

OxPA Meeting 22.4.2014 St Aldates Room, Town Hall, 7 pm to 8.30 pm.

Guest speaker County Councillor David Nimmo Smith, Cabinet Member for Environment (including Transport), and Chair of the County's Transport Decisions Committee.

Meeting of OxPA, Cyclox and the Civic Society, chaired by Sushila Dhall of OxPA

Before opening the meeting for discussion, Councillor Nimmo-Smith (DNS) outlined the transport projects currently underway or planned to meet the projected needs of increased economic development within the county. Places affected include Frideswide Square, the railway station, Oxpens, Westgate, Queen Street, St Aldates, Pembroke Street, St Giles, The Plain, Northern Gateway, Barton Park, Oxford Parkway (Water Eaton) Park & Ride etc. He stressed the need for a holistic approach to integrate the often conflicting requirements of health, the local economy, and environment. His priority in developing transport policy is economic development and to keep and attract business. An additional highly pressing need is to reduce air pollution while maintaining good access to the city by public transport. He also wishes to provide for and maintain "choice" by individuals in their use of private or public transport. An example of a holistic view is the need for travellers arriving by rail to enjoy the experience of the gateway spaces at the station frontage and Frideswide Square as they move into the city. He explained that Revenue streams of funding (mainly Council tax) are used for regular expenditures such as highway maintenance, while Capital projects are largely funded by Government and/or developer contributions.

1. Choice: an audience member pointed out that "unfettered choice" is not sustainable. If too many people make bad choices, unjust damage is inflicted on everyone else: "*...some people's choices have a disproportionately negative effect on others*". DNS indicated that when he talks of choice, quite often that choice is not there due to inadequate public transport alternatives to driving, or routes too hazardous to cycle along due to heavy motorised traffic. He cited the example from his own experience of the absence of a through bus service from Henley to Oxford. This prevented him from choosing public transport for that journey.

2. Pollution: from the floor it was suggested that if the councils are serious about improving air quality, to stop breaking EU legislation, the number of vehicles passing through the centre must be reduced. Large sums are collected by fining motorists illegally passing the bus gates during daytime, so this shows that penalties are not high enough. The county collects the revenue but pedestrians and cyclists still have to put up with excess traffic and poor air quality.

3. Car parking: although city car parking costs quite a lot, they still attract enough custom to make a profit. An audience member suggested that fees might therefore be raised further.

4. Station redevelopment and enlargement: DNS said that County officers and Network Rail planners are aware of the need for both more headroom and carriageway width under Botley Road Bridge; the road is to be lowered; for the benefit of double-decker buses. There was no comment about the width, which is vitally necessary for cycle lanes.

5. Hythe Bridge Street and Park End Street: DNS indicated that the County Council is aware of the need to improve pedestrian and cycling routes between the rail station and the city centre, particularly vital for visitors. This will be part of the Frideswide Square redesign.

6. Frideswide Square: the danger to cyclists on the planned roundabouts was reiterated very strongly by members of Cyclox.

7. Pavement parking: DNS promised to look into the call for clarification of laws on pavement parking¹, in view of the recent appeal from the Guide Dogs charity. <https://m.guidedogs.org.uk/guide-dogs-cymru/campaigns/pavement-parking/#.U1f0LflkTOR>

8. Consultation: DNS assured the meeting that he would encourage his officers to seek our opinions and make use of the expertise available in Cyclox and OxPA in transport consultations. He does assume that objections and comments made during consultations will be faithfully transmitted in Officers' reports to him about projects and schemes. Generally he confines himself to reading the reports in summary form, although the full reports are always made available to him. The summary does not list the formal objections.

9. St Giles: DNS promised to take a walkabout with OxPA to understand our concerns. It was suggested that an experimental widening of the central refuge could be carried out quite cheaply and soon to inform the design of more extensive improvements.

10. B4044 Eynsham to Botley cyclepath: audience members presented strong arguments in favour of providing a safe route from for commuters and others by bicycle and on foot. DNS said that for any scheme the number of people who are likely to benefit has to be weighed against the cost. Central government funding would be needed, but he considers that this proposed cyclepath is neither high on the government's agenda nor locally. In response to a question about increasing the investment in cycling to a dependable long-term £10 per head per annum, DNS said that in Cabinet discussions about funding he relies primarily on arguments about benefit to the County's economic prosperity.

11. Public Health: in response to a question about the recent transfer of public health spending to become a County responsibility, DNS said he is lobbying for more money to spend on health-improving schemes to increase active travel.

12. The Plain: Officers had commented, and DNS agreed, that bus companies are reluctant to accept delays, possibly of up to five minutes at peak times, that singling of the carriageway entering the Plain from Magdalen Bridge would cause. It was noted that long

¹ Post-meeting note: there is an extensive account of the muddled history of pavement parking legislation at <http://pedestrianliberation.org/the-law-2/>. Department for Transport guidance sets out clear minimum widths to allow access for pedestrians on a footway - www.dft.gov.uk/transportforyou/access/peti/inclusivemobility- which reads (page 3) "A clear width of 2000mm allows two wheelchairs to pass one another comfortably. This should be regarded as the minimum under normal circumstances. Where this is not possible because of physical constraints 1500mm could be regarded as the minimum acceptable under most circumstances, giving sufficient space for a wheelchair user and a walker to pass one another. The absolute minimum, where there is an obstacle, should be 1000mm clear space. The maximum length of restricted width should be 6 metres (see also Section 8.3). If there are local restrictions or obstacles causing this sort of reduction in width they should be grouped in a logical and regular pattern to assist visually impaired people. It is also recommended that there should be minimum widths of 3000mm at bus stops and 3500mm to 4500mm by shops though it is recognized that available space will not always be sufficient to achieve these dimensions.

The DfT's Manual for *Streets* <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/sustainable/manforstreets/pdfmanforstreets.pdf> (2007) sets more challenging suggested minimum widths: p.68 reads "There is no maximum width for footways. In lightly used streets (such as those with a purely residential function), the minimum unobstructed width for pedestrians should generally be 2 m. Additional width should be considered between the footway and a heavily used carriageway, or adjacent to gathering places, such as schools and shops.

Living Streets also suggest that the width of the pavement was sufficient for wheelchairs / prams etc to pass each other and note a non-statutory code of practice drawn up by a consortium of Merseyside Councils on disabled access which notes that pavement parking is a hazard (see www.accesscode.info/external/5_17.htm)

delays continue to be caused by inefficient ticketing practices, despite the recent introduction of cross-ticketing.

13. Local Transport Plan aims: an audience member highlighted that Active Travel in the County is one of the four overarching aims of the current LTP². This aim does not appear to receive the priority it deserves.

Councillor Nimmo Smith was warmly thanked for giving his time and coming to engage in dialogue with us about transport in Oxford and we look forward to future cooperation.

² The four Goals are:

** to support the local economy and the growth and competitiveness of the county;*

** to make it easier to get around the county and improve access to jobs and services for all by offering real choice;*

** to reduce the impact of transport on the environment and help tackle climate change; and*

** to promote healthy, safe and sustainable travel.*

See Chapter One of LTP3, at <http://snipurl.com/oxonltp3> [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk]). The Table on page 6 shows that throughout the County the Council has a High ambition to “Develop and increase cycling and walking for local journeys, recreation and health”.