

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Scrutiny Committee



held on Thursday, 25 November 2021 at 6.00 pm
at 135 Eastern Avenue, Milton Park, OX14 4SB

The meeting was broadcasted online and can be watched here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qfm110qLSUM>

Open to the public, including the press

Committee members, present in the meeting room:

Councillors: Nathan Boyd (Chair), Jerry Avery, Hayleigh Gascoigne, Max Thompson, Eric de la Harpe, Ben Mabbett, Patrick O'Leary and;

Cabinet members: Councillors Debby Hallett and Bethia Thomas (both remote)

Officers: Harry Barrington-Mountford, Adrian Duffield, Adrianna Partridge (in person), Candida Mckelvey, Vicky Aston, Andrew Lane and Emma Turner

Guests: Alan Bennett (guest speaker, in person), Cllr Andrew Crawford (guest speaker, Council member in person), Keith Stenning (Oxfordshire County Council) and Greg Stone (National Highways)

Note: Committee members and two supporting officers were present in person, with the option for officers and other attendees to join the hybrid meeting via MS Teams.

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillors David Grant and Ron Batstone.

1. Declarations of interest

None.

1. Urgent business and chair's announcements

The Chair ran through hybrid meeting housekeeping. Chair decided to move the public participation item to the A34 item, so that the public speakers present could speak directly ahead of the item they were discussing.

1. Notes of the last meeting

The committee noted the notes of 12 October 2021.

1. Work schedule and dates for all Vale scrutiny meetings

The Chair will inform the committee of any changes as they occur, some items will be moved around. There may be an additional meeting in early 2022 to manage workload, to be confirmed. Chair added that meetings would be informal where possible over the winter, but some items will require a formal meeting. The format of each meeting will be confirmed in due course.

1. Public participation

Chair confirmed that two public speakers were present in person to speak to item 7, A34 diversion rerouting. The speakers were Councillor Andrew Crawford, Ward member for Wantage, and Dr Alan Bennett, who was a representative of a local residents group, Wantage Traffic Diversion Group.

The speakers would speak at the beginning of item 7 after formal introductions, as permitted by committee.

Councillor Crawford, as a council member, was able to participate and contribute to the item with questions, and helping to answer any questions, as allowed by Chair.

1. A34 diversion routing

Councillor Debby Hallett, as Cabinet member for Planning Policy, introduced the report that was written in the Planning Policy Team. The council had no responsibility for diversions however scrutiny committee were asked to review this as there was some negative impact on local residents who live on the diversion routes.

The report provided an introduction to the issue of night-time diversions and some maps of affected routes. The diversions were not under council control, but the committee may suggest alternative options to National Highways to review, and also Oxfordshire County Council (OCC), who have responsibility for the maintenance of routes. Two officers from these organisations were invited and present to help answer questions.

Councillor Hallett invited guest officers to introduce themselves. Keith Stenning represented Oxfordshire County Council, as the Head of Service for Network Management, and coordination of roadworks. Greg Stone represented National Highways (formerly Highways England), as Route Manager for the A34. He was responsible for current and future needs of the network.

Chair invited the guest speakers to speak. Firstly, Cllr Andrew Crawford spoke to the committee to express his disappointment in the rerouting, which impacted residents who live close to the road. He stressed that this was not about temporary and emergency rerouting but planned night-time closures.

He reported that 25 closures over 3 months on single carriageway roads were disruptive to residents, with a high volume of traffic and large vehicles such as HGV's using the diversion.

He asked scrutiny committee to consider what evidence exists to justify the rerouting. Why was contraflow not used? Councillor Crawford believed that a comprehensive risk assessment was required. There were concerns about road safety – dark roads, blind bends, parked cars. The added journey time for drivers may encourage speeding to make up time. What influence does OCC have to help?

Dr Bennett spoke to the committee. He represented 34 households, and a local group called the Wantage Traffic Diversions group. Dr Bennett felt frustrated by the lack of response from OCC and National Highways. The residents group had protested the night-time diversions, including contacting a local MP to write to OCC. He confirmed that the last 3 years had been worse, as a resident of the area for 26 years. His concerns were the impact on health, with consecutive nights without sleep from the noise and vibrations. The issues raised were sleep deprivation, noise, structural damage, irresponsible driving (mounting curbs, risks to pedestrians, high speed) on a single carriageway. Concern raised about the sub-contracting of tasks which was viewed as less efficient. Inconvenience of some residents needing to relocate to family / a hotel during planned

works, then potential loss of expenses where the works were postponed. Dr Bennett questions whether this was acceptable.

Chair welcomed the committee to ask questions of clarification of the speakers. It was clarified that Dr Bennett spoke based on living in the same home for 26 years, 11 feet from the road, of which the last 3 years were significantly worse in relation to this issue. The committee noted that contraflow systems were a suggested alternative. Due to the protest of the residents group, there was now some warning of diversion routes. Dr Bennett suggested that Sunday daytime diversions could be an option.

Greg Stone then spoke to the committee on behalf of National Highways. He informed committee that the routes were in place for many years and were last reviewed 2.5 / 3 years ago. He was unaware of any difference. He suggested that members could email him with suggested alternatives for consideration. He confirmed that the suggested Sunday daytime closure would not be enough for the maintenance works required on the route. He explained that night-time closures were chosen because of less traffic at night – they had a vehicle counting system ahead of diversions, and they wait for numbers to drop before putting out traffic management. Safety of staff was a priority, and coordination occurs as best as possible to minimise disruption. Multiple tasks were planned per closure, to maximise the efficiency and productivity of the closure.

Keith Stenning from OCC spoke to the committee. Night-time diversions minimise disruption, and there had been a lot of complaints about day-time diversions. Daytime traffic was a bigger problem. The diversion routes were long established and reviewing routes was a difficult problem. Using the next best A-road was the option, and these roads have become more built up over the years. We focused on reducing overall disruption, not the costs involved.

Councillor Crawford expressed disappointment and requested a risk assessment. It was answered that the diversion route team would need to discuss this with OCC. Contraflow could be discussed. Disruption was only if absolutely necessary. The volume of traffic has increased overall.

Committee considered that this was a difficult job and safety was of high importance in deciding the rerouting options. It was suggested that there was not enough information presented to scrutinise the options. Greg Stone suggested that he could provide some more information and gave a suggested timescale of 2 months.

Greg Stone confirmed there was no further major works over the next 3 months, beyond necessary maintenance / resurfacing.

A discussion was had about OCC's role, and it was confirmed that OCC's role was to support National Highways to find routes in order to maintain the A34. The strategic diversions were longstanding, aiming to find the quickest route back to a junction.

Chair added that updated maps would be very useful – how often are they updated / reviewed?

In summary, the committee felt that they needed further information, and Greg Stone had suggested a timescale to come back with more information. Committee considered that it was a complex decision for authorities to make, and that we needed to look back to before 2018, before the diversions were perceived to worsen, to find out what has changed so drastically.

The committee suggested the following information be provided / explored:

- Can a risk assessment be carried out? Discussion to be had with the relevant team.
- Cost benefit analysis of options, appraisal of options
- Mitigation strategies for routes
- Updated maps and related documentation in the decision making
- Previous history of diversions - what has changed?
- More information on contraflows as an option. It was suggested by guest officers that this wasn't always the safest or efficient option. Guest officers explained that different works

needed varying space to be carried out, and contraflow required closure of a longer stretch of road, and there were other time-intensive tasks related to it, such as removing and rebuilding part of the barrier. Tightly managed project budgets.

- When did the night-time diversions begin?

Chair closed the item by summarising that the next steps would be to allow National Highways to come back with more information, that committee could consider at a future meeting, within the next 3 months or so. Potential to start a task and finish group on this. We would work with the Cabinet member, being mindful that the responsibility doesn't lie with the council, however we can make recommendations to Cabinet, to ask them / the Leader to approach OCC councillors. It was confirmed that OCC Councillor Bearder would be notified by Keith Stenning.

Resolved:

1. For National Highways to provide further information where possible, as stated above, and
2. For scrutiny committee to review this at a future committee meeting, in order to make an informed recommendation to Cabinet, bearing in mind that council have no authority on this matter, and therefore Cabinet would be advised to liaise with OCC members.

Chair thanked all participants for the time and work on this matter.

1. Dalton Barracks Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

Councillor Debby Hallett, Cabinet member for Corporate Services and Transformation, introduced the report on the consultation on the Dalton Barracks Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The aim was to consider and implement any changes from the consultation and approve the SPD in early 2022. Andrew Lane was the lead officer present to answer any questions alongside the Cabinet member.

Chair reminded committee that this item was in reference to the non-coloured section of the map under point 6. Committee were asked to focus on that part.

Committee was reminded that an SPD expanded on and clarified the existing policies within the local plan. You cannot add or adjust affordable housing, this was within the local plan. It was confirmed that the results go to Cabinet, and this was scrutiny committee's opportunity to feed into the consultation. Committee were pleased that working alongside the MOD, the development for the area was aiming to be exemplar and sustainable. There was a push to encourage sustainable development by the officer team.

Andrew Lane was asked about scoping for the cycle lanes planned. A committee member raised the education provision, and Andrew Lane confirmed that primary education provision was planned on site for new developments, and secondary education may be off site. Details will become clearer once the application was submitted. At this stage, we were consulting on the SPD. There was mention of park runs, and the need for new developments to have unbroken path for exercising safely - Councillor Hallett would take this thought away to explore further.

All involved were thanked for their input.

Resolved:

Scrutiny Committee considered the content of the Dalton Barracks Strategic Allocation draft Supplementary Planning Document and fed back their comments to the Cabinet Member.

1. Planning enforcement statement

Cabinet member for Planning, Councillor Bethia Thomas, introduced the report on the reviewed Joint Planning Enforcement statement, which included a new triage to increase efficiency and to help ease a backlog by prioritising cases.

Communications was a big part of this work – and will continue to feature.

There was discussion about a 'light touch' option for lower scoring cases. This would be considered, balancing this with the resource that may be needed to action this.

The committee were impressed with the streamlining. Councillor Thomas did reassure committee that this would be reviewed in one year, to ensure the new process worked well. It was a sensible and evolving process and not set in stone. The key was to ensure best use of officer time. The statement included harm assessment that made it clear what conditions trigger priority status.

Emma Turner and Adrian Duffield were also present to support the item. Emma Turner gave detail on the wider package, including the importance of communications. There would be planned FAQs on the website, website updates, changes to reporting papers (similar to the environmental health form). The team want to collate high quality information from residents that will assist in making the council planning enforcement service efficient and accessible.

Chair added that the councillor engagement session was very good, and he thanked all involved.

Resolved:

That scrutiny committee considered the content of the report including the new approach to triaging and feedback to the Cabinet Member for Planning.

The meeting closed at 7.56 pm

Chair:

Date: