

CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT – 26 MARCH 2020

OXFORD – ORIEL SQUARE AND TURL STREET: AMENDED ACCESS RESTRICTIONS

Report by Interim Director of Community Operations

Recommendation

1. The Cabinet Member for the Environment is RECOMMENDED to approve the proposed amendments to access restrictions applying to Oriel Square and Turl Street, Oxford.

Executive summary

2. The introduction of new equipment to enforce bus lanes and streets with access restrictions within Oxford has required the amendment of the traffic regulation orders to facilitate the effective use of this equipment.

Introduction

3. This report presents responses received to a statutory consultation on a proposal to amend the permitted vehicles in Oriel Square and Turl Street in Oxford.

Background

4. Automatic rising bollards were installed in 1999 to support the implementation of the Oxford Transport Strategy (OTS). The Oriel Square and Turl Street bollards restrict vehicular access within the historic city centre, specifically preventing vehicles from by-passing the High Street Bus Gate. Bollards are raised between the following times:

Oriel Square 07:30–18:30;

Turl Street 07:00-23:00.

5. Certain vehicles are exempt and, therefore, eligible to travel through these restrictions, including police, ambulance and fire services and those used for essential servicing. Authorised vehicles can also access any premises, car park or garage on Turl Street, south of the Market Street junction.
6. The Council previously authorised other vehicles to pass through the Oriel Square restriction and traverse Turl Street to High Street. This has led to a significant increase in traffic volumes at both locations, particularly delivery vehicles requesting access via the intercom systems situated adjacent to each bollard control point.

7. Automatic access to restricted areas was previously controlled by proximity (“swipe”) cards, with the Council permitting Oxford University colleges to issue cards to its own staff. An audit in 2019 found that 74 cards had been supplied to university staff and a further 63 to other businesses.
8. In September 2019, work commenced on implementing an Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) based system. This will remove the need for individual car drivers or colleges to hold such cards, reduce administration costs and enhance overall system control. Details for all exempt vehicles will be securely stored on the ANPR back-office system and used to automatically trigger the raising and lowering of bollards. This system is due to be installed and commissioned in April 2020.
9. As such, this proposal seeks to fulfil the original intention of the relevant traffic regulation orders, restrict access to certain areas of Oxford City Centre and support the implementation of an ANPR control solution.

Consultation

10. Formal consultation on the proposals was carried out between 9 January and 31 January 2020. A public notice was placed in the Oxford Times newspaper, and sent to statutory consultees, including Thames Valley Police, the Fire & Rescue Service, Ambulance service, the Local Taxi Association, Oxford City Council and local County and City Councillors. Letters were also sent directly to approximately 170 properties in the immediate vicinity and street notices placed on site.
11. 23 responses were received. These are summarised in the table below:

| Proposal | Support | Object | Neither/Concerns |
|-----------------|----------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| Oriel Square | 4 | 11 | 5 |
| Turl Street | 4 | 4 | 1 |

12. Copies of the responses are recorded at Annex 1 with full responses also available for inspection by County Councillors.

Response to objections and other comments

Oriel Square

13. Thames Valley Police did not object to the proposals
14. Two objections were received from University College (Oxford) on the grounds that the proposal would increase congestion and pollution due to longer journey times and that it would make servicing and maintenance more inefficient. The College also referred to regular closures of Merton Street during university exam seasons to permit “trashing”. Four college employees (two Carterton residents) raised similar objections and two more concerns.

15. Whilst noting that journey times for some trips, including those relating to college maintenance, may increase, the Council considers that the hours of bollard operation provides some flexibility to accommodate different working/servicing patterns. In addition, cycling and walking and frequent bus services to central Oxford provide viable alternatives for many commuters. Furthermore, it should be possible for the College authorities to consider alternative last mile delivery models such as cargo bikes where appropriate.
16. On the practice of “trashing”, both emergency and local authority (refuse) vehicles are already exempt from the restriction and are, therefore, able to service Oriel Square from either the Merton Street or High Street directions. In addition, any road closure restricting access to/from Merton Street at its eastern end, requires the County Council’s approval.
17. Three objections and one concern were received from local businesses (one Oxford resident) regarding the difficulties in accessing Merton Street from the High Street direction and adverse impacts on congestion and pollution. This specific problem is recognised but targeted parking enforcement should minimise the impact of delivery vehicles blocking this key access route.
18. Two further general objections were submitted by Oxford residents, one citing that the proposal would hinder commerce.
19. A concern was raised by the local medical practice that GPs’ vehicles, parked in the Doctor bays at the junction of Oriel Square and King Edward Street, would need to pass through the restriction if/when they are required to conduct a home visit for a patient too unwell to be able to attend an appointment at the surgery. This is noted and such vehicles are exempt from this restriction when driven on an emergency call.
20. One resident was concerned about increased congestion and pollution and that the proposal would lead to an increase in disputes between Council officers and drivers. He suggested re-instating the previous access and control arrangements and reviewing traffic levels before determining whether further restrictions are necessary. Having carefully considered this option, the Council believes any additional journey time disbenefits can be mitigated through take-up of alternative travel modes and smarter delivery models within an acceptable time-frame. Indeed, the effect will be to reduce traffic levels in the immediate vicinity. Administrative costs should also reduce over time, given the greater clarity over which vehicles are actually exempt from these restrictions.

Turl Street

21. Thames Valley Police did not object to the proposals
22. Two specific objections and one concern were received from businesses in Turl Street on the grounds that the proposal would create barriers to trade, that the impact of surrounding development work had affected delivery routes

and that the ability to pass through both the Turl Street and Oriel Square restrictions should be retained.

23. The proposal would not change any of the existing (authorised) access to business premises south of the Market Street junction, only remove authorisation for vehicles travelling through this junction onto High Street (i.e. trips that are not for the purposes of accessing any premises, car park or garage in Turl Street south). Therefore, this change should not affect the vast majority of businesses on Turl Street.
24. The two further general objections (see clause 18), also apply to Turl Street.

Other responses

25. The remaining responses from members of the public expressed support or no opinion with no other comments.

How the Project supports LTP4 Objectives

26. The proposals would help facilitate the safe movement of traffic.

Financial and Staff Implications (including Revenue)

27. Funding for the proposed measures will be met from capital funding allocated for the ANPR scheme.

JASON RUSSELL
Director of Community Operations

Background papers: Consultation responses

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March 2020

| RESPONDENT | SUMMARISED COMMENTS |
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| (1) Traffic Management Officer, (Thames Valley Police) | No objection |
| (2) University College, (Oxford) | <p>Object – We need to have access to the bollard for the reasons listed below. Why we also understand the council’s situation trying to reduce the amount of traffic that comes through Oriel square with many people using it as a rat run including taxis and food delivery companies.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It will add to city pollution as people will be forced to take long detours around Donnington Bridge, up Iffley Road and past the Plain – increasing distance travelled by 75% (or thereabouts) 2. It will add to traffic congestion in those roads – thereby adding more pollution from greater traffic jams 3. We have residents in Oriel College that live on site (not only students) who require access to their residences from all directions 4. College vehicles need to gain access to the Colleges from all sides and this becomes wholly inefficient to take the long way round – particularly when responding to urgent or emergency maintenance needs. 5. Certain delivery vehicles are unable to negotiate the bends at the eastern end of Merton St or perform 180 degree turns in Oriel Square – this might include the Local Authority / contractor waste removal vehicles – 6. The city council regularly closes off the Eastern End of Merton Street during university exam seasons to permit “trashing” to take place (a practice we also disagree with) and this would then leave Merton St completely inaccessible for the periods of those closures including to emergency vehicles – this can be for considerable periods of a day in summer. <p>Colleges have administered the card scheme for many years and restrict the number of issued cards to the absolute minimum - this should be control enough</p> |
| (3) University College, (Oxford) | <p>Object – have a number of objections to this as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We have a number of residents in Merton Street who require access to their homes from all directions (these are |

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| | <p>not only students).</p> <p>2. The Council regularly closes off the eastern end of Merton Street during the university exam seasons so as to permit 'trashing' to take place and this would then leave Merton Street completely inaccessible for the periods of those closures, including any emergency vehicles wishing to get through. This of course can be for considerable periods of a day in the summer.</p> <p>3. Our College vehicles need to gain access to the colleges from both sides and it would become totally inefficient to take the long way around, particularly when responding to urgent or emergency maintenance needs.</p> <p>4. Indeed certain of our delivery vehicles are of a size that they are simply unable to negotiate the bend at the eastern end of Merton Street or perform an about turn in Oriol Square. Of course this will include the Local Authority and/or contractor waste removal vehicles. Closing this route will simply make the running of the colleges in Merton Street much more difficult.</p> <p>5. Surely you can see that people will be forced to take long detours around Donnington Bridge and Iffley Road and this will add to the city pollution.</p> <p>6. This of course will have a knock-on effect in that it will add to traffic congestion on those roads, thereby adding more pollution from greater traffic jams.</p> <p>7. Colleges have administered the card scheme for many years and restrict the number of issued cards to the absolute minimum. This should be control enough.</p> |
| <p>(4) Local Business, (Oxford)</p> | <p>Object – You will no doubt appreciate that Retailing in the traditional areas of the City has been badly hit by the opening of the new Westgate Shopping Mall. Shoppers are naturally attracted to the Westgate by the car parking available there and will not make the walk to the old established retail areas of the City. Therefore, any additional barriers to being able to trade easily and successfully in Turl Street or The High Street are not going to be welcome and will be seen as a further blow to independent Retailers and ultimately will have further cost implications to us and additional exhaust emission issues for Oxford City Council.</p> <p>For commercial stock movements in and out, and to service our Turl St shop and our customers (mainly Colleges for the latter), easy access to the street is vital. For many years our light van has been provided with an access card to the Turl Street barrier and this has worked extremely well and without problems. In particular right now with Turl Street being closed to vehicular access from High St, it is our only means of being able to continue servicing our Walters shop and our various stocks in and stocks out. Were this card facility to be withdrawn clearly our business would suffer and be prevented from properly servicing our shop's needs to keep the business operating properly and efficiently. When Turl Street is eventually reopened to vehicles from the High Street end this will again give us alternative access. However, frequently an option to enter and exit at either end has its advantages when close by as it saves a great deal of time and of course unnecessary further exhaust pollution as compared to circumnavigating</p> |

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| | <p>the City to enter at one end only.</p> <p>With regards to our High Street shop our light van services both Turl Street and High Street locations. Again for previous reason mentioned access through the Oriel Square whilst the bollard is down has provides greater efficiencies in terms of saving time and reducing emissions by again drastically reducing the additional exhaust pollution by avoiding having to circumnavigate Oxford City centre.</p> <p>For the above reasons we do need please to retain our access card for Turl St and continue to have the ability to swipe through the Turl Street barrier, and if the Oriel Square barrier is reinstated we would also need a card to swipe through that barrier also.</p> |
| (5) Local Business, (Oxford) | <p>Object – As a director of a company on Turl S & Market we have been massively inconvenienced by the ongoing Lincoln College & Jesus College refurbishments. There have been many occasions where delivery vans have been denied access and just driven away leaving us without important supplies and another delivery charge.</p> <p>The changes to access will and has confused delivery vans. Even though there will be signs telling them access from the High St (for example) that’s a 20-30-minute diversion and a driver just won’t do it.</p> <p>Please re think yet another unnecessary change as Turl St / Market St is suffering because of the council allowing the colleges to do what they want, when they want as far as huge building operations.</p> <p>Commercially we are all struggling as a once busy walk through roads are now avoided by possible consumers.</p> <p>Maybe for once think of the many business owners paying massive business rate charges suffering as yet more changes to suit the council (or the colleges) are set to cause businesses more misery. I’m sure PR will say it’s good for all but that’s not been true in recent years.</p> |
| (6) Staff at University College, (Oxford) | <p>Object – Staff at the College lodge and other departments on Merton Street work unsociable and long hours with many travelling in from the West and North West of Oxford.</p> <p>The current ability to drive through Oriel Square allows them to avoid driving all the way round the south of Oxford via Donnington Bridge to park which in turn would add to the terrible traffic and added pollution.</p> |

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| | <p>If considering allowing each college on Merton Street an allowance of keys/ fobs to facilitate the ongoing use of Oriel Square, I would request and urge the council to permit at least 20+ which will enable staff to travel west of the city after long and tiring shifts without the added inconvenience, time and pollution involved.</p> <p>The alternative is to allow each lodge at the 4 colleges in the immediate area to have an intercom system which would allow the lodge to manage their staff access.</p> |
| (7) Staff at University College, (Oxford) | <p>Object –I am objecting to this proposal as a staff member at a College. This proposal will detrimentally affect members of College staff that drive to work via Oriel Square. For those staff who live outside and to the west of Oxford (most of our staff are unable to afford to live in Oxford) the removal of access through Oriel Square will significantly add to their journey times and the stress of queuing into and out of work on a daily basis.</p> <p>The proposed restriction will also increase traffic volumes to the north and south of the city centre, adding to the existing congestion/pollution over Donnington Bridge and Iffley Road - this will not only impact upon those commuters using this route, but the many residents and businesses who will be grid locked as a result.</p> |
| (8) Local Business, (Oxford) | <p>Object – These proposals (as far as Oriel Square are concerned will adversely affect the College (which only has road access from Merton St) and the environment as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. They will add to city pollution as people will be forced to take long detours around Donnington Bridge, up Iffley Road and past the Plain – increasing distance travelled by 75% (or thereabouts) 2. They will add to traffic congestion in those roads – thereby adding more pollution from greater traffic jams 3. We have residents in Merton St (not only students) who require access to their residences from all directions 4. College vehicles need to gain access to the Colleges from all sides and this becomes wholly inefficient to take the long way round – particularly when responding to urgent or emergency maintenance needs. 5. Certain delivery vehicles are unable to negotiate the bends at the eastern end of Merton St or perform 180 degree turns in Oriel Square – this might include the Local Authority / contractor waste removal vehicles – closing this route off completely will make running the Colleges on Merton St much more difficult. 6. The city council regularly closes off the Eastern End of Merton Street during university exam seasons to permit ""trashing"" to take place (a practice we also disagree with) and this would then leave Merton St completely inaccessible for the periods of those closures including to emergency vehicles – this can be for considerable periods of a day in exam periods. 7. Colleges have administered the card scheme for many years and restrict the number of issued cards to the |

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| | <p>absolute minimum - this should be control enough - especially as the telephone system to the College lodges was removed some years ago.</p> <p>If the County Council wish to control access further, then perhaps they should control the issue of these cards and only issue at the request of the resident Colleges to agreed standards. However, this creates a bureaucratic process for the Local Authority.</p> |
| (9) Resident, (Oxford) | Object – No comments. |
| (10) Resident, (Oxford) | Object – Too much nanny state. Cancel the whole idea and allow commerce in Oxford to thrive. There is more to Oxford than the life sapping West Gate vulgarity. |
| (11) Resident, (Oxford) | <p>Object – During my work I support many of the businesses and colleges around Oriel Square and Merton Street with 'urgent' audio-visual and IT responses. I need to transport goods and people to and from Ferry Hinksey Industrial Estate to these frontages. Around four times a month I would use the key-card scheme to lower the bollards in Oriel Square to allow deliveries to Magpie Lane and Merton Street. The alternative route via St-Giles and Longwall Street would be extremely inconvenient, adding time to our response for these businesses and creating a far longer journey.</p> <p>Public transport is not an option due to goods to move to/from.</p> <p>Please do not revoke the key-card scheme to lower the bollards.</p> |
| (12) Resident, (Carterton) | Object – I currently reside outside of Oxford and work 12hr shifts in a college on Merton Street. Entering and exiting Merton Street onto the high street - heading in the direction of the plain is already difficult and sometimes hazardous to get out so adding extra vehicles to this in my opinion is not a good idea. |
| (13) Resident, (Carterton) | Object – I am an employee of a College and park in the College's car park on Merton Street and have used the Oriel Square access during my 12 years employment. I live in Carterton and my normal journey to and from work is via |

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| | <p>the Toll Bridge and Botley Road which normally takes 45 minutes. I hold a responsible position in the office and am very tired by the time I arrive home following a seven-hour working day and travelling 40 miles. At times I have had to travel out of Oxford via Marston or Summertown and down the A40 which always has a heavy load of traffic, adding a great deal more time to the journey causing increased stress. Restricting the access will mean that all vehicles including delivery vans will have to enter and exit Merton Street onto the High Street which is not an easy task due to the constant stream of buses, bicycles, vans and all other modes of transport. Of course, this will lead to further congestion on all the roads out of the city causing further delay. I strongly believe that I should have the right to access my place of work via Oriel Square with a valid pass as I have done in the past and would appreciate you considering my objection to this restriction amendment.</p> |
| <p>(14) Resident, (High Wycombe)</p> | <p>Concerns – Whilst I am broadly very supportive of the aim of reducing the number of vehicles using Merton Street, which is in dire need of - at the very least - conservation work to halt the degradation of its historically-significant cobbled surface, I believe that removing access as described in this proposal will result in major inconvenience for businesses and other organisations in the affected area, their suppliers, and their staff.</p> <p>The consequence of this will be both an increased administrative burden on the council, who will ultimately have to resolve the disputes that will inevitably arise, and an overall increase in traffic and pollution levels as vehicles are forced to make more circuitous journeys to reach their destination.</p> <p>As the rising bollards in Oriel Square have been out of action for such a considerable period of time, surely a more sensible approach would be to return them to operation for a period of time, monitor the resulting reduction in traffic, then take a view on whether further restrictions prove necessary; this would also allow those organisations and individuals who would be affected by the restrictions currently proposed a reasonable period of time to make suitable alternative travel, delivery, and supply arrangements.</p> |
| <p>(15) Local Business, (Oxford)</p> | <p>Concerns – You will appreciate that our busy retail business premises is located on Turl St so we are positioned between the Rising Bollard and the entrance to High Street.</p> <p>In the past years when the rising bollard was fully functioning, we were issued with a swipe card which enabled us to lower the bollard and allow access to goods vehicles making essential deliveries of goods and services to our store, also for our customers picking up a quantity of hired suits for a wedding. This system worked well for all.</p> <p>I would politely request that the same arrangement is re-introduced when the Rising bollard becomes operational</p> |

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| | <p>again, allowing us quiet enjoyment of uninterrupted trading.</p> |
| <p>(16) Local Business, (Oxford)</p> | <p>Concerns – Merton Street is already busy from the plain end of the High Street and blocking off access as is proposed from the other end will mean a heavy increase in traffic. The only entry will be by The Eastgate Hotel and this turning is already narrow and only allows one car width, this causes cars wishing to turn left into Merton Street to wait if a car is already trying to pull out onto the High Street. With increased traffic this could back up to the traffic lights, which are only yards away, and cause not only a big jam but also not allow access for the many emergency vehicles that frequently use the High Street.</p> <p>Access to Merton Street is crucial via Oriel Square. There are always huge lorries parked in Merton Street delivering food/goods to the Colleges and if access to Merton Street is restricted to the High Street, coming in from the Plain roundabout, the lorries would have to manoeuvre around the very small blind bend into Merton Street which is extremely hazardous at the moment for all vehicles but even more so for these huge lorries giving grave concerns for not only traffic safety but pedestrians too.</p> <p>There are gas works along St Clements which, whilst only temporary, are due to go on for months and more traffic will undoubtedly cause more congestion and delays for people trying to get to work.</p> <p>If this restriction has to take place, can you at least reduce the time they are up to 9:30am – 6:00pm.</p> |
| <p>(17) Local Medical Practice, (Oxford)</p> | <p>Concerns – I wish to respond on behalf of the Medical Practice to say that whilst we support the proposal we will need to retain access for the GPs' vehicles, as they park in the Doctor's bays at the junction of Oriel Square and King Edward St, and will need to come and go via Oriel Square when they are required to conduct a home visit for a patient too unwell to be able to attend an appointment at the surgery.</p> <p>Our GPs currently have possession of bollard keys which I understand will no longer work once the proposal is adopted.</p> <p>I trust that the GPs and the Midwife working at King Edward St Medical Practice will continue to be exempt for the purpose of restricting motor vehicles but I would appreciate it if this could be confirmed by the council.</p> |

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| <p>(18) Staff at University College, (Oxford)</p> | <p>Concerns – we are able to park at a Private carpark in Merton Street. I come from the North and if I don't come via St Aldates, it means I have to drive down Museum Road down South Parks Road and then via Longwall and then to the Plain and back over Magdalen Bridge and back into the High Street, so that I can enter Merton Street.</p> <p>It feels that I will be using so much unnecessary fuel. I wonder if people who are accessing the Street to go to their place of work (not as a rat run) could be given access via the bollards using either a pass or via the lodge, as we used to in the past.</p> |
| <p>(19) Staff at University College, (Oxford)</p> | <p>Concerns – I would like to express my concerns about being able to get to work on time at the College if there are bollards in place between 7:30am and 6:30pm. Staff use a car park on Merton Street and this traffic restriction will impact on staff being able to get to access this and could cause further hold ups at the top end of High Street.</p> |
| <p>(20) Resident, (Oxford)</p> | <p>Support – Excellent proposal, I fully support it. The city centre needs much greater restrictions on motor vehicle use, which should be permissible only for exception reasons, such as providing access for people with disabilities that prevent them from walking from appropriate parking places.</p> |
| <p>(21) Resident, (Oxford)</p> | <p>Support – I hope I have understood the proposal correctly - I agree that fewer cars should be allowed through Merton lane/Oriel Square and Turl St. Taxis should not be allowed through.</p> |
| <p>(22) Resident, (Oxford)</p> | <p>Support – Would this barrier be on a time limit like the high street so before 7-30am you can pass though, and after 6pm? Or is it no access 24/7.</p> |
| <p>(23) Resident, (Oxford)</p> | <p>Support – No comments.</p> |