

Closure of Racecourse Lane, Shrewsbury – Objections received within statutory consultation

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1. Summary

- 1.1 This briefing note is intended to provide background information to the Environment and Services Scrutiny Committee in response to objections received by Shropshire Council within the statutory consultation required to progress the above safety scheme. .
- 1.2 The scheme involves the closure of Racecourse Lane, Shrewsbury, at a point just south of the existing Lambourn Drive junction necessitating the construction of a turning head. A scheme plan is reproduced as **Appendix 1**.
- 1.3 New and revised Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) will be required in connection with the Prohibition of Motor Vehicles and revised waiting restrictions and these have been the subject of a statutory consultation period running from 7/4/16 to 28/4/16.
- 1.4 The statutory consultation was publicised with site notices, in the Shrewsbury Chronicle and on Shropshire Council's website. Plans were also deposited at Shrewsbury Library and the Shirehall. As a result of this 13 objections to the proposals were received (**see Appendix 2**) these being the subject of this report.
- 1.5 In addition to the above formal consultation, informal consultation was also undertaken in 2014 and 2016, the latter being from 26/2/16 to 11/3/16 just prior to the statutory consultation. This included an advance letter drop to approximately 260 local properties which access to/ from Racecourse Lane and a public exhibition which was held at Bicton Heath Community Centre on 26/2/16. The opportunity to fill in feedback forms was given and an online survey was also made available.
- 1.6 A total of 206 responses were received to this informal consultation of which 117 were from people who live/ work off Racecourse Lane. Of those 117 responses 65% supported the closure and there were 36

objections. Unsurprisingly there were 57 objections from people who do not live or work on Racecourse Lane and who are potentially using the lane as a short-cut.

- 1.7 All the feedback received was analysed and used to inform the forthcoming formal consultation described in 1.4 above. A Mouchel report was written summarising the informal consultation results and this is reproduced as **Appendix 3**.
- 1.8 In purely numerical terms the scale of objection to the statutory consultation is very modest. The number of objections received was 13 of which 3 were from the same household and 1 was not connected to Racecourse Lane. 3 households voiced their support for the proposals and it should be noted that more communications supporting the scheme have been received since the consultation has been completed.
- 1.9 If we consider that there are approximately 260 properties with direct access to/ from Racecourse Lane then the number of (Racecourse Lane connected) households that objected was only 10 out of 260 which is 3.85%.
- 1.10 This backs up the strong consensus established within the informal consultation where 65% of those (Racecourse Lane connected) households who responded were in favour of the proposal to close the road (76 in support, 36 against, 5 indifferent). This indicates that 36 (some of whom were likely to be from the same household) out of 260 properties objected, which equates to 13.85%, though in reality it is likely to be lower in view of multiple same-household responses.
- 1.11 This demonstrates strong support for the scheme which has, if anything, increased over the course of the informal and then formal consultation exercises.
- 1.12 Whilst we need to give due consideration to the legitimate objections and concerns that have been raised, analysis indicates that most of these, following a suitable period of post-scheme monitoring, could be mitigated against if required with the implementation of suitable additional measures.
- 1.13 It is not possible to currently ascertain how travel patterns would precisely change if the scheme was implemented. Initial investigations suggest however that current traffic along Racecourse Lane would disperse and we are confident that concerns raised regarding increased traffic flows past the school would be insignificant. Indeed, there are arguments to suggest that future traffic flows past the school could decrease.
- 1.14 With regard to the concerns raised relating to the inconvenience arising from increased local journey times these are considered insignificant when balanced against the negative impacts of through traffic using the lane. Racecourse Lane was never intended or designed to be a local

distributor road and it is substandard in this respect with limited carriageway width and poor footway and street lighting provision. There are many residential accesses onto the lane, also Oxon C.E. Primary School at the northern end and the Mytton Oak Medical Practice at the southern end all of which generate significant vehicle, pedestrian and cyclist movements which further increase safety hazards. There have been 3 slight injury personal injury accidents recorded on the lane over the last 5 years and according to residents there have been a number of cats and dogs killed over this time. In addition to these there have been many reported damage only accidents.

- 1.15 The adjacent Gains Park Way however, was built as a local distributor road. It is constructed to a 40mph design standard, with good street lighting and footway provision which is set back from the road. Residential properties are also sited well back from the road and the number of accesses onto the main road is limited. The average increase in journey length and time using Gains Park Way is not considered significant with a worst case scenario of approximately 1km extra distance and no more than 90 seconds extra journey time assuming a speed of 30mph. In most cases the effect will be far less than this and there is a strong argument therefore that the scheme benefits significantly outweigh any inconvenience arising from a marginal increase in local journey times.
- 1.16 Looking ahead, we have to consider the impact of the proposed Shrewsbury West Sustainable Urban Extension (SUE), formally adopted by Shropshire Council in December 2013. The SUE Masterplan includes proposals for the development of 720 new homes, up to 12 hectares of employment land, as well as a new expanded local centre to the north of Welshpool Road. Details of this proposal can be found at <http://www.shrewsburywest.org/> , alternatively, details of the outline planning application which is for mixed residential and employment/commercial uses can be found on Shropshire Council's website, reference 14/00246/OUT.
- 1.17 There is a strong argument to suggest that traffic flows along Racecourse Lane will significantly increase in the future if we do not proceed with this scheme. The proposal to close Racecourse Lane to through traffic presents the best way to mitigate against current traffic concerns, and going forward, any adverse traffic impacts to the residents of Racecourse Lane as a result of the strategic planning proposals contained within the SUE Masterplan.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The recommendation of this report is that the Planning Committee support the introduction of the proposed safety scheme. Post scheme monitoring can be undertaken to assess the impact of the scheme in terms of traffic flows, speeds and conflict. Further measures to mitigate against any adverse effects could be considered if required.

- 2.2 Under Part 8 of the Shropshire Council Constitution, delegated powers are given to specified Senior Officers to ratify Scrutiny Committee recommendations. In the case of this Environment and Services Report, the decision will be made by Chris Edwards, Head of Service, Infrastructure and Communities.

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3. Road Safety Policy

- 3.1 One objective of Shropshire Council's Road Safety Policy is to overcome community concerns regarding traffic speeds, according to the function, nature and use of the road (to deal with perception of danger if considered appropriate).
- 3.2 In dealing with community led concerns, Shropshire Council's Road Safety Policy enables town and parish councils to take a primary role in filtering road safety concerns generated by the local community. Members of the general public are encouraged to approach town and parish councils directly with any road safety concerns. Town and parish councils accept these concerns first and then submit those that they support (and consider there to be a level of shared community concern) to Shropshire Council.
- 3.3 Shropshire Council does not look to town and parish councils to submit desired solutions; just communication of road safety concerns i.e. issues affecting vehicle, pedestrian or cyclist safety. Traffic engineers then use expertise and a toolkit of possible measures to determine the best, and most appropriate, measure to mitigate concerns. This may not always be a speed restriction or traffic calming, in extreme cases where there is a strong justification, other measures may be considered such as in this case where a road closure is proposed. Further information on defining an appropriate scheme is contained later in this briefing note.
- 3.4 Community led concerns must have the support of: the Shropshire Council local member, the town or parish council, West Mercia Police, and the local Shropshire Council traffic engineer if they are to be put forward for prioritisation.

4. Defining an appropriate scheme

- 4.1 In developing potential schemes, Shropshire Council traffic engineers are required to give consideration to perceived danger and agree that a perception is 'fair'. Submissions made by town and parish councils are taken as being supported by a weight of community concern.
- 4.2 Road Safety Policy framework enables Shropshire Council traffic engineers to consider what traffic management measures will best address a defined problem taking account of road function, existing

traffic and accident data and community led concerns. Further liaison is typically undertaken with key stakeholders as part of this process.

- 4.3 The Road Safety design framework is based upon a 'toolkit' of measures available for use by Shropshire Council's traffic engineers, enabling individual sites of concern to be looked at and the most appropriate traffic management intervention for that site determined.

5. Closure of Racecourse Lane, Shrewsbury: Summary Report

- 5.1 The question as to whether to close Racecourse Lane has been ongoing for several decades. Successive Local Members, the former Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council (SABC) and Shrewsbury Town Council (STC) have regularly received complaints from local residents calling for action to address their safety concerns arising from increasing traffic flows and speeds along the lane.

- 5.2 Recent development to the south of Racecourse Lane along Mytton Oak Road has resulted in the construction of a roundabout access to the southern end of Racecourse Lane. Some local residents perceive the improved access and increased residential development in that area to have added to the speed and volume of traffic along the lane. The development of the old Shelton Hospital site (Leaton Park) immediately to the east of Racecourse Lane has added to these safety concerns as has, looking forward, the widely publicised Shrewsbury West SUE proposals described in Section 1.16 of this report.

- 5.3 In order to evaluate residents' concerns over traffic increases, a traffic survey was undertaken earlier this year to allow comparison with traffic surveys which were undertaken on Racecourse Lane in 2007 and 2009. These are summarised below:

2007 – 85th percentile speeds 33mph, mean (average) speeds 27mph.
Average daily traffic flow 1413 vehicles.

2009 – 85th percentile speeds 33mph, mean (average) speeds 27mph.
Average daily traffic flow 1360 vehicles.

2016 – 85th percentile speeds 31mph, mean (average) speeds 25mph.
Average daily traffic flow 1534 vehicles.

These confirm residents' perceptions that traffic flows have increased showing an increase of 12.8% from 2009 to 2016.

- 5.4 The surveyed traffic speeds have actually shown a slight drop in that time however it needs to be emphasised that the 2mph reduction in speeds is statistically not too significant and it is not unusual to see slight variance within traffic surveys over time at the same site. It is also worth emphasising that the 2016 survey was taken at a slightly different location to the previous ones. The 2016 survey location was just to the

north of the Lambourn Drive junction whilst the earlier ones were undertaken in the area of the school.

- 5.5 In view of the above it can be seen that vehicle speeds have remained consistent along Racecourse Lane over the last 9 years. Whilst the results, on the face of it, show a good compliance with the prevailing 30mph speed limit, analysis of the survey results indicates there are still a significant number of motorists who drive well in excess of the speed limit. On average, there are approximately 10 motorists per day who exceed 45mph and a small percentage of these have been recorded at speeds of between 55 and 60mph. It is this (admittedly small) percentage of irresponsible motorists who contribute most to the safety concerns of local residents and who impact adversely on their quality of life.
- 5.6 All of the above factors have led to robust canvassing from many local residents through the Local Member which has intensified over the last couple of years. This has led to the design and construction of a suitable safety scheme being prioritised through Shropshire Council's Road Safety Policy. The various consultation exercises which were held to inform the design process (see Section 1 of this report) established that a road closure was the preferred option. Whilst other options, such as traffic calming, were considered and discussed with local residents, it was made clear by the majority of consultees that they favoured a total road closure as this was the only way to reduce traffic flows in view of the ongoing and proposed developments in the area.
- 5.7 Throughout the design process, undertaken by Shropshire Council's term consultant Mouchel, public engagement and consultation played a major part in guiding the scheme and the Local Member also liaised closely with local residents.
- 5.8 The preliminary design of the preferred option of a road closure was presented to consultees at the public exhibition held on 26/2/16 as detailed in Sections 1.5 and 1.6 of this report. Following the strong support received for the scheme, detailed design was progressed and the statutory consultation as detailed in Sections 1.3 and 1.4 of this report was progressed.
- 5.9 Copies of the 13 objections to the proposals are reproduced as **Appendix 2**. In summary however, of the 13 objections, 1 was from Oxon C.E. Primary School, the others were from private households. Of these 3 were from the same household and one was not connected to Racecourse Lane (a Redwood park resident whose children attend Oxon School). 3 households voiced their support for the proposals. If we consider that there are approximately 260 properties with direct access to/ from Racecourse Lane then the number of (Racecourse Lane connected) households that objected was 10 out of 260 which is 3.85%.

5.10 Analysis of the objections from the 13 respondents highlights the following main concerns:

- A Shortage of time to respond and poor notice of the statutory consultation.
- B Misleading consultation and analysis of results.
- C Requirement for and safety implications of coach turning in Lambourn Drive.
- D Lack of more appropriate and safer school parking locations.
- E Increase in traffic congestion and safety issues around school and northern end of Racecourse Lane if scheme is introduced.
- F Exit onto Welshpool Road difficult.
- G Inconvenience/ extra journey time.
- H Preference for having closure north of Lambourn Drive.
- I Increase in turning traffic/ parking/ traffic in Lambourn Drive.
- J Preference for traffic calming instead of closure.
- K Better pedestrian routes required including link from new Leaton Park development.

5.11 Responses to the above concerns are as follows:

- A As detailed in Sections 1.3 and 1.4 of this report a comprehensive statutory consultation was undertaken over a 21 day period from 7/4/16 to 28/4/16. Site notices were maintained throughout this period and this complies with legal requirements.
- B As detailed in Sections 1.3 and 1.4 various opportunities for giving feedback were given and a detailed analysis of this was undertaken in reports all of which was made available within the public domain.
- C A high standard turning head which meets all design standards for large vehicles is proposed within the scheme. Where possible however, there would be safety benefits in rescheduling school coaches and other large vehicles whenever possible so they access the site outside peak school times. Consideration could be given to examining the possibility of introducing lockable bollards in the existing lay-by on Racecourse Lane within the safety scheme. The bollards could be used by the school to allow more accessible coach parking with greater control over timing however consideration should also be given to utilising other alternative school parking sites such as Pensfold car park, Gains Avenue, The Onslow P.H. car park or The Grapes P.H. car park whenever possible.
- D As detailed in C above there are alternative locations for school parking which are currently underutilised. It is acknowledged that there has recently been some development of Pensfold carpark however despite the reduced area it still generally has spare capacity.
- E It is acknowledged that there is currently some congestion at peak school times at the northern end of the lane in the area of the school. There may initially be continuing issues if the scheme is implemented, however we consider this will soon diminish once

motorists understand they have to revise their travel patterns to avoid delays and disruption. As detailed in points C and D above, there are alternative parking locations which are currently underutilised and which are no more than 3 to 4 minutes walk from the school. The footway links to and from these parking areas are of a good standard and often away from vehicular traffic so there is the opportunity for increased walking to school (Park and Stride) which fits in with the health, environmental and sustainability objectives of the School Travel Plan as well as giving the potential for improving congestion and safety.

F If school traffic finds exiting onto Welshpool Road problematic this will also be an encouragement for them to revise their travel pattern as in E above. In the longer term it should also be recognised that with the adoption of the Shrewsbury West SUE Masterplan and construction of the proposed Oxon Relief Road, Welshpool Road would no longer be the main westbound arterial route and would not carry through traffic. The substantial reduction in traffic using it would make exiting this junction much easier.

G As detailed in Section 1.15 of this report, increases in journey time will be insignificant. The worst case scenario will be an additional 1 km in journey length equating to an extra 90 seconds based on a 30mph travelling speed, however in most cases it will be less than this.

H The option for having the closure north of Lambourn Drive was investigated however it was not technically feasible due to existing ground levels and the incidence of a number of mature trees with Tree Preservation Orders.

I This already occurs and whilst it is acknowledged there may be a marginal increase in this in the short term it is not considered it will be a significant concern. It is believed traffic will disperse to different locations once new travel patterns are established and there may even be a reduction in the current traffic using Lambourn Drive.

J Traffic calming was considered as an option within the design process and it was also discussed in detail within all of the informal consultation that was undertaken. The feedback received during consultation was a road closure was overwhelmingly the preferred option.

K It is acknowledged that footway provision is substandard along some lengths of Racecourse Lane. However, there are good footway links to and from the school away from Racecourse Lane which are currently underutilised. Information about these are included in the Oxon School Travel Plan and use of these footpaths should be encouraged. It should be noted that a new footway link from the new Leaton Park development is due to be implemented within developer plans and it is hoped this can be introduced as soon as possible.

6. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

6.1 Risks

- The objections received and challenge to the implementation of this scheme could also be seen as a challenge to the procedures and decision making processes undertaken by SC officers when developing highway safety schemes. This could undermine how similar requests are dealt with by Shropshire Council in the future.
- Lack of a transparent process and inconsistencies across the County could pose a risk to the reputation of the authority.
- Pursuit of less appropriate highway measures could raise expectations at other locations. Shropshire has a diverse highway network and schemes need to be appropriate to highway function and user needs.

6.2 Opportunities

- A decision to support the recommendation of this report will reinforce the need for a consistent approach to scheme development and the use of expertise both within Shropshire Council and outside through the use of partnership organisations.
- Such an approach will develop the most appropriate intervention for a given concern within any political, technical or financial constraints.

6.3 Human Rights

- There are not considered to be any substantive human rights implications.

6.4 Equalities

- This scheme was primarily developed to address the concerns raised relating to the safety of residents and in particular vulnerable road users such as the elderly, the young, pedestrians and cyclists. Any decision to reduce the level of proposed intervention within the scheme and therefore the effectiveness of the scheme by increasing traffic speeds and volumes would adversely impact on children and vulnerable adults. This would have implications under the Equalities Act.

7. Financial Implications

There are not currently considered to be any direct or immediate financial implications in not progressing with the scheme. However, a capital budgetary provision for the scheme has been made within the current financial year and if the scheme does not progress at this late stage then there may be difficulties in substituting another scheme in its place. Any unspent capital budget at the end of this financial year cannot be accrued, unlike in previous years, and would consequently be lost.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1 Demonstrable strong local support is apparent for the scheme and appropriate informal and formal consultation with stakeholders and local residents has been undertaken.
- 8.2 The objections received can be mitigated against if post scheme monitoring indicates they are significant.
- 8.3 There is a strong argument that traffic flows along Racecourse Lane will significantly increase in the future if we do not proceed with this scheme. The proposal to close Racecourse Lane to through traffic presents the best way to mitigate against current traffic concerns, and going forward, any adverse traffic impacts to the residents of Racecourse Lane as a result of the strategic planning proposals contained within the SUE Masterplan.
- 8.4 Clearly, whatever decision is made there will be some residents and stakeholders who will be unhappy with the outcome. However, the balance of evidence substantially supports the introduction of the proposed scheme.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

- Shrewsbury West – Developing new homes for local residents:
<http://www.shrewsburywest.org/>
- Outline planning application reference 14/00246/OUT.

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Simon Jones – Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport

Local Member

Peter Adams

Appendices

- 1 Proposed Road Closure – Consultation Plan
- 2 Objections received to statutory consultation.
- 3 Proposed Road Closure Consultation Results Summary March 2016