

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TRAFFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE

NOTES OF THE MEETING HELD
ON FRIDAY 5 JUNE 2020 AT 10:30AM (VIA ZOOM)

Chair – Cllr Laura Price

Present:

Cllr Suzanne Bartington	Oxfordshire County Council
Cllr Andrew Coles	West Oxfordshire District Council
Cllr Toby Morris	West Oxfordshire District Council
Cllr Joy Aitman	Witney Town Council
Cllr Vicky Gwatkin	Witney Town Council
Cllr Andrew Prosser	Witney Town Council
Cllr Ruth Smith	Witney Town Council
Jacqui Cox	Oxfordshire County Council
Mike Wasley	Oxfordshire County Council
William Hayes	West Oxfordshire District Council
Giles Hughes	West Oxfordshire District Council
Oliver Murray	West Oxfordshire District Council
Andrew Smith	West Oxfordshire District Council
Maria Wheatley	West Oxfordshire District Council
Sharon Groth	Witney Town Council
Trevor Bayliss	Stagecoach Bus Company
John Croxton	Thames Valley Police
Kevin Hickman	Windrush Bike Project

1. **WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS**

Following introductions from those present, the Chair opened the meeting and explained the purpose was to focus specifically on social distancing measures across Witney. This was an established forum which included representatives from all elected authorities and other regular stakeholder groups and therefore was the logical place to disseminate information.

It was not a forum for new ideas and this meeting would be welcoming qualified Council officers to provide information on planned schemes and how meaningful engagement should continue across the town to make the proposed measures as successful and safe as possible.

2. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for their absence was received from Witney Town Councillors Luci Ashbourne and Jim King.

3. **COVID-19 - MEASURES FOR SOCIAL DISTANCING IN WITNEY:**

West Oxfordshire District Council

Representatives from West Oxfordshire District Council provided an illustrative map to attendees detailing potential measures to support local shops and to ensure that the town centre would be a safe and comfortable environment for shoppers from 15th June. The Government had provided funding for these short term 'opening up' initiatives which would need to be used by end of March 2021. Although primarily for action plans, communications and public information, business facing activities and temporary public realm changes, there was concession of some flexibility for leftover funds to be used for more strategic actions in the future. This would be the start of the stakeholder consultation and was a more cautious approach without the possibility of modelling and widespread consultation.

Attendees heard that there were two parts to the District Council's plan. The first would be to send out clear information and social distancing guidance to the relevant businesses; and the second would be thirteen changes in and around the town centre to look at queuing outside of shops, its interference with foot traffic and wider impact on the public realm. This had created challenges in a very short time given Witney's historical layout, quite narrow footpaths and its importance as a local service centre.

The proposed changes were considered the most pertinent areas for concession to social distancing and attempts to divert foot traffic to different routes. Access through the centre would be restricted with temporary barriers to allow some use of the highway to widen the footpaths and 20mph zones introduced to increase safety. A pop-up cycleway would hopefully encourage less car use along with additional bike racks. The timescale had been tight and there had been no time for a consultation but there would be a need to engage with stakeholders and an understand that these measures might need to be developed with further actions and longer term objectives.

There were questions from other attendees concerning deliveries, police resources, about joint working with Oxfordshire County Council and the Windrush Bike Project, the latter had produced their own cycle map and had engaged with the County Council, the queuing of bus users and the use of enforcement officers who would be in the front line when the centre reopened. All agreed that ways to alleviate any problems should not undermine any long-term action.

Oxfordshire County Council

Attendees were also advised of a bid which Oxfordshire County Council would be making for emergency funding aimed at active travel from the Government. Since the lockdown had been introduced an unprecedented number of people had been walking and cycling, and coupled with social distancing, the plans would focus on encouraging this trend. County Councillors had completed a survey on measures in their areas which had been fed back to officers in order to implement a comprehensive plan.

Primarily, this capital funding would be used for re-allocating road space to pedestrians and cyclists but other actions in this first phase could include: cycle racks, signs on roads, temporary road measures, pop-up cycle lanes, the widening of pavements with barriers and cones, new 20mph zones and measures around schools, although this last issue needed more

consideration. The County Council was aware that the District Council also had funding and both authorities would be working jointly for the best use of money. It was possible that while the latter could act very quickly with the use of barriers, these interim measures may be developed and enhanced later by the County.

Attendees heard that the timescales here were also tight; If the bid for funding was agreed, there would be a four week development period and then a further four weeks to implement the measures only, so they had to be realistic with what they hoped to achieve. If successful in this time-frame further funding would be released in phase two which could offer more permanent changes in terms of junctions, cycling, Corn Street and High Street. This could be influenced by other stakeholders in the future including the Windrush Bike Project.

There were suggestions on the use of volunteers to guide shoppers, pop-up park and rides, park and pedal schemes, the use of the current Woolgate and Waitrose car parks, consideration of mobility scooters and ramps, the rise in use of e-scooters, a change to more active travel crossings and agreement that schools needed more thought. The request for some specific actions for schools which could take place in the first eight-week period such as general advice, spacing and advisory lanes was made. There had also been an issue with some schools having closed cycle racks, so portable open-air ones would be beneficial to encourage parent and child cycling. It was confirmed that timed road closures around schools known as 'School Streets' were already being discussed before the pandemic and would remain in the long-term plans of the County Council.

Attendees were also advised that the County Council were clearing vegetation and undertaking minor repairs on key cycle and walking routes and were encouraged to publicise the 'Widen My Path' survey and report any hotspots through the appropriate channels.

There was agreement that the emphasis on these measures should be to promote the changing character and use of the roads. By doing this there was a better chance of changing attitudes and locking in the recent change of behaviour. While it would be difficult to enforce changes, the community should be trusted to follow the rules in order to keep themselves and their community safe.

With the High Street re-opening in ten days' time there was still work to do and the Chair thanked Councillors, Officers and other representatives for attending and proactively working towards a flexible approach for our community. There would be actions which would need to be tweaked but if everyone worked together in a forum such as this, it would enable cross authority correspondence to be disseminated to stakeholder organisations to communicate their collective effort and ensure things don't conflict with long term measures.

The meeting closed.