

Division(s): Jericho and Osney; Isis

CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT – 21 JULY 2016

PROPOSED TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT MEASURES OXFORD WESTGATE CENTRE REDEVELOPMENT

Report by Deputy Director of Environment & Economy (Commercial)

Introduction

1. This report presents objections and comments received in the course of the statutory consultation on the proposals to introduce and amend various traffic restrictions, and to provide new and amended pedestrian crossings, in the vicinity of the Westgate Centre in central Oxford as part of the major redevelopment of the Centre. It includes further responses to the consultation that were received too late to be included in the report as presented to the Cabinet Member for Environment meeting on 9 June 2016.

Background

2. In 2014 Oxford City Council approved – following very extensive local consultation - a planning application for the redevelopment of the Westgate Centre.
3. The principal effect in respect of traffic movements of the approved plans in the vicinity of the Centre is the construction of a new length of public highway on the west and south sides of the development linking Castle Street and Speedwell Street, and the stopping up of the length of Old Greyfriars between its junction with Castle Street and Turn Again Lane. It is proposed to introduce access restrictions to permit local buses and pedal cycles only to use the new length of highway, together with vehicles requiring access to a loading bay being provided for new residential premises within the development (it is proposed that the latter vehicles will only be permitted to enter the road from its south end, and will be required to exit it at the north end).
4. Access to the retained length of Old Greyfriars Street between its junction with Speedwell Street and Turn Again Lane is proposed to be restricted to pedal cycles, taxis, local buses, and vehicles requiring access to the loading area for the development. Restrictions on turning movements to give effect to the above are also proposed.
5. Additionally new and amended zebra and toucan pedestrian crossings are proposed to be provided on New Road immediately west of Castle Street, on the new extension of Speedwell Street, and on Thames Street; the proposals also include signalled crossing points for pedestrians and cyclists

incorporated within new signalled junctions but which are not the subject of statutory consultation.

6. A plan summarising the above proposals is shown at Annex 1. A large-scale version of the plan will be on display at the meeting.

Consultation

7. Following an informal consultation carried out in February 2016, a formal consultation on the proposals was carried out between 21 April and 20 May 2016. This comprised a public notice being published in the Oxford Times on 21 May, and street notices being provided on the highway in the vicinity of the Centre. In addition information was sent by email to statutory consultees, including Thames Valley Police, the Fire and ambulance services, Oxford City Council, Bus Operators, taxi organisations and the local Members; a dedicated page was also added to the County's online consultation portal to allow people to view and respond to the proposals.
8. Nine responses were received, comprising five objections, two expressions of support relating to specific proposals, and two making comments and raising queries on specific aspects of the proposals; the responses are summarised at Annex 2 (this also includes the response of COLTA, the City of Oxford Licenced Taxi Association, to the informal consultation, together with their subsequent communication received on 29 June following the decision at the 9 June Cabinet Member Decisions meeting to defer consideration of this matter in response to representations by COLTA at this meeting). Copies of all the consultation responses are available for inspection in the Members' Resource Centre.
9. Thames Valley Police had no objection in principle to the proposals, but asked how the proposed restrictions were to be enforced, with particular reference to the access restrictions on the new road between Speedwell Street and Castle Street, and also the turning restrictions at junctions. The Police also asked for confirmation that the design of the proposed new and amended pedestrian crossings complied with national guidance.
10. COLTA object to the proposed restriction of the new link road between Castle Street and Speedwell Street to buses and pedal cyclists only. They consider the omission of taxis as permitted users of this link would be counterproductive in terms of the service they wish to provide to the general public, noting that the Oxford Hackney Carriage trade – using London style cabs which are clearly identifiable as taxis - has been using the bus gates within the city centre since their inception and that this allows them to move passengers around the city quickly and efficiently; their passengers include disabled passengers and those with children or shopping waiting at bus stops who wish to be helped in to taxis and then require equal assistance at their point of destination, which is a service buses cannot provide. COLTA also note that similar exemptions are provided in other major cities.

11. COLTA also point out that the development includes a mixture of shops, bars and restaurants etc. some of which will be open till late, and that not allowing taxis to be able to use this restricted route will cause unnecessary difficulties for those passengers (especially those who are infirm or disabled) trying to get a taxi late in the evening or early hours of morning to get home safely, and that customers may well be unaware of, or not find convenient the proposed taxi rank in Old Greyfriars Street.
12. COLTA also express concerns that the restrictions would be a source of potential dispute with customers travelling to and from points near the restricted area on the grounds that the longer journey distance and travel times imposed by not being permitted to use the link road would increase fares; additionally the longer travel distance would increase vehicle emissions by taxis.
13. In view of the above, and taking account of the wider pressures on the taxi trade, COLTA request that taxis are given unrestricted access through the link road, and also that taxi ranks for 3 cabs be provided in both Norfolk Street and Castle Street (6 places in all) adjacent to the planned bus stops.
14. An objection was received from the local representative of Cycling UK and the Oxfordshire Cycling Network relating to the inclusion of cyclists in the proposed prohibition of the right turn from Old Greyfriars Street into Speedwell Street; the provision of the zebra crossing (in relation to both its siting, and the use of a zebra rather than a 'Tiger' crossing which is similar to a zebra crossing but provides for cyclists to legally cross) at the western end of the extended Speedwell Street, and the absence of a link for cyclists between Paradise Square and the new link road. In addition to these objections, clarification was sought on a number of detailed matters including the proposed change to the existing zebra crossing on New Road, the use of double yellow line markings within the new road layout (with a request that these be avoided by designating the area a Restricted Zone, and the scope offered by the works in the area to help deliver the proposed 'Cycle super route' along Thames Street / Oxpens Road as included in the Local Transport Plan.
15. Arriva (a bus operator) strongly supported the proposed restrictions for the new length of highway linking Castle Street with Speedwell Street limiting its use to local buses and pedal cycles, and excluding taxis and private hire vehicles on the grounds that use by the latter would impede buses and could lead to enforcement issues given that some such vehicles were hard to distinguish from private cars.
16. One objection was received from a member of the public in respect of the proposed amendment to the existing zebra crossing on New Road immediately west of its junction with Castle Street, on the grounds that the existing zebra crossing led to significant delays to buses and that a signalled crossing would be preferable especially with the anticipated larger number of pedestrians that will be crossing here when the enlarged Westgate Centre is open.

17. One objection from a member of the public was received in relation to the planned loading bay for the residential premises on the grounds that buses passing loading vehicles waiting on the carriageway would be in potential conflict with oncoming buses; this objection also cited concerns that the proposed new zebra crossing was poorly sited would result in further delays to buses based on experience of the existing zebra crossing on New Road (as referred to in the above objection).
18. A further objection from two members of the public concerned the removal of the traffic lights at the Thames Street junction with Blackfriars Road on the grounds that safety would be impaired in particular due to limited visibility to the east for vehicles turning right onto Thames Street from Blackfriars Road and such traffic would also experience delays waiting to turn onto Thames Street. The objection also raised strong concerns over the safety of pedestrians and cyclists crossing Thames Street and Speedwell Street with the removal of the pedestrian phases provided in the former signalled junctions.
19. One response in support of the proposed pedestrian crossing provision was received from a member of the public, in particular in respect of the proposed new and amended zebra crossings; it was requested that all the new crossings should be constructed on road humps to help reduce speeds, and that they should be well lit.
20. A local residents association (SENDRA – St Ebbe's New Development Residents' Association) requested further information primarily relating to the proposed crossing provision for pedestrians and cyclists, in particular seeking assurances that this includes signalled crossings across Thames Street and Speedwell Street near the Old Greyfriars Street junction, and across Thames Street near the site of the pelican crossing which it is proposed to remove as part of the construction of a new signalled junction with the access to the new car park. Additionally SENDRA recommended that the traffic flows in the vicinity of the Blackfriars Road junction are monitored closely following the removal of the signals to confirm that the junction operated acceptably (especially in respect of traffic turning to and from Blackfriars Road) , with the option of re-introducing signals being retained should monitoring indicate a need.

Response to objections and concerns

21. Thames Valley Police's comments are noted; the enforcement of the proposed access restrictions will be carried out by cameras (as is the case with the current restrictions), with violations being subject to civil enforcement procedures. The proposed crossings will comply with national regulations.
22. In respect of COLTA's objection, the proposals provide for a taxi rank (for approximately 8 taxis) on Old Greyfriars Street, which is very well sited in the centre of the new Westgate development, and is also well connected to surrounding areas (including Castle Street) by pedestrian walkways. The

rank will be especially convenient for customers of the planned restaurants and cinema, as some of these will be directly accessed from Old Greyfriars Street. While careful consideration has been given to COLTA's request for access to the link road, including the option of access only within the evening / early morning period, it is considered that ensuring that the traffic arrangements on the link road operate at all times as efficiently as possible for buses is critical, given the very much higher numbers of passengers conveyed by buses as opposed to taxis, and this would inevitably be compromised were taxis permitted access (even if just in the evening period), also noting that given the space constraints, it is not considered viable to provide the taxi ranks requested on Norfolk Street or Castle Street.

23. While COLTA's concerns over passengers disputing with taxi drivers over longer journeys and higher fares due to not being permitted access to the link road are noted, in practice for the great majority of journeys the additional distance resulting from complying with the proposed restriction will be minimal in relation to the overall journey length (and will also have minimal environmental impact in terms of vehicle emissions).
24. The objection from Cycling UK and the Oxfordshire Cycling Network relating to the inclusion of cyclists in the proposed prohibition of the right turn from Old Greyfriars Street into Speedwell Street is noted, and this matter will be investigated to establish if it is possible for cyclists to be safely exempted from the proposal. If so, it is planned to carry out a further local consultation specifically on this matter, and - subject to a consideration of the responses – to amend the proposal accordingly.
25. The provision of the zebra crossing (rather than a 'Tiger' crossing) at the western end of the extended Speedwell Street, reflects the fact it is not proposed to have a shared use footway / cycletrack on the north east side of the crossing, and therefore a Tiger crossing – which is intended to provide a crossing point between cycle tracks on each side of the road – would not be appropriate.. Dismounted cyclists may of course use the proposed zebra crossing. The siting of the crossing is on the desire line for pedestrian and cyclists entering the centre from the adjacent crossing facilities incorporated in the new signalled junction at the junction of Thames Street / Oxpens Road with the new car park access.
26. The provision for cyclists between Paradise Square and the new link road will be reviewed as requested with the developers consultants; as this is a new footway area, no formal consultation will be required should it be considered that the requested link can be provided safely.
27. It is intended to designate the new road layout as a Restricted Zone to avoid the need for the provision of double yellow lines. Clarification of the proposals relating to the existing zebra crossing at New Road, and the scope offered by the works in the area to help deliver the proposed 'Cycle super route' along Thames Street / Oxpens Road as included in the Local Transport Plan will be explored, including consultation with the appropriate stakeholders including cycle groups.

28. The objections relating to the provision of the amended zebra crossing at New Road and the proposed new zebra crossing are noted. While it is accepted that buses can occasionally spend quite extended times waiting to give way to pedestrians at the existing zebra crossing, these delays are not judged to be excessive and no objections were received from the bus operators to these proposals. While signalled crossings at these locations should be technically feasible and could be considered should there prove to be a need in the future (subject to funding), a zebra crossing will typically provide a better level of service for pedestrians. The siting of the new zebra crossing links to the proposed signalled pedestrian crossing within the new traffic signal junction on Thames Street at the junction with the car park.
29. The objection relating to the proposed loading bay appear to be based on a misunderstanding of the detailed proposal, which is for an off- carriageway bay so that loading vehicles would not be impeding buses.
30. The objection relating to the removal of the signals at the Thames Street / Blackfriars Road junction is noted but the proposed redesign of this junction will improve visibility to the right to address the safety concerns. It is accepted that at times traffic turning from Blackfriars Road may have slightly longer delays than with the present signal control, but overall the traffic movements in the area will be better served by the proposed change to give way control for this junction, which will for example also benefit vehicles travelling into Blackfriars Road. The proposed new signalled crossing immediately east of the Blackfriars Road junction will – in conjunction with a signalled pedestrian phase being provided within the new junction of Speedwell Street and Old Greyfriars Street – maintain a safe route for pedestrians and cyclists crossing to and from the south side of Thames Street to the city centre.
31. The response by SENDRA is noted; the consultants acting on behalf of the developers will respond to their requests for information on aspects of the detailed design. Signalled crossing points across Thames Street (and Speedwell Street in the vicinity of the Old Greyfriars Street junction) will be provided, and the operation of the new highway provision including the revised junction with Blackfriars Road will – if approved - be monitored very closely.
32. The response in support of the proposed crossings is noted; it is however only proposed to construct the new zebra crossing on a road hump. The street lighting provided at the crossings will meet the appropriate standards. Similarly the response in support of the proposed access restrictions is noted.

How the Project supports LTP4 Objectives

33. The proposals would help facilitate the safe and efficient movement of pedestrians, pedal cyclists, local buses and other general traffic in the vicinity of the redeveloped centre.

Financial and Staff Implications (including Revenue)

34. Funding for the proposal is being delivered by the developers of the Westgate Centre; the appraisal of the proposals and consultation has been undertaken by E&E officers as part of their normal duties.

RECOMMENDATION

35. **The Cabinet Member for the Environment is RECOMMENDED to approve the implementation of proposals as advertised, but with the possible exemption of pedal cyclists from the proposed prohibition of right turns from Old Greyfriars Street being made in the light of further investigation and local consultation.**

MARK KEMP

Deputy Director of Environment & Economy (Commercial)

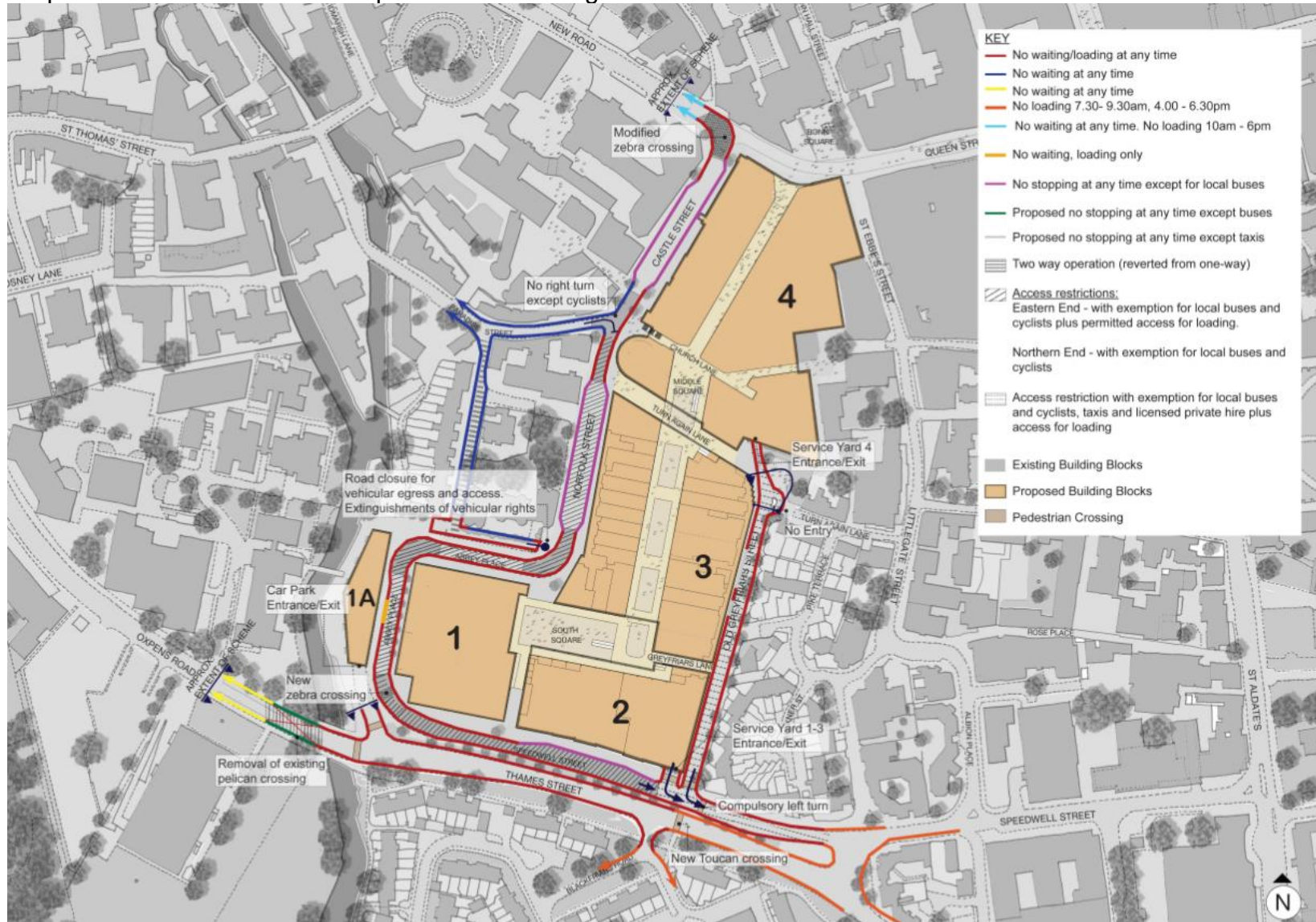
Background papers: Consultation responses

Contact Officers: Owen Jenkins 01865 323304

July 2016

Proposed traffic restrictions and pedestrian crossings

Annex 1



Summary of consultation responses

RESPONDENT	SUMMARISED COMMENTS
Thames Valley Police	No objection but asked for information on the enforcement of the proposed restrictions, and assurance that the proposed pedestrian crossings are in accordance with national standards.
COLTA (City of Oxford Licenced Taxi Association)	Objects to the proposed exclusion of taxis on the new link road on the grounds of inconvenience to taxi passengers, higher fares (which could also be a source of dispute with passengers) and vehicle emissions due to taxis being required to take a longer route in this area, and the consequent wider impact on the taxi business. In addition to requesting access through the new link road, COLTA requested consideration of new taxi ranks (each accommodating three taxis) in Castle Street and in Norfolk Street (forming part of the new link road).
Cycling UK, and Oxfordshire Cycling Network	Objects to the inclusion of cyclists in the proposed prohibition of the right from Old Greyfriars Street into Speedwell Street; to the provision of the zebra crossing (in relation to its siting, and also the provision of a zebra crossing rather than a 'Tiger' crossing which is similar to a zebra crossing but provides for cyclists to legally cross) at the western end of the extended Speedwell Street, and the absence of a link for cyclists between Paradise Square and the new link road. Additionally, clarification is sought on a number of detailed matters including the proposed change to the existing zebra crossing on New Road, the use of double yellow line markings within the new road layout (with a request that these be avoided by designating the area a Restricted Zone, and the scope offered by the works in the area to help deliver the proposed 'Cycle super route' along Thames Street / Oxpens Road as included in the Local Transport Plan.
SENDRA (St Ebbe's New Development)	No objection but requested further information on aspects of the detailed design of the proposed pedestrian and cyclist crossings and junctions, including clarification of crossing

CMDE4

Residents' Association)	<p>facilities being provided at the new signalled junctions.</p> <p>Concerned that the proposed removal of the signals at the Thames Street / Blackfriars Road junction could lead to difficulties for traffic turning right to Blackfriars Road, and for traffic exiting Blackfriars Road and requested that this be monitored closely following implementation with a view to re-instating the signals if required.</p>
Arriva Bus	<p>Strongly supported the proposals in respect of the access restrictions on the link road between Castle Street and Speedwell Street (limiting the use of this road to local buses, pedal cycles and loading vehicles for plot 1A, and excluding taxis and private hire vehicles).</p>
Online response	<p>Objects to the proposed amended zebra crossing on New Road, on the grounds that the current zebra leads to queues of buses waiting for the crossing to be clear of pedestrians, leading to delays for bus passengers (and in particular drew attention to the bus services continuing to the rail station, and therefore the potential wider impact of such delays on public transport users) and considered that the delays will only increase with increased pedestrian activity resulting from the enlarged Westgate Centre. A signalled crossing was suggested as a means of more fairly balancing the needs of pedestrians and bus passengers.</p>
Online response	<p>Objects to the proposed loading bay adjacent to plot 1 A on the grounds that this would impede buses and requested that the loading bay was moved completely off road. Objected to the proposed new zebra crossing as considered this was poorly located and would lead to congestion for buses.</p>
Local resident (letter signed by two parties)	<p>Objects to the proposed removal of the traffic signals at the Thames Street / Blackfriars Road junction on the grounds that visibility for traffic to the right from Blackfriars Road is limited, and also that the consequent removal of the pedestrian phase at the signals would lead to significant danger and delays to the pedestrians and cyclists crossing here to and from the city centre, and requested the provision of a signalled crossing (both across Thames Street and Speedwell Street)</p>
Online response	<p>Supports the proposed crossings and in particular the zebra crossings, and requests that they are humped to reduce traffic speeds, and are well lit.</p>