

Division(s) affected: *Didcot South*

DELEGATED DECISIONS BY CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT

26 MARCH 2026

DIDCOT: LARCH DRIVE / DIAMOND DRIVE – PROPOSED BUS GATE EXEMPTION

Report by Director of Environment and Highways

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet Member is **RECOMMENDED** to:

- a) **Approve the administrative amendment to clarify/confirm that “Police Vehicles on Patrol” are exempt from the Bus Lane/Gate restriction at Larch Drive/Diamond Drive in Didcot, as advertised.**

Executive Summary

1. This report presents responses received to a statutory consultation on proposals to make an administrative amendment to the Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) to clarify/confirm- at the request of Thames Valley Police - that “Police Vehicles on Patrol” are allowed to travel through the Bus Lane/Gate at Larch Drive/Diamond Drive.
2. The current wording within the TROs could be seen to be ambiguous, and as such be open to interpretation – which would undermine the original aim of the proposals. No further changes to the existing restrictions as signed/lined on-the-ground are being considered as part of these proposals.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

3. Of the three priorities identified within the newly adopted ‘Oxfordshire Strategic Plan 2025-2028’ which are listed below, these proposals actively support priority no.1:

(1) Greener Oxfordshire – “We want our communities to enjoy clean air, access to green space, and safe and sustainable ways to move around. This means reducing traffic congestion and investing in public transport, cycling and walking; protecting our natural environment; and helping Oxfordshire respond and adapt to a changing climate.”

- (2) Fairer Oxfordshire – *“We want all our residents to benefit from the advantages our county has to offer. This means supporting a local economy that benefits everyone; assisting people who face challenges in finding work; making our services as easy to access as possible; and helping communities in need.”*
- (3) Healthier Oxfordshire – *“We want all our residents to be happy, healthy and safe. This means helping children get the best start in life; creating opportunities for young people to reach their full potential; supporting older people to age well and stay independent for as long as possible; and encouraging everyone to make healthy choices.”*

Financial Implications

4. Funding for consultation on the proposals (and implementation if approved) has been provided by the County Council’s Vision Zero programme.
5. Finance has completed a high-level review of this report. As no financial figures or costings were included, this sign off is limited to confirming that the narrative is reasonable based on the information provided. Finance has therefore assumed that the service has confirmed the funding arrangements independently, and responsibility for validating the financial position and underlying data rests with the service area.

Comments checked by:

Matt Kocak – Finance Business Partnering Manager

Matthew.Kocak@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

6. The consultation that has been undertaken complies with the consultation requirements for the various elements as required by law including under the Highways Act 1980, the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and any other relevant legislation.
7. The scheme has been promoted by Oxfordshire County Council as the Highway Authority and Traffic Authority under the Highways Act 1980, and the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.

Comments checked by:

Nicole Olavesen – Solicitor (Law & Governance)

Nicole.Olavesen@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff Implications

8. There are no negative staff implications – with the appraisal of the proposals, as well as the consultation process having been undertaken by Officers from the 'Vision Zero', and 'TRO & Schemes' teams as part of their regular day-to-day duties, with no additional or negative impact on capacity expected.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

8. No negative implications in respect of equalities or inclusion have been identified in respect of the proposals.

Sustainability Implications

9. The proposals have been put forward for to help ensure that Thames Valley Police (TVP) can continue with their day-to-day operational priorities unhindered.

Risk Management

10. No potential significant health and safety or service provision risks, or potentially significant financial impacts have been identified in these proposals.

Formal Consultation

11. Formal consultation was carried out between 10 December 2025 and 09 January 2026. A notice was published in the Oxfordshire Herald Series newspaper, and an email was sent to statutory consultees & key-stakeholders, including Thames Valley Police, the Fire & Rescue Service, Ambulance service, Bus operators, countywide transport/access & disabled peoples user groups, South Oxfordshire District Council, relevant local District Cllrs, Didcot Town Council, and the local County Councillor representing the Didcot South division.
12. A letter was also sent directly to approx. 220 properties in the immediate vicinity of the bus gate restriction.
13. During the course of the formal consultation, 34 responses were received via the online survey, comprising of nine objections (26%), one partially supporting/raising concerns, 21 in support (62%), and three offering no objection/no opinion.
14. Additionally, a further four emails were received directly – with Thames Valley Police supporting (confirming that the exemption is vital for daily Policing business) Oxford Bus Company submitting two non-objections (albeit one from the wider business group), and a response from a member of the public objecting on the belief that providing the Police with 'special exemptions' would

A. Email responses:

RESPONDENT	COMMENTS
(e1) Traffic Management Officer, (Thames Valley Police)	Support – Just to confirm this exemption is vital for our daily Policing business.
(e2) Head of Built Environment and Infrastructure, (Oxford Bus Company)	No objection
(e3) Managing Director, (Oxford Bus Company)	No objeciton
(e4) Local resident, (Didcot, Birch Close)	<p>Object – for the following reasons;-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Providing the Police 'special exemptions' erodes the fundamental principle that all drivers must obey the same traffic rules. 2. Doing so undermines public trust in genuine, blue-lights emergency exemptions. 3. It lacks transparent, operational justification unique to this location. The consultation asserts that police patrol passage through the gate is needed, without any reason given. 4. It re-litigates a 2023 committee decision* that was already clearly clarified, both to the committee and in reply to Thames Valley Police when they originally challenged this. There was no ambiguity, TVP received this clarification directly from the Council, in writing. <p>NOTE;- *MINUTES OF A COUNCIL MEETING, 12TH OCTOBER 2023: The Chair referred to the response from Thames Valley Police and asked for clarity on whether the exemption applied to emergency vehicles on patrol. Officers explained that the consultation was on the proposed use of ANPR and not the traffic order itself. The Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) stated that that the exemption was for an emergency only. The Police had been consulted about the TRO at the time and were invited to contact the Council if the wording of the TRO needed changing.</p>

Expanded reasons

1. The Principle of Legal Compliance: A cornerstone of public trust and road safety is the principle that all road users, including the police, are subject to the same rules (notwithstanding blue-light responses). Traffic signs exist to ensure orderly, predictable, and safe movement for everyone. Granting a routine exemption for a specific class of user erodes this principle, suggesting that the rules do not apply equally.

2. Dilution of Emergency Exemptions: The critical public consent for emergency service exemptions relies on their use being reserved for genuine, time-critical incidents. By blurring the line between emergency response and routine patrol, this proposal risks diminishing public understanding and respect for those vital, life-saving exemptions. It may also lead to confusion among other drivers who witness the manoeuvre without blue-lights.

3. Lack of Transparency and Justification: The public notice for this proposal does not provide any operational justification for why this specific exemption is necessary for routine police work. What unique and frequent operational need exists at this specific location that cannot be met by following the same route as the public? Without clear and compelling reasons shared transparently, this appears as an unnecessary privilege. IF THE TEXT IS FOUND TO BE AMBIGUOUS, CHANGE THE TEXT, not the intended meaning of it.

4. Re-litigation of a Settled Matter*: This specific proposal was previously considered and decided upon by this committee in 2022, and reaffirmed in 2023. The principle, that routine police patrols should not receive special exemptions at this location, has therefore already been examined, decided on and finalised, not once but reaffirmed twice. For the police and council officials to bring a request for changes forward now, without presenting any substantively new evidence or changed circumstances, is an inappropriate attempt to re-litigate a settled decision. It shows a disregard for the committee's own prior deliberations and rulings. If this pattern is allowed, are we to expect this matter to be brought back every few years until a different outcome is achieved? This undermines the integrity of the democratic planning process and wastes public resources. The previous decision should stand in the absence of any material changes (none have been presented).

B. Online responses:

RESPONDENT	COMMENTS
(o1) Local resident, (Abingdon, Curtis Avenue)	Object – Stop denying access to ordinary car drivers. Restricting roads doesn't help anyone
(o2) Local resident, (Didcot, Beech Lane)	Object – If I can't use the bus gate I don't see why the police should when not responding to an emergency! Remove the bus gate all together
(o3) Local resident, (Didcot, Box Tree Lane)	Object – There should be no exceptions to the rule. You either let all use the bus gate or no one. There should be no preferential treatment. Not using the bus gate means a big detour if going to Didcot center and multiple traffic lights, not environmentally friendly or traffic friendly but it does allow for a better patrol for police as they can cover a larger area.
(o4) Local resident, (Didcot, Cedar Close)	Object – If residents can't use it police should not be able to either
(o5) Local resident, (Didcot, Diamond Drive)	Object – Strongly recommend open the gate for public use but not only police Traffic jams occur in the Diamond Drive every morning.
(o6) Local resident, (Didcot, Larch Drive)	Object – Police should obey traffic rules. It is a fundamental principle of UK law, else they might as well speed, go through red lights, park on double yellows when they get their lunch, and then expect to get away with it. It is eroding public trust to see this happening, which it does. Even when they are on blue lights there is only a subset of traffic rules they can disregard. The Diamond Drive bus gate rule was already decided in 2023 and explained to Thames Valley Police in detail when they presented an objection. There was no ambiguity then, there is none now. Why is this being re-examined? If there is ambiguity in the wording, then change the wording. There are no new material circumstances needing to change the rule.

(o7) Local resident, (Didcot, Cedar Close)	Object – It is for busses not cars, if you open it to the police then you should open it for residents as well
(o8) Local resident, (Didcot, Sycamore way)	Object – Normal cars etc can't go through it so why should police vehicles
(o9) Local resident, (Didcot, Larch Drive, Didcot)	Object – Increased traffic. Different rules for the members of public and patrol vehicles.
(o10) Local resident, (Didcot, Larch Drive)	<p>Partially support/concerns – To be completely honest I always thought police, ambulances and fire services all had exemption and were able to use bus gates. So I don't have a problem with it, especially if it means they can effectively keep the area safer.</p> <p>My only concern would be that if you allow a change to the existing restrictions, that others will see this as an opportunity to try, ie Delivery drivers, local residents wanting a cut through etc. that I do have a problem with as a Larch Drive Resident</p>
(o11) Local resident, (Didcot, Beech Lane)	Support – Fine with on patrol police vehicles using this gate.
(o12) Local resident, (Didcot, Beech Lane)	Support – I hope that the new arrangement will be of help to police in their work.
(o13) Local resident, (Didcot, Box Tree Lane)	Support – I think emergency response services should be able to use the bus route.
(o14) Local resident, (Didcot, Cedar Close)	Support – I believe they police should be exempt, along with any blue light vehicle whether responding to an emergency or not.

<p>(o15) Local resident, (Didcot, Diamond Drive)</p>	<p>Support – I believe that emergency vehicles, including police on patrol, ambulances, and fire services, should be allowed to use the Bus Gate. This helps them reach their destination more quickly and efficiently, which can be critical in saving lives, as every minute counts.</p>
<p>(o16) Local resident, (Didcot, Diamond Drive)</p>	<p>Support – Helps the police to carry out their work in an efficient manner</p>
<p>(o17) Local resident, (Didcot, Elder Close)</p>	<p>Support – Enhanced patrolling and effective use of police resources</p>
<p>(o18) Local resident, (Didcot, Elder Close)</p>	<p>Support – Perfectly reasonable that any emergency vehicle should be able to use it, even if not actively responding to one.</p>
<p>(o19) Local resident, (Didcot, Larch Drive)</p>	<p>Support – To facilitate Police day to day operations</p>
<p>(o20) Local resident, (Didcot, Larch Drive)</p>	<p>Support – Seems obvious that any emergency vehicle should be able to use that gate.</p>
<p>(o21) Local resident, (Didcot, Larch Drive)</p>	<p>Support – Why wasn't this permission given previously and why not for the Fire Brigade and Ambulance Service as well?</p>
<p>(o22) Local resident, (Didcot, Larch Drive)</p>	<p>Support – I dont think it will increase traffic significantly and am happy for patrol vehicles to use the bus gate to make their day to day activities more convenient</p>
<p>(o23) Local resident, (Didcot, Larch Drive)</p>	<p>Support – As a local resident of Larch Drive I am supportive of the proposals. The primary and essential purpose of the bus gate is to prevent "rat-running" by general traffic cutting through to or from GWP. Allowing police patrol</p>

	vehicles does not compromise this core goal. Police vehicles operate for the benefit of keeping all residents safe and I imagine use of the bus gate by them will be minimal and have a minimal impact on traffic.
(o24) Local resident, (Didcot, Sycamore Way)	Support – I support this proposal because it will aid easier movement and help the police in their duties, which is a benefit to the public and community.
(o25) Local resident, (Didcot, Willow End)	Support – It's a road and should be used by all
(o26) Local resident, (Didcot, Willow End)	Support – I live on willow end and do not think police using the bus gate would be an issue. I support this amendments.
(o27) Local resident, (Didcot, Box Tree Lane)	Support – Fully support the amendment for use by any emergency vehicle. Would not support opening the gate to any private vehicles.
(o28) Local resident, (Didcot, Elder Close)	Support – It's important that the police can do their job without these restrictions.
(o29) Local resident, (Didcot, Sycamore Way)	Support – I can see no reason at all why this wouldn't be supported.
(o30) Local resident, (Didcot, Willow End)	Support – I believe it is right to have a police presence in the area completing patrols and feel this is a good solution for doing this. I do not support other vehicle access to this as the road nor space is designed for that level of vehicle however for the few police vehicles to come through I do support the proposal to waiver the bus gate restrictions for police vehicle on patrol as long as it does not become a cut through.
(o31) Local resident, (Didcot, Willow End)	Support – I strongly support this. Emergency services quick response is key!

(o32) Local resident, (Didcot, Willow End)	No objection/No opinion – To feel safer
(o33) Local resident, (Didcot, Larch drive)	No objection/No opinion – No comment.
(o34) Local resident, (Didcot, Beech Lane)	No objection/No opinion – All emergency services should be able to use the bus gate in cases of emergency , why is it just police ?