

Division(s): Henley

CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT – 10 OCTOBER 2013

READING ROAD (HENLEY) PUBLIC TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

Report by the Deputy Director for Environment & Economy (Commercial)

Introduction

1. The County Council's Local Transport Plan includes an aspiration to improve public transport facilities and key corridors as funding becomes available. Over a number of years contributions have been sought from property developers on or near Reading Road in Henley, including the Tesco superstore, towards improvements to the public transport infrastructure in the area. We now have enough contributions to upgrade the Reading Road corridor which is served southbound by the local Whites Coaches 152 town bus service and in both directions by the Arriva 800 service between Reading and High Wycombe.
2. The county council improves infrastructure along strategic routes to encourage greater use of public transport by providing a welcoming and comfortable environment.

The Proposed Scheme

3. Reading Road in Henley has a mixture of bus stop poles, timetable cases and flags supplied by bus operators, Henley Town Council or the county council. At the same time, bus shelters have often been neglected and fallen into disrepair and many are now in need of replacement. This leads to an impression of general untidiness and lack of care, which can discourage potential passengers by leading them to believe public transport is an unprofessional service with little regard for the travelling environment of its customers.
4. Reading Road was identified some time ago as a potential site worthy of improvement and developer funding has been accrued over time under "Section 106" agreements towards the upgrade of stops and replacement or provision of bus shelters along the entire length of the road from Henley town centre to the "Tesco" roundabout.
5. Full details of the proposed scheme can be found in the consultation document attached at Annex 1. This was hand-delivered to residents and businesses along Reading Road in April 2013, with a request that responses be submitted in writing within 28 days. Unfortunately, residents at Henley Gate did not receive the original document. Further copies were delivered to them in June and the response deadline extended accordingly.

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6. Two new stops were proposed, along with replacement of seven bus stop poles, six new shelters and one replacement shelter.
7. The proposed scheme was to replace all current bus stops with “Premium Route” style integrated pole, flag and timetable case units, replace old shelters and install new shelters at a number of locations.
8. Two new stops were proposed at Quebec Road (outbound) and Noble Road (inbound).
 - The stop at Quebec Road would retain roughly equal walking distances between stops, following the northward relocation of the previous stop at Upton Close.
 - The inbound stop at Noble Road will provide a facility for passengers travelling from the southern end of Reading Road to the town centre or High Wycombe.
9. The relocation of three stops was also proposed.
 - At Upton Close outbound the current stop is located on a grass verge at the southern exit from Upton Close, with the flag some five metres in the air on a lamppost behind a road sign and the timetable case attached to the lamppost at eye level. It is proposed to relocate the stop to the northern exit from Upton Close on an area of rough scrub, and to provide a shelter, thus making this whole area much more attractive.
 - Opposite Noble Road outbound the stop is to be relocated from a lamppost approximately 10 metres further south to allow safer exit from the adjacent Business Park and clearer visibility on the mini roundabout. A shelter is also to be provided.
 - At the junction of Niagara Road inbound the stop is to be relocated approximately 15 metres south of its current location in the footpath behind the residents’ parking bay, to allow the bus to stop on the hatching at the entrance to Niagara Road and passengers to board without having to negotiate parked cars.
10. A map showing the specific locations of this scheme is shown at Annex 2.

Residents’ responses

11. From over 150 consultation packs delivered, seven written responses were received from residents. These concentrated on only two parts of the scheme – the proposed new stop locations at Niagara and Quebec Roads and the proposed shelter outside the Henley Gate development at the southern end of Reading Road adjacent to the “Tesco” roundabout.

12. Several responses were opposed to any new stop(s) being provided at the town centre end, due principally to the narrowness of the road and the resultant congestion at busy times, when two vehicles are unable to pass.
13. The opposition to a shelter at Henley Gate centred on the intrusion on the privacy of the resident of the ground-floor flat despite the suggested provision of a lattice back rather than clear perspex.

Henley Town Council response

14. Henley Town Council support all the proposed sites except one, where they suggested the footpath was too narrow for a shelter. Two individual responses were received from town councillors, opposing parts of the proposal.
15. The Town Council also conducted a survey during 2012, the results of which suggested widespread support for a shelter at Henley Gate, although it should be noted that this survey did not include residents of Henley Gate itself and at the time the ground floor flat was still unoccupied.
16. A full table of proposed sites with the consultation responses and officer comments is included at Annex 2.

Proposed Amended Scheme

17. In response to the strength of objections to the proposed new stop at Quebec Road, officers visited the site during the morning rush hour on Thursday 12 September 2013 to observe the congestion for themselves.
18. Several vehicles, including HGVs, waste collection lorries and even a police car were seen mounting the kerb southbound and it is felt that this site needs further investigation due to the extreme narrowness of Reading Road at this point.
19. It is therefore concluded that a new stop should not be created as originally proposed. It may be possible to install a new stop at the junction of Marmion Road but further work will be required along with appropriate consultation before any conclusion is reached.

Financial and Staff Implications

20. Other than staff time already spent on site visits and assembling the proposal there are no further implications. Some further work may be necessary but, once agreed, the scheme will be delivered by our approved bus stop and shelter contractors, who will carry out all works.
21. A budget of £51,781 has previously been agreed for this project to be fully funded by developer contributions secured under Section 106 agreements. The actual cost of the scheme is now likely to be closer to £40,000 as a result of refined project scope following further site investigations.

22. Henley Town Council have confirmed that they are happy to add any new bus shelters to their register of assets for insurance purposes and undertake whatever routine maintenance may be required from time to time, such as cleaning.

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet Member for Environment is RECOMMENDED to approve implementation of the amended scheme as set out in this report but excluding the proposed bus stop on Quebec Road.

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