

CABINET – 27 JANUARY 2015

ITEM 4 – QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

Question received from the following Members:

1. From Councillor Howson to Councillor Nimmo Smith

“Can the cabinet member confirm for the record whether the mandatory turn left sign across the junction of Hythe Bridge Street with Worcester St applies to all road users or only motorised vehicles? If, as has been suggested, cyclists can still cycle from Hythe Bridge street across the junction and into George St in both directions, what safety measures are in place to prevent 'incidents' from taking place at busy times of day, especially for cyclist travelling towards George St that might cause injury to cyclists?”

Answer

“With reference to permitted movements, the ONLY movements not permitted to ‘motorised vehicles’ are straight on and right turns from Hythe Bridge Street as indicated by the left turn arrow head on the traffic signals. Cyclists ARE permitted to make these movements and ‘Except For Cyclists’ sub plate signs, installed within the traffic signal head assemblies, are due to be installed on site (both sides of Hythe Bridge Street approach).

The exemption for cyclists described above are as advertised and consulted on (during June / July 2014) within the permanent Traffic Regulation Order amendments required for the scheme.

A Stage 3 Road Safety Audit (post construction) site inspection has already been undertaken (Thursday 8th January 2015) and a report of findings will be submitted to the Project team shortly who will fully consider the concerns raised and agree appropriate actions. This audit, as per the previous stages has been completed by a team of Auditors who are completely independent to the project team.

In addition to the above, a list of ‘remedial’ works has been agreed with the Contractor and works to complete/remedy these items, including the ponding issue at the Hythe Bridge Street crossing point, are scheduled to be undertaken from Monday 26th January 2015.

Additional road markings will be undertaken during that period including the marking of a central refuge area where cyclists can wait before progressing to George Street. These markings will also serve as a visible means to further educate motorists of the presence of cyclists at this point.”

2. From Councillor Fooks to Councillor Nimmo Smith

"The County Council passed a motion on April 1st which committed the Council to considering the impact on the health of Oxfordshire residents, from NOx and particulates, as new large developments are proposed and new transport strategies developed. This of course includes the major retail developments in Oxford and the development of LTP4. Given that Public Health England estimated in a recent report that 55 deaths of people over 25 in Oxford in 2010 were due to particulate air pollution, will you ensure that LTP4 and the Oxford Transport Strategy adopt their air quality targets where they exist, and for Oxford adopt the targets in Oxford's Air Quality Action Plan, namely

- Mean NO₂ concentrations of less than 45 ug/m³ by 2020 and 40 ug/m³ by 2025 at the latest
- A 35% reduction in transport CO₂ emissions from 2005 to 2020
- A 50% reduction in transport NO_x and PM emissions from 2005 to 2020?

Further, what would you estimate the cost falling on the County Council if European infraction proceedings, following a failure to meet EU limit values for PM₁₀ and NO₂, meant a fine on the UK Government which would be passed on to the Transport Authority?"

Answer

"As part of finalising our LTP, we will be looking at where and to what extent the county should adopt targets. Our view is that we shouldn't automatically adopt targets agreed by other organisations because the content of the strategy should be the focus.

In the case of Air Quality Action Plans, if the view is that our proposed strategy does not do enough to improve air quality, then our City or District Council colleagues need to tell us what more we should do. Changes in air quality are notoriously difficult to relate to specific interventions, because there are so many factors involved, including the weather. If we commit to target, this suggests the council should be prepared to do and spend whatever it takes – to the detriment of other objectives - to meet that target, even if we are chasing an impossible aim that may be more affected by external factors than what we do.

It is also worth noting that in the published LTP4 Strategic Environmental Assessment: Appendix C - Effects on Human Health, in the Recommendations for Mitigation and/or Enhancement, the proposal is that we

- Continue to work with the Highways Agency, District Councils, Network Rail and train operators to identify air quality improvements associated with the road and rail network to complement measures identified in Air Quality Action Plans.

- Carefully plan schemes in terms of location, scale and design at project level to ensure air quality reductions are realised.
- Apply restrictions on more polluting vehicles within Oxford to encourage a cleaner fleet. Consideration could be given as to how to apply a “polluter pays” principle within demand management measures

Our approach is therefore that we should adopt an ambitious strategy which substantially cuts transport emissions in the city, but that we shouldn't commit to meeting air quality targets 'at any cost'.

In terms of what (if any) financial impact there could be from fines, as I understand it no agreement has been reached on how these would be shared between local and central government”

3. From Councillor Pressel to Councillor Nimmo Smith

" I'm getting constant complaints from incredulous people in my division and beyond about the new junction at Hythe Bridge Street/Worcester Street.

One problem is that pedestrians have to wait far longer than before to cross even one street; most need to cross two. As a result they often cross before it is safe to do so.

Even worse, this must be the only cross-roads in the world where traffic from the north (Beaumont Street) has a green light at the same time as traffic from the west (Hythe Bridge Street) AND cyclists from the west can legitimately go straight on (into George Street), as they used to and as many of them need to. Because the traffic from the north can now go in three different directions at the junction, cyclists trying to cross the stream of traffic in order to go up George Street are now in extreme danger.

And you claim to be trying to encourage more walking and cycling!

Please can you tell me why the new junction was designed in this way, with apparently no thought given to the safety of cyclists?"

Answer

“Along with the changes made recently to Becket Street, Osney Lane and Hollybush Row, the new arrangements at the Hythe Bridge Street/George Street junction are essential to facilitate diversion routes during the construction of the Frideswide Square scheme. This will help minimise delays to all road users resulting from the works in the square, and will allow us to construct the scheme as quickly and efficiently as possible.

The changes at Hythe Bridge Street/George Street are necessary during the construction phase, but will also remain in place once Frideswide Square has been completed. Opening up this junction allows traffic heading from north

Oxford to Hollybush Row and vice-versa to route via Park End Street, thereby reducing traffic in Hythe Bridge Street and helping the whole system flow more smoothly. It also allows traffic accessing Worcester Street car park from north Oxford to do so without passing through Hythe Bridge Street and Frideswide Square. The junction is therefore intended to operate as part of a system that includes the new layout in Frideswide Square.

The county council will shortly carry out additional work on the junction of Worcester Street and Hythe Bridge Street following feedback from cyclists. A number of comments have been raised by cyclists and the council has carried out an independent road safety audit as part of the normal process following any work of this sort.

Whilst the junction is not unique, in that there are many junctions across the UK with traffic lights operating with opposing flows under the same phase, with vehicles having to give way to traffic before making a right turn.

We have looked closely at how the junction is working for cyclists following our own observations and comments received from cyclists since the junction was re-opened and decided to make some minor changes which should make a big difference.

It is worth noting that under the previous layout cyclists were allowed to make all movements as long as they gave way to on-coming traffic at the pedestrian controlled crossing. Under the new junction operation, this has not changed, but we will be introducing a 'storage area' in the middle of the junction to provide an area for them to wait for traffic to clear before they proceed.

We will continue to monitor the junction to establish the operation of the junction. During the course of the main Frideswide Square work the signal timings will be altered to cater for alterations in traffic flows through this part of the city. This means that what you see now will change regularly and be adjusted to suit the phasing of the works at the Main Square until the permanent signal timings for traffic or pedestrians is set.

As with any new road layout, we will be monitoring this junction carefully, both during construction of Frideswide Square and once the whole scheme is complete."

4. From Councillor Smith to Councillor Carter

"The expansion of Windmill School in Headington to 3 form entry was agreed by Cabinet in March 2013. The new build, and other necessary works, we were informed would be completed for the start of term in September 2015. Unfortunately the school has experienced delay after delay; the timetable for the start of various projects has slipped considerably. An example would be the MUGA; this was supposed to be constructed last summer. Could Cllr Carter assure me that the tenders for works, under the council's contract with Carillion will be timely and to budget with a September 2015 completion and full occupation by the school at the start of the autumn term ?"

Answer – a verbal response will be given.