

DEPUTY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL – 6 SEPTEMBER 2012

BICESTER TOWN CENTRE ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS

Report by Deputy Director for Environment & Economy (Strategy & Infrastructure Planning)

Introduction

1. This report considers proposals to improve access to Bicester town centre for all modes of transport by improving the flow of traffic and reducing congestion; providing facilities for walking and cycling and improving bus journey times. The scheme involves a number of different complementary elements on Banbury Road, Buckingham Road, Bucknell Road, Roman Way, North Street, Field Street, St John's Street and Queens Avenue (referred to hereafter as the Scheme Area).
2. The report outlines the public consultation undertaken on the scheme, the comments received and the subsequent changes to the initial proposals. Consultation has been carried out on a traffic regulation order (TRO) for the scheme and this is also covered in this report. The order is required to allow the necessary changes to the highway network to be made so that the scheme can be implemented. The report recommends that the Deputy Leader of the Council approves the implementation of the amended scheme and the making of the Oxfordshire County Council (Bicester) (Traffic Regulation) (Amendment) Order 20**.
3. The proposals will help to achieve the County Council's overall transport strategy for the town by benefitting all users and help to support the economy of the town centre by improving access for visitors and residents alike.

Background

4. Part of Bicester town centre is currently being redeveloped to provide a superstore, cinema, restaurants and other facilities. This will improve the town centre 'offer' when it opens in 2013. Highway works to mitigate its impact have been agreed through a Section 278 agreement with developers.
5. Over the next twenty years Bicester will continue to grow significantly with housing and employment developments, supported by major rail investment, highway improvements and investment in community facilities. This growth will require investment in various parts of the highway network but routes into the town centre by all modes of transport are already problematic. Changes are required to the transport network to enable Bicester to fully benefit from the new retail opportunities.
6. For vehicular traffic problems are particularly apparent on Buckingham Road, which experiences significant amounts of queuing as it feeds traffic into the town centre as

well as acting as a key route through the town. The only cycle facilities within the scheme area are on Queens Avenue and both walkers and cyclists (taking part in an audit of the area) identified the five-arm roundabout at Banbury Road/Buckingham Road as a major barrier to accessing the town centre using these modes. Many buses currently use either The Causeway or North Street to access the town centre, both of which are narrow and environmentally sensitive streets. The proposed scheme looks to address all these issues. A location plan is shown at Annex 1.

Consultation on the scheme

7. The scheme that was consulted on is shown on a plan at Annex 2 and described at Annex 3. In summary, the proposals include altering the five-arm roundabout at Banbury and Buckingham Roads into a three-arm roundabout with Roman Way and North Street closed to motor traffic from the north; transforming North Street and Roman Way into a cul-de-sac with two-way access from St John's Street; changing St John's Street from a one-way (westbound) to a two-way road; removing the traffic signals at the junction of St John's Street and Field Street and replacing them with a mini-roundabout, and a number of alterations on Queens Avenue and Field Street to improve the flow of traffic including banning vehicles from turning right into Bucknell Road but removing the existing right-turn ban out of this road.
8. Formal consultation was carried out on the scheme and traffic regulation order between 9 July 2012 and 10 August 2012 with a public exhibition held over three days between Thursday 12 and Saturday 14 July 2012 at the John Paul II Centre in Bicester. Approximately 350 people attended the exhibition. A letter and plan was sent to all stakeholders and full details posted online. Documents were placed on deposit at County Hall and Bicester Library and copies of the published Notice placed on site. Letters were sent to stakeholders and to 474 businesses and properties within the scheme area. Participants were invited to fill out a questionnaire to record their views on the proposals, a copy of which is attached at Annex 4.
9. Local County Councillors have been involved with the progression of the proposals and are supportive of the scheme and what it is trying to achieve. A total of 192 completed questionnaires were received from the public and a further twelve people submitted responses by letter or email. Copies of all the letters and emails received are available in the Members' Resource Centre. A summary of questionnaire returns can be found at Annex 5 to this report and the detailed comments received together with officer responses are at Annex 6.
10. In addition, a petition has been received signed by 56 local residents supporting the scheme. A copy of the petition is attached at Annex 7. The table below gives a summary of the questionnaire returns:

1. The proposals will achieve their aims	
Strongly or mostly agree	114 (59%)
Strongly or mostly disagree	70 (37%)
Don't know	8 (4%)

2. This scheme will bring	
Many or some advantages	103 (54%)
Minimal changes	15 (8%)
Many or some disadvantages	72 (37%)
Don't know	2 (1%)
3. Preventing vehicular access to North Street/Roman Way from Buckingham/Banbury Road is a good idea	
Strongly or mostly agree	98 (51%)
Strongly or mostly disagree	81 (42%)
Don't know	13 (7%)
4. Turning St John's Street into a two-way road is a good idea	
Strongly or mostly agree	124 (65%)
Strongly or mostly disagree	58 (30%)
Don't know	10 (5%)

11. Following the consultation response officers consider the following changes are required to the proposed scheme:
- inclusion of a northbound bus lay-by on Queens Avenue
 - an amended zebra crossing location on St John's Street
 - an enlarged pedestrian refuge on Buckingham Road at the roundabout to accommodate crossing movements.
12. Some comments were received from people who were unhappy with the scheme or at least with elements of it. The key points raised were the problems that they felt would be caused by permitting right turning traffic out of Bucknell Road; the perceived problems with turning the signalised pedestrian crossings into zebra crossings and the impact on businesses and some residents of North Street and Roman Way if these streets become a cul-de-sac with no direct access from the north. These elements of the scheme have been carefully re-considered but remain unaltered in the final proposals.

Policy and strategy

13. The emerging Bicester Masterplan and Movement Strategy clearly identify the importance of an enhanced and vibrant town centre. These proposals will play an important role in enabling this to happen.
14. The scheme would make a positive contribution to achieving seven of the nine strategic objectives under the current Local Transport Plan (LTP3):
- (a) Improve the condition of local roads, footways and cycleways, including resilience to climate change.
 - (b) Reduce congestion.
 - (c) Improve accessibility to work, education and services.
 - (d) Secure infrastructure and services to support development.

- (e) Improve air quality, reduce other environmental impacts and enhance the street environment.
 - (f) Develop and increase the use of high quality, welcoming public transport.
 - (g) Develop and increase cycling and walking for local journeys, recreation and health.
15. The scheme also fits well with the Bicester Area Strategy, which forms part of LTP3, by providing travel choices and making high levels of sustainable travel a reality and influencing travel behaviour.

Financial and Staff Implications

16. The funding for this scheme is through held Section 106 monies and officers will manage the costs of the scheme so that it is contained within the approved budget.

Equality and inclusion

17. The scheme proposals are not considered to have the potential to affect people differently according to their gender, race, religion or belief or sexual orientation. However, the conversions of signalised pedestrian crossings to zebra crossings have the potential to affect people that are blind or partially sighted. Annex 8 provides more detail on this and shows that officers have considered equality issues carefully before reaching conclusions about the scheme.

Conclusions

18. There was a very positive response to the consultation that was undertaken on this scheme. The majority of respondents agreed that the proposals will achieve their aims. The comments received have been fully considered and have resulted in some changes. However, in essence the scheme remains as proposed.

RECOMMENDATION

19. **The Deputy Leader of the Council is RECOMMENDED to:**
- (a) **note the responses received as part of the consultation;**
 - (b) **agree proposed changes to the scheme, as outlined in paragraph 11 to this report;**
 - (c) **subject to approving the changes, approve the scheme for detailed design and construction;**
 - (d) **authorise the Director for Environment & Economy (Strategy & Infrastructure Planning) in consultation with the Deputy Leader of the Council, to make minor amendments to the scheme; and**

- (e) **approve the making of the Oxfordshire County Council (Bicester) (Traffic Regulation) (Amendment) Order 20** as advertised and set out at Annex 9 to this report.**

MARTIN TUGWELL

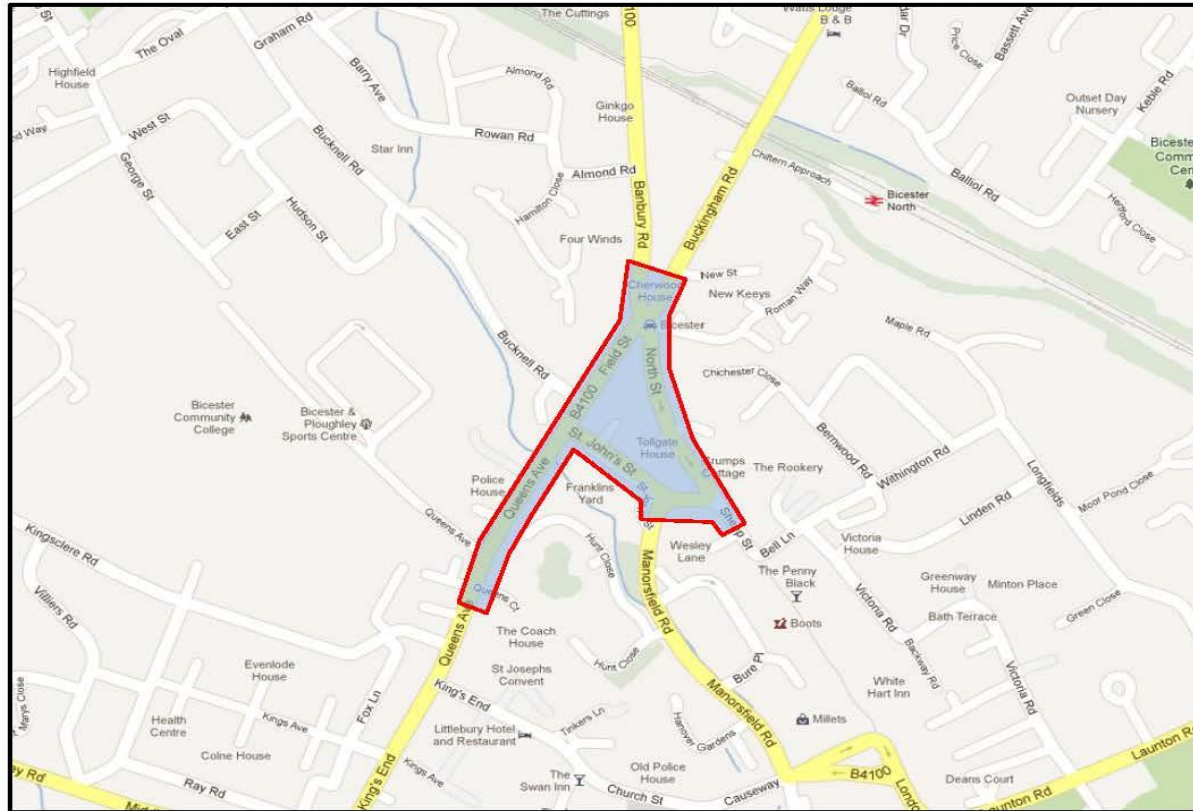
Deputy Director of Environment & Economy (Strategy & Infrastructure Planning)

Background papers: Consultation documentation

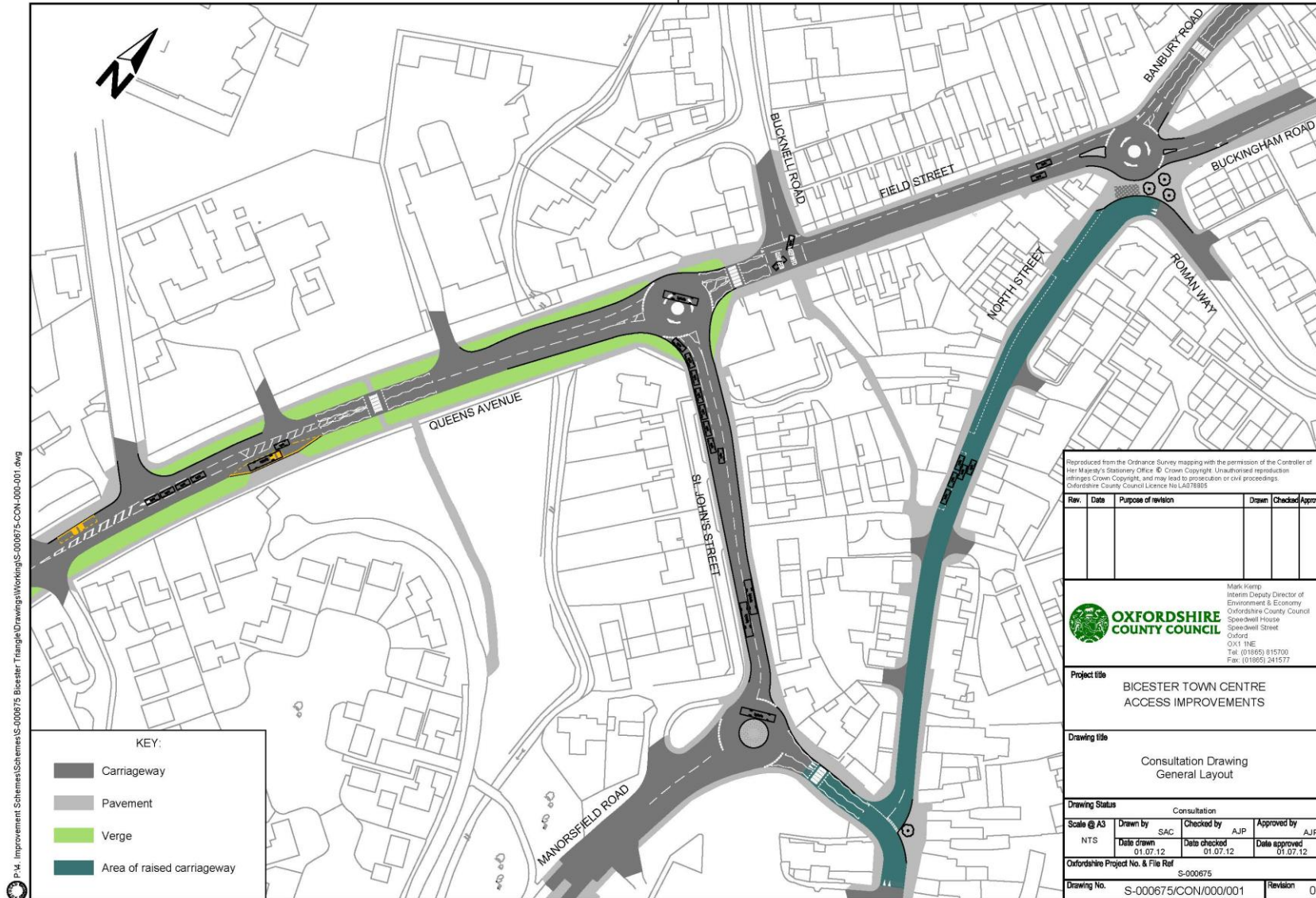
Contact Officer: Daniel Round, Strategic Policy Manager, Environment & Economy
(01865 815623)

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Bicester Town Centre Access Improvements: Scheme Location Plan



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