

QUESTION NO. 1

Councillor Whitham to ask the Chair:

School Streets for September

Congestion outside of some Reading schools such as Redlands primary school in my ward is a real problem. Concerned parents contact Green Councillors on this issue frequently. All children deserve a safe route to school. Further to my question in January can the Lead Councillor update me on progress that has been made towards trialling school streets? With the need to promote keeping your distance, walking, and cycling, it would be great to have some up and running for when schools go back in September 2020. What timescale is the Council working to for school streets to be up and running?

REPLY by the Chair of the Traffic Management Sub-Committee.

I invite Councillor Page, the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by Councillor Page, Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:

I thank Councillor Whitham for his question.

As I explained, in my reply to your question in January, Reading Council is open to expressions of interest from schools wishing to operate and manage school streets. Implementation, even on a trial basis, will be subject to local support and there will be conditions about the types of street that could be eligible (for example, avoiding closures on key emergency service routes or public transport routes).

Prior to the COVID outbreak officers had established how school streets could operate within Reading and were ready to engage with schools, but any trials have not been possible.

Clearly schools have been significantly affected by COVID and that remains the case. Although some children are now back at school the issues and problems that we typically experienced around schools prior to COVID are now considerably changed.

Even if schools are fully open in September the impact of COVID is still likely to be felt, and priorities for schools may well have changed. School Streets is a very localised initiative applied to the immediate area around the school. It is not designed for the issues created by a global pandemic and social-distancing but it could still make a positive contribution to walking and cycling to school. Whilst we cannot force schools to adopt School Streets the Council is ready to receive expressions of interest if there is a desire to do this in September.

QUESTION NO. 2

Councillor Whitham to ask the Chair:

Reading Bridge and other Cycle Lane Consultations

I have been contacted by a number of concerned cyclists about the narrow width of the new cycle lanes on Reading Bridge. It would have been good for people to have seen designs before this was implemented. With all of the future short-term cycling schemes can Ward Councillors be informally consulted before schemes are implemented ?

REPLY by the Chair of the Traffic Management Sub-Committee.

I invite Councillor Page, the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by Councillor Page, Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:

I thank Councillor Whitham for his question.

The new north and southbound cycle lanes across Reading Bridge are temporary measures brought in as part of wider Council schemes funded by central government, as part of the Covid-19 response to provide more options for cyclists and pedestrians, at a time when social distancing remains in place and restrictions continue on the use of public transport.

These are advisory cycle lanes. We would always urge all road users to be aware of other people's movements, particularly where advisory signs are in place. All road schemes are designed with safety of road users in mind and this new road layout is fully compliant with national safety and design standards.

In an ideal world there would be enough road space to make them mandatory, but that is not the case at Reading Bridge. The change of layout makes the best use of the limited road space available within the regulations and it is worth noting a traffic lane has been removed to accommodate the new cycle lanes.

The Council considered reducing pavement widths, but this would have reduced space for pedestrians trying to socially distance at this time. It would also have taken much longer to implement. Installing kerbs or posts would have further reduced the width of lanes for cyclists.

It is important to emphasise that the lanes are a temporary measure in response to the ongoing social distancing guidelines. The Council was clear it would monitor their success and consult widely before opting to make them permanent in the future, and we welcome all feedback.

All future schemes will be shared with relevant ward members prior to implementation.