriction, given the low numbers of vehicles currently using the Widegate Street.

Proposals

10. The proposals include:
 - Introducing an Experimental Traffic Order to prohibit all traffic during the hours of 11.30am to 9pm every day from using Widegate Street. This will provide additional space for pedestrians to walk, improve accessibility, removes safety risks and preserves and enlivens the character of the street environment.
 - Traffic signs would be installed at the entrance to Widegate Street to inform users of the restrictions.

Programme

11. Subject to approval, the programme to deliver the new restrictions is detailed below:

February 2022

- Committee approval to commence promotion process for ETO.

March 2022 to April 2022

- Engage with ward members and local residents, occupiers and the London Borough of Tower Hamlets about the proposed introduction of an ETO. Consult any relevant statutory bodies.

April 2022 to September 2022

- Carry out pre-implementation traffic surveys

- Undertaken pre-implementation statutory consultation and publish notices and subject to no objections and consideration of pre-implementation traffic surveys, Executive Director to consider whether or not to make the ETO (If there are outstanding pre-implementation objections the making of the ETO will be reported to the relevant Committee or Sub-committee for consideration, including consideration of whether a public inquiry should be held).
- If an ETO is made, monitor experiment, obtain post-implementation traffic survey data (if required), review feedback and consider any post-implementation objections.

By mid-2023

- Assess experiment including any objections to inform evaluation of whether or not it should be made permanent and whether or not an Inquiry should be held.
- Executive Director to consider whether or not to make ETO permanent (Should there be significant issues or should she consider a public inquiry should be held, the decision whether or not to make the ETO permanent will be reported to the relevant Committee or Sub-committee).

Key Data

12. Prior to implementing the scheme, consultation with local occupiers and ward members will be undertaken. This will ensure that there is still support for the restriction. Traffic surveys will also be undertaken so that the impacts on the surrounding network can be assessed.

Corporate & Strategic & implications

Strategic implications

13. The proposal to restrict vehicles from entering Widegate aligns with the Corporate Plan Polices 1 – people are safe and feel safe and 9 – We are digitally and physically well-connected and responsive. It also aligns with the Transport Strategy (proposal 11) to take a proactive approach to reducing motor traffic, and (proposal 13) to use timed and temporary street closures to help make streets safer and more attractive places to walk, cycle and spend time.

Financial implications

14. The cost of advertising and making the Traffic Order and installing the signage necessary to introduce this proposal is estimated to be £6,000, which can be met by the Environment Department's Traffic Management Local Risk Budget.

Resource implications

15. Resources to deliver this proposal will be undertaken using existing resources in the Environment Department under business as usual activities.

Legal Implications

16. To introduce a timed restriction on vehicles using Widegate Street, an Experimental Traffic Order under section 9 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 will be required. An ETO must be in operation for at least 6 months before they can be made permanent but must not exceed 18 months. Public consultation will be undertaken in the first 6 months and any objections must be made within this period.
17. In carrying out its traffic functions, the City must have regard, inter alia, to its duty to secure the expeditious, convenient and safe movement of vehicular traffic and other traffic (which includes pedestrians) and the provision of suitable and adequate parking facilities on and off the highway - s.122 Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. The proposals include arrangements to ensure regard is given to this duty and other relevant matters.

Risk Implications

18. The proposal is low risk as the experiment replicates what was there previously under the Events Order, where no issues arose. However, objections could still be made. These can be considered at the appropriate stage as detailed in the report.
19. Restricting access to Widegate Street will help to mitigate Corporate Risks CR20 – Road Safety, CR21 – Air Quality and CR30 – Climate Action

Equalities implications

20. The EqIA indicates that there is a need to ensure access on Widegate Street for disabled people who cannot walk more than 100 metres. This will be possible as this street is less than 100m in length. Access for those using wheelchairs or buggies/prams will not be restricted as clear passageways will be maintained.

Climate implications

21. The restriction will prohibit vehicles on Widegate Street during certain hours. Reducing motor traffic supports the delivery of the Climate Action Strategy by reducing carbon emissions and reallocating space for people walking.

Security implications

22. None.

Conclusion

23. Widegate Street has a narrow carriageway with very narrow pavements. Implementing an ETO to prohibit traffic between the hours of 11.30am and 9pm every day would benefit the public amenity by providing more space and a vehicle free, cleaner environment for people walking, enhancing their safety and comfort. The effect on the surrounding network will be minimal as this street is mainly used for servicing with very low vehicle numbers, and alternative routes are available for other traffic. Introducing the restriction using an ETO will enable the effects to be tested and monitored before any decision is made to make it permanent.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Image and plan of proposal on Widegate Street
- Appendix 2 – Equality Impact Assessment

Background Papers

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