

CABINET – 21 DECEMBER 2021

ITEM 4 – QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

Questions	Cabinet Member
<p>1. COUNCILLOR MICHAEL O’CONNOR</p> <p>The priorities at the intersection of Bardwell Road and Dragon Lane were changed earlier this year as a preliminary to further works that were not in fact carried out. This has made the cycle route NCN 51 significantly more dangerous. ODS have indicated that they would be willing to restore these priorities in order to make the intersection safer—in line with the wishes of many of mine and Cllr. Howson’s constituents. Could the Cabinet member please let me know that he has liaised with ODS and will ensure that this does in fact happen?</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR TIM BEARDER, CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAY MANAGEMENT</p> <p>As part of works to further improve the amenity for cyclists on the North Oxford Cycle Route, in 1994 a number of junctions – including the Bardwell Road / Charlbury Road / Dragon Lane crossroads – had ‘give way’ markings placed across every approach. Although contrary to Government regulations, these junction markings appear to have operated well from a safety point of view, although it is also true that the junctions had a very good safety record before the multiple give ways were provided. Recent government guidance on road markings more strongly emphasises that multiple give way lines are unlawful, and in the light of this, when resurfacing or lining maintenance works are being carried out, current practice is to only provide give ways complying with the regulations. Having said all that, the county council is assessing a request, on road safety grounds, to reinstate give way markings on all four arms of the Bardwell Road / Charlbury Road and Dragon Lane crossroads taking account of the regulations on road markings and the safety record of the junction since the resurfacing last year, which has seen no reported accidents involving cyclists, and other options to improve the junction.</p>

Questions	Cabinet Member
<p data-bbox="215 217 817 248">2. COUNCILLOR MICHAEL O’CONNOR</p> <p data-bbox="215 405 1030 544">Could the Cabinet Members please update us on the progress of Connecting Oxford and the ZEZ? And could they undertake to ensure that the resources are available to make sure it is rolled out on time?</p>	<p data-bbox="1088 217 1926 355">COUNCILLOR TIM BEARDER, CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAY MANAGEMENT and COUNCILLOR DUNCAN ENRIGHT, CABINET MEMBER FOR TRAVEL & DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY</p> <p data-bbox="1088 405 1960 842">The ZEZ will be implemented in its pilot form in February 2022. The technical work required to develop and robustly assess the ZEZ and Connecting Oxford proposals continues, with details of the programme for engagement and formal consultation to be announced early next year (members will be briefed in January). Traffic measures across Oxford such as improvements to Botley Road and traffic measures in East Oxford and Cowley are in progress at the moment, and form part of the wider programme of works that, when integrated, will constitute a comprehensive programme as part of the Central Oxfordshire Transport Strategy implementation (COTS).</p> <p data-bbox="1088 884 1955 1023">It is currently anticipated that the broader city centre ZEZ and key next elements of the current Connecting Oxford programme will be implemented from 2023, subject to consultation, funding and political approvals.</p> <p data-bbox="1088 1064 1960 1437">Final elements of the programme costs and funding will be identified through the development of a detailed business case which forms part of the technical work currently underway. At this stage it is assumed that funding sources will include central government investment and borrowing against future income raised by the ZEZ and a Workplace Parking Levy. The County Council has already made bids for central government funding for these schemes including via the Oxfordshire Bus Service Improvement Plan, Active Travel Fund, and the Department for Environment, Food & Rural</p>

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	<p>Affairs' Air Quality Grant. Outcomes of these bids should be known early next year and further bids for central government funding will be made should suitable opportunities arise.</p>
<p>3. COUNCILLOR ANDY GRAHAM</p> <p>a) the strategy is a detailed referencing document for libraries and heritage putting people place and partnerships at the heart of the delivery under the umbrella of the council's stated priorities but partnership seems to lack detail of who these partnerships are apart from the clear intention to develop the voluntary network and as valuable as that is, can you give more precise details of the other partnerships being sought and their credentials to help us deliver a restored and first class service?</p> <p>b) the digital transformation of the service is an essential part of reaching out to new generations in terms of the content of delivery as well as the need to update records but can we have more detail how this ambition is to be realised and what resources will be put to it to ensure the strategy is effective and ambitious?</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR NEIL FAWCETT, CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES AND SAFETY</p> <p>The strategy is meant to be exactly that, and not a detailed implementation plan. Here, though, is a bit more detail on the areas you raised:</p> <p>Oxfordshire's libraries and heritage service currently work with a number of partners including AgeUK Oxfordshire, Citizens Advice and the universities.</p> <p>The strategy recognises that effective partnership working can deliver improved outcomes in a number of ways. These include extending the reach of partners delivering services from the library network to increase local access to services, the opportunity for community and voluntary organisations to deliver activities and projects and attract investment to the service.</p> <p>Existing partnerships will be reviewed to ensure a match with our ambition to increase and widen participation and impact on health, well-being and community cohesion.</p> <p>New partnerships will be identified, including from the learning and private sectors to increase the opportunity to deliver opportunities for residents to gain skills, including digital skills, and to access support for starting and sustaining new businesses.</p>

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	<p>We will be open to working with any organisation that can help the County Council to deliver on our ambitious objectives.</p> <p>The council are investing in a new digital platform to enable improved access to the museum, archives and local history collection to go live in 2022. It is necessary to undertake some further research into audience take-up of the existing in person and digital offer prior to developing a detailed plan for digital transformation. We will want to ensure the council is able to secure resources from those external agencies funding digital developments in the cultural sector and potential partners. We will continue to offer digital services whilst we develop our new options.</p>
<p>4. COUNCILLOR LES SIBLEY</p> <p>Would the Leader of the Council agree that in April this year it was a fantastic engineering feat over 72 hours to install an under bridge and underpass through the railway embankment at Howes Lane Bicester. This scheme will facilitate the re -alignment of the A4095 Howes Lane and improve essential access links for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists across the 6,000 home ECO development at NW Bicester.</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR LIZ LEFFMAN, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL</p> <p>The delivery of the road bridge and bridleway underpass under the railway was an important step towards facilitating the road realignment we all want to see. It was also a considerable engineering achievement and it was down to the collaboration between Oxfordshire County Council Infrastructure Delivery teams, Network Rail, Stantec designers and Storey contractors. This was the first time that Network Rail has delivered two structures in one 72-hour possession. The design and construction methodology were also innovative and although was more complex than traditional methods, shortened the construction programme reducing risk for the County. The delivery of the underbridge and underpass was the first and most risky step towards delivering the connections through the NW Bicester development site and will allow the road to come forward in the near future.</p>

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<p>5. COUNCILLOR LES SIBLEY</p> <p>Could the Leader of the Council explain the intention remove the Housing & Growth Deal (H&GD) allocated funding of £15.75m from the key infrastructure project of re-aligning Howes Lane will cause years of delay to other major housing and road projects in Bicester and put at risk the completion of the 6,000 home ECO development at NW Bicester, leaving us with several white elephants of bridges and roads going nowhere and why local members were not consulted on this very important key project.</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR LIZ LEFFMAN, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL</p> <p>The funding for the A4095 realignment scheme was allocated from the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal to support the accelerated house building at North West Bicester. Under the Deal signed by the previous administration, Oxfordshire County Council had responsibility for delivering the scheme using this Housing Growth Deal funding but was obliged to deliver this within very specific timescales and conditions or face losing the funding from central government.</p> <p>The first, and most complex, phase of the project was completed in summer 2021 with the delivery of the rail underbridge and underpass. This has taken a key risk, which was one of the key elements Developers said were stopping the housing coming forward.</p> <p>The second phase included the building of the realigned road through the North West Bicester housing development. This phase received £15.75m of growth deal funding and we agreed to take on its management to assist a developer to unlock the housing.</p> <p>Throughout the process of preliminary and detailed design work, the cost and timescales of the scheme were reviewed against the forecast housing delivery on the NW Bicester development site within the 5 years of the Housing Growth Deal. This was to ensure that the scheme continued to meet the funding criteria. Central government allocated funding for infrastructure (Housing Growth Deal funding) has strict criteria for its continued use linked to delivery of housing and spend.</p>

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	<p>In the most recent, detailed review of projected housing numbers, scheme costs and timing of delivery, it was identified that phase two no longer meets the criteria for continued use on this scheme. Faced with the risk of losing the Growth Deal funding from Oxfordshire, phase two has been paused. The remaining growth deal funding has been redirected to schemes that meet the criteria, in order to keep the funding for Oxfordshire.</p> <p>The decision to pause is very regrettable but we felt we had no choice. The County and District Council will now reflect on the best way to deliver the A4095 realignment and engage with the developers on North West Bicester to find alternative ways of funding and delivering infrastructure along with aligning the timing with delivery of housing.</p> <p>We should have been better at circulating and sharing the emerging issues and risks to losing the funding from the A4095 and regret that local members and the local community were not more fully informed. I have asked that the reasons for this oversight are examined. However, the fact that the scheme doesn't meet the strict criteria without housing and a funding pressure, still remains.</p> <p>We understand the disappointment this delay will bring to local residents. The realignment stays a key priority for the Council and we will continue to look for other funding solutions to support the housing including the normal route for new roads to be built by the developers whilst building houses.</p>