

**Extraordinary Joint Meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Neighbourhoods & Community Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Thursday, 29th October, 2020.**

**Present:-** Councillors Dhaliwal (Joint Chair), Hulme (Joint Chair), Mohammad, Basra, Gahir, , Matloob, D Parmar, S Parmar, R Sandhu, Ajaib, Begum, Hulme, Kelly, Minhas and Sabah

**Also present under Rule 30:-** Councillors Sharif, Smith, Strutton and Wright

**In attendance:-** Councillors Anderson (Cabinet Member for Sustainable Transport & Environmental Services), Nazir (Housing & Community Safety) and Dar

**Apologies for Absence:-** Councillor Sarfraz and M Holledge

**PART I**

**1. Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Gahir declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest by virtue of being a Hackney Carriage driver and operator. He withdrew from the meeting and took no part in the discussion or voting thereon.

**2. Experimental Bus Lanes**

Prior to commencing the formal business of the meeting, Councillor Hulme, joint Chair, explained that the Council had received a petition asking that the Bath Road Bus Lane be abolished. The petition had been debated at Full Council on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2020 and it was subsequently agreed that the matter be referred to a jointly chaired Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Neighbourhood and Community Services Panel to allow further consideration of the relevant issues. Councillor Hulme said the Council welcomed petitions and recognised that it was one of the ways residents could express their views and concerns.

Councillor Hulme explained that the first part of the meeting would be conducted as an evidence gathering session to hear from officers and stakeholder representatives. Councillor Dhaliwal would chair the second part of the meeting, during which members of the public and councillors speaking under Rule 30 would be given the opportunity to address the meeting.

The Chair welcomed officers, members of the public and stakeholder representatives to the meeting.

The Senior Transport Planner introduced a report that explained that in response to Covid-19 and preparation for the relaxation of lockdown

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restrictions, the government had announced two tranches of the Covid-19 Emergency Active Travel Fund (EATF) be made available to local authorities to facilitate the introduction of active travel measures to support social distancing. The government guidance accompanying the EATF had emphasised the need to deliver schemes promptly, whilst there was less pressure on the transport network, before the return of traffic to pre-Covid-19 levels.

During May 2020, Council officers approved the introduction of an experimental bus and cycle lane on the A4, which prioritised sustainable modes of transport between Dover Road and Uxbridge Road. The measures were introduced via an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO), in-line with government's statutory guidance and a proposed trial period to run for a minimum of six months, alongside consultation and monitoring of the measures implemented.

Members were advised that the scheme supported national and local transport, environmental and public health policies in promoting sustainable forms of transport to reduce the impact of road traffic congestion and improve health outcomes.

The Engineer (Major Infrastructure Projects) reported that the A4 scheme had been monitored since the ETROs had come into force. Two months of monitoring data was available; however this was insufficient to demonstrate any significant findings to date.

The Chair thanked officers for the presentation and opened the meeting to comments and questions from Members.

A lengthy discussion ensued, during which the following points were raised:

- A Member asked a series of questions, relating to: how the Council was encouraging residents to use sustainable modes of transport; the arrangements for use of the bus lanes by home to school transport buses; and the outcome of meetings held between officers and Private Hire/Hackney Carriage drivers. In response, it was explained that the Council had deployed a number of schemes to incentivise the use of local public transport, including: the introduction of e-scooters, cycle hire, and a free electric bus service. Discussions were ongoing between officers and Private Hire/Hackney Carriage drivers to consider permitting them to use the bus lanes. A driver etiquette had been drafted, setting out information about driving with care and consideration to vulnerable road users. It was explained that home to

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school transport buses were able to utilise the dedicated bus lanes, and duplicate buses from public operators had been added to the bus network to transport school children.

- It was reported that although it was too soon to conclude, early data collected indicated that journey times for vehicles using the bus lanes had improved.
- Health and Safety concerns were raised regarding the cycle and e-scooter hire schemes. It was asked what cleaning arrangements were in place to minimise the spread of Covid-19 from e-scooters. In addition, it was suggested that e-scooters promoted an unhealthy lifestyle as usage replaced walking for short journeys. In response, it was explained that e-scooter use reduced carbon emissions, therefore improving the local air quality. The operator had confirmed that all e-scooters were cleaned daily using hospital-grade disinfectant that remained active for seven days. Further to the issue being raised, the operator had agreed to publish information to its website about how equipment was sanitised. Concern was raised regarding the use of e-scooters on the bus lanes. It was explained that only hire e-scooters were permitted and all other e-scooters were prohibited from using the bus lanes. It was suggested that Council officers engaged with local e-scooter retailers to highlight that e-scooters were only permitted to be used on private land.
- Concerns were raised regarding traffic congestion, particularly in the event of M4 closures creating 'rat runs' through the town. There was discussion regarding the detrimental impact of an increased number of vehicles using side roads surrounding the town centre. Members were advised that it was likely that increased 'rat-running' would occur, as drivers attempted to avoid the A4. However, to date there was no data to suggest congestion was worsening on side roads. Officers would be reviewing known sites and would seek to introduce supportive measures to address this issue. Discussion with Highways England was being undertaken to consider measures to minimise the impact of M4 weekend closures.
- In relation to air quality, it was explained that passive monitors were operational throughout the Borough. During the experimental period modelling would be undertaken to determine if air quality had improved, deteriorated or stayed the same during the period. To date no significant changes had been detected.
- It was noted that there were a number of schools in areas surrounding the town centre and an increase in traffic would exert additional pressure on parents travelling to school by car. It was explained that the scheme was intended to improve active travel. Children were

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being actively encouraged to walk or cycle to school. The Council was also working to implement a 'school streets' initiative which would restricts vehicles during school drop-off and pick-up times.

Implementation of the scheme would improve the air quality and safety of the area, and prompt health benefits.

- A Member asked if it was possible to use some of the EATF to provide concessionary bus passes to school pupils – as it was felt that this would significantly reduce the number of vehicles on the network at peak times.
- Concern was raised that there was not enough electric vehicle charging points across Slough. It was requested that additional points be provided in appropriate locations.

The Chair then invited the stakeholder representatives in attendance to address the meeting.

Mr Gibson, a Private Hire driver, asked if Automatic Number Plat Recognition Technology (ANPT) could be used to identify the private hire and taxi vehicles using the bus lanes, as this would ensure drivers were not issued with fines. He said the requirement to display external signage on vehicles was overly bureaucratic and burdensome for drivers. He advised that Reading Borough Council adopted the use of ANPT and it had successfully prevented drivers from outside the local area using the local bus lanes. He raised safety concerns in relation to cars travelling across junctions and inadequate signage; he requested that the visibility of signage be improved.

The Associate Director Operations Place responded to the matters raised. He said discussion with Reading Borough Council in relation to its pilot scheme had been undertaken and the information shared would be taken into consideration. In relation to the use of ANPT and signage, he explained that Slough's Licensing Team held a list of local Hackney Carriage / Private Hire vehicles and drivers could be identified by ANPT. However, displaying external signage also allowed residents to identify local operators and the intention was to raise standards amongst drivers. The Associate Director Operations Place welcomed the comments made by Mr Gibson and invited him to join the Council's Hackney Carriage / Private Hire task and finish group.

Raha Izzadeen, a young person from the Slough Youth Parliament was invited to make a representation; however due to technical difficulties he had left the meeting. On behalf of Raha, Ms Conte, a Youth Worker, addressed the meeting. She welcomed the suggestion of concessionary bus passes being provided to young people and felt this would incentivise bus use. She explained that young people were often reluctant to use public transport

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because of the cost, safety concerns and the extended journey times of travelling by bus. She said that the young people at the Youth Parliament were keen to protect the environment and support the reduction of carbon emissions. In relation to travel by bicycle, she said that young people had expressed frustration that cars were often parked in cycle lanes and they had raised safety concerns regarding the number of large commercial vehicles using the highway in Slough. She said that the Youth Parliament would welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters further with the Council.

*At this point the Chair adjourned the meeting (at 8.27 pm) for a comfort break.*

*The meeting was reconvened (at 8.35pm) when the same Members were present.*

Councillor Dhaliwal took the Chair for the second part of the meeting.

The Chair resumed the meeting and urged Members to consider all of the relevant matters raised in order to formulate practical solutions and recommendations to propose to Cabinet.

The Chair explained that due to a conflicting personal commitment, Councillor Bedi would be invited to speak ahead of the Slough residents in attendance.

Councillor Bedi raised concerns regarding the consultation process and its lack of transparency. She said the terminology used in the consultation survey had been ambiguous and misleading. She said residents who had spoken to her had not understood that they could submit an objection or express support for the scheme via the survey. She felt the Council's communication with residents had been unclear. In addition, she felt as a councillor she had not been appropriately informed about the bus lane scheme. In concluding, she raised concerns regarding the lack of air quality monitoring data available for residents to view.

The Associate Director Operations Place explained that the Council had had the option to adopt one of two consultation processes. Option one: upfront consultation of 21 days with various stakeholders – this option had not been pursued as it was felt the lockdown period would have significantly impeded consultation responses. Therefore, option two had been adopted - to implement a scheme under an experimental order, affording users of the network six months' to respond during the consultation period before a decision was made on whether or not to continue with the changes on a permanent basis.

In relation to information on the Council's website, it was agreed that the wording of the survey would be altered to ensure clarity and to include explicit

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instructions on how residents could submit comments in favour or in objection to the scheme. With regard to the availability of monitoring data, it was explained that information had been collated and presented in diagram format, illustrated on a month-by-month basis, and could be shared with councillors.

The Chair then invited local residents to address the meeting.

Mr Mohindra, a Slough resident, raised a number of points in relation to: increased traffic on the road network following the lifting of lockdown and people returning to work; congestion and 'rat-running' throughout the town; and lack of communication from the Council informing residents of the road changes. He asked if it was possible for the free electric bus service to be extended into Langley.

Mr Patel, a Slough resident, highlighted the importance of lowering carbon emissions and promoting sustainable modes of transport. He urged the Council to provide more electric vehicle charging points across the Borough and to work in collaboration with businesses to install points near to places of work. He said that during 2015 the Council had considered plans to implement bus lanes near to Farnham Road – he asked why the Council had chosen to implement the bus lane scheme now, rather than back in 2015. In concluding, he suggested that e-scooters be fitted with tracking devices to monitor and discourage users riding on the highway and using footpaths.

The Environmental Quality Team Manager reported that electrification was only part of the solution to improving air quality. He advised that promoting sustainable transport and modal shift was the only way to reduce the volume of vehicles on the road network. The Council was undertaking work to expand the electric vehicle charging point infrastructure across the Borough. Work was also underway to rollout an electric charging infrastructure for taxi vehicles use over the next two years'.

The Chair then invited councillors in attendance under Rule 30 to address the meeting.

Councillor Strutton raised concern that the joint scrutiny meeting had not been sufficiently promoted by the Council. He said that there had been a lack of communication with local businesses about the bus lane scheme. He asked if officers had been in contact with SEGRO (Slough Trading Estate) and for an indication of the number of employees currently attending office buildings each day. Concern was raised regarding the misuse of e-scooters and the lack of enforcement action. He asked if CCTV footage could be used to identify and prosecute people illegally misusing e-scooters. He commended the work of the Council's Environmental Quality Team to improve the air quality in Slough.

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With regard to the use of e-scooters, the Senior Transport Planner explained that the scheme was new and had been operational since 16<sup>th</sup> October 2020. Enforcement measures had been discussed with Thames Valley Police and an education campaign to inform residents about the correct use of the e-scooters would be rolled-out.

Prior to the meeting Councillor Wright had indicated a wish to speak under Rule 30. Due to a technical failure Councillor Wright lost connection and did not address the meeting.

Councillor Smith noted that the current bus lane scheme had been implemented under an experimental order, and therefore should involve the collection and analysis of data. He asked how many permanent air quality monitors there were located along areas of the A4 bus lanes both prior and during the Covid-19 lockdown period and how many there would be at the end of the experimental period. He asked if pre Covid air quality data would be recalibrated to take into account the lower background pollution levels during lockdown, due to fewer vehicles and aeroplanes travelling. He asked why Hackney Carriage drivers had initially been prohibited from using the bus lanes, however consideration was now being given to allowing them to use the lanes. He asked what evidence had been used to justify moving the cycle lanes off pavements / services lanes and locating them onto a shared lane with buses. He raised concern that this measure did not promote social distancing. He queried the approach to encourage residents to use public transport, whilst public health guidance to people was to avoid using public transport.

The Environmental Quality Team Manager reported that there were two air quality monitoring stations in Slough; one on Wellington Street and one on Bath Road. He explained that no additional monitoring devices would be implemented. Data already collected would be used as a base line and scientific analysis would be undertaken to determine the impact the bus lanes had had on air quality.

The Associate Director Operations Place explained that the primary remit of the EATF was to promote cycling and walking. Therefore, if infrastructure had been provided for other vehicle users this would have inhibited this aim, and would have made it difficult to demonstrate to the Department for Transport (DfT) the longer-term commitment to promoting active travel in Slough - which was necessary to receive tranche 2 funding.

Councillor Sharif said that Grove Academy had introduced bus passes for pupils. He suggested that some of the EATF be used to fund bus passes for all secondary aged pupils in Slough. He asked what age range e-scooters

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were intended for and if there was a minimum age requirement to hire the machines. He suggested that the Council considered providing separate cycle lanes, similar to schemes operated in European countries such as Holland and Belgium. He said the Bus Lane on Bath Road was not safe for cyclists, especially during the forthcoming winter months. In concluding, he raised concerns regarding traffic congestion, rat-running and air quality. He urged officers to make data in relation to air quality available to the public to demonstrate the benefits of the bus lanes.

The Senior Transport Officer explained that Grove Academy had funded bus passes for its pupils via allocated Section 106 monies. The EATF received from the DfT was required to be used to encourage active travel infrastructure improvements, and could not be used to fund bus passes for pupils. With regard to e-scooters, it was explained that the target market was young, fit individuals using the machines for short journeys. In relation to cyclist safety and the provision of segregated cycle lanes, it was explained that there was no funding available to deliver this proposal; however further consideration would be given to the concept design of the cycle infrastructure along the A4.

In concluding the meeting, the Chair invited Members to make recommendations.

**Resolved** – That Cabinet be requested to endorse the following:

- (a) The continuing review of the existing A4 bus and cycle lane scheme.
- (b) The monitoring of data available since the implementation of the scheme.
- (c) That the following be introduced:
  - Hackney carriages;
  - E-Scooters;
  - Motorbikes;
  - Private Hire Vehicles, any other authorised vehicles; and
  - Monday to Friday, peak time bus lane between) 7:00hrs – 10:00hrs and 15:00hrs -19:00hrs as part of the experimental scheme.
- (d) The proposed amendment to the Experimental Traffic Regulation Orders (ETRO) to reflect the changes above and reset the six months objection period, as set out by the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and the Local Authorities Traffic Order (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996.



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- (e) The continued monitoring of the scheme following amendments to the Experimental Traffic Regulation orders.
- (f) The Council takes into account existing objections as part of the consultation process.
- (g) The financial commitment for the scheme.
- (h) That the frequency of the new free electric bus service be increased to operate every half an hour, the free bus trial offer be extended beyond the initial two-three month period and the electric bus service be extended into the Langley areas.
- (i) That officers be asked to consider means of encouraging more people onto public transport, including: bus subsidy funding, extending the times bus passes can be used, improved bus route provision.
- (j) That officers be asked to consider bus provision for young people and how they can be supported to use sustainable transport options, taking into account the cost of public transport, provision of youth bus passes.
- (k) To improve traffic flow, the bus lanes where possible be moved from the A4 into service roads.
- (l) Allow Low Emission Vehicles to use the bus lanes in Slough.
- (m) Officers be asked to consider allowing Private Hire Vehicles to use the old bus lanes, on the basis that private hire drivers undertake a crucial role and had essentially become 'key workers' during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- (n) Officers be asked to review current 'pinch points' along the A4 bus route, in particular along the three turns to High Street Railway Bridge and the Sainsbury's roundabout. In addition, consideration be given to removing the bus lane from this section of highway (along both sides) to allow better traffic flow.
- (o) That the design proposals for the cycle lanes take into consideration the space that could be used off the highway to improve cycle provision.

Chair

(Note: The meeting opened at 6.32 pm and closed at 10.06 am)