

CABINET – 19 MAY 2026

ITEM 4 – QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

Questions are listed in the order in which they were received. Should any questioner not have received an answer in that time, a written answer will be provided.

<p>1. COUNCILLOR JAMES FRY</p> <p><u>Item 8: Oxford Congestion Charge Investment Plan</u></p> <p>I am delighted to see at last there are recommendations for using some of the funds generated by the congestion charge for investments for the benefit of city residents. I am particularly pleased to see that, at last, after months of campaigning, that funding is proposed to improve pedestrian safety at the junctions listed in Active Travel (i), namely the Abingdon Road/Weirs Lane junction, the Banbury Road/Marston Ferry Road junction and the junctions of London Place with Morrell Avenue/St Clements and Marston Road/Headington Hill, but am very sorry to see that the</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR BEKAH FLETCHER, CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT</p> <p>The funding available from the congestion charge funding is limited. Officers are aware of concerns about the Rose Hill/Henley Avenue/Church Cowley Road junction; improvements can be considered here when funding is available. The possible options may be influenced by the forthcoming traffic filter trial.</p> <p>As set out in Annex 1, the NHS and school travel offers are designed to support mode shift from car to bus at the city’s most car-dependent employment sites. NHS and education workplaces account for approximately 42% of workplace parking spaces inside the Oxford ring road, indicating the scale of peak-time travel to these sectors.</p> <p>If the investment plan is approved, officers will work with NHS and schools colleagues to determine specific eligibility criteria for these offers.</p> <p>The funding available from the congestion charge is limited, so there are no proposals to extend these specific offers to other employers. As noted in the officer report at paragraph 24, even modest bus discounts become unaffordable if offered too broadly.</p> <p>Park and ride discounts until March 2027 are included in the investment plan.</p>
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<p>junction of Rose Hill/Henley Avenue/Church Way is not mentioned for upgrading.</p> <p>Please may I have clarification about the intended beneficiaries from the free or discounted NHS & Schools bus travel. Annex 1 states that the target group is "NHS employees (all year) and state and private school employees (term-time only) whose main work base is in Oxford".</p> <p>Do these groups include agency workers, such as cleaners, who are among the lowest paid people in the city and do not work directly for the NHS or schools? What is the intended status of people working for GP surgeries, for example, who are not direct NHS employees? What about low paid staff working for non-school educational establishments, such as colleges?</p>	<p>The congestion charge has delivered bus journey time, reliability, and service improvements in the city. The council's commitment to tackling traffic congestion has delivered 172 electric buses for the city. These improvements benefit all bus users as well as reducing noise and air pollution for the city's residents and visitors</p>
<p>2. COUNCILLOR JAMES FRY</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR BEKAH FLETCHER, CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT</p>

Item 10: Quiet Lanes Policy & Pilot Programme

The objectives of this policy and pilot programme are commendable, though the policy needs to be amended to include low traffic routes in urban areas. These should be able to be designed as cycle streets or 'fietstraat' as in the Netherlands. However, is a physical barrier an absolute requirement for this policy? Is there not a danger that residents living the "wrong side" of the barrier and forced to make a long detour to avoid it will be strongly opposed to this initiative?

In Annex 3, it states

Core/ Required Traffic filter / restriction

Aimed at preventing the road from being used by through-traffic. Typically achieved by a motor vehicle restriction at either end of the lane – or somewhere in between – enforced by a physical obstacle (gate, bollard)

While initially focusing on delivering in rural areas, the policy has been designed to allow all areas (rural or urban) to put forward request for quiet lane treatment, with all requests then following the same assessment criteria.

Evidence suggests that sign only schemes do not have the desired effect of reducing traffic flow and speed and whilst speed bumps may deter some users and will help regulate traffic speeds, a more stringent measure is needed to manage traffic flow – for the purposes of the pilot schemes we will be exploring the use of physical barriers.

The location of barriers will be determined in close consultation with the local community, taking into account resident/ business/ landowner access as a primary consideration.

In determining suitability for a quiet lane officers will also assess the alternative routes available before making recommendations, if there isn't a suitable alternative route and where the local community is not fully supportive of the proposal, in these situations a quiet lane may not be a deliverable option. Officers would recommend progressing the pilots on the basis of physical closures and where this solution is not workable then alternative approaches may be sought (such as traffic calming) and if appropriate these could then be put forward as recommended alternative delivery methods following pilot phase evaluation.

<p><i>Complementary/ Optional</i></p> <p><i>Traffic calming which includes vertical deflection (speed humps)</i></p> <p>Would the Cabinet consider easing the insistence upon the Core/Required Traffic filter/restriction to allow Traffic calming including speed bumps as an alternative? These will surely discourage motor vehicles but would not impose extra mileage upon local residents.</p> <p>If speed bumps are acceptable as an option during the pilot programme, I hope that they can be installed with fairly narrow gaps to allow cyclists to go through without having to go over the bumps.</p>	
<p>3. COUNCILLOR EMMA GARNETT</p> <p><u>Item 8: Oxford Congestion Charge Investment Plan</u></p> <p>I am glad to see the congestion charge investment plan has been referred back so that more</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR BEKAH FLETCHER, CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT</p> <p>The investment plan has been designed to support the objectives of the congestion charge by maximising traffic reduction benefits in the city. The temporary congestion charge has reduced traffic in some key areas but not in all areas. The number and frequency of bus services to the hospitals, particularly to the John Radcliffe Hospital, are already excellent. The problem is</p>

<p>ambitious schemes could be considered - improving bus services to hospitals is sorely needed, not just from P&R but from across the city. Oxfordshire County Council aims to cut car journeys by 25% between 2024 and 2030 - shifting them towards public and active transport. It's vital that we reduce car journeys across the whole county - not just in Oxford city - to tackle congestion, road safety and climate change county wide.</p> <p>I remain concerned that the largest share of the congestion charge revenue (Table 1, £1437k out of £4625k) goes on subsidising those who have driven to Park and Rides. I worry that this scheme incentivises making most of a trip by car, with only the final couple of miles by bus; rather than taking a bus for the whole journey. Furthermore, the funds raised from the congestion charge are by definition only going to benefit those who already own cars. Households who don't own cars are more likely to be worse off financially.</p>	<p>that they get caught in congestion. This makes some services unreliable and unattractive.</p> <p>Whilst making travel cheaper for those without access to a car could undoubtedly provide socio-economic benefits, the transport benefits may be limited.</p> <p>Traffic reduction in Oxford improves the county's bus network. Go Ahead have confirmed that the congestion charge has boosted use of their services by around 8%, with two-thirds of that growth coming from non-park and ride services.</p> <p>Traffic reduction resulting from the congestion charge and free park and ride offer has allowed bus operators to improve bus services in (and into) the city, with reduced running times, improved reliability, and new services.</p> <p>Go Ahead submitted a statement to Cabinet in April explaining that any increase ending the free park and ride offer would cause them to review timetables and services in the city and withdraw certain routes introduced following the start of the congestion charge. They have since said a £3 combined charge for park and ride parking and return bus travel would not lead to these changes, but a higher combined charge would.</p> <p>The funding spent on discounting park and ride therefore indirectly benefits those without a car, because it supports traffic reduction and in turn bus service improvements.</p> <p>In areas where congestion has reduced (e.g. Abingdon Road, St Clement's, Iffley Rd and Cowley Rd etc), this has become a more pleasant environment to walk and cycle.</p> <p>The proposed investment plan already includes £720k for free or discounted bus travel for NHS and school staff and £700k for active travel.</p>
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<p>Will the Cabinet consider redirecting more of the revenue towards public transport schemes that don't rely on residents already owning a car to benefit from them (eg: free bus travel for NHS staff and active travel funding)?</p>	
<p>4. COUNCILLOR SUSANNA PRESSEL</p> <p><u>Item 8 – Oxford Congestion Charge Investment Plan; Item 10 – Quiet Lanes Policy & Pilot Programme</u></p> <p>Please can you tell me why the report on the Congestion Charge Investment Plan and the report on the Quiet Lanes Policy did not come to Place Scrutiny prior to coming to Cabinet?</p> <p>If we are not given the chance to scrutinise such reports, it is poor governance and it makes a mockery of the role of Scrutiny.</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR NEIL FAWCETT, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND CABINET MEMBER FOR RESOURCES</p> <p>It is for the Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee to determine its own work programme, and it is recommended that it does so taking account of the Cabinet Forward Plan and of the Budget Management Monitoring Report. Cabinet would not seek to dictate which items should be considered.</p>
<p>5. COUNCILLOR SUSANNA PRESSEL</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR BEKAH FLETCHER, CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT</p>

Item 8: Oxford Congestion Charge Investment Plan

I'd like to propose an additional idea for spending some of the money, please.

Please can some of it be spent on improving the entrance to the Westgate car park, so that it no longer causes enormous tailbacks every weekend? These tailbacks currently paralyse many streets in the city centre. When Botley Road reopens - at last - this traffic, plus new traffic, will all switch to Botley Road. Residents are dreading this. Botley Road always used to be one of the most congested streets in the county. Once it is the only route to the Westgate car park that does not pass through a traffic filter, the congestion will surely be worse than ever. Please follow my suggestion or find another way to reduce congestion and pollution in Botley Road.

To reduce queuing on the approach to the Westgate car park when it reaches capacity, a long queuing lane would need to be created.

To achieve this, the bridge over Castle Mill Stream would need to be widened (or the footways relocated onto new pedestrian bridges either side). The cost of this alone is likely to be £5m - £10m.

The queuing lane would need to extend along Oxpens Road for several hundred metres (otherwise the first few vehicles to start queuing would block the road as now). This could cost another £3m – £5m depending on the length of road widened. This would take years to implement.

All of this extra road capacity would only be required for a few hours each week and would compromise the City and County Councils' aims to improve Oxpens Road for active travel and connect the proposed Oxpens development to the city centre.

Additional capacity for cars is also likely to encourage even more people to drive, making the substantial investment very short-lived. The traffic filters are being introduced as a trial and will be monitored carefully. Monthly data will be published, as it has for the temporary congestion charge.

The proposed congestion charge investment plan includes funding to provide discounted park and ride travel (£3 for parking and return travel for up to five people).

This will continue to undercut the cost of Westgate parking by some margin, and once Botley Road reopens we expect a surge in usage of Seacourt park and ride, which the city council expanded in 2021 "[to reduce traffic and congestion on Botley Road](#)".

	<p>Officers will continue to work with Westgate Oxford to promote park and ride and manage queuing from the Westgate car park.</p>
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