

Divisions Affected - Oxford

CABINET - 16 MARCH 2021

OXFORD ZERO EMISISON ZONE PILOT (A LOCAL CHARGING SCHEME) – OUTCOMES OF FORMAL CONSULTATION AND FINAL SCHEME APPROVAL

Report by Corporate Director of Communities

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**
 - (a) note the content of the report and outcomes of the recent public consultation on the Oxford Zero Emission Zone Pilot; and**
 - (b) approve the final Zero Emission Zone Pilot scheme at Annex 6 and authorise the scheme to be implemented.**

Executive Summary

2. This report outlines a final proposal for the Oxford ZEZ Pilot which was published as part of a period of formal consultation between Friday 20 November 2020 and Sunday 17 January 2021. The ZEZ is to be rolled out in phases, anticipated to start in August 2021 with the creation of a Zero Emission Zone Pilot (ZEZ Pilot) in a small area of Oxford city centre; a map of the zone is at Annex 1. The intention is to then introduce the full Zero Emission Zone (ZEZ) in spring 2022 (subject to the outcomes of separate consultation). The extent of the full ZEZ is shown in Annex 2.
3. Proposals for a ZEZ in Oxford form part of the county's current Local Transport Plan and has a significant role to play in supporting the county council's Climate Action Framework and Corporate Plan – it will help people live healthier, safer lives and it supports and protects the local environment. The ZEZ will also help to reduce the county council's carbon footprint. Similarly, proposals also align with the strategic vision for Oxfordshire by enabling more sustainable growth and by putting Oxfordshire at the leading edge of UK and global de-carbonisation efforts.
4. In total, 885 responses were received via an online survey, with a further 34 pieces of correspondence by letter and email. Feedback reveals a mix of views across all themes. Overall, it is considered that there is sufficient support to carry the scheme forward to implementation subject to a number of refinements. A detailed breakdown of the consultation responses is at Annex 4.

5. The scheme will operate via a road charging scheme with discounts proposed for residents and businesses in the Pilot area, Blue Badge holders, care and health workers' vehicles and for students arriving/leaving at the beginning and end of university term. Further details of the proposed final scheme are at Annex 5 and 6.
6. The cost to implement the ZEZ Pilot is met by a mixture of third-party funding and between the city and county councils. Implementation is anticipated to begin from August 2021.

Background

7. The ZEZ is a joint project with the city council but led by the county council. **The extent of the ZEZ Pilot is shown in Annex 1.** The ZEZ Pilot will allow the councils to gain experience and information before introducing the full ZEZ in Oxford city centre in spring 2022. **The extent of the full ZEZ is shown in Annex 2** (and which will be subject to a separate consultation in summer 2021). Furthermore, it will inform the potential introduction of smaller-scale schemes in Oxfordshire towns to help improve air quality in other areas.
8. A road charging scheme is considered to represent the fairest balance between accelerating the transition to a zero-emission transport system and maintaining access. It also mirrors similar schemes in London and other UK cities, where more polluting vehicles are charged rather than banned.
9. An informal consultation on previous (Red Zone) proposals took place during January 2020 (a summary of the responses to the consultation is on the county's [webpage](#)) with a formal consultation planned for March 2020, but this was postponed due to Covid-19.
10. The city council Cabinet, at a meeting on 10 March 2021, is also being asked to support implementation of the final scheme.

Outcomes of Formal Consultation

11. ZEZ Pilot proposals were published as part of a period of formal consultation on the scheme between Friday 20 November 2020 and Sunday 17 January 2021. A presentation, with all county and city members invited, was held on 19 November 2020. **A summary of the proposals put forward is at Annex 3** with a detailed document of the scheme available on the county's [webpage](#).
12. In total, 885 responses were received via the online survey, with further responses by letter and email. **A detailed breakdown of the consultation responses is at Annex 4.** In summary, feedback reveals a mix of views across all themes i.e. zone boundary, charging hours, charges and discounts, though the largest proportion of all respondents (typically 30-50%) tended to agree with the ZEZ Pilot scheme as it was proposed. Some respondents (typically 10-30%) thought the scheme could be more ambitious, whilst others were less supportive (typically 15-40%).

13. The main concerns raised were in relation to the scheme's impact on access, consequences for the local economy and its effect on certain groups: residents and businesses within the ZEZ Pilot and those with more limited mobility and particular access needs.

Officer Responses and Proposed Changes

14. The area covered by the ZEZ Pilot is already very restricted, with no through traffic routes and some part-pedestrianised streets (Cornmarket and Queen Street). The only public car parking provided in the area is for Blue Badge holders. The pilot scheme therefore is not expected to affect wider access i.e. those travelling through the city centre, rather it mainly affects those with a destination in the ZEZ Pilot area, such as residents and business within the zone and those accessing Blue Badge car parking.
15. The following confirms proposals and changes made following the formal consultation with **more detailed officer responses provided at Annex 5. Please also refer to the final scheme in Annex 6.**
 - **Residents within the Pilot area:** a 90% discount is proposed, and which will apply to August 2030 (limited to 2 vehicles).
 - **Businesses within the Pilot area:** a 90% discount is proposed, and which will apply to August 2025 (maximum 10 vehicles per business registered to and operating from premises within the ZEZ Pilot).
 - **Blue badge holders, international equivalents & Disabled Tax Class:** a 100% discount is proposed until August 2025 (to be reviewed by December 2024).
 - **Temporary disabilities:** It is not proposed to change the scheme so that those with temporary disabilities have an exemption or discount.
 - **Construction traffic:** It is not proposed to give discounts for construction traffic.
 - **Church access to parking:** It is not proposed to give a specific discount for people driving to churches.
 - **People with care or health responsibilities:** It is proposed to offer a 100% discount to professional care and health workers' vehicles whilst carrying out formal duties.
 - **Private Hire Vehicles:** A 50% discount is proposed for certain hybrid Private Hire Vehicles to be charged as ULEVs to August 2025.
 - **Powered two wheelers:** It is proposed that all powered two-wheelers are charged according to the level of CO₂ they emit.

- **Discounts for students:** A 100% discount is proposed to the ZEZ charge for students driving into the Pilot ZEZ area only for the purpose of delivering or collecting personal belongings at the beginning and end of terms (and only for students considered by their colleges to be in acute financial hardship).
- **Exemptions because of planned road closures:** It is proposed to grant limited temporary exemptions to deal with planned road closures where normal compliance with the scheme is not possible.

Final Scheme for Approval

16. Annex 6 sets out the final scheme which officers recommend Cabinet to approve for implementation. These final proposals take account of the consultation feedback and include the changes highlighted in the section above.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

17. The ZEZ Pilot supports the county's overarching transport goals set out in our current Local Transport Plan¹ and sets the basis for our emerging Local Transport and Connectivity Plan. The ZEZ also has a significant role to play in supporting the county council's [Climate Action Framework](#) by enabling a 'net zero carbon' Oxfordshire by 2030. It also supports the county's Corporate Plan by helping people live healthier, safer lives and by protecting the local environment. The ZEZ also aligns with the strategic vision for Oxfordshire by enabling more sustainable growth and by putting Oxfordshire at the leading edge of UK and global de-carbonisation efforts.

Financial and Staff Implications

18. The cost to finalise the scheme design and then implement the ZEZ Pilot is currently estimated to be £211,000 (£295,400 with contingency). A grant for £150,000 has been awarded to the city council from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and which will be used to cover most of the scheme implementation costs, with other costs to be shared equally between the city and county councils.
19. The scheme will generate some income which is estimated to be equivalent to around £260,000 per annum, though the final amount will depend on the actual behavioural responses to the scheme and time the scheme is in place before the wider ZEZ is implemented. Income raised by the scheme will be used to cover ZEZ Pilot operating costs which are currently estimated to be £90,000 per annum. This would cover maintenance, technical support and scheme administration including staff costs. Further work over the coming months will be undertaken to refine these initial cost estimates.

¹To reduce emissions, enhance air quality and support the transition to a low carbon economy; & To protect and enhance Oxfordshire's environment and improve quality of life (including public health, safety and individual wellbeing)

If net proceeds are generated, then that could be used to pay for schemes to help residents and businesses in the ZEZ Pilot make the transition to zero emission vehicles. It has been agreed that the city council will receive a share of net proceeds in proportion to its contribution to the costs of implementing the ZEZ, assumed to be 50%. The Transport Act 2000 requires that net proceeds are only used for schemes that facilitate the achievement of local transport policies.

Comments checked by:

Rob Finlayson, Finance Business Partner, Rob.Finlayson@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

20. External support has been brought in to provide legal advice and support on the final scheme including proposed changes following formal consultation. Further external support is required to finalise the scheme's Charging Order which will be done in consultation with the county council's own Legal team.

Comments checked by:

Jennifer Crouch, Principal Solicitor (Environment Team), for and on behalf of Anita Bradley, Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer
Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council,
Jennifer.Crouch@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

Equality, Inclusion & Sustainability Implications

21. There is a clear and pressing need to take action to reduce air pollution as soon as possible, with the ZEZ Pilot scheme designed to do that whilst also recognising the impacts of Covid-19 on residents and businesses. The pilot scheme only effects a small part of Oxford city centre with changes already made from previous designs to reduce the requirements for residents and businesses within the zone including 90% discounts.
22. The ZEZ Pilot scheme is expected to provide positive environmental benefits through reduced traffic levels and emissions from transport and which will support a better walking and cycling environment in the city centre. These benefits are likely to disproportionately fall on those living and working in the ZEZ Pilot area. The scheme may also generate income to pay for schemes to help residents and businesses in the ZEZ Pilot make the transition to zero emission vehicles, and on other schemes that promote zero and low emission transport in the city. This will help to increase the overall accessibility of the city centre, with increased active travel also contributing to mental, physical and more general wellbeing benefits.
23. The main negative impacts of the scheme are its effect on access and affordability of access for those travelling within the zone between 7am and 7pm and using a non-zero emission vehicle. However, these negative impacts are not considered to be significant given only a small area of the city centre is proposed and is already very restricted i.e. is not a through route. The proposal

will offer a 100% discount for Blue Badge holders and disabled tax class vehicles at least until the review period in August 2025 which will mitigate the impact of those living with a disability. Drivers without Blue Badges cannot park in the ZEZ Pilot currently (there are public car parks close to the ZEZ Pilot which are unaffected by the charges). There is also very little workplace parking within the ZEZ Pilot, with the city centre also highly accessible by bus (including Park & Ride) and train.

24. **An Equalities & Climate Impact Assessment (ECIA) has been completed for the ZEZ Pilot scheme (Annex 7).** The ECIA has been used to determine its potential impacts on protected characteristics and was informed by responses to the formal consultation. Thereafter, the ECIA was used to consider if further changes to the scheme were required.

Comments checked by:

Robin Rogers, Head of Strategy, Communications, Strategy and Insight,
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Risk Management

25. A risk register has been maintained with the main risks at this stage associated with delay in getting DfT approval for ZEZ signage and the back-office systems in place. These risks are being actively managed through early engagement with DfT and the county's council's enforcement team and the current enforcement contractor.

Communications

26. A communication strategy is in development for implementation. Members will be regularly updated at appropriate stages including through the Project Steering Group (attended by the Cabinet Member for Environment and Cabinet Member for Finance). Ongoing engagement will also take place with businesses and stakeholders including through the ZEZ Partnership which first met in January 2021 and will continue to meet regularly (every 6 weeks) until after the ZEZ Pilot is implemented.
27. Communications have kept the profile of the ZEZ high over the last few years with considerable interest in the scheme already, but this will need to be increased in the run up to and during scheme implementation. This will include greater publicity of the scheme nationally.

Comments checked by:

Jonathan Sayers, Media and Communications Officer,
Jonathan.Sayers@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

Next Steps

28. If approved, the ZEZ Pilot will be subject to final scheme design with implementation as follows:

Final scheme development - March to June 2021
Implementation - July 2021
Scheme anticipated to come into effect - August 2021

JASON RUSSELL
Corporate Director of Communities

Annex 1 - Extent of the ZEZ Pilot
Annex 2 - Extent of the full ZEZ
Annex 3 – Summary of ZEZ Pilot proposal for consultation
Annex 4 – Report of consultation
Annex 5 – Proposed changes and officer responses
Annex 6 - Final ZEZ Pilot scheme for approval
Annex 7 – Equalities & Climate Impact Assessment

Contact Officer: Joanne Fellows, Growth Manager (Central Oxfordshire)

March 2021