

Witney Town Council welcomes the designs for enhancement of the High Street.

The extent of public consultation is appreciated, and the opportunity for residents of Witney to communicate how they access and use the area and how it can be improved.

Witney Town Council particularly welcomes the introduction of trees, benches and bike racks to the linear section in the Co-op area, which has been an area of lower quality paving, with no stopping points for people to rest or pause, and no cycle parking for people calling into shops.

The thresholds to the area will work well in contrasting coloured road surface, and the proposed honey/Cotswold stone coloured footway material will retain the heritage feel whilst working around trees and other features with the required flexibility. WTC would like as much footway as possible to be improved, beyond the areas indicated on these plans, given that this was the biggest mandate of the previous feedback.

The T-junction at Welch Way is an improvement in principle, repurposing the dead space at the roundabout into pedestrian and shopper space and focusing the attention of road users on to the restriction. The Council knows that any technical issues identified by feedback from residents and bus companies will be addressed by the highway engineers and designers.

Witney Town Council urge further thought about the roundabout at Corn Street and Langdale Gate. It is an off-centre roundabout, with roundabout priority rules compromised by the priority rules at the Corn Street constriction. There are also two Church Green exits on to the roundabout. A solution that replaces the roundabout could prove safer and smoother. The accident statistics show a cluster of minor collisions at that point, albeit pre-2020. This may lead to removal of the constriction at Corn Street, which nearly happened in the 2020 Tranche 1 negotiations about the East-West cycling route, however, there needs to be a safe, prioritised, crossing for pedestrians at Corn Street, to link High Street to Church Green.

Witney Town Council wishes to raise the following general principles to be included in the plans as they move towards completion:

Committed sums - the new street furniture and weed control of the improved spaces will need to be maintained and replaced over future years. This will fall to the Town Council, so sufficient funds are needed to ensure that that is sustainable. The maintenance of the roadside planting needs clarity as to which council takes on responsibility. If that falls to the Town Council, committed sums should be agreed to reflect this.

Loading Bays - WTC accepts the need for shared use of spaces on the High Street at different times of day. WTC would like to see full collaboration of the design team at OCC with businesses on the siting and timings of loading bays, including parking places for takeaway delivery drivers, with clear rules, timings and expectations laid out and communicated.

WTC hopes that consensus can be reached in collaboration with the High Street's businesses.

Public Art - public art on the themes of sheep and on the themes Witney's heritage have been discussed. Several residents presented a dove theme, including residents from Ukraine, with the suggestion of a canopy - permanent or removable - for events in the square. WTC would like to see opportunities to place such features on the linear sections and in the public spaces and pedestrian priority spaces. The same goes for information boards about Witney's heritage. Even if funding needs to be separate, we would like design consideration and collaboration to locate sites.

Buses - WTC hopes that the narrower road will make bus drivers drive as slowly and carefully as they do on places like Queen Street in Oxford, where busy shopper pedestrians mix with buses. If opportunity arises, WTC is not against removing the buses from the High Street completely if such a solution can be arrived at. Whilst buses remain on that route, the enablement of walking and cycling is limited.

Enforcement - WTC would welcome enforcement of the traffic restrictions through ANPR and feedback from residents upset at lack of enforcement in the months leading up to the publications of the designs supports that. WTC understands and trusts that a solution that is fair to Blue Badge holders and legitimate deliveries would be implemented.

WTC feels the enhancement designs promise to give a High Street with more greenery, more places to pause and chat, better outside dining and the benefits that more considerate, lighter traffic bring to those dwelling, walking and cycling in the space in terms of a less stressful, safer experience with cleaner air. As a council that has cheered this project on at every turn, supported by residents' comments to councillors at forums such as Councillors at the Cafe and the Annual Town Meeting, we look forward to seeing the changes materialise.

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