

Common issues raised about the latest design for Frideswide Square and officer response

The absence of any on road cycle lanes through the square and on its approaches

The design now includes cycle lanes on all of the main approaches to the main square to improve comfort and convenience for cyclists.

In the square itself, the key design principle is to reduce road space to an absolute minimum (on the links and on the roundabouts) to keep vehicle speeds as low as possible but still allowing consistent smooth flow of traffic. Narrower roads also mean easier and quicker crossing by pedestrians. The design speed is 12-15mph. Even though the road will continue to be busy, the design should allow cyclists to comfortably share the road with traffic even at quieter times. Introducing dedicated cycle lanes would actually encourage faster traffic speeds and make crossing roads harder for pedestrians.

The shared use areas of paving in the square have been proposed partly in response to concerns expressed by cyclists who do not like the idea of no cycle lanes on the road.

The need for there to be dedicated cyclists' only space on the paved areas

The areas where it is proposed cyclists share space with pedestrians are very generous in width. However, providing dedicated space is likely to result in higher cycle speeds and less considerate behaviour towards pedestrians – cyclists would be more likely to take the attitude that pedestrians should be getting out of their way. The proposed design has shared use cycle/pedestrian symbols repeated along the lengths of the shared areas (how the symbols appear – paint, etched slabs etc - and distance between symbols to be decided) to indicate to cyclists that they are allowed to be there but that they need to share that space with pedestrians.

There are a number of examples elsewhere in Oxford where cyclists and pedestrians share space together successfully without the need for the route/area to be segregated.

The shared use element of the proposals will be one of the many aspects of the scheme that will be closely monitored after construction – changes will be proposed if it is clear that the design is not working as intended.

The lack of a formal crossing point between the Royal Oxford Hotel and the north side of the square

During the design process the impact on traffic of a formal crossing in this location was investigated. Adding a crossing here caused significant delays to traffic. For the latest design there is not a formal crossing but a traffic island remains which will

allow people to cross the road in two sections by using gaps in traffic which it is predicted there will be plenty of. This is one of the elements of the design that will be particularly closely monitored.

The difficulties that pedestrians with visual impairments will have using the space amongst other things due inadequate tactile markings/guidance and the proposal for cyclists to use some of the paved area. A number of questions were also raised about materials to be used and the height of landscaping features

The bands of paving leading to the two main crossing points will be built using more tactile paving to ensure that it will be more effective at guiding people with visual impairments to the crossing points. The bands of setts elsewhere in the square that do not lead to crossings will either be removed or built using lighter colours and less tactile materials to avoid causing confusion for people with visual impairments. These bands help to give structure to the landscaping design.

The vertical elements in the activity strips running east west on either side of the square have been narrowed slightly to help reduce the likelihood of people with visual impairments colliding with them (the final paving design will also consider the use of more tactile materials around the vertical elements to aid detection by visual impaired people). The reduced width of the vertical elements will also increase the width of the space that cyclists will be sharing with pedestrians.

Using solar powered road studs either side of the crossing points across the road will be considered. This could help guide people with visual impairments across the road in lower light conditions. Overall the scheme will of course be lit to high modern standards making the square as easy as possible to navigate at night time.

Whilst officers believe that the areas of shared use will work well in terms of interaction between cyclists and pedestrians and even those with visual impairments, this will be monitored to assess the success of the design after completion. The layout of the hard and soft landscaping and the relative busyness of the square in terms of pedestrian flow will mean that cyclists will not ordinarily travel at speeds that cause pedestrians to feel uncomfortable or that actually lead to physical conflict. The shared footway areas are very wide – the narrowest point is 3.5m but generally they are at least 4m wide. The shared areas have deliberately been designed not to have dedicated cycle paths which reduces the chance that cyclists will feel they can dominate the space. In any case, there will be a zone next to the buildings on either side of the square which will be pedestrian only and therefore act as a 'safe zone' for those with visual impairments.

Officers will work with representatives of those people with sensory and mobility impairments to make sure the materials and final construction layout is as helpful as it can be for those groups. After construction the county council will consider how training of people who might struggle to use the new layout can be offered.

There is a lack of clarity about how cyclists would join and leave the road

The design of exactly how cyclists get on and off the shared paved areas will continue to be investigated to deliver the best possible outcome. The comments made by cyclists in the consultation will be taken into account as the finer detail of design is progressed for things like dropped kerbs for transition points including where they would be best placed for the range of journeys people want to make

The new trees proposed alongside the road in the centre of the square are too dense and block views through the area

There are now only four trees in each of the four planters in the centre of the square. The tree species has been changed to one which has a less dense canopy, allowing better longer views through and beyond the square.

Making sure that the landscaping design doesn't prevent the use of the improved public space for things like temporary markets, public art installations, public events (such as infrequent outdoor cinema or theatre)

Officers believe that the design is already very flexible and allow these kind of activities to take place. Pop up power supplies will be installed to further help this take place. The latest design has been refined in the areas of the activity strips to introduce even more flexibility of use. For example the vertical elements in these are now a little narrower. A detailed management plan will be developed to ensure that the best use is made of the square for the benefit of all. This will consider an art strategy for the square.

The latest design shows a raised stone plinth at the west end of the activity strip on the north side of the square which could be used for temporary art installations.

The difficulties that the new design could create for loading for premises on the south side of the square

The loading bay that currently exists on the south side of the square close to Becket Street is being removed but replaced close by at the north end of Becket Street. Another loading bay is also being provided at the north end of Hollybush Row.

Whether the statue of the Ox on the west side of the Said Business School could be placed somewhere in the square to allow people to appreciate it

The latest design shows the Ox statue positioned in between the two tree planters on the north side of the square. This will be tested as the detailed construction design is progressed.

How the scheme could generate additional traffic if it works as well as the technical work is estimating. This in turn could have a detrimental effect on bus journey times

Traffic flow and impact on bus services is something that will be very carefully monitored after the scheme is completed. If bus journey times are negatively affected there is scope to use traffic lights at the end of the bus lane at Binsey Lane

and at the south end of the St Giles to help improve conditions for buses on the approaches to the area.

The need to consider having no kerb level difference throughout the whole of Frideswide Square, not just at crossing points

The design team do not believe that there is anything significant to gain from removing all level changes at kerbs throughout Frideswide Square. The latest design should help to keep vehicle speeds down to the desired design speed of 12-15mph and the 50/60mm high kerb away from crossings helps people with visual impairments to detect when they would enter trafficked highway. 100/140mm high kerbs are needed at bus stops to enable level boarding of buses for people with mobility impairments.