

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

<b>TO:</b>	<b>TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE</b>		
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>14 SEPTEMBER 2022</b>	<b>AGENDA ITEM:</b>	
<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>RESULTS OF STATUTORY CONSULTATION - SIDMOUTH STREET ACTIVE TRAVEL</b>		
<b>LEAD COUNCILLOR:</b>	<b>TONY PAGE</b>	<b>PORTFOLIO:</b>	<b>CLIMATE STRATEGY AND TRANSPORT</b>
<b>SERVICE:</b>	<b>HIGHWAYS &amp; TRAFFIC SERVICES</b>	<b>WARDS:</b>	<b>KATESGROVE, REDLANDS</b>
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#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 A report to the Sub-Committee in June 2022 recommended that the temporary active travel scheme on Sidmouth Street proceed to statutory consultation to openly seek public feedback on whether it should become permanent. This is in the context of future potential, and desire, to improve its linking to the wider surrounding cycle network. The Sub-Committee gave approval for this consultation, which took place between 21<sup>st</sup> July and 10<sup>th</sup> August 2022.
- 1.2 This report informs the Sub-Committee of objections and other feedback received during the statutory consultation. Members are asked to consider these objections and conclude the outcome of the proposal.
- 1.3 Appendix 1 - Drawing illustrating the existing scheme on Sidmouth Street.
- 1.4 Appendix 2 - Feedback received to the statutory consultation.

#### 2. RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- 2.1 That the Sub-Committee notes the content of this report.
- 2.2 That consultation feedback in Appendix 2 is considered and the Sub-Committee agrees either for the permanent implementation of this scheme, or for its removal. The officer recommendation is for the permanent implementation of this scheme to be agreed.
- 2.3 That the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to seal the resultant Traffic Regulation Order and no public inquiry be held into the proposals.

**2.4 That respondents to the statutory consultation be informed of the decision of the Sub-Committee accordingly, following publication of the agreed minutes of the meeting.**

### **3. POLICY CONTEXT**

3.1 The proposals complement - and are complemented by - the Council's Local Transport Plan (LTP), Local Cycling, Walking and Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). The proposals will complement the Council's Climate Emergency Strategy and Health and Wellbeing Strategy by removing barriers to the greater use of sustainable, healthy transport options.

### **4. THE PROPOSAL**

#### Current Position

4.1 The cycle lane facility on Sidmouth Street was installed following the allocation of 'Tranche 1' funding through the government's emergency Active Travel Fund, which was received in 2020. It was one of the short-term proposals that specifically addressed the immediate need to promote active travel and facilitate social distancing based on the government advice around the COVID-19 pandemic at the time. The cycle lane scheme on Sidmouth Street was installed as a temporary scheme with a necessarily short development period. The Department for Transport advised local authorities at the time to use the expedited Temporary Traffic Regulation Order procedure and only to consult retrospectively if the scheme was proposed to be made permanent. This is why the consultation is now taking place.

Appendix 1 provides a drawing to illustrate the scheme that has been installed.

4.2 It has been acknowledged that this scheme may not be the optimum solution, however, it does provide a facility that did not previously exist, send a clear message that the carriageway is not just for motor-vehicle use and aim to increase cyclist confidence in using the road, thus encouraging greater uptake.

The scheme that is temporarily in place can be considered the foundation on which to build and improve and since the delivery of the scheme, it now has the increasing potential to be a key link to the existing and future cycle network expansion set out in the LCWIP and BSIP.

The June 2022 report acknowledged that the scheme would benefit from improved linking but referenced that the costs of undertaking this work at the time exceeded the limited funding (and short design-to-delivery turnaround time) at the time.

4.3 The June 2022 report recommended that the scheme proceed to statutory consultation, commencing the process that could lead to its permanent implementation. It was proposed that this would enable the Council to receive open feedback on the scheme and specifically to receive any reasons for objection - the legal requirement of the consultation.

The report also noted that should the Sub-Committee agree to the permanent implementation thereafter, that officers will undertake investigations into options that will facilitate greater linking to the surrounding cycle network and aim to enhance the use of this facility. These works will be costed, designed and funding sources investigated and reported to an appropriate Committee.

The Sub-Committee gave approval for this consultation, which took place between 21<sup>st</sup> July and 10<sup>th</sup> August 2022.

4.4 Appendix 2 provides the anonymised feedback that has been received during the statutory consultation.

The statutory consultation process is a consultation with the public and other statutory consultees to create and potentially seal a Traffic Regulation Order. Traffic Regulation Orders underlie many traffic and parking restrictions on the Highway and allow them to be implemented and enforced.

The statutory consultation process is the Council proposing a new Traffic Regulation Order and in doing so, it must seek any objections - and the reasons for the objections - so that these may be considered as part of the decision on whether the restrictions be implemented. The Order advertised for this programme and the Norcot Road proposals contained all the proposed restrictions and changes, so a decision must be made for all items before it can be sealed and any element implemented. No progress can be made on any element of the Traffic Regulation Order until the decisions for all elements have been made.

Statutory consultations are not to be viewed as a vote, where a higher number of objections compared with comments of support would necessarily lead to proposals not being implemented. Rather, it is expected that the responses will be balanced toward objections and the Council needs to consider the reasons provided in the objections and decide whether a scheme is amended, removed or installed as advertised.

Statutory consultations are open for anyone considered to be impacted to respond, meaning that the respondent's address and other personal information is irrelevant. Under Data Protection law, capturing this information is not necessary and therefore is not a requirement for the response.

4.5 The following provides quantified analysis and officer comments to the main 'themes' of feedback received for this consultation. This analysis, and the detail in Appendix 2, were provided to ward Councillors and members of the Sub-Committee on 19<sup>th</sup> August 2022, providing early sighting and advance opportunity to review the results in preparation for this meeting.

The Sub-Committee is asked to note that many of the following themes appeared in responses of objection and support, and many contained several of these points. Additionally, officers have quantified the following detail based on feedback that clearly references these themes, which introduces a degree of interpretation. For these reasons, the quantification should be considered as an indicator of volume and separate from the numbers of responses received as objection/support/neither.

- a) Around 273 comments referred to the perceived low use of the cycle lane by cyclists. These were in both objections and support.

Officer Comment:

This and 'Theme c' (connectivity) will be related. It has been acknowledged that use is expected to increase with greater linking in place and there is a commitment, subject to whether the scheme is approved, to investigate improved linking opportunities and funding. It is also expected that the delivery of other cycle infrastructure will further add to the attractiveness of this route, for example, anticipated BSIP schemes along London Road and even the delivery of Shinfield Road's Active Travel scheme.

Many of the comments relate to the perception of cyclists using the carriageway or other routes instead of the dedicated facility. For cyclists who are confident to do so and consider the carriageway to be a more expedient route to their destination, this is to be expected regardless of the other infrastructure in place. However, the intension of cycling infrastructure, particularly when segregated, is to provide a choice to cyclists of all levels of experience and confidence and to encourage uptake of cycling as a clean mode of transport.

- b) Around 199 comments referred to additional disruption caused to traffic, congestion and pollution on Sidmouth Street and the impact on surrounding roads (e.g. London Road, Eldon Road). Increased journey times were referenced as a negative result of the diversion, and this was then related back to 'theme' 1 in being unjustifiable.

Officer Comment:

The officer comment to 'Theme' a addresses the references to the perception that the level of use doesn't justify the disruption to traffic. The scheme was conceived and quickly delivered during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, we do not have pre-implementation traffic survey information with which to investigate these claims and any such data would have been obtained during periods of lockdown and be unrepresentative. However, it is considered unlikely that the volume of traffic on Sidmouth Street has increased because of the scheme being implemented.

The implementation of the scheme will be requiring a proportion of motorists to undertake a longer journey to reach their destination, and this will be causing a level of additional traffic displacement elsewhere on the network. Should the scheme be agreed for implementation, we would seek potential options that could mitigate this traffic as part of the investigations for improving the linking options.

Additionally, with greater linking and the improvements being delivered/planned for delivery as part of the Active Travel funding, LCWIP and BSIP, it is hoped that there will be greater uptake of these alternative travel options and a resultant reduction in local car journeys.

- c) Around 54 comments each referred to a) the perceived poor connection of the facility to the surrounding cycle network; and b) the preference

for Watlington Street (either already being used more by cyclists, or the preference for investment into upgrading that route instead).

Officer Comments:

Part a) has been addressed in the officer comments to 'Theme' a.

With reference to part b) It is acknowledged that Watlington Street has been a part of the cycle network for a long time. It is a lower-trafficked street, particularly following the implementation of the road safety scheme that closed South Street and The Grove. It may also continue to be the more direct route for many cyclists. However, Sidmouth Street provides a non-trafficked, segregated two-way dedicated cycle facility with no on-street parking to navigate around. It is a very different proposition to Watlington Street and with improved linking between the Kennet tow path and London Road's shared-use facilities (and beyond) it should be an expedient north-south linking route and appealing to cyclists of all abilities and confidence levels

- d) Around 41 comments received regarding perceived safety concerns, for motorists and cyclists using the cycle lane. This is often in reference to the junction over South Street or when accessing off-street parking places. Of these, around 26 related to parking access for non-residential properties and 4 in relation to residential properties.

Officer Comments:

Independent Road Safety Audits have been conducted at the design and post-implementation stages. There have been some minor signing alterations actioned as a result, but there has been nothing to suggest that the scheme layout is unsafe in this regard. Many of the comments refer to apparent poor driver behaviour, which will be challenging for a local authority to address.

We understand that the scheme represents a significant change for the street and resultant changes in how motorists are required to navigate the facility, however, it is not particularly unusual in the principle of its design.

These comments will form part of the investigations around linking and scheme permanency, should the scheme be agreed for permanent implementation. There will need to be some changes made to accommodate improved linking and to remove some of the temporary traffic management items that are currently in place.

- e) Around 27 comments received where people were looking forward to there being better connections to the network in the future, many who supported it stated that it needed to be improved but that the scheme was a good first step in providing cycling infrastructure.

Officer Comments:

This is useful feedback and mirrors points made during June 2022's Traffic Management Sub-Committee and the report on this item.

- f) Around 20 comments stating that they like the segregation and want more dedicated cycle lanes in Reading. 13 of these also stated that it was much safer to be segregated but many motorists state that due to

changes in the highway code, cycle lanes are now pointless as cyclists are encouraged to be in the middle of the road.

Officer Comments:

As referenced earlier, segregated cycle lanes provide a facility that feels much safer for cyclists and will particularly appeal to less confident cyclists, having a greater influence on transport mode shift. The scheme on Shinfield Road was designed from the outset as a segregated facility and subsequent major Active Travel schemes in the borough will also be delivered as such wherever it is feasible to do so. The government has released guidance to local authorities that strongly encourages the implementation of segregation measures for cycling schemes.

- g) Around 18 comments raised concerns about emergency services trying to get down the road and being unable to drive down the cycle lane.

Officer Comments:

It is firstly important to note that emergency service providers (police, ambulance services and fire services) are all statutory consultees. This means that they will have specifically received copies of the Temporary Traffic Regulation Order and the proposed Traffic Regulation Order that was advertised for this consultation. Officers are not aware of any concerns having been raised by the emergency services.

The suggestion of enabling emergency service vehicles to use the cycle lane is acknowledged, however, doing so would result in the potential of any vehicle having unobstructed access along the two-way cycle lane. This was considered a significant risk during the design stage, which is why bollards have been installed at appropriate points in the middle of the lane to prevent this. It remains the view of officers that these obstructions should not be removed.

Other points of note:

- h) A number of cyclists stated that it is good to have options for those who do not feel safe on the road and those cycling with children.
- i) A number of the comments suggested that the cycle lane should be made smaller, to improve traffic whilst keeping cycle access. There were also suggestions that there could be two traffic lanes heading northbound, with a smaller cycle lane. This would improve traffic flow and get people out of the road easier.

Officer Comment:

This could be a consideration as part of the wider linking works as referred in 'Themes' a and b.

- j) Some suggested improvements to the traffic lights.

Officer Comments:

This will form part of the work required to improve linking to the wider network (officer comments for 'Theme' a) and will likely form part of the wider considerations referred in 'Theme' b officer comments.

k) There was little comment on the parking reduction that the scheme introduced.

4.6 The main themes of the responses have been as expected. The report to June 2022 Traffic Management Sub-Committee acknowledged some of the areas for improvement and referenced the desire to investigate options to overcome/mitigate these, subject to funding, should the scheme be agreed for permanent implementation.

There have been no themes nor individual responses that would currently lead officers to recommend that the cycle scheme not be implemented permanently and some of the constructive suggestions for improvement echo some of the high-level thoughts that officers have been considering.

#### Options Proposed

4.7 The Sub-Committee is asked to consider the contents of this report and the feedback that has been received. Members are asked to decide whether the scheme, as advertised, can be implemented (the Traffic Regulation Order made/sealed) or whether the scheme should not be implemented.

It is the officer recommendation that the scheme be implemented permanently, and the resultant Traffic Regulation Order sealed, as advertised.

#### Other Options Considered

4.8 The Sub-Committee could defer the decision. This is not recommended by officers.

The Temporary Traffic Regulation Order that is currently enabling this scheme - and has already been extended - will expire in October 2022 and cannot be extended further. Unless a decision is made to retain the facility (as advertised) at this meeting, the scheme will need to be removed promptly.

The removal of the scheme will attract costs, as would its subsequent reinstatement, should a later decision be made to implement the scheme permanently. The removal and replacement of the scheme will cause confusion for motorists also.

### **5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS**

5.1 The retention of the cycle scheme contributes to the Council's Corporate Plan themes as set out below:

- **Healthy environment**

The implementation of cycle facilities can remove barriers to cycling and lead to an increase in uptake of this active and healthy transport mode. This can lead to a reduction in motor-vehicle journeys, particularly short local journeys, which can be some of the most polluting, improving air quality by reducing emissions.

- **Thriving Communities**

Cycling is a lower-cost transport mode that also provides exercise. Providing cycle-prioritisation facilities and, therefore, removing some barriers that may exist toward cycling offers an appealing and beneficial transport option for our communities.

- **Inclusive economy**

The schemes referenced in this report provide useful links between destinations and other parts of the cycle network across the borough. With the addition of future schemes, such as Shinfield Road, they make Reading an increasingly attractive place in which to cycle and visit sites of cultural significance, retail and entertainment venues and enjoy its geographical benefits (e.g. the River Thames and River Kennet).

5.2 Full details of the Council's [Corporate Plan](#) are available on the website and include information on the projects which will deliver these priorities.

## **6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).

6.2 A Climate Impact Assessment has been conducted, which considers a net 'Low-negative' impact as a result of the Sub-Committee agreeing to the permanent retention of the scheme.

Should the Sub-Committee decide to remove the scheme, this will have a negative impact. In addition to the loss of benefits that the scheme provides in encouraging active travel modes, contractors will be required to remove associated lining, signing and other infrastructure from the Highway. This work will involve operations using machinery powered by fossil fuels and some potential material wastage for elements that cannot be redeployed or stored.

## **7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION**

7.1 A full statutory consultation has been conducted in accordance with appropriate legislation. Notices of intention were advertised in the local printed newspaper and erected on lamp columns within the affected area. The Police, and other defined organisations, are a statutory consultee and have been directly notified.

The lead for a petition that had previously been received by the Council, requesting the removal of the temporary scheme, was directly notified of the commencement of this statutory consultation.

The consultation was hosted on the Council's website (the 'Consultation Hub'), where details and plans were made available.

7.2 Traffic Management Sub-Committee is a public meeting. The agendas, reports, meeting minutes and recordings of the meetings are available to view from the Council's website.

## **8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

8.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—



- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

8.2 It is not considered that an Equality Impact Assessment is relevant as the proposal is not deemed to be discriminatory to persons with protected characteristics, nor do they significantly vary existing operations. Statutory consultation processes have also been conducted, providing an opportunity for objections/support/concerns to be considered prior to a decision being made on whether to implement the proposals. The Council has also been monitoring feedback during the period that this scheme has been temporarily implemented.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 The Order for the cycle facility on Sidmouth Street will be made under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and advertised in accordance with the Local Authorities Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996.

This report seeks agreement for the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services to undertake this process, should the Sub-Committee agree for the permanent implementation of this scheme.

9.2 Following the making of this Order, the public must be afforded a period of six weeks to raise any legal challenge, prior to any alterations to the restrictions within being proposed through statutory consultation.

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 The only immediate financial implications resulting from the recommendations of this report will be for the advertising of the sealed Traffic Regulation Order.

10.2 Should the Sub-Committee not agree to the recommendations of this report, the removal of the scheme will have a significant financial implication. The works will be costed and funding will need to be identified, with spend approvals being sought if necessary.

10.3 Should the Sub-Committee agree to make this scheme permanent, then officers will undertake investigations into options that will facilitate greater linking to the surrounding cycle network and aim to enhance the use of this facility. These works will be costed, designed and funding sources investigated. A report to an appropriate committee for scheme and spend approval will follow.

## Capital Implications

The following figures are based on the Sub-Committee agreeing to the recommendations of the report and therefore relate to the immediate costs of advertising the sealed Traffic Regulation Order.

	2022/23 £000	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000
Proposed Capital Expenditure: Local Traffic Management and Road Safety Schemes	1	0	0
Funded by Grant (Integrated Transport Block)	1 0	0 0	0 0
Total Funding	1	0	0

### 10.4 Value for Money (VFM)

It is considered that the recommendations of the report provide best value for money as the benefits (current and potential) of the scheme are retained with minimal immediate expenditure.

### 10.5 Risk Assessment.

There are no foreseen financial risks related to the recommendations of the report.

## 11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 Active Travel Fund Tranche 1 - Recommendations for Temporary Schemes (Traffic Management Sub-Committee - 15<sup>th</sup> June 2022).
- 11.2 Petition Receipt: Petition Against the Cycle Lane in Sidmouth Street, Reading (Traffic Management Sub-Committee - 4<sup>th</sup> March 2021)
- 11.3 Re-Allocation of Road Space - Reading's Active Travel Proposals (Traffic Management Sub-Committee - 16<sup>th</sup> September 2020)
- 11.4 Active Travel Programme and School Streets Update (Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee - from July 2020 onwards)
- 11.5 Active Travel Programme Report (Policy Committee - 18th May 2020)
- 11.6 Active Travel Fund Tranche 1 - Recommendations for Temporary Schemes (Traffic Management Sub-Committee - 15<sup>th</sup> June 2022)