

To all Members of the Place and Overview Scrutiny Committee

Dear Councillor

Call-In for Burford Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) 7.5 tonnes Weight Limit Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Travel & Development Strategy
Wednesday, 5 January 2022 10.00 am

You will be aware that the above decision by Cllr Duncan Enright has been called in. The Windrush Valley Traffic Action Group (WiVTAG) is making this submission to the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee to record our support for Cllr Enright's decision. We wish also to comment on the reasons given for the call-in, by Cllr Field-Johnson and others, in such documents to which we have had access.

WiVTAG represents 15 communities in Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire as well as many local farmers and 51 local businesses. We have campaigned for the Burford ETRO to be revoked and for the development of a better regional solution to manage freight traffic in the West Oxfordshire area. We fully support the decisions made by Cllr Enright at the Cabinet Member Decision (CMD) Meeting on 5th January 2022.

Referring to the reasons for the Call-In as presented by Cllr Field-Johnson:

1. We believe that claims made in the Call-In letter of misrepresentation and pre-determination by Cllr Duncan Enright are entirely spurious and utterly without foundation. Indeed, it is the view of WiVTAG that Cllr Enright has, throughout the entire ETRO period, been scrupulously fair in listening to all sides of the debate and refraining from taking positions or taking decisions ahead of your officers detailed reports. In regard to the CMD meeting on 5th January, all statements were submitted in writing several days ahead to enable Cllr Enright to consider these in detail. The content of these statements, together with all the submissions and reports during the experimental period were taken into consideration by Cllr Enright in formulating his decisions.

We find the Cllr Field-Johnson's statements in this regard to be offensive.

2. Cllr Field-Johnson and the Burford Town Council have challenged the validity of the data on HGV traffic in Burford itself and the displaced traffic in the wider area, as presented by your Officers. WiVTAG acknowledges that there is considerable variability in the figures, as do your officers, and as expressed in their report (page 122/123 Table 3.10 Assessment of Success Criteria). Notwithstanding the variability of the data, it clearly indicates that the criteria for success of the ETRO were not met, and it is unacceptable for those seeking to undermine Cllr Enright's decision of 5th January to now attempt to redefine the criteria. Burford Town Council is not able to point to more reliable data from both before and after the introduction of the ETRO. In our view, there would need to be far more robust reasons to reject the considered conclusions that your Officers have reached in their comprehensive report to Cllr Enright. No such reasons have been identified.

Support for Cllr Enright's decisions:

- 1. Displacement of HGV Traffic.** It is clear beyond reasonable doubt is that the ETRO caused widespread displacement of heavy traffic onto other, often minor, roads that are manifestly less suitable than the A361 in terms of environmental and structural characteristics. HGV traffic on legitimate business, delivering and collecting to or from communities north of the River Windrush, has been forced to make extensive diversions to cross the river, or use unclassified minor roads through Crawley, Minster Lovell, Swinbrook or the Barringtons. Quite apart from the adverse environmental and traffic-management effects that this caused, the ETRO has been seriously disadvantageous to farming businesses in the area, all of which require access to move livestock, collect, and distribute produce, and to obtain other essential materials.
- 2. Burford's Permit Scheme was Unfit for Purpose.** The exemptions permit scheme operated by Burford TC was proven to be totally unfit for purpose. By their own admission Burford TC accept that the farming community had been all but forgotten in their deliberations, and their national logistic needs not taken into account. Equally, the radius of 4.8 miles that Burford identified as the limit of their permit scheme appears to have been entirely arbitrary with no relationship to the possible freight traffic displacement routes. Many local businesses have pointed out that the ETRO is effectively anti-competitive in that the permit scheme did not reflect the status and location of local supply and delivery points.
- 3. Adverse Effects on Air Quality.** Air quality is an important priority and is now enshrined in law. Although figures for air quality have been distorted by a number of factors recently, notably changes to travel patterns due to the COVID pandemic, nevertheless, the air quality in Burford has never breached the approved national guidelines. By contrast, Witney has long been recognised as an Air Quality Management Area and yet much of the HGV displacement has been to Witney.
- 4. OCC's Climate Change Agenda.** As part of its climate change agenda the County Council's commitment to transport related carbon reduction is important, and that means reducing emissions from HGVs as far as possible. HGVs typically do no more than 7 miles to the gallon of diesel and the Burford ETRO has introduced either long diversion routes requiring excessive additional distances and increased emissions, or extraordinary infrastructure damage to the minor road network. One highly respected and reputable local business reported at the Decisions Meeting that the Burford ETRO had resulted in an additional 41,800 km travelled by his fleet, an additional 57 tonnes of CO₂ as well as increased wages and fuel costs that have had to be passed on to customers.
- 5. The Equality and Climate Impact Assessment (ECIA)** in the final Officer's Report (Appendix D) noted, as an alternative to the ETRO, that OCC *"Reconsider an Area Wide weight restriction and a more regional approach with neighbouring authorities"*. Their Recommendation was that this be *"considered within the emerging Local Transport and Connectivity Plan work"*. Recommendation (a) at the CMD meeting agreed with this alternative and Cllr Enright was correct to make a corresponding decision.

6. **Strength of Local Objection.** Well considered and independent objections to the Burford ETRO have been received by the County Council from:

- a. Thames Valley Police
- b. Gloucestershire County Council
- c. Cotswold District Council
- d. OCC's own Trading Standards team
- e. 15 town and parish councils

as well as hundreds of objections from residents across Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire. By contrast very few letters of support for the ETRO were presented.

7. **WiVTAG's Constructive Approach.** WiVTAG has worked with local businesses, with the farming community and with OCC's officers to find constructive solutions to the problem. We acknowledge that HGVs are often unwelcome in the communities through which they travel. But we also recognise the essential need for freight traffic to support our local and national economic base. To that end we have offered a solution through a zonal weight restriction in the Windrush Valley area that provides a reasonable level of protection to Burford and local communities but does not unduly restrict the needs of local business or undermine the need to reduce emissions as part of OCC's commitment to the climate change agenda. Your officers' report to Cllr Enright reflects this opportunity where it recommends to "*Reconsider an Area Wide weight restriction and a more regional approach with neighbouring Authorities*".
8. **In summary, the continuation of the Burford Weight Limit is not justified.** It does not simply divert traffic from one area to other communities but causes a net increase in environmental and infrastructure damage; displacement of traffic to inappropriate and less safe routes; an increase of pollution in areas where air quality problems already exist; and damage to the local economy. While everyone acknowledges the challenges that HGV traffic poses to many local communities, the Burford Weight Limit is manifestly not the appropriate solution and Cllr Enright's considered decision is correct and should be confirmed.

For these reasons we urge you to support Cllr Enright's decision taken on 5th January

a) APPROVE officers to consider the costs and benefits of developing area wide restrictions across Oxfordshire including close working with neighbouring authorities, as part of the county wide freight strategy, as soon as practicable. Noting any future approval of area wide weight restrictions would likely see existing environmental weight restrictions revoked subject to consultation.

AND

b) REVOKE the Burford Experimental Traffic Regulation Order of 7.5t weight restriction. Therefore, not making a permanent order.

Kind regards

Windrush Valley Traffic Action Group