

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 7 JANUARY 2014

Councillors Present: Peter Argyle (Substitute) (In place of Sheila Ellison), Jeff Beck, Brian Bedwell (Chairman), Paul Bryant (Substitute) (In place of Andrew Rowles), Dave Goff, Roger Hunneman (Substitute) (In place of Jeff Brooks), Alan Macro, Gwen Mason, Tim Metcalfe, Virginia von Celsing, Quentin Webb, Emma Webster and Keith Woodhams (Substitute) (In place of Tony Vickers)

Also Present: Councillor Pamela Bale (Highways, Transport (Operations), Emergency Planning, Newbury Vision & Deputy Conservative Group Leader), Councillor Hilary Cole (Planning, Transport (Policy), Culture, Customer Services, Countryside), Jon Winstanley (Highways and Transport - Project Manager), David Lowe (Scrutiny & Partnerships Manager) and Charlene Myers (Democratic Services Officer)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Jeff Brooks, Councillor Sheila Ellison, Councillor Mike Johnston, Councillor Andrew Rowles, Councillor Garth Simpson, Councillor Tony Vickers and Councillor Laszlo Zverko

PART I

60. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Emma Webster, Peter Argyle and Brian Bedwell declared an interest in Agenda Item 3, and reported that, as their interest was personal and not prejudicial or a disclosable pecuniary interest, they determined to remain to take part in the debate and vote on the matter.

61. Items Called-in following an Individual Decision on 16 December 2014

Councillor Brian Bedwell introduced the item to the Commission and thanked Members for attending the meeting at late notice.

Councillor Macro was asked to present his reasons for the Call-in to the Commission, in doing so he explained that he was in favour of the proposed scheme but he had two main reasons for concern which he wanted to highlight.

Councillor Macro explained that the westbound carriageway experience significant congestion and the proposed development of Ikea would exacerbate the situation further.

The scheme failed to include the suitable provisions for cyclists and the consultation report appeared to miss the comments raised by the Tilehurst Parish Council.

Councillor Macro advised the Commission that the scheme failed to include an additional lane eastbound and therefore the benefits of the scheme overall were questionable. Councillor Macro suggested that there was suitable land available to extend the eastbound and westbound carriageway as part of the same scheme and that vulnerable turning points along the respective part of the A4 could be avoided via alternative access routes if the additional land was utilised.

Brian Bedwell thanked Councillor Macro for his report and asked Jon Winstanley to present details of the scheme to the Commission and respond to the points raised by Councillor Macro.

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Jon Winstanley explained that the scheme involved widening the A4 to the south by approximately 3 metres via the construction of an additional westbound lane. The scheme included an additional 200 metres of eastbound merge lane from Royal Avenue and lengthened the left turn lane on the eastbound approach to Langley Hill by 60 meters.

The total scheme cost was £2.9 million. The Department for Transport (DfT) granted £2 million and the remaining £0.9 million comprised the Local Transport Plan (LTP) grant funding, S106 contributions and the contribution from IKEA.

Jon Winstanley advised that the main issue related to the morning traffic peak. The merging lanes caused congestion and was further exacerbated by the pedestrian crossing which slowed the movement of traffic through the area.

The Highways and Transport Service had conducted a traffic survey as part of the consultation process and established that the split of traffic using the eastbound and westbound lanes was roughly 50% for each.

The Commission was shown a plan of the area which outlined the current line of the road against the highway boundary. Jon Winstanley advised that there were restrictions around the widening of the carriageway due to the highways boundary. It was acknowledged that in order to acquire land outside the highway boundary delivery time of the scheme would be impacted. Jon Winstanley advised the Commission that funds had been granted on the provision that the scheme was completed by 2015.

A project board had been established to oversee the work and it had considered the use of the central hatching in order to provide additional space for an extended carriageway. Jon Winstanley advised that if the option were to be pursued then alternative turning points along the A4 would need to be agreed. It was suggested that the option was viable but would need further consultation and review; as such it had not been included within the current scheme. Jon Winstanley acknowledged the suggestion that the lay-by could be used as space to extend the eastbound carriageway but explained that the area was relied upon by school traffic.

Councillor Macro suggested that the volume of traffic on the A4 would increase as a direct result of the proposed IKEA store. The congestion would be most significant at 21:00, when the store closed. A comparison was made to the volume of traffic in Wembley which had increased following the development of an IKEA store in the area.

The Commission heard that IKEA had completed a traffic assessment as part of their planning proposal and the information had been scrutinised to assess the impact. Jon Winstanley advised that he believed it was unlikely that the flow of traffic at 21:00 leaving IKEA would significantly impact the A4 and this was supported by the IKEA traffic assessment.

Jon Winstanley proceeded to explain that the consultation process had included open workshops, to which the Parish Councils were invited. Highways and Transport had checked their records and advised that Tilehurst Parish Council had not announced their attendance although it was noted that a point had been raised regarding the possible use of a tidal scheme by an unnamed attendee. The Commission heard that that this was most likely a comment made by Tilehurst Parish Council. Jon Winstanley explained that the tidal scheme had been considered but had been discounted due to safety concerns.

In summary, Jon Winstanley advised that the traffic assessment had established that during the morning peak 1400-1600 vehicles used the west bound carriageway compared to 1000 using the eastbound carriageway. Jon Winstanley explained that the scheme focused on the west bound carriageway in order to provide the most benefit overall.

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Councillor Brian Bedwell thanked Jon Winstanley for his presentation and invited questions from the Commission.

Councillor Von-Celsing and Councillor Bryant referred to Councillor Macro's comparison to the volume of traffic generated by the IKEA store in Wembley and believed that the traffic flow would not be as significant along the A4 as more stores became available nationwide.

Councillor Goff questioned why the Highways and Transport Service could not incorporate the use of the central hatching as part of the proposed scheme and therefore avoid further disruption at a later date. Jon Winstanley advised that there would be a need to establish alternative turning points. He felt that the proposed scheme would deliver the desired benefits but he acknowledged that the option could be considered.

Councillor Webb advised that he used both sides of the carriageway on a regular basis and agreed with the traffic assessment as outlined by Jon Winstanley. Councillor Webb agreed that further benefits could be delivered by utilising the central reservation, acknowledging that the suggestion was not part of the current scheme. He suggested that the decision should remain and an action put in place to review the traffic flow at a later date.

The Commission discussed the issues relating to right hand turns along the stretch of the A4 subject to the proposal. Jon Winstanley explained that the central reservation would be used in order to provide the extended space, in doing so there would need to be alternative turning points. Jon Winstanley advised the Commission that the alternative access points would need thorough consideration as many businesses' relied upon the right hand turn, removing the access could hinder their accessibility and trade.

Jon Winstanley recommended that the Commission approved the scheme and agreed to review the traffic flow and need to utilise the hatch lane at a later date.

Councillor Argyle stated that, although the scheme proposed a smaller extension to the eastbound carriageway, the development would still deliver benefits and alleviate traffic congestion. He therefore supported the scheme.

Councillor Webster supported Councillor Argyle's comments and referred to minutes from the Tilehurst Parish Council meeting which stated only that the Parish had concerns about the use of Royal Avenue. There was no mention of comments raised at the consultation meeting.

Councillor Webster was in support of the Ikea development and believed that the current cycle lanes along Charrington road were provided sufficient space for cyclists, she stated that the lanes were well used and accessible.

Councillor Webster questioned the effect the Call-in would have on the progress of the project and what the next steps would be.

Jon Winstanley explained that the key activity was the site clearance which had to be complete by February 2014, before the bird nesting period began.

Councillor Metcalfe suggested that the pedestrian crossing affected the flow of traffic and noticed that this issue had not been addressed within the scheme. Jon Winstanley explained that the crossing could be widened to allow more people across, thereby reducing the frequency of the disruptions to traffic. Consideration had been given to replacing the crossing with a bridge; however, the option was not feasible due to the amount of land required. Highways and Transport would continue to consider alternatives.

The Commission discussed the use of the lay-by near the pedestrian crossing. Brian Bedwell explained that the majority of people accessing the school were from the local

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area and therefore walked. In response to comments made by the Commission, Jon Winstanley explained that a pedestrian crossing could be within 3-8 metres in width. There were many examples of widened pedestrian crossing alleviating congestion and this was an option being considered.

Councillor Bedwell thanked the Commission for their questions and asked Councillor Bale to comment.

Councillor Bale advised that the scheme had been of interest to Members for many years and originated from the Kennet and Thames Vision 2006/2007. The Commission heard that the DfT funding would not have been granted if they considered that the scheme would not work and did not deliver benefits.

It was resolved that:

- The decision should not be changed.
- The Executive should consider a review of the traffic along the A4 24 months after completion of the project to assess the need for the central reservation as space for a dual carriageway further eastbound side.

(The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and closed at 3.00 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature