

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Council

DATE: 24 September 2020

CONTACT OFFICER: Sushil Thobhani
(For all enquiries) Service Lead, Governance
(01753) 875036

WARD(S): All

PART I **FOR DECISION**

PETITION – ABOLISH THE BATH ROAD BUS LANE

1 Purpose of Report

To advise the Council of a Petition that has been received under the Council's Petitions Scheme. The Petition contains 5272 signatures, all of which were submitted online via the e-petition facility on the Council's website:

"We the undersigned petition the council to abolish the Bath Road Bus Lane. There has been no consultation with any residents, this bus lane just suddenly appeared a few days ago and is already causing misery and confusion and this is before traffic gets back to anything like normal."

2. Recommendation

Following debate, the Council is requested to resolve what action it wishes to take with regard to the Petition, noting the Officer's recommendation to continue to monitor outputs of the experimental phase of the A4 bus and cycle lane scheme to identify whether the scheme can be made permanent or removed.

3. The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan

3a. Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy Priorities

Increasing life expectancy by focussing on inequalities

- Active travel can play a crucial role in maintaining good health, preventing illness, supporting mental wellbeing and generally enabling people to be healthier and happier for longer.
- Improvements to air quality in the most affected areas could play an important role in increasing quality of life for people with respiratory disease and reducing Slough's health inequalities in the long term.

3b Five Year Plan Outcomes

The scheme was implemented to help deliver the following key actions from the Five Year Plan and the Major Infrastructure Projects Service Plan 2020-21.

- Slough will attract, retain and grow businesses and investment to provide opportunities for our residents - Ensure a fit for business transport infrastructure, by reducing congestion and making journey times more reliable and safer.
- Our people will be healthier – Through the facilitation of, and uplift in active travel. Build on success in making Slough safer, by incorporating road safety measures into all engineering schemes delivered across the Council.
- Slough children will grow up to be happy, healthy and successful. Enable children and young people to lead emotionally and physically healthy lives – by improving air quality through schemes that reduce congestion and improve safety at key locations.

4. **Other Implications**

(a) Financial

The cost of delivering the A4 scheme has exceeded the initial £60k budget although final costs are to be submitted. This cost will be met through the Emergency Active Travel Fund (EATF) Tranche 1 grant issued by government to support social distancing and active travel measures.

(b) Risk Management

The scheme is being assessed through safety audits and designer responses are being compiled which may result in some modifications to the current scheme.

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no Human Rights Act Implications associated with the recommendations of this report.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

An Equalities impact assessment has not been undertaken for the experimental Bus and Cycle Lane since the proposed scheme was implemented in response to the Governments call to Local Authorities to support social distancing and encourage more journeys by bicycle and foot. An Experimental Traffic Regulation Order was made on the 14th August 2020 to enable the Council to start the works and consultation process. As part of the consultation a further review through consultation feedback and other data collection methods will be undertaken to identify whether the scheme has had any impact on the community.

5. **Supporting Information**

- 5.1 Under the Council's published Petitions Scheme a Petition that contains 1500 or more signatures triggers a debate at Council.

Debate

- 5.2 The Petition Organiser has been invited to the meeting to speak on the Petition (up to five minutes) and the Petition will then be discussed by Members of the Council (a maximum of 15 minutes).

- 5.3 Following this discussion the Council will need to decide what action to take with regard to the Petition. Where the issue is one on which the Cabinet is required to make the final decision the Council will decide whether to make recommendations to inform that decision.
- 5.4 The Scheme indicates that the Council's response to a Petition will depend on what a petition asks for and how many people have signed it but may include one or more of the following;
- Taking the action requested in the Petition
 - considering the Petition at a Council Meeting
 - Holding an Inquiry
 - Commissioning relevant research
 - Organising a public meeting
 - Mounting a wider public consultation
 - Meeting with the Petition Organiser or representatives of signatories
 - Providing a written response outlining the Council's views on the subject
 - Referring the issue to the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee **OR**
 - Referring the issue to the relevant Committee/Cabinet
 - Consulting statutory partners and local service providers
 - Instigating discussions with the voluntary and community sectors
 - Making representations to Commercial or other Interests

Background

- 5.6 In response to Covid-19 and in preparation for the relaxation of lockdown restrictions, the government announced two tranches of the Emergency Active Travel Fund be made available to local authorities to facilitate the rapid introduction of active travel measures to support social distancing.
- 5.7 Within the context of this government guidance and preparing for the reopening of Slough, a Significant Decision (May 2020) was agreed which in the short term would enable the prioritisation of pedestrian and cycling journeys along the A4 between Dover Road and Uxbridge Road. Existing road space was proposed to be reallocated and designed to remove a single lane of east and westbound traffic; enabling pedestrians to use the entire footway which previously had been designated a shared pedestrian and cycle lane.
- 5.8 The A4 bus and cycle scheme was planned in part, to capture some of the unexpected positive impacts of the lockdown during where Slough recorded a significant drop in traffic flows and concomitant improvements to local air quality. Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) are situated in areas which do not meet national air quality objectives and put in place to protect people's health and the environment. Within Slough, 5 AQMAs are located around the M4, Tuns lane, Bath Road, Town Centre/A4 and Brands Hill/A4 and cover nearly 2,000 residential properties.
- 5.9 During lockdown, an approximate 70% traffic reduction was recorded at the Huntercombe Spur junction with a 50% reduction at Brands Hill/Junction 5. Based on modelled scenarios, the borough's five Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) indicated a reduction of between 30%-41% in NO₂ and a reduction of between 45%-59% in NO_x.

- 5.10 An integral part of this work has included adherence to the principles of Travel Demand Management, *Remode, Retime, Reroute and Reduce*. These principles allow SBC to build-in network resilience by framing a flexible approach, which can be adapted according to need and demand. An additional supporting grant related to Travel Demand Management was issued by government for this purpose and which was used to identify measures to support the reopening of schools. The A4 bus and cycle lane supported the aims of the Travel Demand Management and facilitated improved journeys for Home to School Transport, Public Bus Services plus additional bus services provided specifically for pupil travel.
- 5.11 Government guidance at the time indicated that journeys should be made by active travel modes (cycling, walking) or use of private car. The newly designed A4 bus and cycle lane has continued to allow for car use but has also optimised journeys for sustainable modes. By redistributing road space, SBC can respond flexibly to very specific circumstances. The scheme now facilitates direct routes for all modes and provides choices other than the private car.
- 5.12 The new scheme allows cyclists and buses onto the previously designated vehicle lane with freed space for pedestrians on footways. During the initial period of preparation of opening up the town although bus patronage reduced and services contracted, there has been a demand for bus services. Bus improvements will be realised including improved journey times and improved bus passenger satisfaction. Bus capacity had meant that on normal passenger services, social distancing continues to be observed however, for school dedicated buses that run a closed service, the bus can operate at full capacity.
- 5.13 To utilise the existing space most efficiently and in preparation for schools opening in September, SBC Transport and Education teams worked directly with school headteachers to understand how to 'spread the peak' and to provide resources to share with their school communities. The central message remained **Think about the way they travel. Choose active, sustainable modes where possible. Allow more time for their journeys and plan ahead.** Staggered opening times have been implemented, SBC staff have rescheduled, Home to School Transport options with exemptions applied to these vehicles to use the new bus lane, providing clear routes to school. In parallel, SBC officers liaise daily with public transport operators since school reopened to understand and communicate any issues. Currently four minibuses and drivers are on standby and can be deployed as necessary to provide an immediate response. This arrangement is working well with the minibus only deployed twice in the week since schools reopened.
- 5.14 It is expected that businesses will not be returning to a 'business-as-usual' model; with fewer staff required to attend offices daily, continuing to reduce the pressure on the transport network. However, the scheme has been designed over six sections, each with individually attached traffic regulation orders thereby permitting an immediate response if and when the situation demands. In terms of mitigation, measures to reduce potential rat-running have been designed but will only be deployed as needed.
- 5.15 The scheme has been introduced rapidly to address an unprecedented situation. In preparing for the relaxation of lockdown the A4 bus and cycle lane was shaped by time constraints which did not allow for public consultation before implementation. However, the scheme was delivered through an 18 month experimental traffic regulation order that gives residents an opportunity to formally make representations

in favour or against the A4 bus and cycle lane. During the trial period, the bus lane will remain enforceable to ensure the road works are managed efficiently. Without enforcement, the lane would be misused by motorists and no longer provide reassurance to potential cyclists that it is a safe, direct route.

- 5.16 Government continue to underline the need to prioritise sustainable modes. Significant funding opportunities will be made available in the upcoming period which will support local authorities to implement schemes that provide uplift in cycling and walking. Active travel provides several benefits including improvements to air quality and personal health. Forecast modelling based on future development opportunities also indicates that Slough's vision for a forward-looking 21st Century town is unachievable without addressing the demand for the travel by car and the resulting congestion. The A4 bus and cycle lane provide an opportunity to evaluate potential positive impacts while continuing to respond flexibly to unprecedented circumstances as necessary.

6. **Conclusion**

Members are requested to consider what action to take with regard to the petition.

7. **Appendices Attached**

- 'A' Monitoring report
- 'B' Experimental Traffic Regulation Orders
- 'C' Significant decision

8. **Background Papers**

Petition