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# School Streets Pilot Project, Calcot Infant and Junior Schools

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<b>Committee considering report:</b>	Individual Executive Member Decisions
<b>Date of Committee:</b>	26 May 2022
<b>Portfolio Member:</b>	Councillor Richard Somner
<b>Report Author:</b>	Cheryl Evans
<b>Forward Plan Ref:</b>	ID 4097

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## 1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To inform the Executive Member for Planning, Transport and Countryside of the responses received during the statutory consultation of an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order, which gives effect to a pilot “Car Free School Streets” initiative at Calcot Infant and Junior Schools.
- 1.2 To discuss the level of success of the pilot project and the potential for similar projects to be implemented in the future.
- 1.3 To make recommendations as to the continuing operation of the pilot project and possible introduction of further projects.

## 2 Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- (a) The Experimental Traffic Regulation Order which gives effect to the traffic restriction is made permanent;
- (b) The Council continues to collect and monitor data relevant to the scheme;
- (c) The Council continues to engage with and collect feedback on the scheme from the local community via the commonplace platform;
- (d) The Council continues to work alongside Thames Valley Police in the short term to deal with the minority of those that continue to be non-compliant;
- (e) The Council applies for the Powers for Designation of Civil Enforcement for moving traffic contraventions to support long term compliance and further investigates the suitability of technology-based enforcements systems for this site, with a view to purchasing an enforcement system from a future year’s budget;
- (f) Further investigation into the feasibility of a Zebra crossing on Royal Avenue to the north-west of the school site is undertaken, with a view to installing such a crossing from a suitable capital budget;

- (g) Further investigation into the requirement for additional parking restrictions is undertaken, with a view to introducing new restrictions as part of the ongoing Parking Review process;
- (h) Subject to the availability of funding and staff resources, site suitability and the level of community support, further Car Free School Streets schemes can be rolled out in future years.
- (i) In anticipation of the necessary resources becoming available and powers of enforcement being obtained, schools are invited to express an interest in a School Streets scheme. However, it is recommended that no further similar projects are implemented “on the ground” until the necessary powers and means of enforcement have been secured.

### 3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
<b>Financial:</b>	<p>The introduction of a Zebra crossing would cost approximately £25,000.</p> <p>It would cost approximately £40,000 to purchase a camera system to undertake enforcement of the Traffic Regulation Order.</p> <p>Additional staff resources (see below) would have a financial implication, the cost of which would be subject to job evaluation should any new posts be created.</p> <p>Although the Council has an annual “school safety” capital budget of £50,000, the level of funding required to implement the recommendations of this report would be well in excess of the available funding. There is also an annual “active travel” capital budget, the majority of which is earmarked for specific schemes to deliver infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists. Additional funding would need to be sought, should the recommendations of this report be approved.</p>
<b>Human Resource:</b>	<p>Implementing further School Streets projects and taking on responsibility for civil enforcement of moving traffic offences would require additional staff resources in the Traffic &amp; Road Safety and Parking teams, respectively.</p>
<b>Legal:</b>	<p>Any Traffic Regulation Orders required would be processed and sealed by the Legal Services team.</p>
<b>Risk Management:</b>	<p>If implemented, the projects will be managed in accordance with the Environment Department’s approach to risk management.</p>
<b>Property:</b>	<p>None.</p>

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<b>Policy:</b>	The consultation was in accordance with the Council's consultation procedure.			
	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<b>Equalities Impact:</b>				
<b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		x		N/A
<b>B</b> Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		x		N/A
<b>Environmental Impact:</b>	x			Encouraging and enabling active travel will reduce the environmental impact of travel and is part of the Council's Environment Strategy.
<b>Health Impact:</b>	x			Encouraging and enabling active travel will promote physical activity.
<b>ICT Impact:</b>		x		If the Council takes on the responsibility for enforcing moving travel offences, it is likely that a software package will need to be procured. This would need to be compatible with existing ICT systems and would require the assistance of ICT colleagues.
<b>Digital Services Impact:</b>		x		On-going support in the use of Commonplace as the chosen consultation platform for this project.
<b>Council Strategy Priorities:</b>	x			Maintain a green district – successful school streets initiatives will help reduce the environmental impact of travel.

<b>Core Business:</b>		x		Although contributing to the above Council Strategy Priority and wider social and environmental objectives, the delivery of this type of project is not in itself a statutory service.
<b>Data Impact:</b>		x		N/A
<b>Consultation and Engagement:</b>	<p>Local stakeholders and road users were consulted on the proposed school streets initiative by way of;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active Travel Fund (ATF) Webpage to place within wider policy context i.e. Government’s “Gear Change” &amp; local West Berks strategies / COVID19 response. (Aug 2020)</li> <li>• Phase 1 – Heat Map, scoping exercise to determine support for the scheme (April 2021)</li> <li>• Parent survey – school community (June 2021)</li> <li>• Statutory advertisement of Experimental Traffic Regulation Orders (July 2021 to date)</li> <li>• Phase 2 – Design feedback of implemented scheme (Sept 2021)</li> <li>• Transport Advisory Group (Nov 2021)</li> <li>• Holybrook and Tilehurst Parish councils attended stakeholder meetings (Dec 2020 and May 2021)</li> </ul> <p>This report has been circulated to all members for information and comment, with the local ward members Councillors Linden and Stewart more closely involved during the development and operation of the scheme.</p> <p>The local ward members both support the proposal to make the restriction permanent.</p> <p>In response to other comments, the wording of the recommendations has been amended to clarify that schools would be able to express an interest in developing a scheme in advance of enforcement powers being obtained.</p>			

## 4 Executive Summary

4.1 A pilot “School Streets” project was implemented in September 2021 on roads surrounding Calcot Junior and Infant schools. The project involves prohibiting motor

vehicles from accessing these roads a certain times of day as a means of encouraging more walking and cycling to school.

- 4.2 The Experimental Traffic Regulation Order which gives effect to the vehicular restriction has been subject to statutory consultation since the project was implemented. There has been a parallel informal consultation which has given stakeholders the opportunity to make comments and suggestions.
- 4.3 Monitoring of travel patterns and analysis of the consultation responses indicate that the scheme should be made permanent, but that some further measures are required to improve compliance with the restriction and to further encourage active travel to the schools.
- 4.4 In view of the experience of this pilot scheme, similar projects could be implemented at other schools in the future, in the right circumstances and provided that sufficient funds and resources are available.

## **5 Supporting Information**

### **Introduction**

- 5.1 A School Street is a road close to a school with a temporary restriction prohibiting entry to motorised traffic at school drop-off and pick-up times. The restriction applies to school traffic and through traffic, with exemptions for local residents and those with particular needs. The result is a safer, healthier and more pleasant environment for everyone. While the restrictions is legally enforceable, these projects aim for a high levels of “buy-in” from stakeholders and compliance “by consent” in preference to achieving compliance by the prospect of enforcement action.
- 5.2 School Street schemes offer a proactive solution for school communities to tackle air pollution, poor health and road danger issues, whilst also encouraging active travel, which promotes healthier lifestyles and a reduced reliance on car-based travel.
- 5.3 This video was created by the Council’s Graphic Design team to help promote and explain School Streets: <https://youtu.be/Q6gWsrHvNjM>.
- 5.4 This report provides information to enable the Council to decide whether, in light of consultation feedback and data collected on the scheme over the past 6 months of operation, the scheme should continue and whether similar schemes should be implemented in the future.

### **Background**

- 5.5 The Department for Transport’s Active Travel Fund, initiated during the Covid-19 pandemic, gave the council the opportunity and an injection of funding to undertake a pilot School Streets scheme.
- 5.6 Calcot Junior and Infant schools were considered for this experimental scheme due to the continued parking issues outside the schools at peak drop off and pick up times. The application and deadline to apply for the funding arose over the summer holidays when schools were on summer break. The Traffic and Road Safety team had worked

with the schools on a number of occasions and approached the Head Teacher. The Governors were approached and all parties agreed to participate in the pilot scheme.

5.7 This scheme's main aims are to:

- (a) Cut down on traffic and parking pressures outside the schools;
- (b) Discourage car journeys to school and encourage walking and cycling;
- (c) Make the streets outside the schools safer at the start and end of the day;
- (d) Improve air quality and create a more pleasant environment for everyone.

### **Consultation**

5.8 An informal consultation was held between 28<sup>th</sup> January and 18<sup>th</sup> February 2021 in order to gauge the level of local support for the project. Following a positive response, the details of the scheme were developed. The scheme was launched on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2021, at which point an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order came into force to prohibit motor vehicles from entering the restricted streets, a small section of Royal Avenue (that runs adjacent to Curtis Road), Curtis Road and Gatcombe Close between the hours of 08:15 - 09:15 and 14:30 - 15:30 Monday to Friday (term time only). The necessary regulatory signs were erected at the roadside. The extent of the restriction is shown in Appendix A, along with a copy of the Order. This video was produced shortly after the scheme was launched to promote the measures and explain the background: <https://youtu.be/RmMBoxRV7r8>.

5.9 When the Experimental Traffic Regulation Order came into force, a statutory consultation began, inviting comments on and objections to the restriction. In addition to the statutory consultation, which is essentially a formal legal process and not especially accessible to many stakeholders, comments were invited via an online portal (<https://westberksschoolstreetsphase2.commonplace.is/>). The consultation period ran for six months, at which point the comments received were collated and analysed. A separate document summarising the consultation process is included as Appendix B.

5.10 The key messages arising from the consultation are as follows:

- (a) No formal (statutory) objections to the restriction continuing in force have been received.
- (b) The Head and Governors of Calcot Junior and Infant Schools would like the scheme to be made permanent.
- (c) The majority of respondents agreed with the objective of encouraging Active Travel to school and restricting access to Royal Avenue.
- (d) Several respondents said that they felt safer walking or cycling as a result of the restriction.
- (e) Thames Valley Police have stated that whilst they support the principles of the scheme and were able to provide enforcement support to assist with its launch and early days of operation, it would not be realistic to expect ongoing enforcement action.
- (f) The issue of ensuring and promoting compliance with the restriction was raised by a wide cross section of respondents, with many observing that a small but significant minority of road users are not abiding by the restriction. Potential means

of enforcing the restriction without relying on the police are discussed in paragraph 5.16 and 5.17.

- (g) Further measures to improve safety, particularly a formal pedestrian crossing, are seen by parents as being necessary to further encourage and enable walking to school.
- (h) Parking issues have not necessarily been solved, but some parking has been displaced into adjacent streets. Due to many residential properties not having off-street parking, there can be pressure on the space available to park.

### **Monitoring of the scheme**

5.11 Data has been collected before and after the scheme was launched using variety of methods;

- (a) Speed radar devices;
- (b) Pedestrian and cycle counts;
- (c) Aerial drone (A4 crossing);
- (d) Air quality readings;
- (e) Community reminders – 15 letters distributed to owners of vehicles contravening the restriction;
- (f) Police enforcement – 25 Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN) tickets issued.

5.12 A summary of the results can be found in Appendix C (Vehicle Speed and Volume monitoring), Appendix D (Pedestrian and Cycle volume monitoring), Appendix E (Summary of data results) and Appendix F (Air quality monitoring).

5.13 The main points arising from the collection and monitoring of the data are:

- (a) Average 30% increase in pedestrian movement;
- (b) Average 75% increase in cycle / scooter use;
- (c) The highest pedestrian movement in the am period is northwest of the main school entrance, demonstrating the popularity of the “park and stride” option at Highview community centre in the mornings;
- (d) The highest pedestrian movement in the pm period is the southern A4 entrance, demonstrating the popularity of the park and stride option at Linear Park in the afternoons;
- (e) Higher pedestrian use of the A4 pedestrian crossing point has not impacted vehicle congestion on this road;
- (f) The air quality data is inconclusive due to seasonal variations and there being no comparable “before” data available.

### **Has the scheme met its objectives?**

5.14 In view of the positive shift towards active travel on journeys to school and the positive comments received during the consultation, the scheme is considered to have

succeeded in meeting its objectives. However, there have been some unintended consequences in respect of parking displacement and inconsiderate parking in streets outside the restricted zone. Several stakeholders have drawn attention to the need for better compliance with the restriction and while the Police have been helpful in the early days of the project it is not realistic to expect a continual Police presence to deter potential offences. The observed levels of compliance and the requirement for formal enforcement is disappointing, but is consistent with the findings of similar projects in other areas. Some stakeholders have requested further measures to improve road safety for those walking and cycling in the area.

- 5.15 The following paragraphs discuss potential further measures to address the concerns raised and to ensure that the initial benefits of the scheme are not lost over time.

### **Further measures**

- 5.16 Although it was hoped that road users would abide by the restriction, it is clear that in order to address the issue of non-compliance, regular enforcement is required. The Council is not currently empowered to enforce this type of restriction, as non-compliance is classed as a Moving Traffic Offence, and therefore only the police are able to carry out enforcement. In view of Thames Valley Police's comments, it is clear that police enforcement will not continue indefinitely. It is also apparent that when there is no visible police presence, offence rates will be higher.
- 5.17 Local highway authorities will shortly be able to apply to the government to take on the powers to enforce moving traffic offences and issue drivers with penalty charge notices. If the Council were to apply for these powers, the enforcement would take place by means of a technology-based process, ie the deployment of cameras linked to an IT system which identified offending vehicle owners and created the required penalty charge notices. Applying for the necessary powers and procuring, setting up and operating the enforcement system would require a significant commitment in terms of initial and ongoing expenditure and officer time. The Council would retain any income received from penalty charge notices but because the purpose of the enforcement would be to deter offences, the resulting income would be low and therefore unlikely to cover the ongoing costs.
- 5.18 Several consultation responses requested further pedestrian and/or cycle facilities on the roads leading to the schools, and in particular a pedestrian crossing. The layout and space available on the roads in the area makes it difficult to provide comprehensive facilities but there are some potential locations where it may be possible to introduce a Zebra crossing, or local improvements to footways such as lower kerbs at informal crossing points.
- 5.19 Traditionally, the provision of formal controlled pedestrian crossings has been based on numerical criteria in terms of the numbers of pedestrians wishing to cross and the volume of traffic on the road. The overall volumes of traffic and pedestrians would not justify a controlled crossing on any of the roads surrounding the schools. However, the point may have been reached whereby lower thresholds of usage need to be accepted and pedestrian crossings are installed as a means of encouraging active travel, rather than just to cater for a pre-existing demand. Subject to a safe and convenient location being identified, further consideration of a controlled crossing could be given.



5.20 In light of concerns raised in respect of parking issues on surrounding roads, further parking restrictions may be required.

### **Implications for introducing similar schemes**

5.21 Car Free school streets will not be suitable for all West Berkshire schools. It should also be noted that closing a road will not necessarily be the right solution to successfully implement change to a school community's travel choices. It is considered preferable for schools to be invited to approach the Council to request that a School Street project be implemented in their area, rather than the Council seeking to impose a scheme on a school community. Any considerations for new schemes should follow certain conditions and set expectations around community buy-in to ensure success.

5.22 The following list of considerations, although not exhaustive, will inform the decision as to whether a School Streets project is suitable;

- (a) Whether the school has an up to date School Travel Plan;
- (b) Whether the school is actively working on the actions within its School Travel Plan;
- (c) The level of support among the school community and local residents;
- (d) The nature of the surrounding road network (eg, schools situated on heavily trafficked through roads with no alternative routes will not be suitable);
- (e) Availability of alternative parking areas to encourage park and stride schemes;
- (f) Resources within the school to support active travel initiatives.

5.23 In order to support a further roll-out of this type of project further financial and staff resources would be required or other projects and services de-prioritised. Capital funding to introduce physical measures to encourage and enable walking and cycling would be of the order of tens of thousands of pounds per school. In terms of staff time, the pilot scheme has been particularly time intensive, due to the need to continually liaise with the school, engage with the community and undertake the monitoring process in addition to the more conventional project management tasks. Although it is to be hoped that future schemes would require a lower number of staff hours, it is still considered that the Network Management team would struggle to deliver even one project per year with the current level of staffing.

5.24 If an automatic means of enforcing the existing restriction at the pilot site were to be introduced, it should be noted that the incremental cost of adding further sites would be comparatively low and it may be possible to alternate enforcement activity between sites.

### **Proposals**

5.25 In view of the above, it is proposed that:

- (a) The Experimental Traffic Regulation Order which gives effect to the traffic restriction is made permanent;
- (b) The Council continues to collect and monitor data relevant to the scheme;
- (c) The Council continues to engage with and collect feedback on the scheme from the local community via the commonplace platform;

- (d) The Council continues to work alongside Thames Valley Police in the short term to deal with the minority of those that continue to be non-compliant;
- (e) The Council applies for the Powers for Designation of Civil Enforcement for moving traffic contraventions to support long term compliance and further investigates the suitability of technology-based enforcements systems for this site, with a view to purchasing an enforcement system from a future year's budget;
- (f) Further investigation into the feasibility of a Zebra crossing on Royal Avenue to the north-west of the school site is undertaken, with a view to installing such a crossing from a suitable capital budget.
- (g) Further investigation into the requirement for additional parking restrictions is undertaken, with a view to introducing new restrictions as part of the ongoing Parking Review process.
- (h) Subject to the availability of funding and staff resources, site suitability and the level of community support, further Car Free School Streets schemes can be rolled out in future years.
- (i) In anticipation of the necessary resources becoming available and powers of enforcement being obtained, schools are invited to express an interest in a School Streets scheme. However, it is recommended that no further similar projects are implemented "on the ground" until the necessary powers and means of enforcement have been secured.

## 6 Other options considered

- 6.1 To discontinue the pilot School Streets project and remove the restriction on vehicular access. In view of the positive reaction to the scheme and the encouraging shift towards active travel for journeys to school, this is not recommended.
- 6.2 To extend the restricted zone at the pilot schools. Although this was requested by a handful of consultees, this is not considered practical.
- 6.3 To make the restriction permanent but not make any further changes or improvements in the area; to continue to rely on the Police to enforce contraventions of the restriction. In view of the observed compliance issues and the stakeholder feedback, it is clear that the success of the scheme will be diminished if complementary measures, including a suitable means of enforcement, are not introduced.
- 6.4 Not to introduce any further School Streets schemes elsewhere. The pilot scheme has shown that results can be achieved by this type of project and therefore other schools should be afforded the opportunity to see the benefits, subject to adequate resources being available.

## 7 Conclusions

- 7.1 It can be concluded that the pilot School Streets project at Calcot Junior and Infant Schools has succeeded in encouraging non-car travel to school and creating a safer and more pleasant environment in the vicinity of the schools. To maximise the benefits of the scheme, however, further measures are required.
- 7.2 Subject to sufficient resources being available, and in the right circumstances, similar School Streets schemes could be introduced in the district.

- 7.3 The School Streets pilot has met its aims and therefore it should be considered that the experimental 'Car Free' School Streets scheme restrictions should be made permanent in the roads surrounding Calcot Junior and Infants schools.
- 7.4 In order to achieve greater compliance with the restriction, more intensive enforcement action is required and this could be achieved by a camera-based enforcement system.

## 8 Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix A – Experimental Traffic Regulation Order
- 8.2 Appendix B – 6 month Consultation summary
- 8.3 Appendix C – Vehicle Speed and Volume monitoring
- 8.4 Appendix D – Pedestrian and Cycle volume monitoring
- 8.5 Appendix E – summary of Data Results
- 8.6 Appendix F – Air quality readings

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### Background Papers:

None

### Subject to Call-In:

Yes:  No:

- The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval
- Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council
- Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position
- Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or associated Task Groups within preceding six months
- Item is Urgent Key Decision
- Report is to note only

**Wards affected:** Tilehurst Birch Copse and Holybrook Parish councils are affected by matters relating to the pilot scheme. All wards are potentially affected if similar schemes are rolled out more widely.

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