Public Questions

Item (a)	Highways Improvement Group Meeting on 6 October 2026

(a) Question submitted to the Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Carol Maleham:

Question:

"We live in Lawrences Lane where bollards were installed several years ago and this meant that the lane could only be accessed by pedestrians, cyclists etc but no cars. This has been a huge success with many people using the lane safely, dogs are able to run off the lead, adults and children have also been able to walk without worrying about cars.

However, a number of weeks ago these bollards were removed without notice and the signage has been changed to allow cars access once more. Most people are completely unaware of the changes which is potentially lethal. The lane has changed in the years where there have been no cars, the tarmac has receded at the edge and the hedges are overgrown, so the width of the lane has been significantly reduced.

Apparently, the bollards were removed as an ETRO had lapsed in Jan 2024 at this point it should have been finalised or removed but nothing happened until a few weeks ago.

My understanding is that the farm owner highlighted that the lane was being used by small vehicles as one of the bollards was missing this then led to the bollards being removed. This farm is about to be put on the market so therefore it would benefit the saleability of the farm if the lane was open to vehicles!

The lane is now dangerous as everyone using it still believes it is for pedestrian use only and therefore safe, can the bollards please be reinstated? The only people the removal of the bollards has benefitted are the properties halfway up Lawrences Lane."

The Executive Portfolio Holder – Environment and Highways answered:

Lawrences Lane was closed to through traffic during the COVID-19 lockdown using an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order. To retain sufficient space for vehicles to turn around safely, the physical closure had to be positioned at a particular point on the lane. However, this arrangement caused access difficulties for some local residents, and the bollards were subsequently removed on a number of occasions.

This created an unsafe and unsatisfactory situation: the lane remained signed as a traffic-free route, but vehicles were physically able to travel through it. This could give pedestrians and other users a false sense of security.

As the restriction could not be enforced safely and reliably, the experimental order was allowed to lapse, and the lane reverted to the arrangements that had been in place for many years before the lockdown.

We recognise the concerns raised and will consider whether a future restriction could be introduced and enforced safely without causing unacceptable access problems. Any further work will need to be assessed alongside other traffic-management and road-safety priorities across the district.

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The Executive Portfolio Holder – Environment and Highways asked:
Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?

Carole Maleham asked the following supplementary question:

"Since COVID 2019, the lane has been used hugely by local people for recreation - people walking with dogs allow them to go off the lead, children run up and down the lane.

When the bollards were introduced, we were delighted and it was a safe environment. I agree they disappeared at times and I would e-mail Mr Dowding and say they've gone. I've even got one in my garage that I got out of a hedge. There's one there. And I have to say, I think there were perhaps individuals were removing them for their own interests.

We were very keen for them to be replaced and to be safe for people to walk up and down. Now, obviously, they disappeared a few weeks ago and it was like, gosh, where have they gone? Because the signage hasn't changed. And even to this day, I passed a man today, his little lad was five years old, cycling up to St Finian's. And when you go up the lane and you meet somebody, the road has disintegrated, the hedges have overgrown, it's reverting to nature really.

It's not a safe environment for people and it's not actually very safe for cars. Now, part of the problem has been the bollards at the bottom of Lawrence's Lane near the track where the travellers were, there was only one, so people were circumnavigating it. If we'd had two, and the signage had perhaps been different, then I think that would have stopped part of that problem. Two at the top - perhaps farmers were taking them out and not putting them back in.

What we're saying is, as a local community, we believe they should be reinstated. We go up and try and manage it ourselves. We appreciate it costs money, but it's a safe place that people locally want to go and can't at the moment."

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

I think the kind of question is, "will we relook at it effectively?" And I think the answer to that is "absolutely". It kind of cuts across a couple of different ward areas and various ward members have made representation to me over the last couple of days.

I think it does come with challenges, but it is something that we will take forward and relook at what is the best solution to suit all. Because I think there are challenges, like I said, it's complicated. It's not as easy as just closing the road and allowing access. You've got to be able to manage that.

Personally, for me, it's around making sure you get the right outcome, because there are several interventions you could put in place. For example, ANPR cameras that aren't going to stop traffic. It's about finding the right intervention to get the right outcome that's needed, not just enforcing a rule, if that makes sense.

Carole Maleham continued:

"I think initially the bollards were going missing, but latterly they have stopped going missing. So, it was people then accepted that it was a restricted area, whereas initially there was pushback from certain people and that has stopped. and for them to be there and then suddenly they're gone and the fact is it's a dangerous lane and it's to do with signage as well."

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Absolutely, I remain committed to take it away. Anything that happens needs to have a new traffic regulation order, so there is a process that will follow, but I'm absolutely committed to taking it away and looking at what alternatives we could do to reintroduce it, but I can't at this point give a commitment on that timeline. But thank you for bringing it forward. It's on the agenda more substantively later anyway.

The Principal Engineer – Traffic and Road Safety added:

We have asked for the hedges to be trimmed, and we've also got confirmation from adjacent landowners that they are also looking at trimming the hedges as well. People have accepted that since the bylaws were put in, they haven't been maintaining the hedgerows as they should. We've now established with the residents and the landowners that they will look at trimming the hedgerows to make it at least how it used to be originally. Yes, it won't change the fact that it is a narrow lane, but at least the hedges will be more manageable.

Item (b)	Highways Improvement Group Meeting on 6 October 2026

(b) Question submitted to the Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Sam Jones:

Question:

"My question for the highway's improvement group concerns active travel provision between Wash Common and Newbury.

Currently residents of Wash Common have no dedicated cycle infrastructure between us and the town centre. In the LCWIP (2011-2026) this corridor was identified as the highest priority for improvements, yet 15 years later, not a single improvement has been made.

Residents wishing to access the town centre or train station must endure sharing a busy 30mph road, with steep gradients, and no protection. This puts off all but the most confident of cyclists.

Does WBC have any plans to implement the suggestions from the LCWIP plan, such as dedicated infrastructure, or the implementation of 20mph speed limits and traffic calming along Elizabeth Avenue and Valley Road?"

The Executive Portfolio Holder – Environment and Highways answered:

The Council is in discussions with developers regarding the provision of cycle and pedestrian infrastructure on Andover Road between the proposed Watermill Bridge site and Monks Lane. This is with a view to connecting into the existing active travel route on the south side of Monks Lane. This existing route affords onward connections to Newbury College, Newbury Retail Park and also to the town centre and rail station via Newtown Road which also has existing off carriageway cycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

In addition, the Council has drafted proposals for cycle direction signing on the route via Elizabeth Avenue and Valley Road, between Wash Common and the town centre, which we hope to implement as part of our 2027-28 programme.

There are no present plans for any other measures on this corridor.

The Executive Portfolio Holder – Environment and Highways asked:
Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?

Sam Jones asked the following supplementary question:

“Just for a bit of background. So, my question was a bit too long to fit on there, but I'm glad to hear that there's plans for infrastructure on the east, with the new developments. But I think the bigger issue is [that] it's very steep gradient. It's very challenging conditions. Literally on the way here, coming down Andover Road, I witnessed two very dangerous close-passes from people impatient from being stuck behind cyclists going up a hill. So, trying to think of a supplementary question on the fly. Do you recognise the need for more than just basic signage going up that section, as opposed to some kind of dedicated infrastructure, or some kind of traffic calming to specifically serve areas on the west side of Andover Road and the existing areas of Wash Common as they are today?”

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

As a keen cyclist myself, I absolutely would love to see proper cycle infrastructure everywhere where possible. What I mean by ‘proper’ is properly segregated cycleways. However, trying to retrospectively fit cycleways is hard. A, it's hard. B, it's very expensive. And it's even more hard when you live in an old place like Newbury and there are a whole manner of utilities, sewers, etc. But certainly, I absolutely agree - I'd love to see more of it.

I will propose that we take that topic to the Cycle Forum. So, we have a Cycle Forum, which involves a lot of our active travel groups, the various cycling clubs, as well as our active travel officers in there, and they can take that and discuss that. And that could form something to look at in future.

But yeah, absolutely, I would love to see purpose-built, segregated cycleways in as many places I could possibly squeeze them. But we are bound, unfortunately, by a lot of

physical infrastructure around us. And then, they're not cheap, especially retrospective [schemes]. But yeah, absolutely. We're happy to take that away to the Cycle Forum as well.

Sam Jones continued:

"If I may, though, the 20 mph speed limit that I recommended, that isn't segregated infrastructure and that would be valuable. So, is that something that could be prioritised as an alternative?"

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

We recently changed our kind of policy to tweak it so that where there's demonstration of community support in line with our manifesto. If there is a demonstration of community support, then that is absolutely something that we can look forward to and that can be brought forward to this group for review. We've got a number of petitions tonight based on speed limit changes. So absolutely, if there's that demonstration of that support, [I'm] happy for it to be considered.

Item (c)	Highways Improvement Group Meeting on 6 October 2026

(c) Question submitted to the Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Andrew Gill:

"The road that is now the B4000 between the A4 and the A338 was improved to enable the building of the M4. As part of the agreement with the villages along the route, it was agreed that the road would not become a major route, hence the B-road designation.

This was fine until the A34 was routed round the west side of Newbury. First a lot of traffic came down the road causing major problems and resulting in the weight limit on the road. Now, following the ubiquitous use of commercial satellite navigation on smart devices, the smaller vehicle traffic has been diverted down the road, as it is calculated as the quickest route.

This was evident on the 22nd of September when the A34 was blocked and traffic was much reduced, and again on the 25th when the M4 had a problem going west and the traffic was increased above the "normal" Friday volume. This amount of traffic makes it very difficult for residents along the road to get onto or across the road and for the 2 schools, 1 in Stockcross and the other in Wickham to cross when going to their respective churches for services. The noise makes it unpleasant for the residents alongside the road to use their gardens for leisure and relaxation.

The group must come up with a plan to reduce the speed on the route so that it is no longer quicker than using the M4/A34 junction. Consider either reducing the speed limits along the road or making it a residents only route as has happened at Wanborough further along the road to Swindon."

The Executive Portfolio Holder – Environment and Highways answered:

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Thank you for raising your request to introduce changes to the B4000 to lower traffic volumes.

As unfortunate as it can be in terms of the increased traffic flows along the B4000 when the M4 or A34 is closed due to an incident, the occasional delay to join or cross the B4000 and additional noise is not enough justification for a proposal to restrict vehicular traffic along the B4000 to just residents.

The B4000, although not a principal A-class route is still an important east/west route for many motorists west of Stockcross who need to access other West Berkshire villages along the road that are not served directly by the M4, A34 or A4. Even if such a restriction was implemented, it would be impossible to manage and enforce and would offer false hope to the residents along the B4000 of reduced traffic movements.

The introduction of lower speed limits would require physical measures to make drivers abide by the lower speed limit – simply changing the sign faces is unlikely to change driver behaviour based on evidence gathered locally and nationally. The current speed limit on the road is deemed to be appropriate based on various factors including the number of frontages and junctions, accident history (where inappropriate speed is a contributing factor) and visibility.

Although we are not directly looking at this road, we have commissioned a set of studies on roads and junctions in the vicinity of the B4000 and the outcome of those studies may highlight some measures that we could potentially introduce to help the current situation. These studies are due to be completed by our external consultants towards the end of the year so any measures would likely be included within a future year works programme.