

HEADINGTON LIBERAL DEMOCRAT COUNCILLORS' SUBMISSION TO LONDON ROAD CONSULTATION (PHASE II)

Date: 8th May 2009

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We recommend that the proposals should be placed within the wider need to regenerate Headington centre. We recommend establishing a partnership body, involving the local authorities, traders and residents' representatives, to take forward these strategic issues.
2. We recommend that Phase II proceeds only when a full investigation into the problems of Phase I has identified the lessons to be learnt and a framework put in place to ensure the mistakes will not be repeated.
3. We encourage the introduction of a new crossing on London Road and we recommend that it is placed next to Osler Road.
4. We also recommend retaining the underpass for those who wish to use it. In addition, we recommend that there are improved railings and safety measures for the underpass.
5. We recommend that the re-paving of the centre, both on London Rd and beyond, is seen as an urgent priority in these plans.
6. We recommend the yellow boxes at junctions are retained in all cases.
7. We recommend that the proposals for raised junctions are reviewed. We recommend that the details of the bus stop layouts is reviewed within the principles identified.
8. We welcome the review of the phasing of the London Road/Windmill Road junction which is currently being undertaken following our highlighting of residents' concerns.
9. We recommend that the opportunity is taken to review the use of buses down Osler Road.
10. We recommend that the neighbouring roads are given full attention as part of the wider regeneration of the centre.

INTRODUCTION

This submission is the response of the Liberal Democrat Councillors for Headington to the proposals for Phase II of London Road. In formulating a submission, we surveyed residents of Headington ward and their replies have informed the views expressed here. The questions in that survey were intentionally different from those asked on the County's own form and went wider than the details of the present plans. When speaking to residents, we did encourage them to respond both to our survey and the County's questionnaire. The relevant outline figures from the LibDem survey are included as an appendix.

The submission is divided into the following sections:

Overview: a vision for Headington

Pedestrian Crossings

Street Scene

Junctions

Parking, bus stops and taxi rank

Impact on neighbouring roads

Conclusion

Appendix: 'What do you want in your District Centre?' Survey Responses

OVERVIEW: A VISION FOR HEADINGTON

We know from talking to many residents that they want to see their district centre improve. Some already believe that Headington centre is on the up. It is a centre, where people work and shop, stop to eat or drink – not just a place people pass through on the coach or bus. The proposals for London Road must form part of the wider regeneration of the area: they must support it, not hinder it.

We must reiterate what Headington's LibDem Councillors said in our submission to the original outline plans for the London Road: the approach to this area needs to be strategic and co-ordinated. It needs to take into account not just London Road but also the impact on neighbouring roads, like Osler Rd and Old High St. What's more a single agency can not deal with all the issues. It demands working in partnership between the County, the City, bus companies, traders, residents and their representatives. At its core, the present proposals are about highway engineering but they should be part of a wider campaign to improve Headington district centre. Though the plans talk of an aim to 'enhance the Headington shopping area', we doubt that the Councillors presently running County Hall have the vision to achieve this. What is urgently needed is not just a stakeholder group meeting irregularly but a partnership body empowered to take forward these strategic issues.

We have also found widespread concern about how the roadworks of the district centre will be managed. This is unsurprising following the problems with Phase I of the London Rd 'improvements'. There is real anger among Headington residents about the over-run of those works and the avoidable annoyances they caused, which seem to have occurred every week. It is our recommendation that before any further works in the area are agreed, a full and open investigation needs to be made of the problems between the County and their contractors in Phase I. Only when the lessons have been identified and learnt should there be any agreement to move ahead with Phase II.

Recommendations

We recommend that the proposals should be placed within the wider need to regenerate Headington centre. We recommend establishing a partnership body, involving the local authorities, traders and residents' representatives, to take forward these strategic issues.

We recommend that Phase II proceeds only when a full investigation into the problems of Phase I has identified the lessons to be learnt and a framework put in place to ensure the mistakes will not be repeated.

PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS

Much of the media attention has focussed, at this stage as before, on the issue of pedestrian crossings in the area and, in particular, the future of the underpass. The first three questions of our survey were designed to take a wider view of these issues. We will look at each in the order they were asked.

There was significant support for a new crossing: 74% in favour. Judging from the following answers given, some of those who voted against a new crossing did so because they were concerned about the impact it might have on the underpass.

We asked those who were in favour of a crossing where they would like it. We presented two options: just west of Osler Road where the temporary crossing was recently, or in place of the underpass. We also encouraged respondents to make their own suggestions. Of those replying, 57% wanted it next to Osler Road and 36% in place of the underpass. Other suggestions focussed on the area just beyond Windmill Road with requests for another crossing in that area.

The third question was whether residents agreed with the Conservatives' proposal to block in the underpass. This is an issue that arouses strong opinion on both sides. Some respondents consider it dangerous and positively want to see it go. Others expressed anger at the proposal and many said that they used it personally. The overall figures in response were 36% in favour of its removal with 61% wanting to see it stay.

In formulating our response to this part of the proposal, we have taken into account those figures and the following observations:

1. There are clearly some people who do not want to use the underpass and there needs to be a facility for those people.
2. Equally, there is a group of pedestrians, mainly but not only elderly or partially sighted, who prefer to use the underpass. They feel safer crossing away from the rush of the road. Neither a pelican nor a zebra crossing would serve as well this group of pedestrians.

3. The temporary crossing near Osler Road proved popular, perhaps unexpectedly. It is clearly on a line of travel for many pedestrians. Having a crossing there also binds together the district centre shopping area which effectively starts with the pubs between Lime Walk and New High St and the parade just after the garage.
4. There has been a suggestion that removing the underpass would create extra space for pedestrians along the London Road. If a usable space where, say, market stalls could be placed were to be made available that could be a significant benefit. However, even if the road layout were shifted to accommodate that space all on one side of the London Road, it would appear to be too small to provide such a civic space.
5. The cost of blocking in the underpass would, in itself, be considerable.

Recommendations

We encourage the introduction of a new crossing on London Road and we recommend that it is placed next to Osler Road.

We also recommend retaining the underpass for those who wish to use it. In addition, we recommend that there are improved railings and safety measures for the underpass.

STREET SCENE

The state of the pavements in parts of London Road is a disgrace. Only last week, a 79-year-old resident had to go to hospital having slipped on the uneven surface. We welcome the intention to re-lay the public pavements – this can not be done soon enough.

We also appreciate that much of the pedestrian area is actually private forecourts, especially on the north side of London Road. It is also an issue on Windmill Road. These works give a real opportunity to re-lay all of the pedestrian area, if owners buy in to the scheme. It is not clear what discussions have been had with the owners and what the outcomes are. It is essential that the next report clarifies the situation for each of the forecourts.

The shopping area also extends beyond London Road, down Windmill Road and Old High Street. We recommend that improved paving is also provided for these areas.

In our survey, we asked what residents considered would improve the area. Many commented specifically about the state of the pavements. Of the two stated options for improvements – better lighting and more trees – there was much higher support (3:1) for extra planting. In addition, a significant number of extra comments about floral displays. At the same time, a concern was repeatedly expressed about clutter on the pavements.

The issue of clutter is one which needs a co-ordinated approach. For instance, there are quite rightly requests for extra cycle-parking space. However, cycle racks naturally attract abandoned or damaged cycles which add to the sense of clutter. A better protocol needs to be put in place, working with the City Council, to ensure efficient removal of bicycles which have been abandoned.

Recommendation

We recommend that the re-paving of the centre, both on London Rd and beyond, is seen as an urgent priority in these plans.

JUNCTIONS

We are concerned to see the removal of the yellow boxes outside junctions, particularly Stephen Road and Osler Road, as well as Kennett Road (and also, outside Headington ward, Holyoake Road). We recommend that these are retained.

We also question the proposals for raised junctions. If there is to be a new pedestrian crossing near Osler Road, it would be sensible to have that raised, but the plans for both that junction and for the main carrefour at Windmill Road present very large raised area which would surely not have the desired traffic-calming effect. These seems to us to be a waste of money.

There has also been concern about the present phasing of the traffic lights at the main junction which now creates difficulties for right-turning cars and, as a consequence, danger for pedestrians. However, we asked specifically about this in our survey: 55% voted to retain and 45% to change it.

Recommendations

We recommend the yellow boxes at junctions are retained in all cases.

We recommend that the proposals for raised junctions are reviewed.

We welcome the review of the phasing of the London Road/Windmill Road junction which is currently being undertaken following our highlighting of residents' concerns.

PARKING, BUS STOPS AND TAXI RANK

We want as many people as possible to be encouraged to come by public transport. But we know that for some of the shops passing trade is important and so we welcome the moderate increase in the number of short-stay spaces. Headington's two car-parks also need to be well sign-posted.

We also welcome the intention to improve bus stops and separate coach and bus stops. Our survey suggests that this is popular. We have some concerns about the detail. For instance:

1. Space is lost in two places on the north side of London Road, just past Osler Road and Windmill Road, by positioning of a new tree. While this is clearly intended to separate the bus stop from the parking area, it may simply perpetuate the present problem of manoeuvring for buses
2. The disabled bays on the north side just past Windmill Road might better be placed next to the bus stops, as they are less likely to be used by inconsiderate drivers
3. The coach stop on the south side of London Road, east of Windmill Road, while good in principle, is likely to be too small
4. The moving of the taxi rank in itself may not be a problem, but the decrease in its size is a concern

Recommendations

We recommend that the details of the bus stop layouts is reviewed within the principles identified.

IMPACT ON NEIGHBOURING ROADS

As mentioned above, the local councillors are concerned about the impact the changes on London Road will have on the surrounding streets. These works should be seen as an opportunity to look more widely at Headington area. There are two particular issues in the area covered by Phase II that are top of the list:

Osler Road – the introduction of buses onto this quiet residential street continues to be highly controversial. The number of buses has increased, with empty buses sometimes using the route and others which are unscheduled using it. As the rationale for using that road was said to be hold-ups on the London Road, the time is surely right to review that bus use of that road and for the County actively to discourage it. This would not only improve the life of residents on Osler Road, it would re-instate buses on Headley Way, where people are crying out for a return of buses to up and down the top half of the road.

Old High Street – with the arrival of Waitrose, and with increasing traffic pressure in Old Headington village, there is a need to consider the state of the whole of this road. We are in discussions with Waitrose and the City Council about improving the car-park, and better signage should be part of that. The road itself deserves attention. The proposal to increase slightly pavement space at the London Rd end is controversial with residents. What is needed is more consideration for the whole road and, in particular, the layout of the

junction at the top of the road with St Andrew's Road. I know that the Friends of Old Headington have been in discussion with County officers about this.

Recommendations

We recommend that the opportunity is taken to review the use of buses down Osler Road.

We recommend that the neighbouring roads are given full attention as part of the wider regeneration of the centre.

CONCLUSION

We should genuinely like to thank the officers involved in preparing the proposals for the open and engaged approach to consultation that has been shown so far. This has been a significant improvement on other consultations undertaken by the County Council in recent years. We hope that that openness will continue and will be reflected in changes to the proposals at their next iteration.

Submitted on behalf of: Cllrs Altaf Khan, Gail Bones, David Rundle and Ruth Wilkinson

APPENDIX: 'WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM YOUR DISTRICT CENTRE?' SURVEY RESPONSES

The Liberal Democrat councillors surveyed all of Headington Ward during from late March until the end of April. The results to date (and they are still coming in) show a response rate of just over 10%. The data below provides a synopsis of the questions and the results which are directly relevant to Phase II of the London Road scheme.

Would you like to see another crossing on London Road?

Yes: 74%

No: 26%

If yes, where would you like to see it?

Next to Osler Road where the temporary stop was: 57%

In place of underpass: 36%

Other: 7% (most respondents making a suggestion wanted one beyond Windmill Road)

The Conservative County Council is proposing to block in the underpass. Do you support getting rid of it?

Yes: 36%

No: 61%

Unsure: 3%

Streetscene

What do you think would improve the shopping area?

Better street lights: 17%

More trees: 53%

Other: top issues were re-paving, de-clutter, changes in shops

Traffic Lights

The County proposes to keep the sequence of the lights at London Rd junction the same. Do you agree?

Yes: 55%

No: 45%

The County is looking at changing the layout of bus stops. How would you like to see them altered?

Separate London / airport coaches from local buses: 46%

Increase space for buses near Bury Knowle Park: 48%

Increase space for buses on London Rd near Starbucks: 41%