

CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT – 16 JULY 2020

OXFORD: WALTON STREET - EXPERIMENTAL PROHIBITION OF MOTOR VEHICLES

Report by Director for Community Operations, Communities

Recommendation

1. The Cabinet Member for the Environment is **RECOMMENDED** to defer a decision on the continuation of the above experimental order pending further analysis and assessment of its impact.

Executive summary

2. Formal consultation has recently concluded for the experimental order prohibiting access to and from Walton Street at its junction with Beaumont Street and Worcester Street (Oxford).
3. The experimental order builds upon objectives set out in the Oxford Transport Strategy to prioritise sustainable travel modes and improve and accommodate additional movement flows around the city. Consistent with wider aspirations set out in Connecting Oxford, the trial is intended to remove 'through trips' through the Walton St area in order to;
 - prioritise and promote sustainable travel modes,
 - improve air quality,
 - help positively address the climate emergency agenda,
 - provide a safe and improved environment for local residents and businesses
4. Analysis of the formal consultation phase has found that 51% of respondents expressed support for the measure whilst 43% expressed an objection. Note: since the closure of the public consultation the authority has received a high level of support emails in relation to the closure.
5. Officers are recommending a deferral on a final decision to make the experimental order permanent, both in response to the current COVID-19 situation and following the extensive feedback received during the formal consultation period. A decision on the experimental order is required before May 2021. It is anticipated that the delayed decision will be taken before January 2021.

Introduction

6. This report presents an 'overview' of responses received in the course of the statutory consultation following the implementation in November 2019 of an experimental Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) prohibiting access by motor vehicles to and from Walton Street at its junction with Beaumont Street and Worcester Street in Oxford.
7. The experimental closure was implemented following a period of maintenance works on Walton Street which commenced in July 2019, close to its junction with Worcester Street. The experimental closure followed a short period of preliminary consultation with key stakeholders undertaken in late September/early October 2019. This preliminary consultation phase attracted 493 individual responses a majority (63%) indicated support for undertaking the experimental closure.
8. A 6-month statutory consultation on the trial closure subsequently commenced on 7th November 2019 and concluded on 29th May 2020. In response to the formal consultation 51% of respondents expressed support for the trial closure, while 43% of respondents expressed an objection, 6% expressed no opinion.
9. On 18th November 2019 the experimental order to close Walton Street came into force. This ETRO runs for a period of 18 months until 18 May 2021. A final decision on whether to make the experimental order permanent or not is required to be made before this date.
10. Officers recognise that a determination on whether to make the experimental order permanent would typically follow promptly following the end of the formal consultation phase. However, in light of the ongoing COVID-19 situation and following a significant number of responses received during the formal consultation period, county council officers have recommended deferral of a decision on Walton Street until a later date. It is recognised that a final decision on whether to make the trial closure permanent is still required before May 2021.
11. Deferral of a decision would be consistent with planned delays to other significant Oxford City schemes being progressed including establishment of the Zero Emission Zone for the city, where a plan to launch the initial 'Red Zone' phase of the initiative in December 2020 has been postponed in light of the COVID-19 situation.
12. Significant alterations to individual travel habits both during and as we move out of the COVID-19 situation, also means that local travel demands and context have significantly changed during the first 6 months of the experimental trial. Against this altered context it has not been possible to assess the impact of the closure over a sustained period. With a focus on COVID -19 recovery measures and other sustainable travel measures being explored and prioritised across the wider city, it is considered pragmatic to allow for a further period of assessment to consider coordination between trial

measures in the Walton Street area and other response measures being considered elsewhere across the city.

13. It is recognised that to-date the experimental trial closure has had a number of unintended subsequent impacts in the area which are currently being worked through. Through a deferred decision it is intended that over the coming months prior to any final decision being sought, the county council will continue to actively and constructively engage with a number of the key groups who have raised concerns and submitted comments during the formal consultation period.

Background

14. The current proposals as shown at Annex 1 have been subject to a number of previous consultations set out below.

Consultation

15. Following the preliminary consultation carried out in October 2019 (in which 63% of respondents supported the measure) - approval was given for the making of the experimental order on 4 November 2019, which then came into force on 18 November.

16. The statutory six-month consultation period for an experimental TRO started on 07 November 2019 and ended on 29 May 2020. A public notice was placed in the Oxford Times newspaper (on 7 November 2019) and sent to statutory consultees, including Thames Valley Police, the Fire & Rescue Service, Ambulance service, Oxford City Council and local County & City Councillors. Public notices were also placed on site and letters sent directly to approximately 2,105 residential & commercial properties in the immediate vicinity and surrounding roads.

17. 630 separate responses were recorded as being received during the course of the 6-month consultation period from a range of interested parties including: local residents & businesses, interest/campaign groups and other individuals. The overall breakdown of responses is shown below:

| Response Source | Support | Object | Neither/Concerns | Total |
|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------|
| Online | 271 | 192 | 24 | 487 |
| Other | 49 | 81 | 13 | 143 |
| Total | 320 (50.8%) | 273 (43.3%) | 37 (5.9%) | 630 |

18. Five petitions* were also received during the consultation period, which comprised of the following:

| Petition | View | Number of Signatures |
|----------------------------|--------|----------------------|
| Alive & Kicking in Jericho | Object | 12 |
| St Bernards Road | Object | 81 |

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|---|---------|-------------|
| Residents | | |
| OCC to provide baseline data before closing Walton Street | Object | 710* |
| Re-open Walton Street | Object | 710* |
| Total Object | | 1513 |
| Keep Walton Street Closed to through traffic | Support | 645 |
| | | |
| Total Support | | 645 |

* note: individuals may have signed two petitions as well as submitting an individual response.

Response to objections and other comments

19. Officers are aware of the following comments that have been raised by key stakeholders:

| Stakeholder | Key Comments |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Thames Valley Police | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Emergency response times, * Alternative Diversions much longer. |
| Fire & Rescue Service | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Emergency response times (still within national response time requirements) * Additional traffic on diverted routes, * Allow for temporary removal if required. |
| Oxford City Cllr (Carfax Ward) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Positive feedback from local residents, * Review the impacts on streets between Walton Street/Kingston Road & Woodstock Road. |
| Worcester College | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Pedestrian crossing needs to be reinstated, * Barrier needs to be safe for cyclists, * Allow for temporary removal if required. |
| Cycling UK | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Will reduce motor vehicle traffic, * Improve conditions for walking & cycling, * Improve air quality, * Good trial of 'Low Traffic Neighbourhood'. |
| Cyclox | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Improve conditions for walking & cycling, * Improve air quality, * Good for local business. |
| Oxford Pedestrian Assoc | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Improved for pedestrians, * Reduced traffic travels at slower speeds, * Potential for increased traffic on side roads. |
| Low Carbon Oxford | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Reduce carbon emissions, * Improve air quality, * Reduce traffic congestion in area, * Improve conditions for walking & cycling, * Reduce 'rat-running'. |

| | |
|------------------|--|
| OXTRAG | * Needs of residents need to be considered, * Allow for temporary removal if required (i.e. St Giles Fair). |
| Bus Users Oxford | * Restore some through traffic to Walton Street (i.e. 'PickMeUp', taxis & private hire vehicles) |

20. Following local feedback received during the formal consultation period, some additional complementary measures have been progressed including;
- Additional temporary barriers at the Walton St/St Bernard's Road junction to dissuade a disproportionate traffic flow from utilising St Bernard's Road
 - Additional advisory signage on numerous cross streets between Woodstock Road and Kingston Road to dissuade disproportionate vehicle movements from these streets
21. Design of some specific elements remains ongoing and will be investigated further alongside key stakeholders during upcoming months.
22. It is envisaged that these will form part of the ongoing engagement with key groups & individuals who have made representations and submitted comments during the consultation period.
23. Additionally, officers will be reviewing and analysing the significant number of responses received from local residents and individuals during the consultation period – many of which are extremely detailed in nature – over the coming months and seeking to continue to speak with and work with local people to discuss and understand these in more detail.

How the Project supports LTP4 Objectives

The proposals would help facilitate the convenient and safe movement of pedestrians and cyclists leading to the encouragement of more use of sustainable travel modes and improved air quality.

Financial and Staff Implications (including Revenue)

24. Funding for the proposed measures has been provided by the highway annual capital maintenance programme.

JASON RUSSELL
Interim Director for Community Operations

Background papers: Plan of prohibition of access by motor vehicles.
 Consultation responses

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July 2020



Walton Street - Proposed Prohibition of Motor Vehicles

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