Oxford city centre street scene manual – part one: equality impact assessment

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1. Introduction

1.1. This report assesses the impact of the proposed policies, processes and materials in the Oxford city centre street scene manual: part one on different social groups to identify any discriminatory or socially exclusive effects. In line with county council and national guidance, this assessment covers the following:

- Disability and health
- Age
- Gender
- Race
- Socio-economic status
- Sexual orientation
- Religion or belief

2. Analysis

2.1. The tables at the end of this assessment contain the detailed analysis of the impacts of the manual on different groups.

2.2. This analysis reflects feedback on the draft manual from the county council's disability equality advisers and from user groups representing disabled people (in particular Unlimited). Their assistance is gratefully acknowledged. The tables contain a summary of the main points of concern; a more comprehensive summary of feedback on the manual from Unlimited and other groups can be found in annex 3.

3. Conclusions

3.1. The implementation of the policies in the street scene manual will have many positive effects for many of the social groups listed above.

3.2. However, some policies may lead to difficulties for certain groups. Perhaps the most significant of these difficulties are the anxieties and practical problems faced by people with sensory or cognitive impairments when certain conventional features of the street are removed or altered in an attempt slow traffic down, give priority to

pedestrians and create an attractive environment. Examples include the introduction of single-level streets with no height difference between the carriageway and footway, and a shift from signal-controlled pedestrian crossings to less formal crossings.

3.3. The challenge is made greater still by the fact that removing certain conventional street features (such as the height difference between the footway and carriageway) benefits some people with particular disabilities but creates problems for other people with different disabilities.

3.4. The street scene manual cannot provide the solution to this dilemma. The manual supports a shift away from formal systems in order to reduce traffic speeds and reinforce the individuals' responsibility for their own safety and the safety of others. However the manual is deliberately and necessarily non-prescriptive about how this should be achieved. Suggestions are made and guidance provided, but the manual recognises that more research and experimentation are required in order to find the optimum balance between the infinite competing demands placed on streets. **It is critical that the people who have the greatest anxiety about new street design practices are at the heart of this research and experimentation.**

3.5. Overall the street scene manual contains many policies that will benefit a wide range of people and have few or no disadvantages. Those policies that have the potential to create problems for certain social groups have been identified and in some cases, a change to the policy or supporting text has been recommended. The manual itself recommends more research is needed in some areas and this recommendation must be acted upon.

ANNEX 1

Disability and health

Table 1: People with mobility impairments		
Positive aspects of manual	**Negative aspects of manual**	**Mitigation and/or comment (for negative aspects)**
• Emphasis on pedestrian priority and reducing traffic speeds reduces actual and perceived dangers from traffic • Decluttering of street furniture removes barriers to movement • Provision of raised crossings removes gradients and makes crossing easier • Provision of seating at regular intervals provides resting points • Even, firm, grippy surfaces remove hazards and facilitate easy movement of wheelchairs and scooters • Bus stop design requirements (seating, 140 mm kerb etc) make bus stops easier and more comfortable to use • Single-level streets with no kerbs give wheelchair and scooter users the same	Preference for informal crossing points likely to result in reduced perceptions of safety when crossing streets	Application of crossing hierarchy needs to reflect traffic conditions and consider the particular needs of people with mobility impairments. A mix of crossing types may be helpful in some streets. **Action: additional guidance to be added to cover this point**
	Reduction in physical separation between road users such as single-level streets will result in reduced perceptions of safety for some	Single-level streets potentially provide great mobility benefits for wheelchair and scooter users. However, as with all street design decisions, a proper analysis must be carried out of the traffic conditions and other factors to ensure a single-level street is appropriate. A single-level street need not remove the distinction (though surfacing materials) between carriageway and footway; retaining this distinction may increase perceptions of safety for some. **Action: additional guidance to be added to cover this point**
	Provision of additional cycle parking may obstruct pavements	The manual recognises this problem. However, an additional statement could be added to the effect that cycle parking should not be provided on the footway if a realistic alternative location is available – for example in the carriageway or on private land. **Action: additional guidance to be added to cover this point**

freedom of mobility as ambulant pedestrians and greatly reduce impact of footways obstructions such as parked bicycles • Preference for zebra crossings reduces waiting time and allows unlimited crossing time for slower pedestrians (unlike signal-controlled crossings) • Increased formal cycle parking and quicker removal of abandoned bikes will help reduce obstructions • Requirement to consult people with disabilities at an early stage in scheme design and throughout design process	Proposed hierarchy of users in street design places cyclists above buses, taxis and cars. People with mobility impairments often rely on these latter modes and are anxious about cyclists running into them.	The hierarchy applies to the design of streets in the city centre, not to the priority given to these modes in reaching the city centre, which may be different. A disabled person becomes a pedestrian as soon as they alight from a bus, taxi or car and at that point they will get the benefit of pedestrian-focused design. The manual states that wheeled traffic (including cyclists) may be restricted in some circumstances to improve pedestrian comfort and safety. **Action: clarify status of hierarchy; include disabled drivers/passengers in the hierarchy.**
	Removal of road signs and markings could increase contravention of traffic restrictions, including restrictions on cycle access, thereby putting disabled people at risk.	The manual advocates the removal of as many signs and markings as possible, but makes it very clear that all traffic restrictions must be enforceable (SS6). It is acknowledged that some road users are not aware of the meaning of some road signs, but using alternatives requires special authorisation from the government and would undermine compliance with the correct sign in other places.
	Any increased restrictions on motor traffic are likely to result in greater walking distances for motorists and bus users. This extra walking distance may be difficult for people with mobility impairments	There are pros and cons of additional restrictions on motor traffic in the city centre for people with mobility problems. Reducing motorised traffic leads to a safer and more pleasant environment for pedestrians with mobility impairments; but this must be considered against reduced accessibility. These factors will always be assessed as part of the scheme design process set out in the manual. The process requires consultation with mobility impaired people at an early stage and throughout work on the scheme design.

Table 2: People with sensory impairments (particularly visual)		
Positive aspects of manual	**Negative aspects of manual**	**Mitigation and/or comment (for negative aspects)**
• Emphasis on pedestrian priority and reducing traffic speeds reduces actual and perceived dangers from traffic • Decluttering of street furniture removes hazards • Provision of raised crossings may make crossing easier and safer for some – but see opposite • Even, firm, grippy surfaces remove trip hazards • Increased restrictions on motorised traffic may help reduce actual and perceived dangers • Increased formal cycle parking and quicker removal of abandoned bikes will help reduce obstructions • Requirement to consult people with disabilities at an early stage in scheme design and throughout design process	Preference for informal crossing points may make some crossings difficult or impossible to use for people with sensory impairments	Application of crossing hierarchy needs to reflect traffic conditions and consider the particular needs of people with mobility impairments. A mix of crossing types may be helpful in some streets. **Action: additional guidance to be added to cover this point**
	Reduction in physical separation between road users (such as single-level streets) will result in reduced perceptions of safety for people with sensory impairments, who may not be able to detect the part of the street where vehicles are permitted.	*See also Table 1.* The ability of people with visual impairments to identify the part of the street where traffic is permitted must always be considered. A change in texture and/or colour will help and has little or no detrimental impact on wheelchair and scooter users. Significant level changes (60mm or above) are easy to detect for cane-users but create barriers to movement for wheelchair and scooter users and may increase traffic speeds. This is a complex area that requires further research and experimentation. **Action: additional guidance to be added on this point, but it is covered already to an extent by policy SS19.**
	Provision of additional cycle parking may obstruct pavements and create hazards for people with visual impairments	The manual recognises this problem. However, an additional statement could be added to the effect that cycle parking should not be provided on the footway if a realistic alternative location is available – for example in the carriageway or on private land. **Action: additional guidance to be added to cover this point**
	Proposed hierarchy of users in street design places cyclists above buses, taxis and cars. People with sensory	The hierarchy applies to the design of streets in the city centre, not to the priority given to these modes in reaching the city centre, which may be different. A disabled person becomes a pedestrian as soon as they

	impairments often rely on these latter modes and are anxious about cyclists running into them.	alight from a bus, taxi or car and at that point they will get the benefit of pedestrian-focused design. The manual states that wheeled traffic (including cyclists) may be restricted in some circumstances to improve pedestrian comfort and safety. **Action: clarify status of hierarchy; include disabled drivers/passengers in the hierarchy.**
	Removal of road signs and markings could increase contravention of traffic restrictions, including restrictions on cycle access, thereby putting disabled people at risk.	The manual advocates the removal of as many signs and markings as possible, but makes it very clear that all traffic restrictions must be enforceable (SS6). It is acknowledged that some road users are not aware of the meaning of some road signs, but using alternatives requires special authorisation from the government and would undermine compliance with the correct sign in other places.
	Any increased restrictions on motor traffic are likely to result in greater walking distances for motorists and bus users. This extra walking distance may be difficult for people with mobility impairments	There are pros and cons of additional restrictions on motor traffic in the city centre for people with sensory impairments. Reducing motorised traffic leads to a safer and more pleasant environment for pedestrians with sensory impairments; but this must be considered against reduced accessibility. These factors will always be assessed as part of the scheme design process set out in the manual. The process requires consultation with sensory impaired people at an early stage and throughout work on the scheme design.

ANNEX 1

Table 3: People with respiratory health problems		
Positive aspects of manual	**Negative aspects of manual**	**Mitigation and/or comment (for negative aspects)**
• The manual supports street design that promotes a slow, continuous flow of traffic, rather than stop-start traffic; this smoothing of flows will reduce pollution emissions. • The manual supports additional tree planting in the city centre, which will help with absorption of air-borne pollutants. • Additional public seating will help provide resting places for people with respiratory health problems • Any increased restrictions on motor vehicle access will reduce exposure to air-borne pollutants – but see opposite. • Requirement to consult people with disabilities at an early stage in scheme design and throughout design process	Any increased restrictions on motor traffic are likely to result in greater walking distances for motorists and bus users. This extra walking distance may be difficult for people with respiratory problems.	There are pros and cons of additional restrictions on motor traffic in the city centre for people with respiratory problems. These will always be assessed as part of air quality assessment work on traffic access changes.

Table 4: People with learning difficulties		
Positive aspects of manual	**Negative aspects of manual**	**Mitigation and/or comment (for negative aspects)**
• Emphasis on pedestrian priority and reducing traffic speeds reduces actual and perceived dangers from traffic • Decluttering of street furniture removes hazards • Provision of raised crossings may make crossing easier and safer for some – but see opposite • Even, firm, grippy surfaces remove trip hazards • Increased restrictions on motorised traffic may help reduce actual and perceived dangers • Increased formal cycle parking and quicker removal of abandoned bikes will help reduce obstructions • Requirement to consult people with disabilities at an early stage in scheme design and throughout design process	Preference for informal crossing points may make some crossings difficult or impossible to use for people with learning difficulties.	Application of crossing hierarchy needs to reflect traffic conditions and consider the particular needs of people with learning difficulties. A mix of crossing types may be helpful in some streets. **Action: additional guidance to be added to cover this point**
	Reduction in physical separation between road users (such as single-level streets) may result in reduced perceptions of safety for people with learning difficulties, who may not be able to identify reliably the part of the street where vehicles are permitted.	*See also Tables 1 & 2.* The ability of people with learning difficulties to identify the part of the street where traffic is permitted must always be considered. A change in texture and/or colour will help and has little or no detrimental impact on wheelchair and scooter users. A significant level change (60mm or above) may be easier to understand as this is the normal way of demarcating footway and carriageway, but this creates a barrier to movement for wheelchair and scooter users and may increase traffic speeds. This is a complex area that requires further research and experimentation. **Action: additional guidance to be added on this point, but it is covered already to an extent by policy SS19**
	Provision of additional cycle parking may obstruct pavements and create a more complex environment with more hazards.	The manual recognises this problem. However, an additional statement could be added to the effect that cycle parking should not be provided on the footway if a realistic alternative location is available – for example in the carriageway or on private land. **Action: additional guidance to be added to cover this point**

Age

Health problems and disabilities associated with old age are covered in the section above.

Table 5: People below driving age (including children travelling to school)		
Positive aspects of manual	**Negative aspects of manual**	**Mitigation and/or comment (for negative aspects)**
• The creation of a safe, civilised, attractive environment for pedestrians will benefit all those who walk in the city centre, in particular young people who are sometimes more vulnerable. • Features to promote bus and cycle use (e.g. better bus shelters) will be a particular help for non-drivers.	Any increased restrictions on motor traffic are likely to result in greater walking distances for motorists and/or bus users. This could affect non-drivers.	There are pros and cons of additional restrictions on motor traffic in the city centre from the perspective of people without access to a car; reducing motorised traffic leads to a safer and more pleasant environment for walking and cycling and greater pedestrian activity, but this may be offset partly by the loss of activity associated with the motor traffic (e.g. taxi queues or bus stops).

Gender

Opinion is divided as to whether men or women face greater personal security risks in public places:

Recorded crime figures suggest that men are more at risk than women from stranger assault in public places. The British Crime Survey reveals that men are the most frequent victims of stranger and acquaintance violence, but muggings are more evenly split between men and women. However, victim surveys reveal that crimes of violence against women often go unreported. From the Edinburgh Women's Safety Survey [Edinburgh City Council, 1998] 43% of women said that over the previous twelve months, they had been harassed by rude or abusive comments on the street and nearly a fifth had been followed by a stranger. Of all the incidents described through the survey [ranging from verbal abuse to assault or robbery] only 2% had been reported to the police. (http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/crime/personalsecurity/personalsecurityissuesinpede3005?page=4)

However, assuming the risk is not equal, the following effects apply:

Table 6: Men or women, whichever gender is at greater risk from crime in public places		
Positive aspects of manual	**Negative aspects of manual**	**Mitigation and/or comment (for negative aspects)**
• The creation of a safe, civilised, attractive environment for pedestrians will benefit all those who walk in the city centre and help reduce perceived and actual personal security threats	Any increased restrictions on motor traffic could reduce activity in the street and the "natural surveillance" provided by that activity.	There are pros and cons of additional restrictions on motor traffic in the city centre from a crime perspective; reducing motorised traffic leads to a more pleasant environment and consequently more pedestrian activity, but this may be offset partly by the loss of activity associated with the motor traffic (e.g. taxi queues or bus stops) .

Socio-economic status

The assessment below assumes that people with lower incomes cannot or do not drive or use taxis and are therefore reliant on buses, walking and cycling for access to the city centre. This is certainly not true of all people from lower-income households, but given the costs of taxis and parking this assumption is likely to be reasonably accurate.

Table 7: People from lower income households		
Positive aspects of manual	**Negative aspects of manual**	**Mitigation and/or comment (for negative aspects)**
• The creation of a safe, civilised, attractive environment for pedestrians will benefit all those who walk in the city centre, including bus users and cyclists. • Features to promote bus and cycle use (e.g. better bus shelters and cycle parking) will be a particular help for people without access to a car.	Any increased restrictions on motor traffic are likely to result in greater walking distances for motorists and/or bus users. This could affect non-drivers.	There are pros and cons of additional restrictions on motor traffic in the city centre from the perspective of people without access to a car; reducing motorised traffic leads to a safer and more pleasant environment for walking and cycling and greater pedestrian activity, but this may be offset partly by the loss of activity associated with the motor traffic (e.g. taxi queues or bus stops).

Religion and belief, sexual orientation and race

The manual is not considered to have any discriminatory effects relating to these characteristics.