

Questions from Members of the Public

Questions are listed in the order in which they were received.

<p>1. CITY COUNCILLOR LINDA SMITH</p> <p>What is the County Council doing to prevent the far too frequent flooding of Watlington Road under the rail bridge? Does the County Council have any understanding of the cause of the problem and what could be done to prevent it in future?</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR PETE SUDBURY, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR CLIMATE CHANGE, ENVIRONMENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS</p> <p>Thank you for highlighting this concern. I can confirm that our gully emptying crew attended to the flooding under the railway bridge on Saturday, 24th August. They removed all surface water and cleaned all highway surface water drainage assets. Since this visit, we have not been made aware of any additional flooding.</p> <p>Regarding further investigation, our Highway Operations Team will examine the water pump within the embankment of the railway structure.</p>
<p>2. PETER WEST</p> <p>As a part of the July 9th Council meeting, I posed a question to you regarding compensation for businesses that had lost money or closed due to the introduction of the LTNs. However despite representations to you personally, Martin Reeves, Bill Cotton and formal presentations to the Council, witnessed by many, you wrote the following.</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR ANDREW GANT, CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purpose of our transport strategy is to make Oxford accessible, attractive, and sustainable. We therefore expect our plans to improve the city's economic performance, not worsen it. • In many parts of the city, a minority of visitors arrive by car (in the city centre fewer than 10%), so improving access by non-car modes should lead to greater economic benefit than improving access for cars. • Business performance will always be influenced by a wide variety of factors, including wider trends in consumer preferences. • Over the longer term, it is possible to gauge whether national and local policies (which extend well beyond transport) have supported economic growth in the city. However, the data to make a causal link between specific transport policies and the performance of individual business simply does not exist, either in Oxford or anywhere else. Even if

<p><i>The County Council is not aware of any empirical evidence linking reduced income and/or closure directly to changes in patterns of patronage as a result of LTNs.</i></p> <p>I would be grateful if you would either confirm that the council has received empirical (definition; information gathered through observation, experimentation or sense experience) or not. Should you have to correct your response I would be pleased if you would make a public apology for the error.</p>	<p>it did, local authorities have to take a broader and longer-term view, so individual cases cannot and should not drive policy.</p> <p>The empirical evidence comment was related to the <u>direct</u> and <u>singular</u> relationship between a loss of income and LTNs. There will be many and varied factors that will impact on a specific business in question; cost of living challenges, energy prices and changing consumer habits (e.g., internet shopping, home delivery, a change in ideology, such as seeking more sustainable brands etc) to name just a few. Indeed, the biggest issue often cited by large and small retailers alike, up and down the country, is the outdated business rates regime.</p> <p>The high street is constantly evolving and at a faster rate than perhaps there has ever been, most likely due to rapidly changing consumer habits (mentioned above) and the COVID-19 pandemic. Businesses are sadly closing across the county and country. In many of these locations, LTNs will not be present but trading conditions will still be challenging, even where there is free parking (e.g., Abingdon). There is every sympathy for all businesses that are struggling in these times but to simply say it is solely down to one factor is oversimplifying a very complex issue. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that by providing an environment that is easily accessible on foot or by bike can benefit retail. More people access the city on foot, by bike or using public transport than by car so enhancing access by these more space efficient modes will benefit the majority of residents and visitors. Furthermore, raw data on St Clement's and Cowley Road show an increase in footfall from 2019 (pre-LTN and COVID-19) to 2023/24 (post LTN and COVID-19) – footfall is widely accepted as a good barometer for the 'health' of the high street.</p> <p>In the city, many customers already arrive by non-car modes (in excess of 90% recorded in city centre pedestrian surveys in 2022) and the filters will make access by bus, walking and cycling even more attractive in the future – in the city centre and beyond.</p>
<p>3. BERNADETTE EVANS</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR ANDREW GANT, CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT</p>

<p>The Council tells us it will be monitoring the impact of the traffic filters on Oxford's SMEs with a shopfront by way of measuring footfall. Botley Road businesses are made up of builders/trades yards with parking, retail parks with parking, wholesalers with parking and smaller independents. Monitoring customers via footfall won't be accurate for these businesses given so many arrive in a vehicle, so what proposals do the council have for accurately measuring the impact of the traffic filters on these businesses?</p>	<p>We are monitoring footfall and spend data for key locations / areas – city centre, Jericho, Cowley Road, Cowley, Headington and Summertown. This will not provide data for individual shops and businesses, but it will do at the local area level. The data can then be compared to wider regional/national data.</p> <p>We will also be actively seeking feedback from shops and businesses throughout the consultation that will initially run during the first six months of the trial to help us understand how they are being impacted by the traffic filters.</p> <p>Overall, the filters should make access to Botley Road businesses for deliveries and servicing easier due to reduced traffic levels across the city and also of course because vans and HGVs will be exempt when the filters are operating. We have been engaging with businesses since February 2022; we listened to concerns about the impact of the proposals on their deliveries and that is one of the reasons why HGVs and other goods vehicles are exempt from the filters.</p> <p>As regards the customers shopping at businesses along the Botley Road, these will of course be accessible by car from the west if not using a permit; for those who use a traffic filter permit, <u>any</u> route will still be possible. Indeed, many of the trips to the larger retail units/sheds are low frequency and as such people should be able to use their day passes to drive there through a filter if they need to. For those travelling to the smaller businesses who don't want to use a permit, driving will still be possible but catching the bus or walking and cycling will be more attractive options than at the moment given the positive impact the filters will have on levels of traffic and congestion.</p>
<p>4. IAN YEATMAN</p> <p>Several areas, such as Greater Leys, Herschel Crescent, Donnington Bridge, and Jericho, are currently considered unsuitable for double-decker</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR ANDREW GANT, CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT</p> <p>As part of our successful Enhanced Partnership, bus companies have made significant investments in the vehicle fleet with 159 new zero emission buses being placed into service this year – the largest single such investment ever made in Oxfordshire. This comes despite the impact of the pandemic, which has made bus operations more difficult and expensive to maintain.</p>

<p>buses, causing significant challenges for residents, particularly those with limited mobility. Is the council working with the bus company to explore the possibility of introducing a smaller bus service in these areas?</p>	<p>On most routes, double deck vehicles are necessary because of the popularity of Oxford’s bus network. Although there may be plenty of capacity available at the periphery of the city, the key radial corridors into the centre attract high loadings which necessitate the use of larger vehicles. The majority of vehicles in the companies’ fleets are double deck for this reason, and relatively few single decks are available.</p> <p>Whilst one of our main bus companies has access to a small number of minibuses, these would not be suitable for use on existing routes and therefore it would be necessary to create new routes to serve areas off the commercial network. As a single bus costs £200,000 per year to operate, this would be very expensive and would not be the most effective use of funds or staff when the majority of residents remain within a 10-minute walk of a bus stop, as opposed to other areas where the very existence of any bus services depends on Council income. Additional routes would also abstract passengers and revenue from the commercial network, making it less financially sustainable – experience from the PickMeUp service indicated that over 40% of users simply switched from the main bus network.</p> <p>Where residents are unable to access the commercial network, the Council provides the Comet community bus service which is available between 10am and 2pm on weekdays to facilitate essential travel. In south Oxford, similar services are provided by the Daybreak organisation located on Greater Leys.</p> <p>Officers continue to explore options for Donnington Bridge, although this would result in significant unbudgeted expenditure compounded by that already required as a result of Network Rail’s extension of the Botley Road closure.</p>
<p>5. RICHARD PARNHAM</p> <p>Did, at any point since the start of 2023, Network Rail and / or its contractors offer Oxfordshire County Council the opportunity to</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR ANDREW GANT, CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT</p> <p>When the original plans were drawn up, there was an intention to open the road between the different work stages, though this didn’t happen due to original project delays. Work commenced 11 April 2023 and was due, on this phase, to be completed on 31 Oct 2024. All</p>

<p>fully (or partially) reopen Botley Road to any form of motorised traffic, in either 2023 or before November 2024?</p>	<p>this was set out in public information and on the web page Oxford City Station Phase 2C Botley Road Oxfordshire County Council .</p> <p>Since the communication of the recent further delays to the project, we are aware of several options being explored by Network Rail and understand a partial reopening is not feasible and a temporary re-opening not practical. Network Rail provide up to date information on their website Botley Road bridge replacement - Network Rail .</p>
<p>6. EMILY SCAYSBROOK</p> <p>In a city like Oxford with so many tourists, footfall does not meaningfully reflect trade for all city businesses. Cash is also still used extensively, especially by said tourists, and so credit card data is not sufficiently reflective either. With that in mind, will the recently-reappointed traffic filters evaluation company, Steer, reexamine its approach to evaluating the impact of the traffic filters on Oxford businesses, and promise to meaningfully engage with them - both individually and including neighbourhood business groups like the High Street Association, Jericho Traders, Cowley Road traders etc - directly?"</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR ANDREW GANT, CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT</p> <p>One of the ways we will assess the effects of the traffic filters on businesses, will be by analysing footfall and spend data in the city centre and five other locations: Cowley Road, Cowley Centre, Headington, Jericho and Summertown. Footfall data provides information on general activity levels, while spend data, based on credit card transactions, provides insight into the level of economic activity in an area. We will also be running a consultation during the first six months of the trial, actively seeking the views of the public and wider stakeholder groups. This will include businesses – we will encourage them to let us know the detail of how the trial is impacting them. Data from the traffic filter trial monitoring and evaluation together with consultation feedback will be considered by the county council’s Cabinet in deciding whether to make the scheme permanent.</p>

7. ANGUS WILKINSON

It is roughly 12 months since the last ofsted/CQC inspection of SEND provision within Oxfordshire. Is the Cabinet content that OCC's planning and actions since then have had sufficient urgency, intensity, and resource to deliver the demonstrable changes that the Improvement Notice demanded?

COUNCILLOR KATE GREGORY, CABINET MEMBER FOR SEND IMPROVEMENT

Thank you for your question on this important issue. Since the inspection of the authority in 2023, a significant amount of work has taken place to address the weaknesses identified across the local area partnership. These include but are not limited to:

- The production of a priority action plan which was approved in December 2023
- The establishment of an improvement board with an independent chair and representatives from Oxfordshire parent/carer forum, the SEND youth forum, senior leadership from the integrated care board, schools and multi-academy trusts from January 2024. The Board meets monthly and monitors progress against the priority action plan and our broader transformation programme.
- The establishment of specific workstreams focused on addressing the weaknesses and involving representatives from across the partnership including parent/carers
- The continuation of our Enhanced Pathways initiative working to support mainstream schools to be more inclusive
- Refreshing our approach to assessments for EHCPs so that we meet statutory deadlines – our performance is now above the national average
- Rolling out our trauma informed restorative approach with mainstream schools
- Supporting our special schools to share best practice with mainstream schools through our 'inreach/outreach' programme
- The development of a Quality Improvement Framework for EHCPs to improve the quality of assessments
- Stabilisation of the senior leadership team and an increase in capacity to address backlogs

The council has committed significant resource of £1m to the support of SEND services and to the work of the area partnership. We have taken on additional staffing and appointed permanent staff and are developing schools led approaches to Alternative Provision, leading to an increased stability in the service.

Our progress is regularly monitored by the Department for Education and in July this year a full stocktake of our progress took place. We are awaiting the outcome of that stocktake.

We will also have a 'deep dive' into our progress in October this year as well as a number of other 'inspection' type events. We are particularly pleased that the early years and key stage 2 performance indicators show that children with SEND are performing above the national average in some areas.

Whilst we know we have more work to do to turn around what a recent report called a 'broken' system (ISOS 2024), we await the outcome of our recent monitoring to ascertain whether we are making sufficient and robust progress.