

## Classification: NULBC UNCLASSIFIED

Draft report Subways, also known as Underpasses in Newcastle under Lyme

Cleaner Greener and Safer Scrutiny Committee Feb 2017

*Membership Chair (Councillor Naylor) Vice Chair (Councillor Burgess) Councillor Allport, Cooper, Dillon, P. Hailstones, Mancey, Olszewski, Panter, Reddish and G. Williams.*

Contents to add

### *Chair's preamble*

Underpasses, commonly called subways were seen as a good solution to the problem of separating pedestrians from fast moving traffic. In the decade of the 1960s many town highway engineers were attuned to the needs of through traffic. Ring roads were constructed; town centres bypassed and subways were constructed as part of the process. Newcastle under Lyme was no exception

The numerous (14) subways across the town, and some not directly linked to a ring road, are useful in many ways. They offer ramps and steps and an easy way to cross busy roads. They have become a 'problem' as the funding for their maintenance appears to have been steadily eroded and with a divided responsibility between the Borough Council and the County Council the perception is that subways in our Newcastle public domain are progressively neglected

The Borough Council risks its reputation due to poor public experience in subways and the possible loss of Purple Flag award

### *Specific Issues*

Increased risk to pedestrians from storm water flowing into subways and not getting away down drains due to infrequent attention to inadequately sized and sometimes blocked drains

Impact of increasingly dirty barrel roofs and walls with patchy and dirty appearance largely due to the need to spray out offensive and unpleasant graffiti. Subways can be seen as places to avoid and may increase the fear of crime in the public psyche

High cost of continuing need to clean off graffiti. This can fall to the Borough Council if there is offensive material. Other graffiti in the public domain is left by the County Council for long periods of time as they have the responsibility for graffiti connected to 'highways' sites

Lack of engagement with Councillors and members of the public about the issues. It is unlikely that residents of the Borough know there is divided responsibility for the public domain, subways included.

The County Council takes total responsibility for these structures. The Borough Council only sweeps the ground surface of subways and collects litter

### *Positive Actions*

There have been joint approaches to some aspects of subways in Newcastle. Led lighting has been installed resulting in much improved brighter lighting. So-called 'sacrificial light covers have been

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used to defray costs of replacement when damaged by graffiti. Roof barrels have been painted bright white

Artworks have been commissioned in some subways. These have been largely untouched by graffiti 'artists' and well received by users of the arms decorated in this way

There has been some use of 'community payback' with young offenders to clean up some subways

### *Recommendations*

1 Engage further 'community payback' teams without delay to start on a publicly visible and ongoing approach to cleaning off graffiti Ask NBC Senior Executive Team for their experience with these initiatives, success and limitations

2 The Police Commissioner's Proceeds of Crime (POCA) and People Power funding may offer an opportunity. Applications can be submitted by strategic community safety partners (i.e. those that are formally part of a community safety forum, JOG, LSP or similar) and make a long-term contribution to local community safety activities. People Power applications can be submitted by community groups for values between £100 and £3,000 with a view to becoming sustainable in the longer term. Applications should be supported by local policing and carry the support of the community safety partnership, who makes recommendation to the OPCC. in the longer term. Applications should be supported by local policing and carry the support of the community safety partnership, who make recommendation to the OPCC.

3 Joint volunteer approach: NBC to set dates and provide materials and call for volunteers among known volunteer groups to clean sections over several months.

4 Safer Routes to School initiative of the County Council could be seen as a driver to improving the environment of identified relevant arms of subways. No parent wants to be explaining offensive drawings and words on subways to children on their way to school. County Council to be engaged with this with a view to funding clean up schemes

4 Drains need more frequent suction. Responsibility and process mechanisms to be identified clearly and on a proper maintenance programme to be agreed between NBC and SCC

5 Develop the idea of paid for lit up advertising panels; this had been mooted by the County's portfolio holder as something to be trialled in Stafford. Ask for their ideas and experience

6 Build on the popular 'Art in Subways' detail needed on how SCC/NBC/BID can work on joint approaches to gain substantial funds: A report from the Regeneration and Economic Development Manager follows later in this report

7 Explore idea of 'sponsor a sub' fund seeking from businesses (BID/NBC via Britain in Bloom team)

8 Some subways could be closed entirely. Start the process of identification. Whilst this is a costly process it is a logical step long term and plans should be drawn up and agreed between NBC and SCC identifying where closure could take place, and what alternatives can be made for pedestrians e.g. controlled green man zebra crossings.

9 The offer from the portfolio holder Cllr Mark Deaville at SCC to be taken up and agreed for the first of regular meetings quarterly meetings An agenda item for the first meeting to be: discussion of County handing over responsibility and funding for complete maintenance of subways to the Borough Council under the District Deal

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10 Council's website to allow reporting by members of the public on subway 'issues'

### *Investigation*

14 surveys have been completed by members of the Cleaner Greener and Safer Scrutiny Committee on the 15 subways with more surveys done for town centre subway arms than outlying ones.

The results of field surveys show on balance subways were fairly litter free, At the time of most surveys there hadn't been heavy rain so the drain 'problem' i.e. not sufficient of capacity to take away storm water was not recorded.

The lighting was just about adequate and walking surfaces also adequate. All the subways were recorded to a greater or lesser degree as being rendered unpleasant due to scrawls of graffiti, some of it offensive and bordering on offensive. Nearly all the walls and lighting were shabby, dirty and giving an impression of neglect

*Local authorities: their roles; other partner organisations: How they have been involved up to now other potential partners in ways forward*

Staffordshire CC Highways: advice and information sought from officers and Portfolio Holder Cllr Mark Deaville

The Engineering Manager Graham Williams advised and gave information on respective roles The Regeneration and Economic Development Manager gave information about background and initiatives involving partners including Sustrans, Inspector Barlow from the Local Policing Unit submitted the statistics relating to reported crime adjacent to subways.

Ward Councillors with subways in their areas should be informed and enlisted for their help; Leader of the Council has already written to Leader of SCC (Cllr Philip Atkins) previously about the condition of our subways (no reply given)

BID team for liaison between town centre businesses and operations staff at the Council

LAP for town centre could have a role especially in finding funding and dispersing information as needed

County Council- ref *Safer Routes to School*, (relevant teams) some subways are identified as such when they are near to Primary Schools

Britain in Bloom team perhaps to seek sponsorship to help with care and maintenance of subways

Joint Operations Group

CGS Committee needs to invite NBC's portfolio holders (both authorities) and relevant Executive Officers in both authorities to comment on the draft report in respect of recommendations

*A case study- success and limitations*

### *Conclusion*

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The current management of our subways is steadily failing the residents of Newcastle in respect of providing a pleasant experience to a necessary process: crossing a busy road

Despite a difficult economic climate, it is now time for the two Authorities and 'partners' to meet and come up with a more satisfactory plan to address the recommendations in this report

Appendix *Maps? ref to where survey sheets can be seen and their analysis*

Acknowledgements

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