



PLACE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Wednesday, 27 August 2025 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 12.44 pm.

Present:

Voting Members:

Councillor Liam Walker - in the Chair
Councillor Bethia Thomas (Deputy Chair)
Councillor Ron Batstone
Councillor Will Boucher-Giles
Councillor David Henwood
Councillor Gavin McLauchlan
Councillor Lesley McLean
Councillor Susanna Pressel
Councillor Leigh Rawlins

Other Members in

Attendance:

Cllr Liz Leffman, Leader of the Council
Cllr Judy Roberts, Cabinet Member for Place,
Environment and Climate Action

Officers:

Martin Reeves, Chief Executive
Hannah Battye, Head of Place Shaping
Aron Wisdom, Programme Lead – Central (Infrastructure
Delivery)
Tom Hudson, Scrutiny Manager

The Council considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting and decided as set out below. Except insofar as otherwise specified, the reasons for the decisions are contained in the agenda and reports, copies of which are attached to the signed Minutes.

33/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Ashby (substitute: Cllr Henwood), Cllr Gordon (substitute: Cllr Boucher-Giles), Cllr Kerr (substitute: Cllr McLauchlan), and Cllr Brant (substitute: Cllr Batstone).

34/25 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

(Agenda No. 2)

There were none.

35/25 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 3)

The minutes from the previous meeting held on 25 June 2025, were **APPROVED** as a true and accurate record.

36/25 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESSES

(Agenda No. 4)

Cllr Brighthouse criticised the proposed temporary congestion charge as inequitable and inconsistent with Council policies.

Cllr Malik argued that the congestion charge and bus filter proposals conflicted with Council policy and would not help residents, especially those on Oxford Road

Richard Parnham argued bus speeds had not worsened since 2019 and criticised the lack of supporting data. Graham Jones questioned whether the scheme's inconvenience and harm to businesses were justified. Emily Scaysbrook highlighted business opposition, poor timing before Christmas, and issues with consultation. Nicholas Hardiman warned of increased traffic and pollution near schools, and negative effects on local shops. Peter West doubted the scheme's effectiveness. Philippa Jackson cited hospital staff shortages, road safety risks, and a contradiction with Vision Zero policy. Paul Major suggested the scheme was rushed for funding and would hurt retailers during the holiday season.

Danny Yee addressed the committee in support of the temporary congestion charge, suggesting that inaction on congestion would only worsen the congestion in and around Oxford.

Those addresses which were provided in written form are appended to this minute.

37/25 OXFORD TEMPORARY CONGESTION CHARGING POINTS

(Agenda No. 5)

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Liz Leffman, was invited to present a report on the proposed Oxford temporary congestion charging points before it was submitted to Cabinet for determination. Cllr Judy Roberts, Cabinet Member for Place, Environment and Climate Action, Martin Reeves, Chief Executive, Hannah Battye, Head of Place Shaping, and Aron Wisdom, Programme Lead – Central (Infrastructure Delivery) also attended to answer the Committee's questions.

The Leader of the Council presented the Oxford Temporary Congestion Charge report, explaining that Botley Road closures had caused congestion and unreliable buses, which had led the City Council to request interim measures. She acknowledged a level of public opposition, emphasised the aim to support bus users, and noted exemptions would be included to reduce negative impacts.

The Committee raised a number of questions and concerns related to the proposed Oxford Temporary Congestion Charge Points, including the following:

- Whether the Council had plans to mitigate the impact of the congestion charge on SEND students, referencing report sections that stated pupils at certain schools would face longer journey times. The Programme Lead replied that SEND pupils attending affected schools would be able to apply for permits to pass through congestion charge points, and that the equalities impact assessment would be

kept under review, though this was challenged as not being a concrete mitigation. Follow-up questions raised concerns about children awaiting SEND assessment, asking how their needs would be addressed, and officers advised that they would discuss this with SEND colleagues but could not promise anything immediately.

- Whether the Council could work with councillors on school streets and drop-off points in the north of the county to help parents who drop off children before onward journeys. The Programme Lead confirmed they would be happy to collaborate and would connect the councillor with the relevant school travel planning staff. Further discussion covered the need to accelerate school traffic reduction schemes, including working with private schools on shuttle buses and encouraging more schools to adopt school streets, with officers stating that extra staff were being brought in to expedite these programmes and that engagement with schools was already underway.
- Concerns around the quality and frequency of bus services, particularly on Botley Road and in rural areas outside Oxford. It was noted that Botley Road bus services had declined in popularity and quality owing to the road closure, with fewer and smaller buses running, and that elderly residents were increasingly using the subsidised Botley Flyer instead of regular buses.

Officers responded that bus usage on Botley Road had dropped, but that subsidies had been provided to maintain services, and a recovery plan was in place to encourage people back onto buses once the road reopened. Regarding rural areas, officers stated that Oxfordshire had a relatively good rural bus network compared to other counties, but acknowledged gaps and the need for further improvement. They explained that, given most bus service start or end in Oxford, reducing congestion in Oxford would make rural bus routes more reliable and attractive, potentially leading to increased commercial viability and service expansion.

The Council had explored demand-responsive transport and shuttle buses in the past, but, owing to congestion, these had not been commercial. The congestion charge would support redeploying resources to improve connectivity and encourage behavioural change towards greater bus usage. Education about available services was highlighted as important for increasing uptake.

- Whether Park and Ride sites could accommodate increased demand, and the timeline for the opening of the new Eynsham Park and Ride. The Head of Place Shaping and the Programme Lead confirmed that current sites operated at about 60% capacity on average, with sufficient space to handle expected increases, and that the new Eynsham site would not open for another two years.

There was also discussion about whether the congestion charge income would be used to make parking or bus travel free at park and ride sites. Officers clarified that the proposal was to make the bus element free, not the parking, and that users would need to show a parking ticket to access free bus travel.

Some councillors and the Member of Parliament for Oxford East had raised concerns that Oxford residents, especially those in deprived areas, might end up

subsidising free travel for non-Oxford residents without seeing direct benefits themselves. Officers responded that the main benefit for city residents would be reduced congestion and pollution, and that discounted fares for deprived areas could be considered if funding allowed.

- Concerns as to whether the congestion charge and related measures would simply shift traffic from one area to another, raising concerns about increased localised traffic and the impact on the A34 ring road, which was already heavily congested. The Programme Lead acknowledged that modelling predicted some increases in traffic on the ring road and certain routes, but argued that overall benefits, such as improved bus reliability and reduced city centre congestion, would outweigh these disbenefits. The Programme Lead explained that junction improvements had been made on the ring road to help manage increased flows, and that air quality monitoring would continue to assess impacts.

National Highways had not objected but wanted further discussions if the scheme proceeded. Officers also noted that traffic redistribution was a forecast and actual behaviour would be monitored after implementation.

- Which hospital and school staff would be entitled to exemptions from the congestion charge, expressing concerns that the scheme could worsen staff shortages and make recruitment more difficult. The Programme Lead explained that community-based NHS staff, including carers who needed to travel between sites, would be exempt from the charge, allowing them to move more efficiently around the city. However, hospital staff who worked at a single site would not receive a full exemption but could use resident permits if eligible, and most hospital sites could be accessed without passing through a congestion charge point.

For school staff, officers stated that teachers and other staff would generally not be exempt, but the impact was expected to be minimal as most schools could be reached without crossing a charge point, and some staff could use alternative routes or public transport. Officers acknowledged the concerns but believed the overall impact of the proposal on travel to schools would be limited.

- Members had concerns about the predicted increase in collision rates on the ring road due to displaced traffic, and asked about plans for active travel, specifically whether cycle routes could be moved away from major road carriageways to improve safety. Officers responded that modelling showed a modest rise in collisions on the ring road, but that overall citywide collision rates would decrease, especially for vulnerable road users in the city centre.

They explained that, in accordance with local policy, the Council prioritised pedestrians, cyclists, and buses in its hierarchy of road users. Officers also described ongoing work to develop off-road and greenway cycle routes, particularly around Oxford, and referenced plans to reassign bus lanes on major roads to segregated cycleways once traffic levels were reduced. This was to improve safety and to encourage active travel.

- Alternatives to the congestion charge been considered, such as removing Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) or introducing charges only during peak congestion times. Members also questioned what actions would be taken if bus speeds did not improve as expected, including whether further fines or increased charges would be introduced. Officers replied that removing LTNs was not recommended, as they did not improve bus journey times on all key routes and city wide, and that the congestion charge timings were designed to align with the forthcoming traffic filter scheme for consistency and to avoid confusion. They stated that, if bus speeds did not increase sufficiently, raising the congestion charge or introducing further fines would require a new round of consultation and Cabinet approval. This would make it very unlikely to happen within the temporary scheme's timeframe.
- How the Council would monitor the impact of the congestion charge, specifically regarding emissions, bus speeds, congestion levels, and the uptake of active travel or other travel alternatives. The Programme Lead, and the Chief Executive, answered that a comprehensive monitoring plan had been published, which would track air quality at multiple sites, bus journey times, traffic flows, and changes in travel behaviour and active travel. They stated that data would be made publicly available, ideally monthly or – even better – as close to real-time as possible, and that new systems were being trialled to better measure footfall and spending in the city.
- Whether the back-office computer system for the congestion charge would be reliable, expressing concerns that the existing parking permit system was inadequate and difficult for users. The Programme Lead responded that improvements were being made to the system, including resolving log-in issues, and they were confident it would be fit for purpose if the scheme was approved.

Councillors also asked how the congestion charge could be suspended in emergencies declared by the emergency services. The Programme Lead explained that, as with current practice, the police and network management team would coordinate to suspend the charge when necessary, and that communications and systems would be updated accordingly, although previous incidents had sometimes taken up to 48 hours to implement.

- The sources of the expected income from the congestion charge and the total amount anticipated. The Programme Lead answered that the gross income was projected to be around £5 million over ten months, with a net surplus of approximately £3.2 million after accounting for administration and enforcement costs. The income would come from both congestion charge payments and penalty charge notices issued to those who did not pay.

The Committee **AGREED** to recommendations under the following headings:

- That the Cabinet gives specific consideration to historic peak capacity levels data at the Park and Rides and whether there are any negative implications on plans to reduce car journeys within the city by increasing park and ride usage.

- That the Council publishes and updates its monitoring data online as closely to real-time as possible, and no less than once a month from the commencement of the congestion charge.
- That the Council provides congestion charge exemptions for those Oxfordshire parents with children referred for but awaiting EHCP assessments and/or results.
- That the Council commits to dedicating a proportionate percentage of income to supporting services in deprived and rural areas.
- That the Council invests in increased education around the flexibilities in the existing bus network.
- That the Cabinet does not extend the IT system used for parking permits to the resident pass system and finds a more user-friendly alternative instead.
- That the Council improves the time it takes to enable the police to suspend congestion charges in case of emergency.
- That the Council expedites the delivery of its 'smaller schemes' with additional resource, particularly those which relate to schools.

The Committee **AGREED** to make the following observation:

- That continuing to focus on developing greater choice of destinations and promoting the facilities of non-Oxford destinations is a positive for the City and the rest of the county.

The Committee **AGREED** to the following action items:

- The Leader of the Council would to share her reply to the Member of Parliament for Oxford East, which was done during the meeting via the Scrutiny Manager.

38/25 COMMITTEE ACTION AND RECOMMENDATION TRACKER (Agenda No. 6)

The Committee **NOTED** the action and recommendation tracker.

39/25 COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PLAN (Agenda No. 7)

The Committee discussed the possibility of scheduling an October meeting, reviewed agendas for September (including verge and vegetation management, City Centre strategy and action plan, part-night lighting, and local government reorganisation) and November (section 106 dashboard, Fire and Rescue improvement plan, Oxfordshire rail strategy).

Members suggested future items on bus services and rural transport. The Committee had received letters from Sutton Courtenay and Appleford on Thames Parish Councils requesting that it scrutinised the Council's work on minerals and

waste planning. The Committee agreed that it would welcome a report on this in the future, recognising that – given the level of specialist knowledge needed – it would need to be carefully scoped so that the Committee could add value.

Monitoring the congestion charge scheme in 2026 was proposed and it was agreed that this should be placed on the work programme for April 2026.

Concerns were raised about a Cabinet response to the Transport Working Group's recommendations not yet having been received.

The Committee was keen for the work programme to remain flexible, with further suggestions invited by email.

40/25 RESPONSES TO SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS

(Agenda No. 8)

The Committee **NOTED** the Cabinet responses to the reports on the Rail Strategy and S106 Improvement Programme.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing

This page is intentionally left blank

I assumed that the Ricardo Oxford Traffic Filter Interim Scheme report, was designed to support the Congestion Charge implementation to reduce congestion, pollution and increase bus speeds by 10%. I analysed both the traffic forecasts and pollution levels on an individual road basis and as a broad strategy, as preferred by Cllr Gant however I did note that the Council told Ricardo their preferred option before their report was undertaken, which I believe is both unethical and unprofessional by both parties.

My analysis considered the data outlined in the Ricardo report and compared it with the council’s own ‘OSM ‘Do Nothing / Do Something’ spreadsheets, (obtained by a Freedom of Information request); the City Council’s 2025 Oxford Air Quality Annual Status Report’, dated June 2025 and Google’s ‘Typical day’ maps for Oxford.

Pollution

My analysis concluded that the congestion charge proposal did **not** reduce the ‘broad’ pollution levels, in fact, the City Council Air Quality report provided **measured** air pollution data in comparison to Ricardo’s rather complex **calculations** to disprove the Ricardo report data. The City’s data indicated that the broad average for the roads listed by Ricardo with congestion charging was 19.2µg/m3 that is already below the Council’s target pollution target for 2025. Only 2 roads i.e. St Clements and the Eastern bypass are above the 30µg/m3; 92% of roads are below the 2025 target (30µg/m3) and 64% are already below the 2030 target of 20µg/m3. It should be noted that the City Council’s data related to 2024, that pollution has lessened since then with the increasing use of electric vehicles across the city and will continue to do over the future years.

Traffic

There are numerous questions regarding the traffic data used by Ricardo, many of which are listed below. Whilst Ricardo stated that they would not consider the changes in congestion speeds in their report for some unknown reason, I have demonstrated that total traffic volumes are reduced by 3%, while the traffic speeds remain virtually unchanged.

Analysis of the Google Typical day data shows that the maximum congestion is approximately 6 minutes but generally there is only a problem at morning and evening rush hours and during school’s term times.

Conclusions

My conclusions are that despite the errors outlined below, the Ricardo report does not support any of the council’s claims or objectives regarding pollution, congestion and bus speeds. My analysis has led me to the conclusion that the decision to proceed with congestion charging is a very rushed attempt by the council, using very flawed data, to avoid having to pay compensation to the bus companies and / or increase income to pay for further traffic proposals.

Below are some discrepancies in the Ricardo report:-

The Ricardo report commences with a series of assumptions made and the calculations undertaken, however examination of your OSM ‘Do Nothing/ Do Minimum spreadsheets show that Ricardo have simply copied the ‘Total Vehicle’ numbers from these two spreadsheets; the two spreadsheets do not have identical ‘vehicle type’ headers, yet the data has been used without reference or qualification. I show below an example taken from my analysis. I would be interested in an explanation for the 1,331% change in Car B2/C1 categories?

The data below is a summary of the approx 1,725 roads listed in the council's Traffic Data 2025 'Do Something' / 'Do Nothing' OSM spreadsheets																	
Do Something Titles	Car A	Car B1	Car B2	Car C	Car D1	Car D2	Car E	Taxis	LGV 1	LGV 2	LGV 3	HGV 1	HGV 2	HGV 3	Buses	Total Vehicles (including bus)	Congested speed (kph)
	Car B	Car C1	Car C2														
Do Nothing Totals	295,552	183,711	179,522	2,783,472	407,072	1,297,418	493,521	296,856	111,130	683,851	226,452	13,223	144,986	55,090	148,729	7,320,586	62,470
Do Something Totals	452,118	26,374	2,568,513	141,567	386,111	1,229,994	474,007	428,805	111,977	689,057	228,177	13,375	146,651	55,722	157,749	7,110,197	62,588
%age Differences	53%	-86%	1331%	-95%	-5%	-5%	-4%	44%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	6%	-3%	0%

When you look out of your council office windows onto New Road, you will see lots of motorbikes, cars, vans, lorries and buses passing by in both directions. The Ricardo report lists 528 vehicles/day. However, when you check the Council’s AADT data for this road, this number is for buses only; the others were not counted.

Only 34 roads were selected to represent Oxford, yet key roads were missed or wrongly selected; There are no references to St Cross Road, one of the main traffic filter sites! There are neither buses or congestion on this road!

Several roads selected have the wrong data attached to them e.g. Ashurst Way is a side road on Rose Hill (1,256 V/D) whereas Rose Hill itself, a major road into / from Oxford carries 18,806 vehicles / day.

No mention is made of Horspath Driftway (The Slade) a major route in Headington and the major hospitals, although it carries 19,266 vehicles/day, nor the Cowley Road, that will be directly affected by the St Clements ANPR cameras.

No mention is made of how cars have been calculated to be personal, or business, care or blue badge exempt.

This page is intentionally left blank

Danny Yee

The officers' report provides responses to most of the attacks on this scheme. Some opponents have pivoted from lambasting the county for not acting fast enough to complaining about it acting too quickly. Others have suddenly started pretending that Oxford has no problem with congestion or air pollution or road danger. No one has proposed any coherent alternative.

The need for measures to address congestion and move Oxford towards lower traffic has been clear for decades: the ancestry of the current plan can be traced back to the city council's 1972 Balanced Transport Policy, but the core traffic filter scheme has been in planning since 2015 and public since the Connecting Oxford launch in 2019. This congestion charge is a weakened version of that scheme, a temporary measure while the Botley Rd remains closed.

There are other schemes that might achieve similar ends -- and there will never be any kind of consensus on the best option -- but what is being proposed has been carefully thought through and the evidence is that it will be a step in the right direction. It can also be modified to address problems that may arise -- as indeed it already has been, whether in matters as broad as hours of operation or as specific as the needs of ice hockey players.

I would like you to imagine the counterfactual to introducing this scheme. Imagine you were, instead, considering a scheme to remove city-wide bus prioritisation measures, a scheme which would cripple the bus system and also result in an additional two dozen people a year being injured badly enough to make it into the police injuries database. You would be pretty skeptical about that. And indeed, no one would seriously think about removing the High St bus gate now.

You will have looked carefully at this scheme. If you can think of anything that can still be improved at this stage, that will be useful. But the time has passed for procrastination.

This page is intentionally left blank

Other Congestion charges dissuade visitors from driving into another city. Residents in Summertown, Cutteslowe and Wolvercote particularly oppose this proposed congestion charge as it will tax them for driving in their own city for over 70% of the year.

The Marston Ferry Road checkpoint will make it harder for people in Summertown to travel to other areas of their city and, particularly, to attend hospital appointments. People going to hospital are often not capable of cycling, walking far or waiting at bus stops. The effect on teachers working at Cherwell School has been well documented in the press. Why should they, other teachers, and health workers at the hospitals, be taxed for driving to work when they can't afford to live within easy cycling distance.

For the Summertown shops there will be no direct limitation on visitors arriving down the Banbury Road and no projected increase in traffic on that road. The effects will be indirect – projected increases in ring road traffic between them and their Oxfordshire client base making it a less convenient area to visit.

Traffic is, though, predicted to increase substantially on the Woodstock Road to the detriment of residents living on the road and in the adjoining streets, with an average projected increase of 1,217 vehicles a day. This is over 444,000 vehicles a year. These vehicles will be driving past two primary school playgrounds right next to the road, both of which should be safeguarded from increased traffic-related NO₂ and PM2.5 pollution.

The Summertown shops are mainly a convenience shopping area, not a destination one. People call in to pick things up. Anything that makes it harder for them to do so will damage the viability of businesses in Summertown, which is considered one of the most successful district centres in the country. We should be proud of this, not threatening it.

*The wider area of Summertown is, however, also a regional draw. The 2021 Neighbourhood Forum survey of car park users found that external visitors were travelling on average 17.3 miles on a weekday, and 24 miles on a Saturday; not distances that lend themselves to cycling and walking.

An additional challenge for Summertown businesses, will be the peak time restrictions on the Marston Ferry Road, which will hinder direct access from Headington, Northway and Marston. Summertown acts as an important local hub for Northway and Marston as they have few leisure, retail or hospitality facilities. Residents there may go instead to Headington, thereby adding to congestion and pollution on Headley Way and London Road, and the schools situated there.

*None of the projections of traffic movements show any improvement in congestion in our area, quite the reverse, with massively increased congestion on the Woodstock Road. I ask you to advise against this proposal.

This page is intentionally left blank

Presentation to the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27th August, 2025 by Graham Jones on behalf of ROX-backing oxford business

We recognise that members of this committee have a very important role in properly assessing the proposals for a temporary congestion charge within Oxford.

You must be able to ascertain whether the huge inconvenience to residents and businesses and the likely damage to the local economy are outweighed by the hoped-for benefits.

The main benefit being targeted by the congestion charge is to improve bus times by 10% and yet, some LTNs, forcing local traffic on to major bus routes and some new 20 MPH stretches, where bus drivers normally hoped to catch up on their schedules, have already set back this aim.

Instead of trying to right this, the congestion charge locations, not all of which are on prime bus routes, seem set to add to the problems rather than solve them.

That is unless one of the other stated objectives can be achieved, that of a reduction in traffic. The Council's own data suggests that a sizeable reduction of 15% to 20% is required but admits that some areas, including the ring road, are forecast to see increased traffic levels. Perhaps on bus routes not affected by the congestion charge points.

So, these charging points are not in logical locations but will, nevertheless, divide communities. Please look at a map?

The rules around permits and exemptions are very complex and restrictive, not appreciating that many people living in the county and beyond will have limited or no free access.

Has the Council seriously considered the challenges that will be faced by visitors and customers to retail outlets and hospitality businesses, as well as staff, to the city centre and suburban shopping areas?

In spite of the new Westgate, Oxford has seen a significant decline in its shopping offer with many different types of retailers disappearing altogether.

The County Council needs to look to see how it can help to reverse this rather than squeezing the lifeblood out of the city.

Cllr Gant has said on several occasions that alternatives have not been offered. This is not true and **ROX**, in its submission to the consultation, put forward six well considered ideas.

Why have these not been looked at in more detail by traffic planning officers while they had time with the postponement of the traffic filters?

We implore you as a scrutiny committee to stop the council from bringing in these measures. To do so and before Christmas will seriously knock the stuffing out of the Oxford business community.

This page is intentionally left blank

Richard Parnham
Presentation to Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee
27 August 2025 10.00 am

Today I will focus on just one of the six key justifications for the congestion change: the suggestion that it will “make bus journeys faster and more reliable”.

In annex 9 of the document pack for this meeting, you are presented with information that shows that average bus speeds in Oxford were between 11- 11.6 mph in March – June 2025. Implicit in this is that bus times have got worse recently. Well, newsflash: they haven't. The council has data, which it didn't share with you, but I will, which indicates that bus speeds in 2019 at the same time of year were – between 11.2 – 11.4mph. This means average bus speeds within Oxford's ring road have barely change over six years, and that's despite the closure of Botley Road, the LTNs (which shredded services locally) and the new 20mph limits. So when the bus companies demand a 10% improvement in bus speeds, they are not asking the council to fix a problem that (overall) has got worse recently: instead, they were asking for lockdown-style levels of traffic, mainly for their commercial benefit. When they asked to make this 10% improvement a condition of their electric bus investment, Oxfordshire County Council should have told them to get stuffed, and invest in electric buses anyway.

So will the congestion change make a difference to bus speeds? Almost certainly not. According to data in the council's possession, there's no improvement in road speeds predicted, for example, on Abingdon Road (it may get fractionally worse), the road nearest to Botley Road. But nor are road speed improvements predicted for London Road, Iffley Road and Banbury Road, to name but a few major bus routes. The best outcome, but for only around its 500m length only (two locations are modelled), a 1-3kpm improvement on St Clement's, during peak hours only. That's deeply troubling benefit/harm ratio, on a city-wide, Oxford economy-wide basis.

And there's probably an apparent reason for this lack of road speed benefits: the congestion charge sites were never selected because they were congestion hotspots, or major bus routes: they were selected because they severe connections between neighbourhoods – a legacy of the original purpose of the “Connecting Oxford” scheme, on which the congestion charge scheme is largely derived. So now you have the farcical situation where two of the congestion charge sites carry no buses at all, while two more that do don't typically suffer from any congestion. Of the two congestion charge sites that a) are bus routes and b) can be congested, Hollow Way is predicted to get slightly slower if the congestion charge is brought in, both morning and interpeak. You heard that right: slower, not quicker. We've already discussed St Clement's.

City-wide, the big “unknown” is the impact on bus services caused by displacement. We've worked out that around 70% of buses go nowhere near a congestion charge filter, but may get caught up in displacement from it. That's certainly likely to occur on Marsh Lane, but will bus routes on Garsington Road get hit as a result of the modelled increase in traffic on that road? What about Cowley Road? What does the council know, but is not telling us?

And by that I mean: the council has data in its possession data which shows a clear absence of improvements in road speeds if the congestion charge is bought it, at numerous roads across the city. So why wasn't this finding published, leaving it up to us to do the maths independently? Was this discovery missed in the mad rush to get the proposal ready for publication – or did someone actively decide not to publish this finding? If someone made an

Richard Parnham
Presentation to Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee
27 August 2025 10.00 am

active choice not to publish this finding, I'd like to know who that was, and why. I want an explanation - and a name.

Good morning,

I would like to draw the committee's attention to the catastrophic impact that the Marston Ferry Road traffic filter will have. We could be looking at a mass exodus of teachers from local schools in this area as well as the city's hospital staff and to top it off possible deaths and injuries too.

The Chief Executive of the Cherwell, Swan and New Marston Primary schools has expressed grave concerns about the impact on staff recruitment. A survey from July 2024 states that 43% of staff at the Cherwell School will likely resign when traffic filters are introduced. How will these schools survive if almost half their staff leave?!

Marsh Lane during rush hour is a road used by many hospital staff and patients alike for access to the JR. Not only will displaced traffic avoiding the Marston Ferry Road filter increase congestion on this road but NHS Trusts say the Congestion Charge risks disrupting the city's hospitals, provoking an exodus of hospital staff who depend on their vehicles for their daily commute. The County Council say some staff will be exempt but not all hospital staff will be eligible. How will an already struggling NHS cope with even more staff shortages?!

And finally, there appears to be a major discrepancy between Oxfordshire County Council congestion plans and their Vision Zero initiative.

According to OCC: "Vision Zero starts with a simple premise, that no human being should be killed or seriously injured as the result of a road collision, whatever mode of transport they are using."

The Road Safety Audit Response Report on the Oxford Traffic Filters Project states that there is a risk of increased collisions throughout the scheme.

Measures to reduce this are mentioned, however, it also repeatedly states that the traffic filters trial will review, adapt, and evaluate during the lifespan of the trial period.

So, the public will now be subject to a trial that may put the lives and safety of people at risk, going against their very own mission of Vision Zero. According to their own reports there have been no reported injury collisions by the Swan School in the period 2019-2024. So why is the council introducing a traffic measure, right by a school which has the potential to increase injuries and possible death where so far there have been none at all!

This page is intentionally left blank

Scrutiny speech 270825 - Emily Scaysbrook

Despite officers' wholly inadequate suggestion to make Park & Ride free for two months, let me be clear: the business community is still overwhelmingly opposed to this scheme - as indeed are the majority of consultation respondents, and more than thirteen thousand petition signatories to date. Officers cannot credibly claim that this proposal carries public support. To introduce this scheme immediately before Christmas is reckless. To suggest that free Park & Ride travel for just two months constitutes sufficient mitigation is insulting, simplistic, and does nothing to address the concerns the business community has raised. Officers should be ashamed of recommending it.

I urge this committee to scrutinise whether it is rational or reasonable to jeopardise the survival of small and local businesses at the very point in the year when survival or closure is decided. What traffic "emergency" exists now that is so pressing, so urgent, that even a short delay until after Christmas is unthinkable? And given that officers themselves have admitted the scheme will cause disruption for three to six months, on what basis is just two months of mitigation considered sufficient? More to the point: how can free Park & Ride travel be mitigation when so many people travel by car not because of cost, but because buses do not meet their needs - shift work, rural journeys, mobility issues, or carrying shopping and children. Free tickets do nothing to remove those barriers.

Please also scrutinise whether a six-week consultation held over the summer holidays, with analysis squeezed into just three weeks while key officers are on holiday, meets any credible democratic standard. Scrutinise why infrastructure is already being installed before councillors have even taken their formal decision. Does that inspire confidence in this council or in local democracy? Public faith in this authority is dwindling precisely because of behaviour like this - the clear impression that decisions are predetermined and voices are ignored. Please do not reinforce that belief by waving this scheme through.

And scrutinise, too, the honesty of what is before you. This scheme is called a "congestion charge" not because it accurately reflects its nature, but because officers admit that signage with that wording was most easily available. Is that acceptable?

This committee must subject this scheme to real scrutiny. The timing is indefensible. The process is flawed. The justifications do not withstand serious examination.

Thank you.

This page is intentionally left blank