

CABINET 23 FEBRUARY 2016

PROPOSED BUS LANE & PARKING/WAITING RESTRICTIONS – ORCHARD CENTRE (PHASE 2), DIDCOT

Report by Deputy Director of Environment & Economy (Commercial)

Introduction

1. On 4th February 2015 the Performance Scrutiny Committee considered the decision of the Cabinet Member for Environment made on 14th January 2016 (Councillor Hudspeth substituting for Councillor Nimmo Smith) following proper notice of call in. The Committee agreed to refer the decision back to Cabinet for it to consider in the light of the following aspect of the decision:
 - That the officers dealing with the matter had not been made aware of the fact that a 1500+ signature petition had been presented to Council opposing the proposal.
2. This report presents comments and objections received in the course of the statutory consultation on the proposals to introduce and amend various traffic restrictions in Station Road and The Broadway, Didcot.
3. The proposed Traffic Regulation Order is the legal vehicle that is being used to address the impact of the decision of the Planning Authority regarding the Orchard Centre (phase 2) development.

Background

4. The Orchard Centre (phase 2) development was considered at SODCs Planning Committee on 29th July 2015. A resolution to grant planning permission, subject to prior completion of Section 106 Agreement, was given.
5. The County Council's response to the planning application was submitted on 22nd May 2015 with an update submitted on 9th July 2015 following an amendment to the original application and receipt of further information. Copies of these can be found at Annex 8 & 9.
6. A petition was received by Cabinet on 14th April 2015 in relation to the Planning Application. The County Council sent a response on 18th April (see Annex 10) confirming that officers would reflect, as appropriate, on concerns raised when preparing the response to the planning application. SODC had also received a petition of over 1000 signatories in response to the planning application and included this fact and a summary of their concerns within the Planning Committee Report at Appendix 3 .

7. The proposed development included the creation of a new highway through the Orchard centre (south of Station Road) and the stopping up of the existing bus link along High Street. The development plans intended the re-opening of the southern end of Station Road to buses and pedal cycles only, with access to the bus lane being controlled by rising bollards, in place of the existing bus provision in High Street (between Broadway and Hitchcock Way) which will be closed. Details of the proposed traffic regulation orders for Station Road, including the section not currently highway just north of Broadway, and on Broadway itself in the vicinity of the proposed new signalled junction with Station Road are shown at Annexes 1 – 4 (Annexes 1-7 are part of the original report to the Cabinet Member for Environment on 14 January 2016).
8. An application for the Stopping-Up of High St has been made by the developer to the Secretary of State (pursuant to S247 Town and Country Planning Act 1980). The decision is currently still under consideration due to outstanding objections. The County Council does not have an objection. Original correspondence in response to the developer contacting us about their proposal is attached at annex 11.

Consultation

9. The formal consultation on the proposals was carried out between 5 November and 4 December 2015. This comprised letters being sent to approximately 255 residential and business properties in the immediate area, street notices being placed at intervals along the roads affected, public notices being published in the Didcot Herald on 4 November and the Oxford Times on 5 November 2015. In addition information was sent by email to statutory consultees, including Thames Valley Police, the Fire and ambulance services, Didcot Town Council, Bus Operators and the local Members, while a dedicated page was added to the County's online consultation portal to allow people to view and respond to the proposals.
10. Eighteen responses were received, comprising 9 objections, 8 responses raising one or more areas of concern, and 1 response in support; the responses are summarised at Annex 5. Copies of all the consultation responses are available for inspection in the Members' Resource Centre.
11. Thames Valley Police had no objection in principle to the proposals but did raise a concern that pedestrians crossing the bus lane had no specific crossing provision, and that while the rising bollards should effectively control access by cars and other larger vehicles, motorcycles would be able to bypass the bollards in contravention of the proposed restriction. The police also raised queries about possible obstruction of the bus route as a result of loading during permitted loading hours.
12. County Councillor Hards raised a number of specific concerns relating to the suitability of Station Road for use by buses, the provision for loading and deliveries, and parking issues including the proposed loss of three disabled bays and some spaces used by residents of Station Road.

13. The response from a local bus company raised a number of concerns regarding the viability and technical details of the scheme; these, together with the response supplied by the developer's consultant, are detailed at Annex 7.
14. A local taxi operator challenged the exclusion of taxis from the bus lane, citing that almost all the bus lanes in operation in other parts of the county permit use by taxis, as does the current bus only link in the High Street at the eastern side of the existing Orchard Centre.
15. Harwell Parish Council objected to the proposals to allow buses to use the pedestrian area of Station Road adjacent to The Cornerstone arts centre building.
16. Didcot First, a local organisation promoting Didcot, raise similar concerns on the safety of buses using the pedestrian area and queries on the wider management of buses in the vicinity, including the existing bus stops nearby.
17. The manager of The Broadway public house raised concerns over loading provision under the proposed new layout and traffic restrictions.
18. The remaining objections and concerns were largely from residents of Station Road; these included concerns over the suitability of Station Road as a bus route, and concerns over road safety, noise and emissions, and the loss of parking.

Response to objections and concerns

19. The concern of the police over the safety of pedestrians crossing the bus lane is noted; however experience of roads with similar restrictions (principally Queen Street in Oxford) is that these operate with good levels of safety and that bus drivers exercise high levels of care when travelling through such areas. Their concern that motorcyclists may contravene the proposed restriction (given that the proposed rising bollards would not stop motorcycles from travelling within the bus lane) is also noted; again experience of other bus lanes has been that abuse by motorcyclists is in practice very rare. The concern relating to potential obstruction by loading vehicles is noted and the operation of the scheme if approved will be monitored to determine if this is an issue requiring further investigation. The proposals have been the subject of an independent road safety audit at both the preliminary and detailed design stages.
20. Many of Cllr Hards concerns were the subject of consideration by South Oxfordshire District Council at their Planning Committee meeting on 29 July 2015 at which approval for the Orchard Centre phase 2 development was granted. Annex 6 shows the developers' consultants responses to detailed concerns raised in that consultation, and the paragraphs within this Annex particularly relevant to these concerns include paras 1,2, 7 and 13.

21. The proposal to remove the 3 disabled parking bays that are currently at the southern end of Station Road adjacent to the cinema also raised concerns. Although not on the public highway a total of 9 new disabled parking spaces are proposed as part of the development, 4 of which are proposed to be located in the new Station Road car park, which will be in an equivalent location to the spaces to be removed from Station Road.
22. A clause has been included within the draft Section 106 agreement for the developers to pay for the monitoring of on-street parking on Station Road and White Leys Close and to fund the implementation of a Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ) , which would restrict parking to residents only, if this is judged to be required. This provision is considered to adequately address concerns were raised by local residents over the proposed amendments to waiting restrictions in Station Road.
23. The concerns of the local taxi operator that taxis are not proposed to be allowed to use the proposed bus lane are noted. A taxi rank is currently located on High Street, which is approximately 30m in length. Taxis are able to arrive and depart the rank from both Broadway and Hitchcock Way. The re-provision of a taxi rank at a new location opposite the petrol filling station (26m in length) ensures that taxis continue to benefit from a waiting facility. The pick-up / drop-off layby outside Sainsbury's will be maintained. A further taxi facility is proposed within the Broadway car park (17m in length), since this is closer to the retail units and it ensures that customers have a choice. It is anticipated that this would accommodate the level of demand for taxi use, and that when considering the wider interests of pedestrians and road safety in minimising the use of the proposed bus lane, the current proposal to limit the use of the bus lane to buses and pedal cycles only is appropriate.
24. Harwell Parish Council's concerns over the proposed bus lane through the current pedestrian area do not cite any specific issues, but are presumed to relate to road safety and pedestrian amenity. The comments given above on the Thames Valley Police response on road safety apply; it is accepted that the proposal may result in some loss of pedestrian amenity but this needs to be balanced against the wider benefits of the development.
25. The concerns of Didcot First relating to the use of the bus stops are noted. High St is not officially a bus terminus and no bus stands are provided there. Therefore, Station Rd has been designed with bus stops but it will not be a terminus. It is proposed to provide 3 bus stops on Station Road; 2 boarding and alighting stops and 1 alight-only bus stop. The 2 boarding and alighting bus stops are proposed to have a bus shelter with seating. However, it is not proposed to provide a bus shelter for the alight only stop as there will be no bus passengers waiting at the bus stop. The design of the bus stops has been agreed by the County Council with the developer.
26. The issue of loading for The Broadway public house is being investigated by the developer's consultants, who will be liaising with the manager on this matter.

27. The concerns of residents responding to the consultation primarily related to the use of the road by buses and also the proposed changes to parking provision; Annex 6 provides a detailed response to these issues. Additionally some concerns were raised by residents over potential structural damage to properties on Station Road caused by vibration from the bus traffic. Station Road has previously operated as the main town centre bus route up until 2002. There is no reason to suggest that reopening it as a bus route would cause any structural damage to buildings.
28. As part of the development scheme Station Road is to be widened on the east side to assist two-way bus operation. As part of this work the eastern half of the road will be resurfaced and tests have been undertaken recently on to determine the current condition of the rest of the road; the results are currently being analysed to determine how much resurfacing of the remainder of Station Road is required.
29. Pedestrian safety on Station Road (particular children and other vulnerable groups) was cited as a concern from a number of respondents. The pedestrian facilities on Station Road will be maintained and there will continue to be footways on both sides of the carriageway, ensuring sufficient provision of segregation from other road-users.
30. Some respondents also expressed concerns about the impact of the bus route on those businesses with outdoor seating, and whether they would be able to continue to provide this in the shared space. The proposals do not include any physical changes to the existing seating areas and the businesses will be able to continue providing outdoor seating for customers.
31. Concerns were raised about the proposed management and control of bus flows to prevent more than one bus at a time through shared surface part of Station Road. It is planned that the proposed rising bollards will restrict access to the shared space area for permitted vehicles only, and as such will not 'gate' buses. Given the relatively low frequency of buses that are anticipated to use Station Road, it is not considered necessary to 'gate' bus traffic at this time but this will be kept under review as bus services in Didcot respond to local growth.
32. The concern that the removal of the High Street bus route will add additional traffic to Jubilee roundabout is not correct; the proposed Station Road bus route was selected instead of routing buses via the Jubilee roundabout.
33. The potential impact of traffic generation from the car rental business on the Station Road bus route and vehicle traffic was cited as concern. However as this is an existing operation it is not considered relevant in relation to the proposed changes to the traffic restrictions on Station Road.
34. A minor concern was raised that the proposed rising bollards to manage the bus flows will make it difficult for service vehicle access to the telephone exchange. However a detailed design swept path analysis has been undertaken for all movements that will be required to be made, and this is not considered to be an issue.

How the Project supports LTP3 Objectives

35. The proposals would help facilitate the flow of motor traffic in the area.

Financial and Staff Implications (including Revenue)

36. Funding for the proposal is being delivered by the developers of the Orchard Centre (Phase 2); the appraisal of the proposals and consultation has been undertaken by E&E officers as part of their normal duties.

RECOMMENDATION

37. **Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to approve implementation of the proposals as advertised.**

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Background papers: Consultation responses

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