

AGENDA ITEM 4

PETITIONS

1. Lead Petitioner – Nick Fudge

Reinstate 30-Minute Free Parking in Tilehurst to Support Local Businesses

As residents of Tilehurst, we have seen the detrimental effects of parking charges introduced in Dunstall Close and the Recreation car park in Tilehurst. Our favourite shops and traders in Triangle have suffered a significant drop in business due to these new charges. The once-thriving local businesses will struggle to survive, making it challenging for us as residents to access local amenities that we rely on daily.

The Labour-run Reading Council's decision to remove the 30-minute free parking scheme has not only affected our community but also undermined small businesses - the backbone of our local economy. Small businesses play a vital role in job creation and economic growth. According to Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), small firms accounted for 99.3% of all private sector businesses at the start of 2020 and provided 61% employment (source: FSB). By imposing these parking charges, we are risking this valuable contribution.

We urge the Reading Council to reconsider their decision and restore the 30-minute free parking scheme immediately. This action will provide much-needed relief for our beloved local shops and traders while ensuring that residents can continue accessing essential services conveniently.

RESPONSE by Councillor Ennis (Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport):

The first 30-minutes free rate in car parks in Tilehurst was removed in March 2024 following a freeze in changes to parking charges during and immediately following the pandemic. This change was agreed as part of a wider fees and charges review.

The cost of providing car park facilities and maintenance of those car parks has increased significantly. In some instances, income from Council car parks has failed to cover the rising costs of running them, such as lighting, pay and display machines, maintaining surfaces, and relining.

The Council recognises the importance of local shops to communities and have carefully considered the fees with a view to keeping them as low as possible, whilst also improving improved public transport, walking and cycling facilities to enable residents to access them by more sustainable means.

Given the financial pressures the Council is facing, all financial options were assessed but the failure to generate sufficient income from the car parks places wider stresses on the Council's finances and the ability to deliver core services.

Petition in Relation to Agenda Item 9: 'Reading Transport Strategy 2040 – Final for Adoption':

From South Oxfordshire Parishes: Kidmore End, Eye & Dunsden, Binfield Heath, Stoke Row, Highmoor & Sonning Common.

Reading Transport Strategy 2040

The Petitioners seek a decision from Reading Borough Council not to incorporate into its Local Transport Plan those provisions of the Reading Transport Strategy 2040 that include the multi

modal scheme defined as The Third Thames Crossing and described as such in the Final version of the RTS.

RESPONSE by Councillor Ennis (Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport):

I would like to thank the Parish Councils for submitting this Petition regarding the Reading Transport Strategy 2040.

The Strategy sets out an ambitious vision to create healthier, greener and more equal communities in Reading. The focus is on promoting sustainable transport options, whilst recognising the importance of the private car for many people.

The topic of this Petition is one of the key challenges included in the Strategy; namely how to address the issues caused by the limited crossings over the River Thames. The existing situation leads to significant congestion and air pollution in areas including Reading, Caversham, Sonning and Henley. The Strategy takes a holistic approach to addressing these issues and seeks to work with our partners, including the Petitioners, to jointly develop effective solutions to these issues which impact the everyday lives of residents.

One of the key parts of the Strategy is the delivery of a network of park and ride mobility hubs on the edge of the urban area. This includes three locations to the north of the borough; on the A4074 (Upper Woodcote Road), B481 (Peppard Road) and A4155 (Henley Road) corridors. It is acknowledged within the Strategy that due to the nature of the borough boundary these hubs would be best located in neighbouring authority areas, in the case of the north within South Oxfordshire. The objective of these park and ride hubs is to promote sustainable travel, as is the case with the park and ride network in Oxford which has successfully operated for many years.

The delivery of these park and ride facilities would help to reduce demand for traffic crossing the River Thames; and would therefore help to alleviate some of the issues set out in the Strategy. However, they would not resolve the issues of sometimes slow and unreliable bus journey times which are impacted by congestion over the existing river crossings, nor would they provide an alternative route for through-traffic which is not seeking to stop within Reading.

In order to address these issues, the Cross Thames Travel scheme has been included in the Strategy; with a key element being the provision of a new crossing over the River Thames. The Petition is focused on this and sets out a number of concerns relating to rationale, process, transparency, scheme impact and deliverability.

Taking these concerns in turn, the rationale for including a new river crossing is set out within the Strategy. This includes our commitment to work constructively with partners to undertake a fundamental review of travel options across the River Thames, with the objective of enhancing sustainable choices and helping to reduce the negative impacts of traffic congestion, including from through-traffic. The Strategy supports the inclusion of public transport priority, segregated pedestrian and cycle routes, and mitigation measures in the surrounding areas as core elements of a new river crossing scheme. A further element for investigation is an orbital route to link the new crossing with the A4074 (Upper Woodcote Road), which has been included in the Strategy to specifically respond to the concerns raised by partners through the consultation process regarding the impact of a new crossing on existing road traffic in Oxfordshire.

In terms of process, the Strategy has been produced in line with the relevant Government guidance; three separate consultations have been undertaken after which feedback has been reviewed, reported and carefully considered; and approval to proceed has been obtained from a Council Committee at each key stage of its development.

The Strategy and accompanying reports are transparent in recognising the views received against including a new river crossing in the Strategy. In fact, the Strategy goes so far as to specifically include the Motions of Oxfordshire County Council and South Oxfordshire District Council regarding a new river crossing, which are included within the main Strategy document itself. In addition, the text in the Strategy regarding opposition to a new river crossing has been further strengthened in response to consultation feedback received during the development of the strategy.

Regarding scheme impact and deliverability, the Strategy is clear that further work will be required to develop options and explore costs to improve cross river travel. This would include a full range of impact assessments and the development of appropriate mitigation measures. It is proposed that this work would update and build upon previous joint work which has been undertaken by the Cross Thames Travel group, with the objective of developing deliverable solutions to the issues as set out within the Strategy.

Finally, it is important to add that further options are included within the Demand Management section of the Strategy. These also seek to help address the issues resulting from traffic congestion in Reading, including from through-traffic. Again, the rationale for this scheme, the issues it is seeking to address, key considerations for further work and the differing views expressed through the consultations on this area are set out within the Strategy documentation. This further demonstrates the Council's commitment to work with our partners to investigate all options which would enable the overall objectives of the Strategy; to create healthier, greener and more equal communities in Reading, to be achieved.