

CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT – 24 NOVEMBER 2016

PROPOSED AMENDMENT OF ACCESS RESTRICTIONS, SHEEP STREET BICESTER

Report by Deputy Director of Environment & Economy (Commercial)

Introduction

1. This report presents responses received in the course of the statutory consultation on a proposal to amend the access restrictions on Sheep Street, Bicester to permit pedal cyclists to use the street in both directions outside the period where all traffic is prohibited.

Background

2. Sheep Street is a key shopping street in Bicester. It is currently one way, with the permitted direction of travel being from north west to south east. Motor vehicles are only allowed in the street to load/unload before 9am and after 4pm daily; in addition a small number of permit holders are allowed at all times (to access off-street parking etc). Ridden pedal cycles are prohibited at all times.
3. Following local requests to improve cycle facilities in Bicester, it is proposed to permit pedal cyclists to cycle in either direction on Sheep Street outside the period 9am to 4pm (see **Annex 1**).

Consultation

4. The formal consultation on the above proposals was carried out between 22 September and 21 October 2016. A public notice was placed in the Oxford Times, and notices placed on site in the immediate vicinity. An email was sent to statutory consultees, including Thames Valley Police, the Fire & Rescue Service, Ambulance service, Town and District Councils and the local County Councillors, and letters sent to all addresses within the road.
5. Twelve responses were received, comprising 4 objections, 7 expressions of support, and a response from the police expressing no objection; these are summarised in **Annex 2**. Copies of the full responses received are available for inspection in the Members Resource Centre.

Review of responses

6. Thames Valley Police raised no objection to the proposals.

7. County Councillor Stratford, the local member, expressed a strong objection to the proposals on the grounds of reduced safety and a less pleasant environment for pedestrians – in particular the many elderly users of the street – and that the proposed two way usage would further increase the risks.
8. Three other objections were made by members of the public, also on safety and amenity concerns for pedestrians using the street.
9. Seven responses were received from members of the public generally supporting the proposals, though some respondents suggested the demarcation of an area of the street for cyclists to reduce the risk of conflict with pedestrians, and others suggested alterations to the time when cycle access should be permitted. The latter included suggestions for the start of permitted access in the afternoon to be later to avoid shopping times and when pedestrians returning home from work would be using the street; conversely one suggestion was made that cycling should be permitted at all times.
10. Four of the responses supportive of the scheme were submitted by members of the public living outside of the town and – given the generic nature of their comments – may possibly have no personal familiarity of the street.

Discussion of responses

11. The concerns over the safety and reduction in amenity for pedestrians raised by Cllr Stratford and other respondents are noted. Experience of other locations where cyclists are permitted to use shopping streets at off peak times has been typically good, with low levels of conflict, and with cyclists significantly benefiting from having a more convenient route that avoids busier streets where accidents risks can be significant. In turn this can help encourage cycling in place of the use of private cars, helping relieve congestion and improve air quality, and also providing the health benefits of active travel. It is nevertheless accepted that in communities with no existing experience of such usage, there can be very understandable concerns over the potential negative consequences
12. In the light of these points, the absence of any strong local representations in favour of the proposal and the development by the District Council of a Bicester Masterplan, it is suggested that the proposed introduction of cycling in Sheep Street not proceed at this time.

Financial and Staff Implications (including Revenue)

13. The appraisal of the proposals, consultation and preparation of all paperwork has been undertaken by E&E officers as part of their normal duties.

RECOMMENDATION

14. **The Cabinet Member for the Environment is RECOMMENDED to:-**
- (a) **note the consultation responses;**
 - (b) **not approve the proposed amendment to the access restrictions along Sheep Street as advertised.**

CHRIS McCARTHY
(Interim) Deputy Director of Environment & Economy (Commercial)

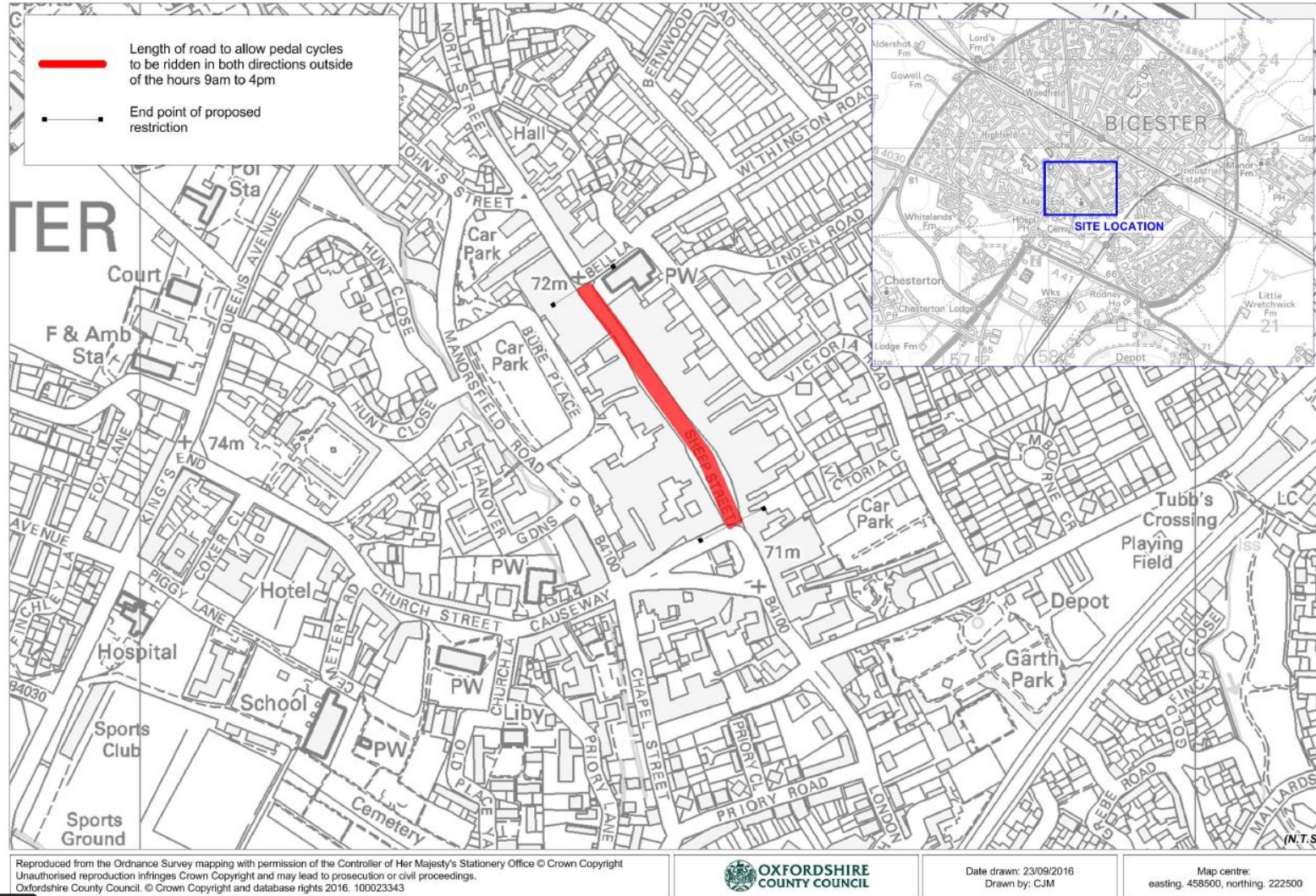
Background papers: Plan of proposed restrictions
 Consultation responses

Contact Officers: David Tole 07920 084148

November 2016

ANNEX 1

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL - HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT



ANNEX 2

RESPONDENT	SUMMARISED COMMENTS
(1) Thames Valley Police	No Objection
(2) Cllr Stratford	<p>Strongly objects, on grounds that Sheep Street was pedestrianised to ensure a safe and friendly environment for all residents. It was recognised that there would a need to provide some vehicle access to address servicing shops and businesses in Sheep Street, hence the time restrictions currently in force and managed via the 'rising bollard' technology. There is very limited vehicle access for a few households within Sheep Street where there is no alternative, and Importantly even this very limited vehicle movement is 'one-way only'.</p> <p>Introducing cycle moments, even at restricted times will present a real danger to pedestrians - in particular elderly residents - given the 'silence' of cycles and that this danger will be greatly increased if 'two-way' movement were permitted. There is already a significant issue with skateboards and rollerblades presenting a danger to pedestrians and they are generally noisier than cycles so people do have some warning of their presence.</p> <p>Lack of enforcement of the current restrictions is also an issue, with more vehicles violating the one way restriction to either service public houses, and, in the evening 'burger vans' operating, and similarly there is an increased problem of illegal parking around Market Square in the evening which has become a major concern.</p>

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(3) Member of public (non local)	Supports, but requests that a cycle lane is marked to designate the area cyclists may use.
(4) Member of public (address not given)	Supports, but suggests that the time of permitted access be changed to 5.30pm given that shops are still open till then and therefore pedestrian usage will still be quite busy till then.
(5) Member of public (local)	Objects – considers that permitting cyclists at any time would be dangerous.
(6) Member of public (address not given)	Objects – notes that there is already a significant amount of cycle use in the street and that restrictions without enforcement are pointless.
(7) Member of public (non local)	Supports – considers that permitting cycling at all times of the day would be acceptable taking account of the width of the carriageway and usage of the street.
(8) Member of public (non local)	Supports
(9) Member of public (non local)	Supports
(10) Member of public (local)	Objects – considers that the proposal would make the street less pleasant for pedestrians and introduce safety risks given the speed of some cyclists, and that cycles are very quiet and would not therefore be heard by pedestrians. The short length of the street (approximately 275 metres) means that cyclists pushing their bikes are not seriously inconvenienced by the current restriction. If the proposal were to be progressed, the hours of operation should be limited to outside the times when the shops are open / pedestrians will be in the area walking to / from work, and that the area to be used by cyclists is clearly designated.
(11) Member of public (non local)	Supports – considers that permitting cycling at all times of the day would be acceptable , and that such provision could be expected to encourage more cycling in place of car use in the town.

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(12) Member of public (non local)	Supports
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