

## **TRANSPORT DECISIONS COMMITTEE – 11 FEBRUARY 2010**

### **WALLINGFORD AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT AREA TRAFFIC CALMING SCHEME**

#### **Report by Head of Transport**

#### **Introduction**

1. This report describes the proposed scheme to install traffic calming, in the form of cushions, on two roads approaching Wallingford town centre, the Wantage Road, Wallingford and The Street, Crowmash Gifford. This scheme is proposed in response to the Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) declared in Wallingford town centre, the AQMA plan can be seen in Annex 1. The report considers the results of two rounds of public consultation, with comments on the responses from County Council officers. The recommendation is that the proposed scheme should be implemented.

#### **Background**

2. The traffic calming proposal seeks to address the air quality issues prevalent in Wallingford town centre. This will be achieved by calming traffic on the main approaches to Wallingford and encouraging increased use of the A4130 Wallingford by-pass for through traffic. Annex 2 shows the location of the proposed traffic calming.
3. South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) has been monitoring air quality in Wallingford since 1998. In 2008 air quality monitoring identified locations in Wallingford where the national annual mean objective for nitrogen dioxide of  $40 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  is being exceeded. The AQMA was declared in March 2009.
4. The declaration of an AQMA in Wallingford is solely due to the elevated levels of nitrogen dioxide. The main source of nitrogen dioxide within Wallingford is from motorised traffic.
5. Although the traffic levels passing through the AQMA in Wallingford are not particularly high, the urban topography exacerbates the problem. The 'street canyon' effect of high-sided buildings with a narrow carriageway makes pollutant dispersal difficult. Also, due to a number of traffic pinch points such as Wallingford Bridge and the Lamb crossroads, queuing traffic occurs along sections of the High Street, Castle Street and St. Martins Street throughout the day.
6. Three other options were originally set out for consideration as a potential way to reduce the air quality problems. These options were:
  - Implementation of a "gating" strategy;
  - St Georges Road and St Nicholas Road northbound only;

- Reduction in traffic flow through the town centre, reducing queuing at Lambs Crossroads, by either:
    - Making a section of High Street one-way;
    - Closing a section of High Street to vehicles;
    - Changing St Martin's Street and or Castle Street to entry or exit only;
    - Making the bridge one-way or closing it to traffic.
7. The "gating" strategy has been implemented at the eastern entrance to Wallingford and provides a "green wave" for westbound traffic, by linking the traffic signals at Wallingford Bridge and the Lamb Crossroads, to reduce queuing within the air quality management area.
  8. Following discussions with the Air Quality Steering Group and additional work undertaken by Halcrow the other options have not been progressed any further. They would displace traffic on to other routes within Wallingford, which may exacerbate the air quality problems and introduce safety concerns.
  9. Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) has been working with SODC through the Wallingford Air Quality Management Steering Group. The group supports SODC's production of the draft Wallingford Air Quality Action Plan, which is due for consultation early 2010.

### **Public Consultation**

10. An informal consultation took place between 9 and 20 November 2009, followed by formal consultation from 20 November to 11 December 2009.
11. The informal consultation was with the emergency services, Crowmarsh Gifford Parish Council, Wallingford Town Council, SODC, local County Councillors, and bus operators. News articles detailing the proposals also appeared in the press.
12. During the informal consultation 22 consultees were contacted, there were 12 responses. Of these, 7 supported, and 5 objected to, the traffic calming scheme; the remaining 10 consultees did not respond. A summary of the informal consultation responses is available in Annex 3, along with officer comments.
13. The main objections by informal consultees include views:
  - That too many pairs of traffic calming cushions are proposed;
  - Not sure that a reduction in through traffic will be achieved;
  - Other transport issues should be addressed instead;
  - That trade will be affected in the town if the traffic calming scheme achieves a 25% reduction in traffic; and
    - That a 20mph speed limit should be implemented instead.
14. During the formal consultation, properties fronting the carriageway where traffic calming is proposed, were contacted. A summary of the formal

consultation responses is available in Annex 4. News articles detailing the proposals also appeared in the press.

15. During the formal consultation 157 properties were sent the consultation letter. A total of 36 responses were received, of these 19 supported the traffic calming scheme, 12 objected and 5 did not express a clear view. Overall, of those who stated an opinion for or against the scheme (excluding non-respondents and those who did not state a clear opinion) 61% were in favour of the traffic calming scheme.
16. The main objections to the scheme were:
  - That the traffic calming will not benefit air quality;
  - That vehicles travelling over speed cushions will cause worse air quality;
  - Some feel there is insufficient through traffic which could be diverted on to the by-pass and be deterred from travelling through the town by the traffic calming cushions; and
  - Concerns the traffic calming would reduce trade within Wallingford.
17. Many respondents cited that the on-street car parking on Wantage Road in the vicinity of Sinodun Road causes congestion, and is hazardous, particular for cyclists. Oxfordshire County Council is currently pursuing a Prohibition of Waiting Order (double yellow lines & 'No waiting at any time' signage) at this location, to alleviate congestion and increase road safety. This is a separate scheme to the traffic calming proposed within this report.

### **Officer Comments**

18. The scheme presents pairs of speed cushions which are traffic calming devices designed to slow cars without affecting emergency service vehicles. They also help to maintain constant traffic movements when placed at regular intervals.
19. Gated chicanes have not been proposed as this halts the flow of traffic while vehicles give way, this may cause stationary vehicles to queue which could lead to increased air quality problems.
20. No measures have been planned for the western end of The Street, as the traffic signals at Wallingford Bridge act as a traffic management measure.
21. Studies have shown that the use of cushions may reduce through traffic on average by 25%. It is clear from the 2007 interview surveys with motorists at Wallingford Bridge that 15% of traffic using Wallingford Bridge travelled through Wallingford without a destination in Wallingford. An estimated reduction in through traffic of around 270 vehicles per day is expected. There is clearly scope to encourage this traffic to use the A4130 by-pass which is a more appropriate route for this traffic. A reduction in traffic travelling along the High Street is beneficial to reducing the contribution of nitrogen dioxide which leads to the poor air quality in the town.

22. Many of the other schemes identified by respondents are included in the long list of schemes that may be included in the third Local Transport Plan, currently being drafted and consulted upon by OCC.
23. It is evaluated that this scheme will overall assist the air quality in Wallingford, as the reduction in through traffic will lead to a reduction in vehicle emissions within the AQMA. Some consultees said that individual vehicles emit slightly increased emissions when travelling at a slower speed; i.e. over the speed cushions; however the proposed speed cushions will not be located within the AQMA. Monitoring will be conducted, by SODC, to identify if the air quality in Wallingford alters after installation of the speed cushions.

### **How the project supports Local Transport Plan (LTP) 2 objectives**

24. The LTP2 states as part of the overall objective to tackle poor air quality, that Oxfordshire County Council recognises that, as a transport authority, it must play a leading role in delivering improvements.
25. The LTP2 recommends an air quality strategy which encompasses nine air quality action points. This scheme is relevant to three of the air quality action points: 2, 7, and 8.
  - Air Quality Action 2: Manage, develop and maintain the county's road network to reduce the impact of bottlenecks (including roadworks) and make better use of existing road capacity to improve the flow of traffic through polluted areas.
  - Air Quality Action 7: Restrict vehicles from areas of poor air quality.
  - Air Quality Action 8: Provide alternative routes for traffic to avoid areas of poor air quality.
26. Additionally the LTP2 states, specifically for Wallingford, that measures to reduce exposure to pollutants, should be explored and implemented. These proposals are the culmination of studies undertaken into possible solutions to the air quality problems in Wallingford, with this scheme being the most beneficial.

### **Financial and Staffing Implications (including Revenue)**

27. The proposed traffic calming is funded through the capital programme for 2010/2011. Funds to undertake construction supervision and project management of the scheme are included in the total budget allocated to the scheme. The capital construction cost for 2010/11 is estimated at £31,705.00.
28. Oxfordshire Highways staff will undertake construction supervision and project management of the scheme.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

29. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to authorise implementation of the proposed traffic calming scheme on Wantage Road, Wallingford and The Street, Crowmarsh Gifford as set out in this report.**

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Background papers: Nil

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