

## **Divisions Affected – Bicester Town**

### **DELEGATED DECISIONS BY CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT**

**14 NOVEMBER 2024**

### **SHEEP STREET, BICESTER EXPERIMENTAL TRAFFIC REGULATION ORDER PERMITTING TWO-WAY CYCLING**

**Report by Director for Environment and Highways**

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Cabinet Member is **RECOMMENDED** to:

- a) **Approve the introduction of an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order to permit two-way cycling throughout Sheep Street, Bicester at all times of day and days of the week and thus temporarily superseding the existing 'no-cycling' order**
- b) **Request officers to continually review in detail and stop the trial if there are any pedestrian safety concerns that cannot be suitably promptly addressed.**

## **Executive Summary**

2. The Cabinet Member considered a proposal for an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) in April 2024 following an initial stakeholder consultation. The decision at that meeting was for officers to conduct a formal public consultation into the proposal. This report outlines the results of that consultation (**Annex 1** contains the Consultation Report).
3. The consultation highlighted concerns about the proposal from the majority of those that responded, particularly about the potential impact on the safety of pedestrians. The report addresses these concerns and measures that could be put in place to address these, and sets out the benefits of trialling permitting cycle access through Sheep Street detailing how this would meet the County Council's LTCP objectives and policies in terms of increasing the number of trips made by cycle by facilitating safer and more accessible cycling routes.

## Background

4. Sheep Street has an existing Traffic Regulation Order in place which designates it as a Pedestrian Zone, with access for permit holders at any time and access for disabled drivers and for loading outside of core shopping hours. The TRO includes a ban on cycling for the 300 yards of the pedestrianised area. The Bicester Market implements a road closure in Sheep Street which is based on the existing Traffic Regulation Order. Please see **Annex 2** for location diagram.
5. Bicester has an approved Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan which includes a proposal to reconsider the ban on cyclists through Sheep Street to aid cycling connectivity to the various retail and leisure facilities in the town centre improve movements through this part of the town. The National Cycle Route 51 runs through Bicester and is broken by this section; reconsidering this ban would also benefit for this longer distance route.
6. An ETRO can run for a maximum duration of eighteen months with the first six months of the order being the formal consultation stage. This would provide the opportunity for close scrutiny of the impact. The ETRO also allows for changes to be made, with any material changes effectively restarting the 6-month consultation window. As such no changes can sensible be made within the least 6 months of the 18-month order.
7. Several towns similar to Bicester have successfully implemented shared pedestrian and cycling zones in their pedestrianised town centres, serving as effective examples for Bicester's consideration:
  - Aylesbury: located seventeen miles from Bicester, Aylesbury is a market town of similar size with a pedestrianised centre that permits cycling. Similar to Bicester, motor vehicle access is allowed under specific conditions, such as for permit holders, blue badge holders, and during designated loading times. An observation of the area found that cyclists were generally outnumbered by pedestrians and that cyclists travelled slowly, usually for shopping or commuting purposes. No incidents of conflict between pedestrians and cyclists were noted, and this arrangement has been in place since at least 2010 without reported issues, indicating long-term feasibility.
  - Newbury: another market town comparable in size to Bicester, Newbury has converted its main shopping street into a shared space for pedestrians and cyclists. During a recent observation on a weekday afternoon, the street was busy with shoppers, predominantly on foot, with a few cyclists moving at a slow pace. No conflicts between users were observed, further illustrating the potential for shared use in busy town centres.
8. These examples, provided by the Oxfordshire Cycling Network, demonstrate that shared pedestrian and cycling zones can operate successfully in towns similar to Bicester without creating significant user conflicts. By implementing an ETRO for Sheep Street, Bicester has the opportunity to assess this approach and gather

local feedback, potentially creating a safer, more connected space that aligns with the LTCP's active travel targets

## **Corporate Policies and Priorities**

9. The proposals outlined in this report align closely with the overarching Vision, Values, Objectives, and Strategic Priorities outlined in the County Council's Corporate Plan. By adhering to these guiding principles, the initiative put forth in this report aims to deliver tangible benefits to service users and the wider community. The proposals aim to support the Corporate Plan by:
- Upholding the County Council's vision of fostering a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable community by enhancing accessibility and promoting active travel.
  - Improving the strategic priority of enhancing transport infrastructure by facilitating safer and more accessible cycling routes, aligning with the County Council's commitment to sustainable transportation options.
  - Promoting Health and Wellbeing by encouraging cycling and creating shared spaces that prioritise pedestrian and cyclist safety.
  - Supporting Economic Development by increasing active travel to local businesses.
  - Enhancing Environmental Sustainability by reducing vehicle movements through promoting cycling, thereby reducing carbon emissions and improving air quality.

## **Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) Implications**

10. The recommendations outlined in this report align closely with the Council's LTCP Vision, key outcomes, and LCWIP targets, with a particular focus on prioritising Active Travel. The implementation of the ETRO on Sheep Street facilitates safer and more accessible cycling routes, encouraging residents and visitors to choose active modes of travel, which supports the LTCP objective of increasing active travel modal share.
11. In line with the LTCP targets, this initiative contributes to the county-wide goal of increasing the number of cycle trips per week from the current baseline of 600,000 to 1 million by 2031. Specifically, in Bicester, it aligns with target BCW1 in the LCWIP, aiming to achieve 60,000 cycle trips per week by 2031—representing a 200% increase from the baseline of 20,000.
12. The implementation of the ETRO would include detailed monitoring to address potential safety concerns, particularly regarding interactions between cyclists, vehicles and those walking or using mobility scooters. Adequate signage will be employed to influence behaviour, mitigate safety risks and ensure the safety of all users.

## Equality & Inclusion Implications

13. The implementation of the ETRO on Sheep Street in Bicester has some implications for equality and inclusion as outline in Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) available at **Annex 3**. This includes the risk that people walking may feel intimidated by cyclists travelling at speed through the street and/or feel at greater risk of being hit by a cyclist than when cycling is not permitted in the street.
14. We also have to consider accessibility of people with disabilities who use a cycle as a mobility aid.
15. The EIA will be closely monitored during the six-month review period after the ETRO has taken affect and at the end of the ETRO formal consultation period.

## Sustainability Implications

16. The implementation of the ETRO on Sheep Street presents sustainability benefits, including the promotion of active travel, reduction of traffic congestion, encouragement of low-carbon lifestyles, and positive contributions to climate action. A Climate Impact Assessment is available at **Annex 4**.

## Consultation

17. An initial stakeholder consultation took place over four weeks from 12 February to 11 March 2024. At the Cabinet Member Decisions meeting in April 2024 it was agreed that a formal public consultation would be undertaken. This took place from 15 July to 31 August 2024.
18. The consultation received 1,267 responses. When asked 'Do you agree or disagree with implementing an ETRO period to allow cycling in Sheep Street at all times of day?' 21% of respondents agreed, citing reasons such as improved cycling accessibility, environmental and health benefits, and successful examples from other locations. However, the majority, 77%, expressed concerns about the proposal. Key issues raised included safety risks for pedestrians, potential negative impacts on footfall to local businesses, and the increased likelihood of collisions between people walking and cycling.
19. In considering if a trial should go ahead to allow cycling except on Fridays due to the market, 80% of people replied that they did not support cycling at any time, and only 11% feeling this was worth trialling.
20. The majority of respondents were local residents who regularly visited Sheep Street, with a significant portion, 59.4%, being older people aged 55 and over. This particular consultation has been one that older people have felt more compelled to participate in than younger people. Potentially due to their strength of feeling on the issue or how they feel they will be impacted. 90% of over 55's disagreed with trialling cycling.

21. Respondents with disabilities expressed strong concerns about the safety implications of allowing cycling in Sheep Street. 90% of people who identified as having a disability disagreed with trailing cycling. However, 10% of people with disability agreed with a trial going ahead, some of these respondents may use a cycle to make moving around easier due to their disability.
22. Representation from the Bicester Friday Market has very strong feelings that cycling should not take place on Friday's due to the cyclists creating a hazard and obstruct market trading and the potential for collision between cyclists and pedestrians. They feel there is not enough space in the street to accommodate both activities.
23. Both Bicester Bike User Group and Oxfordshire Cycling Network wrote in support of the trial citing that not allowing cycling is discriminatory for disabled cyclists; cycling benefits the local economy by improving accessibility; there is adequate space in Sheep Street to accommodate pedestrians and cyclists; cycling benefits health; and allowing cycling would remedy the broken link in National Cycle Network Route 51.

## **Officer Response to Concerns**

24. The primary objections to the proposed ETRO centred on concerns about pedestrian safety, especially for children and individuals with mobility issues, as well as reports of near misses involving cyclists. Conversely, some respondents noted that shared pedestrian and cycling spaces have been effective in other towns. Additionally, some individuals with mobility issues expressed that cycling access is essential for them to navigate the area comfortably. A few respondents suggested that a designated cycle lane on Sheep Street might reduce conflicts by offering pedestrians a clear idea of where cyclists might be. However, officers believe that while this might provide spatial clarity, it could also lead cyclists to expect an unobstructed path, potentially reducing their caution in a shared environment.
25. To address these concerns, officers recommend that the ETRO be implemented with clear signage, instructing cyclists to share the space with care and consideration. During the ETRO trial period, monitoring will be undertaken to capture data on cyclist and pedestrian interactions, specifically focusing on cyclist speed, routes through the street, and any conflict points. VivaCity sensors and CCTV cameras will be installed to collect data on pedestrian and cyclist speeds, track cyclist paths, and document any near-miss incidents, enabling an evidence-based evaluation of the impact on pedestrian safety.
26. An ETRO allows for ongoing consultation during the first six months, with the flexibility to modify or rescind the regulation if necessary. This trial period will enable a thorough assessment, combining both formal data collection and community feedback to determine whether Sheep Street can operate effectively as a shared space.

27. Officers propose a campaign encouraging safe cycling behaviours in Sheep Street, under the theme “Use it Safely or Lose it,” to promote courteous and cautious cycling practices. This initiative aims to educate cyclists on safe interactions with pedestrians, reinforcing the shared nature of the space.
28. Should the ETRO be approved, once implemented, there will be further opportunity for the public to provide their formal feedback for a period of up to six months via the County Council’s Let’s Talk Oxfordshire Portal (and in other forms if required). Assuming the ETRO is not suspended, there will need to be another formal council decision as to whether or not to progress with a permanent Traffic Regulation Order based on comments and experiences through the experimental order. The Equalities Impact Assessment (**Annex 3**) will also be reviewed at the end of the first six months the ETRO is live.

## **Financial Implications**

29. The scheme has an approved business case which releases £15,520 of held Section 106 planning obligation funds. This will cover the delivery of the experiment, its assessment, and making the ETRO permanent if deemed successful.

Comments checked by: Filipp Skiffins, Assistant Finance Business Partner, [filipp.skiffins@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:filipp.skiffins@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

## **Legal Implications**

30. Any implementation of the Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) and any decision to give it permanent effect will need to comply with relevant legislation, including the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and associated regulations.
31. The formal legal consultation requirements during the first six months of the ETRO need to be complied with and reported to the Cabinet Member.

Comments checked by: Karen Jordan, Senior Solicitor and Team Leader (Environment Team), [Karen.Jordan@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Karen.Jordan@oxfordshire.gov.uk).

## **Procurement**

32. When procuring goods, services or works, the procurement will be conducted in accordance with the Council’s Contract Procedure Rules and, where applicable, the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (PCRs).
33. Any new and / or amended signage would be undertaken via the term maintenance contract with Milestone.

## Staff Implications

34. The implementation of the Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) on Sheep Street in Bicester will be met by existing staff resources.

## Risk Management

35. As part of the development process for the implementation of the Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) on Sheep Street in Bicester, various risks and opportunities to the Council have been carefully considered. Below is a summary of the assessment and actions taken to minimise risks:

Description of areas or sources of risk and impact on project	Mitigation	Owner
Safety concerns: Potential safety issues due to shared space of cyclists, vehicles and people walking or using mobility scooters, leading to discomfort for all users.	Implement clear signage instructing cyclists to share the space with caution and care. Monitoring of the number and speed of cyclists, the route they take and conflict between pedestrians and cyclists will take place.	Project Manager
Budget overruns: unexpected expenses or inaccurate cost estimates leading to budget overruns.	Regularly review and update the budget, have a contingency fund of 24%, and conduct detailed cost analysis before project initiation.	Project Manager

### Paul Fermer Director of Environment and Highways

Annexes  
Annex 1: Summer 2024 Consultation Report  
Annex 2: Location of Propose ETRO  
Annex 3: Equality Impact Assessment  
Annex 4: Climate Impact Assessment

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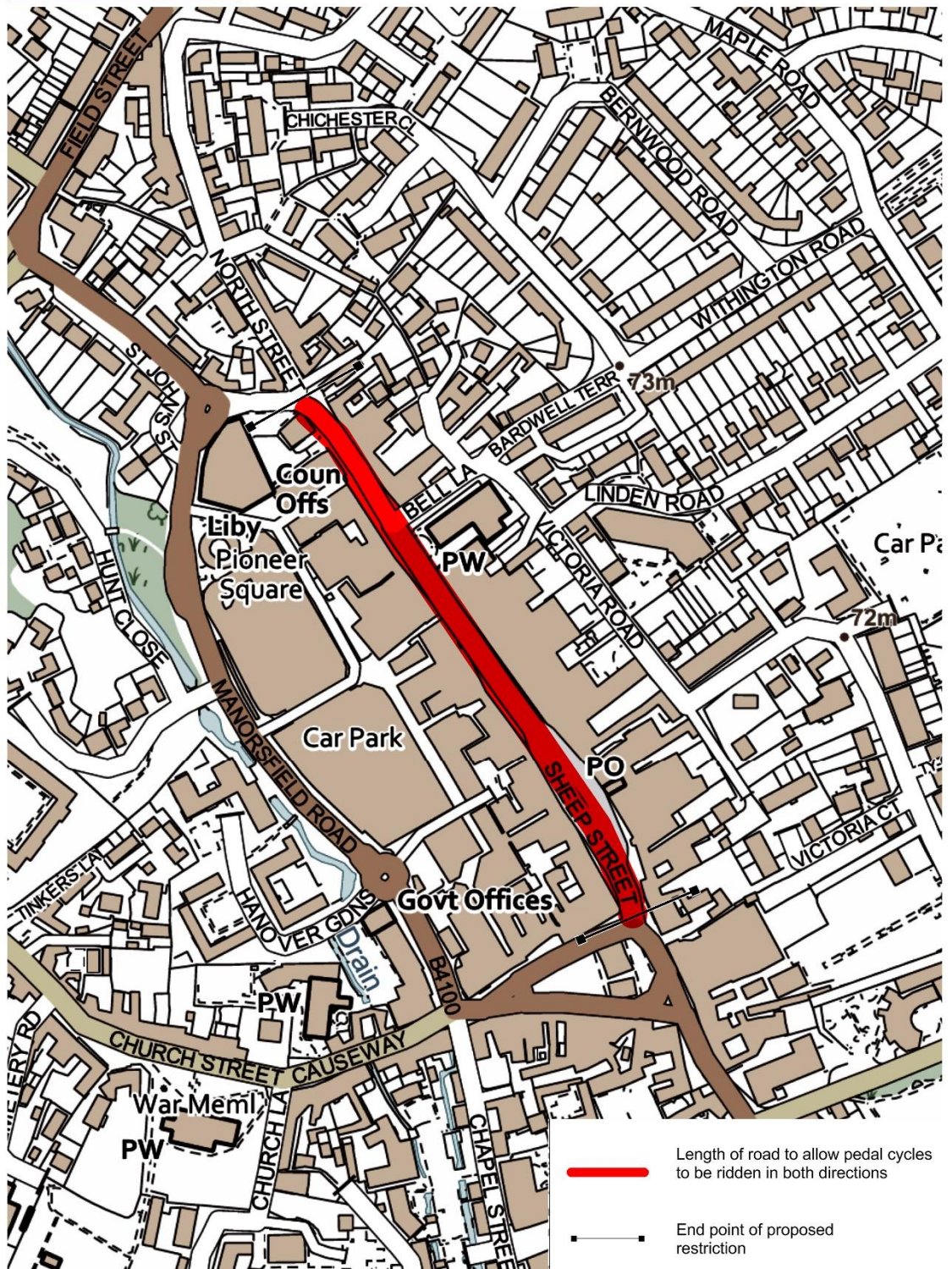
November 2024



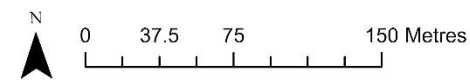
## Annex 2: Location of Propose ETRO to allow cycling, Sheep Street Bicester



Oxfordshire County Council - Highways and transport



- Length of road to allow pedal cycles to be ridden in both directions
- End point of proposed restriction



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