

QUESTIONS WITH NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Question from Mr Andrew Siantonas to Councillor Yvonne Constance

Following the withdrawal of subsidy for the 17 bus in 2016, many people in the Wolvercote and Summertown division of Oxfordshire County Council have lost their ability to independently access facilities across the county. This is because these people find it difficult to walk from, for example, Kendall Crescent shops or Wren Road up to Banbury Road along which the buses run. They have to rely on relatives or friends or pay for expensive taxis. Even though we are looking forward to coming out of lockdown thanks to the success of the vaccination programme, these people will effectively remain in enforced lockdown because of their lack of access to public transport.

Given the recent government announcement of £3 billion to invest on buses in England, what plans does the County Council have to ensure these people again have access to public transport either by restoring the 17 bus or by providing other acceptable services.

Answer

The County Council welcomes the publication of the National Bus Strategy and its ambition in relation to providing high quality public transport for the whole community. However, we are at a very early stage in the process and nothing is yet clear, therefore no commitments can be made at this stage to any particular changes or improvements that may be made.

The Council is required to enter into a statutory Enhanced Partnership with bus operators, and to commit to do so by the end of June. This is followed by the production of a Bus Service Improvement Plan which must be finalised by the end of October. These are exceptionally challenging timescales for a comprehensive plan which covers a broad range of areas such as bus priority, vehicles, information, ticketing and branding as well as service provision.

Therefore, at this point the County Council cannot be specific about the improvements that could potentially be delivered by the strategy. We await further details about the £275m funds for the recovery period (covering the next financial year), during which period we expect there to be minimal changes made. Any changes arising from the Partnership and Improvement Plan are not likely to take place before April 2022.

Most people in the Jericho and Cutteslowe areas live within 800 metres of a bus stop served by an exceptionally high number of buses. For those who are unable to access these, community transport options which offer a more door-to-door service may be more suitable. The Comet community bus is available on weekdays between 10am and 2pm and can be used for a wide variety of purposes. Further details are available on the Council's website at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/comet or by telephoning 01865 323201 (9am – 12pm Monday to Friday).

Question from Mr Gregory O'Broin to Councillor Yvonne Constance

When OCC Cabinet approved Scheme C (Didcot to Culham River crossing) in July 2020 was it aware of the following impediments to the road alignment: -

(a) The imminent proposed enlargement of the private Appleford rail sidings that would require a much larger & costlier road bridge to cross over the curving rail tracks?

(b) The absence of any investigation of the degree of damage to Appleford residents (& their wellbeing), from noise, air quality, & visual impact caused by elevating the road above adjacent roof levels?

(c) The absence of any detailed cost or feasibility studies of other technically viable road alignments within the same land corridor that would reduce the impact on the local community?

Answer

(a) *The imminent proposed enlargement of the private Appleford rail sidings that would require a much larger & costlier road bridge to cross over the curving rail tracks?*

Hanson received planning permission for the two additional rail sidings on 27th October 2020. The Cabinet report detailed the alignments based on a feasibility design consulted on in March/April 2020. As preliminary designed has progressed, OCC has worked with stakeholders to further define design parameters across all four schemes, not just the Didcot to Culham River Crossing.

(b) *The absence of any investigation of the degree of damage to Appleford residents (& their wellbeing), from noise, air quality, & visual impact caused by elevating the road above adjacent roof levels?*

High level assessments are conducted to define the preferred options which consider a whole multitude of factors. The detailed assessment of noise, air quality and visual impact is undertaken as part of a planning application. It is not possible or feasible to conduct detailed analysis on all options considered. Detailed mitigation requirements, including noise and visual screening, are determined through the Environmental Impact Assessment process as part of the planning application.

(c) *The absence of any detailed cost or feasibility studies of other technically viable road alignments within the same land corridor that would reduce the impact on the local community?*

Early scheme sifting takes into account many constraints including Scheduled Ancient Monuments, environment, topography, land use etc. In response to the consultation in 2018, OCC realigned the Didcot to Culham River crossing route, north of Hanson's private railway sidings, further away from Appleford. Officers do not believe that moving the alignment further west, south of the railway sidings, is possible due to the reasons already highlighted in the response to Appleford Parish Council on 4th March 2021.

