

**County Hall
New Road
Oxford
OX1 1ND**

Councillor Ruth Smith
Witney Town Council
Market Square
Witney
OX28 6AG

Environment and Transport

5 August 2026

Dear Councillor Smith

Re: Concerns about the Impact of the Works on Businesses and Bus Users.

Thank you for your letter of 23 July, and for setting out the concerns raised unanimously by Full Council. While it is pleasing to hear that communication between the contractor and the Town Council has met expectations we take the other issues raised seriously and have set out our response below, together with the actions we are taking ahead of the second phase of works.

Businesses

We acknowledge that works of this nature inevitably affect businesses. Excavation, traffic management barriers and the phasing of works outside individual premises all create disruption, and we have sought to mitigate this where we can — including commencing works at night, for which the contractor has applied for the necessary licences with the District Council. We also recognise that night working, while reducing daytime disruption, can have an adverse effect on the night-time economy and on hospitality premises with guest accommodation. Where possible night works have avoided weekends and been conducted over specific shorter periods rather than continuously. Please note that further night works will be required as the scheme progresses but we will ensure that affected premises receive notification in advance.

We met with the Chamber of Commerce on the 16th July to discuss their concerns. We reviewed our own footfall data, which shows pedestrian numbers are up on the same period last year. We do not offer this to dismiss what businesses are reporting: takings and footfall are not the same thing, and we accept that traffic management, noise and altered pedestrian desire lines may well be changing customer behaviour in ways the footfall figures do not capture. The reasons behind reported reductions in spend are difficult to ascertain with confidence.

Buses

The bus situation has been genuinely complex. A number of services are affected at different times, and agreeing temporary stops and diversions with the operators has taken considerable coordination. We accept the criticism that the published information has not been detailed enough.

Ahead of the switch to phase 2 works on the opposite side of the road from 10th August, we have prepared a fuller set of bus diversion maps giving significantly more detail than is currently available. These maps have now been published on our Let's Talk platform but we will also work with the contractor to improve the on-street information.

On the new bus shelters to be installed in Market Square, these are expected around September. We appreciate residents' and bus users' patience while we deliver the best long-term outcome.

Engagement and Signage

We have been engaging with the community during the works, including additional staff on site to ensure Witney Carnival proceeded without reported issues, and early discussions with the organisers of the forthcoming Witney In Pink procession. We accept, however, that our presence on site with individual businesses needs to improve. We are working with the contractor on how to strengthen day-to-day business engagement so that concerns about barrier placement and shop access can be responded to directly and quickly.

We produce a newsletter every two weeks, but we accept your point that published information does not reflect the real-time position on street. We will make clear who people should contact about live construction issues, and direct queries about the scheme design more generally to the County Council for response.

On positive signage, we agree. We are putting out additional signage to communicate that businesses remain open as usual and have already printed banners to be fixed to traffic barriers.

This remains an important investment that will deliver much-needed enhancement to Witney High Street, and we are grateful for the Town Council's continued engagement.

Yours sincerely,

Nick Howdle-Smith
Infrastructure Delivery Project Manager

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