

## **CABINET – 20 DECEMBER 2016**

### **Proposed Amendments to Traffic and Access Restrictions – Queen Street, Oxford**

#### **Report by Acting Director for Environment & Economy**

#### **Introduction**

1. A report on proposals for changes to access for buses, taxis and cyclists in Queen Street was considered by the Cabinet Member for Environment on 24th November 2016.
2. The Cabinet Member for Environment decided at that meeting “to approve a proposal that Queen Street remain open as it was before the Westgate redevelopment with a review after 6 months” subject to ratification by full Cabinet on 20th December.
3. This report sets out the reasons for the Cabinet Member for Environment’s decision on 24th November and (in the event that Cabinet is minded to approve it) makes officer recommendations for additional measures.

#### **Cabinet Member’s Decision and reason for referral to Cabinet**

4. The officer report to the Cabinet Member for Environment’s Delegated Decision meeting on 24th November sets out the background to the Queen Street proposals advertised for public consultation earlier in 2016 and is at Annex 1.
5. The officer recommendations were:
  - i. NOT TO APPROVE the proposals as advertised;
  - ii. TO INSTRUCT officers to report to a future Cabinet Member Decisions meeting a proposal for an experimental closure of Queen Street to buses and taxis which addresses the concerns about conditions in St Aldates and High Street raised during the recent consultation and which does not rely on the bus turning facility at Worcester Street; and
  - iii. TO NOTE the city council’s and COLTA’s latest correspondence in relation to the decision made at Cabinet Member Decisions on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2016 regarding changes to TROs for Castle Street, Norfolk Street and Speedwell Street as part of the Westgate centre development and confirm that this does not alter the decision made.
6. Recommendations (i) and (iii) were accepted. The Cabinet Member for Environment’s decision on recommendation (ii) was “to approve a proposal

that Queen Street remain open as it was before the Westgate redevelopment with a review after 6 months” subject to ratification by full Cabinet on 20th December.

7. The reasons for the Cabinet Member for Environment’s recommendation are as follows:
  - Future pedestrian flows in Queen Street are impossible to accurately predict once Westgate opens, so it makes sense to implement something on a trial basis. This means either closing Queen Street to buses, monitoring the overall impact and reviewing whether or not to open to buses OR keeping Queen Street open, monitoring for conflict between pedestrians and buses/bikes and reviewing whether or not to close it.
  - The major bus operators have agreed that if there are health and safety concerns a closure to buses can be carried out overnight and the alternative bus routes can be reverted to.
  - The bus turning at the Worcester Street car park identified as part of the original plans to close Queen Street to buses has not been resolved with Nuffield College. Keeping Queen Street open provides more time to resolve this or identify a suitable alternative.
  - St Aldate’s should not be further cluttered with buses and stops - it is a major tourist destination and should be kept as much an uncluttered architectural gem as possible.
  - At a time when OCC is promoting increased bus patronage ease of access for buses to and through the city centre and around the new Westgate development is important.
8. The Cabinet member considered that given the wider implications of this decision, and its controversial nature, it should be considered by Cabinet.

### **Officer response**

9. Officers’ analysis of the issues and the original officer recommendations remain as set out in the report to Cabinet Member Decisions on 24th November. Whilst we respect the recommendation of the Cabinet member, we would still ask Cabinet to consider the original report as the preferred recommendation going forward.
10. The bus operators’ assurances on safety and their willingness to switch to alternative routes at short notice (if required) are welcome but these do not remove our concern over pedestrian safety as expressed in the main report.
11. Cabinet should note that the original officer report did not seek a decision to *approve* an experimental TRO to close Queen Street, only authority for officers to prepare a proposal for subsequent approval. It should also be

noted that approval from the Secretary of State for Transport is required for an experimental TRO that prevents bus access to a street.

12. If Cabinet is minded to approve the Cabinet Member for Environment's recommendation, officers recommend that the Cabinet consider and agree the following additional measures:

- A well-considered 'plan B' to be worked up with the bus operators to ensure any urgent closure of Queen Street due to safety concerns can be implemented quickly and with minimal disruption;
- Officers to work with bus operators to remove the bus stop that was previously in Bonn Square as this should no longer be required once the new bus stops in Castle Street and Norfolk Street are available;
- Officers to work with bus operators to reduce the flow of buses in Queen Street below the level that existed prior to the start of the Westgate construction works, to help reduce bus/pedestrian conflicts;
- Officers to develop proposals to reduce the numbers of taxis and private hire vehicles using Queen Street below the level that existed prior to the start of the Westgate construction works to help reduce taxi/pedestrian conflicts;
- Cycle access should remain unchanged for the time being and should be reviewed six months after the opening of the Westgate centre, at the same time as the bus access arrangements; and
- Officers to develop proposals to address the concerns about congestion and the environment in St Aldates and High Street raised in the most recent Queen Street consultation.

### **Financial and Staff Implications**

13. The approved capital programme includes for these proposals as part of the Connections to Oxford Station project. The total budget for the scheme (including costs to date) is £1.970m and it is funded using the following sources:

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|-----------------------------|---------|
| • County council capital    | £0.170m |
| • LEP (Local Growth Fund)   | £1.300m |
| • City council contribution | £0.500m |

14. This allocation will be reviewed following the Cabinet's decision. The city council has confirmed that its contribution to the project – for public realm improvements in Queen Street – will not be available unless there is a commitment to pedestrianisation. The view of the LEP in relation to the Local Growth Fund allocation will need to be sought following Cabinet's decision.

## Equality implications

15. Since the proposals are under review, equality implications will be assessed and reported at a future Cabinet Member Decisions meeting when the final proposals have been developed and assessed.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED**:

- (a) To consider the Cabinet Member for Environment's decision and recommendation as set out in paragraph 6.
- (b) If the Cabinet is minded to approve the Cabinet Member for Environment's recommendation, TO INSTRUCT officers to work with bus operators and others towards the 'additional measures' set out in paragraph 11, seeking Cabinet or Cabinet member approval where required.

BEV HINDLE

Acting Director for Environment & Economy

December 2016

Background papers:           Annex 1 – “Proposed Amendments to Traffic and Access Restrictions – Queen Street, Oxford” (report by Director for Environment & Economy to the Cabinet Member for Environment: 24<sup>th</sup> November 2016)

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