

Guidance is given in square brackets under each of the headings below. Headings which are discretionary are also in square brackets. Please delete as you go along and remove heading and sections not needed.

Divisions Affected – Banbury Grimsbury & Castle

DELEGATED DECISIONS BY CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT

10 OCTOBER 2024

CHERWELL STREET BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT SCHEME, BANBURY

Report by Director of Environment and Highways

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet Member is **RECOMMENDED** to:

- a) **Approve in principle the preferred scheme to take forward into the preliminary and detailed design stage for the Cherwell Street Bus Service Improvement Scheme.**

Executive Summary

1. The Cherwell Street bus service improvement scheme in Banbury is a DfT-funded project under Oxfordshire's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), developed by Oxfordshire County Council in collaboration with local bus operators. The first version of the Bus Service Improvement Plan was approved by Cabinet on 19 October 2021 and has recently been updated and approved on 18 June 2024. This Banbury scheme constitutes measures to improve bus journey times from the current George Street bus lane into the town centre. The preferred scheme also proposes related pedestrian improvements (see scheme diagram in **Annex 1**).
2. Following a comprehensive options' assessment, Oxfordshire County Council officers carried out an informal public consultation on the proposed scheme option in March 2024. The consultation document is provided in **Annex 2**. Whilst consultation feedback towards the proposals was generally positive, including from the key bus operator, there are elements that would require the removal of highway lanes and/or reduced highway capacity which has raised concern. Officers have addressed the issues in this report, but the next stage of design work will provide more evidence and detail, ahead of a formal consultation in December 2024.

3. Approval is therefore sought for the principles of the scheme to be taken forward into the next design stage.

Options and Feasibility

4. There are delays for buses travelling between George Street and the bus hub in Banbury town centre, with significant congestion at the Bridge Street/Cherwell Street junction during peak periods. The scheme aims to improve and prioritise bus movement in this area.
5. The Oxfordshire BSIP recognised the lack of journey time reliability for buses through Banbury and aimed to improve their access into the town centre by introducing a northbound bus lane on Cherwell Street to reduce delay at peak times.
6. An appraisal was undertaken of a wide range of interventions (including the northbound bus lane), with five scheme options shortlisted for design and assessment using a VISSIM microsimulation model. The work demonstrated that the bus lane was not operating well because of its interaction with the petrol filling station on Cherwell Street, and reconfiguration of the signals with an extended left turn lane into the town centre (for buses and left turning vehicles) worked more effectively. Given the low number of left turning vehicles, modelling showed that this lane worked as a 'virtual bus lane' that still prioritised bus movements. Further detail is provided in the Options Assessment Report (**Annex 3**).
7. As well as the virtual bus lane, the proposed scheme includes wider improvements:
 - **George Street / Cherwell Street junction** - the scheme includes the widening of the existing George Street bus lane to current standards where the buses turn left; the introduction of a pedestrian crossing on George Street and on the northern arm, and improvements to the traffic lanes approaching the junction from the south. These improvements would require general traffic lanes on George Street to be reduced from two lanes to one lane, close to the junction.
 - **Cherwell Street / Bridge Street / Concord Avenue junction** – adjustment and optimisation of traffic signals; improved pedestrian facilities across all arms including reconstructed pedestrian islands; removal of the pedestrian island; and altering the highway lane allocations on Bridge Street (east) to address the current issue of left-turning vehicles mounting the footway due to sub-standard lane widths.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

8. The adopted Local Transport Connectivity Plan (LTCP) sets out the modal hierarchy with pedestrians given the highest priority and buses also prioritised

above motor vehicles. The recommended scheme prioritises both these modes.

9. The scheme meets the priority to “put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work” by influencing a move to sustainable transport and the priority to “invest in an inclusive, integrated and sustainable transport network” by making services, amenities and sustainable modes of travel more accessible.

Financial Implications

10. The scheme is currently being funded through the Department for Transport’s Bus Service Improvement Plan. The County Council has secured £2.3m for the scheme through this fund. An additional £500,000 of s106 funding has also been allocated to this project.

Comments checked by:

Filipp Skiffins, Assistant Finance Business Partner
(Filipp.skiffins@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

Legal Implications

11. The Council is the local highway authority for Oxfordshire under the Highways Act 1980 and is also the traffic authority under the Traffic Management Act 2004 and has a duty to secure the expeditious movement of traffic. In order to progress the design of this scheme the services of a design consultant will be procured by the Council and Legal Services will advise and assist with putting the contract for services in place.

Comments checked by:

Gareth Hale, Senior Solicitor and Team Leader, (Contracts & Conveyancing)
(Gareth.Hale@oxfordshire.gov.uk) (Legal)

Procurement Implications

12. When procuring goods, services or works, the procurement must be conducted in accordance with the Council’s Contract Procedure Rules and, where applicable, the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (PCRs).
13. The Council are currently in the process of procuring design consultants to complete the preliminary and detailed design for the scheme through the Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO).

14. The procurement strategy for construction for the scheme is currently being developed.

Comments checked by:

Lauren Hawkins, Category Manager, Finance and Commercial Services
lauren.Hawkins@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff Implications

15. Resources are in place from the Place Planning North and Infrastructure Delivery teams to take the scheme through design and a second public consultation. The Infrastructure Delivery team will provide project management resource to manage the project finances, risk, programme, change control and internal reporting. The client team will support the design consultant with Oxfordshire County Council technical assurance processes.
16. The design consultant commissioned to undertake the options and feasibility stage of the work is being commissioned to update the modelling and progress the design.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

17. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed (**Annex 4**) and highlights an overall positive change for pedestrians and bus users with protected characteristics under the Equality Act (2010). A negative impact has been highlighted for car users who travel through Bridge Street (east). Further detailed modelling will be undertaken through the more detailed design phases.

Sustainability Implications

18. The proposed Cherwell Street scheme scores well at this early-stage Climate Impact Assessment as it focuses on investing in public transport infrastructure, helping to transition to net zero in Banbury by supporting behavioural change. Any reduction in car trips will help with air quality. Officers and consultants will engage with vulnerable groups to ensure the proposals provide benefits. The full Carbon Impact Assessment is provided in **Annex 5 - Climate Impact Assessment**.

Risk Management

19. A risk register will be maintained by the Infrastructure Delivery project team. Significant escalation of risk will be reported to the Bicester & Banbury Programme Board.

20. There are physical constraints on Cherwell Street, with two BT chambers restricting the current width on a short stretch of highway immediately north of the petrol station. The moving of these will add cost to the scheme and will be established in the next few weeks.
21. The BSIP funding deadline means the scheme needs to start on the ground in March. There is a risk that complications during the design stage will extend beyond this timescale. Officers and consultants are working closely to avoid unnecessary delay.
22. The Banbury and Bicester Capital Programme Manager and Board will provide high level project assurance. Technical design assurance will be provided by the County Council's technical assurance team ensuring the preliminary and detailed scheme design meet all appropriate county and national design guidance. Risk and contingency allowance have been included in the project budget costs and will be managed by the project manager and programme board.

Informal Consultation

23. Engagement with County, District and Town Councillors for the impacted wards, District Council Officers and Stagecoach as the main bus operator in Banbury was undertaken as part of the options and feasibility work. Representatives of Banbury Active Travel Supporters responded to the public consultation and will be further engaged during the preliminary design stage.
24. An informal public consultation on the preferred option ran from Monday 4 March 2024 until Monday 1 April 2024 with findings provided in the Consultation Report (**Annex 6**). Local Councillors from all three tiers (County, District and Town) were invited to a briefing prior to the consultation launching. Consultation promotion included:
 - Letters were hand delivered by officers to residential and business addresses in the vicinity of the scheme along Bridge Street, Cherwell Street, Lower Cherwell Street and George Street
 - Posters were displayed at the town hall (where hard copies of the survey could be collected), on buses and at other locations around Banbury
 - Social media and other digital communications were issued – including emailing local partners.
25. 1400 visitors accessed the Let's Talk page with a total of 120 respondents completing the consultation survey; online and paper survey options were available and promoted.
26. Key survey findings included:

- The most common methods of travel through the study area for respondents was by bus or by walking.
- 88% of respondents were supportive of the objective of improving the journey times and reliability of buses accessing Banbury town centre via Cherwell Street and Bridge Street.
- 85% were supportive of the core scheme proposal of extending the left turn (all traffic) lane from Cherwell Street to Bridge Street (west) to improve bus access to the town centre from the south.
- 86% were supportive of improving the design of the Bridge Street junction to remove existing pedestrian safety issues and formalise traffic lane arrangements.
- 87% were supportive of improving signal timings to manage congestion for all traffic and ensure buses pass through the Bridge Street junction more efficiently.

However, some respondents highlighted areas of concern, in particular the impact of:

- Removing the right-turn lane from Concord Avenue into the town centre, to provide wider running lanes and a wider pedestrian island
- Reducing the eastbound running-lanes to one lane on George Street at its junction with Cherwell Street, to provide a wider bus lane for the left turn movement and to improve the pedestrian crossing facilities
- Removing the Bridge Street (east) pedestrian island and changing the westbound running lanes to improve pedestrian safety and mobility.

27. There are some additional comments that are discussed in the full consultation report, several of which have been considered and addressed in the updated scheme design to be taken forward to the next design stage. The need for further consideration of provisions for cyclists is understood by officers who will be working with the local active travel supporters' group to identify improvements through this part of Banbury.
28. Following the next stage of design and further modelling, there will be a full public consultation in December, including an exhibition. This will present more detailed information on the elements of the scheme and invite the public to comment and state whether or not they support the final proposals. The recommended scheme for construction will come back to the CMD in February 2025 in order to meet the DfT requirement to start early works before the end of the 2024/25 financial year.

Officer Response to Concerns

29. There were concerns raised that the changes at Cherwell Street / Bridge Street/ Concord Avenue would cause further delay to bus services because they would

be impacted by delays to general traffic in the wider area where there is no bus priority in place i.e. gains on Cherwell Street would be negated by increased congestion on Bridge Street (east) and Concord Avenue (southbound). Balancing the needs of the various bus and coach services through that junction has been a primary concern throughout the development of the scheme. The only route into and out of the town centre is via this junction.

30. In preparing the BSIP bid, the focus was on improving on the unreliable bus journey times along Cherwell Street as by far the majority of services from the west and south into the town centre use this route (currently 17-18 buses per hour). However, there are some local services plus out-of-town services that travel through Grimsbury and into the town centre via Bridge Street (east) (4-5 buses per hour) and from the end of 2025 some services from the south will travel via Tramway Road and use this route. Only one coach service arrives via Concord Avenue.
31. The feasibility work highlighted that the traffic lanes on Bridge Street (east) were so narrow, partly to allow for a pedestrian island, that vehicles were bumping up onto the pavement (which is also narrow) to turn left on the green signal. Earlier options to address this by reducing Bridge Street (east) to one lane eastbound whilst retaining the pedestrian island (to minimise pedestrian crossing time to reduce highway capacity impacts) were dismissed through the assessment work because they caused too much additional delay for buses from this direction and to all vehicles through Grimsbury. It has been a challenge to balance the needs of the different bus services and improve on the situation for pedestrians, but officers feel the current scheme provides the right benefits and minimises the negatives.
32. The next stage of the design work will enable these issues to be examined in more detail. The route into Banbury via Bridge Street (east) is a key corridor that connects Banbury train station and the Grimsbury area with the town centre but it is an unpleasant route providing a poor experience for all users. It is clear from early modelling work that even with no scheme in place, it will become more congested in the future. Encouraging more people to use this route on foot or by bus will therefore help to reduce these issues.
33. Another reason for a lack of scheme support from some respondents was that the proposal to widen the bus lane on George Street would lead to reductions in width elsewhere and increased congestion. The current bus lane is below standards in terms of width where the buses turn into Cherwell Street; the proposals will improve conditions for bus services and provide a formalised crossing for pedestrians where there is currently none. Modelling undertaken to date suggests that there is minimal impact on vehicular movements.
34. The bus and pedestrian elements of the scheme received a high level of support from those that responded to the informal consultation. The next design stage of the work will provide more information to examine the elements of the scheme proposals in detail including the areas of concern. Officers will be continuing to work on cycle provision in the area as a separate project as this scheme is part of a continuing programme of sustainable and place making improvements for Banbury.

Paul Fermer

Director of Environment and Highways

Annexes Annex 1: Design drawing
Annex 2: Consultation document (proposals consulted
on in March 2024)
Annex 3: Options Assessment Report
Annex 4: Equalities Impact Assessment
Annex 5: Climate Impact Assessment
Annex 6: Consultation Report (results of the
consultation)

Contact Officer Jacqui Cox – Place Making Manager (North)
Colm McAllister - Senior Transport Planner

October 2024