

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

29 October 2018

Public Questions (15 in total)

1.	Question from James Allen to Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	Why are all animals equal but some are more equal than others? Referring to buses and taxis using boots corner!
	Response from Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	<p>The initial ambition for the experimental traffic order was to remove all traffic and fully pedestrianise the space but this was not feasible as it would have prevented key bus routes being able to service the town centre, and as buses along with pedestrians and cyclists make up the bulk of town centre visitation, this would have adversely impacted upon the vibrancy of the town centre. The exemption for taxis was to ensure that access for all was maintained.</p> <p>Both of these forms of transport can also cater for many individuals with disabilities eg all Stagecoach buses serving Cheltenham centre are low floor.</p> <p>The removal of through traffic from a town centre is not revolutionary, and has been delivered in Gloucester, Worcester, Bath and Oxford.</p> <p>The aim is to encourage modal shift ie for individuals to consider other forms of transport where they have the choice and also to support the vibrancy of the town centre; both government objectives. Equally delivery of the Cheltenham Transport Plan is an agreed objective of CBC & GCC and reflected in their adopted Local Transport Plan 3.</p>
2.	Question from James Allen to Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	Have the council not noticed all the housing development north of city centre - New Barn Lane/ Bishops Cleeve/Gotherington. Boots corner traffic flows did not incorporate these, can this be adjusted retrospectively and then reopen Boots Corner
	Response from Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	<p>The traffic flows were predicted until 2026 in the original traffic modelling and made assumptions about housing growth in line with DfT guidance. It did include JCS projections but Boots Corner is in many ways unrelated as the challenges of the A4019 corridor are evident now and schemes such as NW Cheltenham will provide mitigation including public transport access to unlock the challenge. The other housing growth that you cite has not impacted on southward journeys as access to Boots Corner from the north has been restricted for many decades and the key pinchpoints generally for commuters are issues such as restricted access at J10 which causes traffic to seek access either via J9 at Tewkesbury or J11 which is why GCC and partners are seeking funding to improve J10. Meanwhile GCC and CBC have secured £22m to tackle the challenges on the A40 around Arle Court. Delivery of these schemes will improve access from and to the north of Cheltenham and obviate the need for cars to pass through Boots Corner and effectively sever the High Street in two. Both GCC and CBC will be considering the traffic network data and economic impact of the trial respectively over the coming months and it is anticipated that a formal decision will be made by in early 2019.</p>

3.	Question from Janice Brazier to Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	<p>Please identify who will be making the decisions on the success of the initial trial and determining what changes will be made for the next phase of the trial. I understand that one plan was to determine the data and feedback in November and make a decision in mid December. However this would miss the peak traffic in the town associated with Christmas shopping, and only cover a greatly truncated trial period. In reality thousands of cars were still passing through Boots Corner per day until around or after the 10th August when ANPR cameras were installed and fines started. Given that this is six weeks after the supposed start of the scheme are we to be assured that any decision will be pushed back accordingly, given this greatly shortened data collection period in an 18 month trial, this also has the benefit of considering the peak flows over the Christmas period, if this is not to be the case can the scrutiny committee please outline why.</p>
	Response from Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	<p>The process for determining the success of the trial will be by CBC and GCC. CBC will consider the economic impact on the town centre against the original analysis submitted when the Local Sustainable Transport Fund bid was successful in 2012. GCC will consider in detail the traffic impacts associated with the trial.</p> <p>I am unsure where these dates came from as my understanding is that the trial would need to run for a minimum 6 months in order for reliable traffic data to be established. That would take the trial to the end of December 2018 before any conclusions can be drawn, so the impacts of the Christmas period will be considered.</p>
4.	Question from Janice Brazier to Overview and Scrutiny
	<p>Please outline how accident statistics will be included in the consideration of the 'success' of this scheme. I am particularly interested in how long it takes for an accident to be included in the figures from when it occurred, will the scrutiny committee please ensure that sufficient time is allowed to include accident statistics before any decision is to be made.</p>
	Response from Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	<p>Accident statistics are compiled by the local constabulary and you are correct that there is a time delay from collection to publication. I will ask GCC colleagues to take note of your request.</p>
5.	Question from Chun Kong to Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	<p>In 2008 GCC threw out the attempt from CBC to close Boots Corner based on the anticipated congestion and the danger from the increased traffic in St James's Sq and in particular to St Gregory's School collection and drop off. From what I can see nothing has changed except that the traffic model, which highlighted these dangers has been dropped in favour of one that does not. So the known problems were in this way removed from sight and scrutiny. We now have the reality of the change and we can clearly see the predictions of the original traffic model which caused the scheme to be thrown out coming through. Given the intentional nature of this deception and the increased danger to the public, which is fully understood by the officers and members in CBC, <u>who will be held responsible for any accidents which occur in these streets?</u> I certainly do not agree to and will take action to prevent my business rates being used to contribute to the defence of the people who have performed this intentional act.</p>
	Response from Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	<p>Prior to the current scheme being implemented I believe that various options were explored but none produced credible results as they utilised a software package known as Saturn which is not appropriate</p>

	<p>for street level simulation. .Although a feasibility study was undertaken there were never any formal processes in 2008 so the County did not throw out the scheme. The County was at that time engaged with CBC on exploring options which eventually led to the development of what modelling work would need to be done in order to support the development of a scheme that could be taken forward. This was why a Paramics micro-simulation model was introduced and developed as it has much greater modelling flexibility and can deal with the complexities of the urban grain in Cheltenham. That modelling produced results that were deployed in the successful Local Sustainable Transport Fund bid to the Dept for Transport in 2012 and clearly met the criteria of central government.</p> <p>One aim is to reduce traffic speeds as has been demonstrated in phase 1 on Albion Street.</p> <p>There has been no attempt to hide data as suggested in the question. Indeed the modelling work and potential for increased traffic on St. James was one of the main topics at the public traffic regulation order committee meeting and one of the main points the committee considered. The committee recommended a phased delivery approach so that traffic impacts could be monitored. An increase in traffic volumes is does not directly correlate to an increase in traffic accidents. The traffic regulation order committee will also consider all traffic data and accident data before making any decision as to if the scheme is extended or made permanent.</p>
6.	Question from Adam Lillywhite to Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	<p>The GCC cabinet decision of 15 July 2018 clearly outlines the three options for trial. Timed closure of Boots Corner, the road restricted to a single lane and then total closure, the outcome of these three options are to be reported back to the TRO Committee for a decision. This was agreed through two full democratic meetings, even though both were influenced by Task Force members when it appeared that the scheme would not get given the go ahead, the first involved the committee being taken offstage during a public meeting, to determine a trial that was acceptable, the second, by a behind the scenes letter from the task force outlining the importance of the scheme to it. Clear interference in an otherwise democratic process by the supposedly advisory body sponsored by CBC. However having reached this point the public are entitled to be able to rely upon those responsible to implement the decision in good faith and without changes, as this would undermine the process undergone to reach it. However GCC have accepted requests which fundamentally undermine the decision taken and therefore the process that has underpinned that decision. This has removed two of the options for trial. Will the scrutiny Committee please establish the reason for the removal of these options and outline how this can be justified in the democratic process when residents and Businesses of the town were expressly given the reassurances of these trial options as a condition of the trial being allowed by the leader of GCC and the head of the TRO committee.</p>
	Response from Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	<p>The full GCC cabinet decision of 22/07/15 is noted below</p> <p>CABINET RESOLVED to: -</p> <p>1 <i>Accept the recommendations from the Traffic Regulation Committee made on 15 January 2015 relating to the inner-ring road changes, with the exception of the Boots Corner proposed trial;</i></p> <p>a) <i>Make those elements of the traffic regulation orders relating to the Cheltenham Transport Plan, as detailed on the Traffic Regulation Order Proposed Restriction Changes Schedule at Appendix B of the decision report; and</i></p> <p>b) <i>Defer a decision on the elements of the traffic regulation orders relating to Boots Corner.</i></p> <p>2 <i>Authorise the Commissioning Director: Communities and Infrastructure to implement the scheme through the following phased approach:</i></p> <p><i>Albion Street – October 2015 to February 2016</i></p>

Imperial Square and Oriel Road – April to July 2016

c) Royal Well – Summer 2016

d) Contingent on the successful implementation of the other schemes, a Boot's Corner experimental order and trail scheme – Spring 2017

This is what GCC as highways authority have delivered albeit with some slippage on the timetable. What is being quoted is simply options in the background paper not an explicit decision. The authority over which option to implement was delegated to the Commissioning Director: Communities and Infrastructure and all changes or delays in the implementation process have been approved by the Lead Cabinet Member. The Lead Cabinet Member has been kept updated on the scheme throughout the implementation.

7.	Question from Adam Lillywhite to Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	<p>To date we have been told that the changes in the first three phases of the Cheltenham Transport Plan have been successful and that mitigation has occurred to resolve any problems. Yet it has not resolved the issues that traders have raised and neither has it resolved the issues from the second phase which is the entry into Rodney rd. There are terrible queues here whenever the town gets busy, sometimes backing up into Bath Rd and even backing traffic up along the North side of Imperial square to the Promenade, stopping the traffic turning right out of imperial square and heading to St George's rd, this is gridlock in the true sense of the word.</p> <p>My understanding is that the people making and influencing and making the decision on the 'success' of the scheme, are members of the Task Force. The group which is promoting the scheme and has ensured that it has gone to trial rather than been thrown out and have now reduced the options of trial from 3 to 1. Can the Scrutiny committee please outline who has made the decisions on the success of the phases to date and who will in the future. As it is clearly not true that the mitigation for phase 2 has worked. Can the scrutiny committee please determine exactly who will be making the decision on phase 4, who is informing this decision and what is to be done to ensure that they are impartial, and not members of the Task Force, the group that is responsible for forcing this scheme through to date. This scheme that would have been thrown out again in a strictly democratic process, it is a process and has already been so fundamentally undermined by their removal of the full range of trial options that were conditional on it progression.</p>
	Response from Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	<p>The purpose of the O&S committee is to hear from the GCC team how each phase of the Cheltenham Transport Plan has been considered and how any mitigating actions have been implemented. I am aware that the traffic lights at the Quadrangle junction took a while to bed-in but I believe that they are working effectively now.</p> <p>The Cheltenham Development Task Force is purely an advisory body so it has had no role in determining the GCC decision to progress each phase, which has been based entirely upon its merits and determined by the highways authority, in line with the authority given by the GCC cabinet decision of 22/07/15.</p> <p>The process for determining the success of the trial will be by CBC and GCC. CBC will consider the economic impact on the town centre against the original analysis submitted when the Local Sustainable Transport Fund bid was successful in 2011. GCC will consider in detail the traffic impacts associated with the trial. GCC is following a democratic and statutory legal process for the traffic regulation orders which has included public consultation and a public meeting. The TRO committee further demonstrated their commitment to this process when it listened to public comment.</p>
8.	Question from Jon Howe to Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	<p>I would like to ask about the council's plans for the future of Cheltenham town centre, I was surprised during our recent meeting with Councillor McKinlay that apparently there is no long term plan for the town. I cannot believe that this is the case, GCC stated that they only supported the Boot Corner closure as it was part of the town regeneration plans. Can you please outline why consultation response process to this experimental TRO is not being well publicised to the residents and businesses of the town and they are not at this stage being made aware of the bus lane that is planned to go straight across the front of the Boots store and in so doing displacing the existing pedestrian crossing. Please outline why the public have not been made aware of this situation or the reality of the plan, or positively encouraged to respond to this major and fundamental change to our town, they are still being sold the idea of a 'world class' public square which will just not be the case.</p>

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	Response from Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	<p>The Council's strategy is embodied in the Place Strategy that was endorsed by CBC full council in March 2018.</p> <p>It is correct to state that The Cheltenham Transport Plan whilst delivered by GCC as the highways authority reflected an ambition to protect the High Street / Town Centre. However it is also fair to note that the plan is shared by GCC and its delivery is noted in the Local Transport Plan 3 objectives 2015 - 2020 and also in the full report to GCC cabinet on 22/07/15 – see below <i>The proposed scheme is in line with the County's LTP3 policy objectives to promote sustainable travel by commuters</i></p> <p>Options for bus movements in the vicinity of Boots Corner were explored but no decision made. Following public consultation of the traffic regulation orders it was determined to retain the pelican crossing between Boots and Primark so the option for alternative bus movements closed off.</p>
9.	Question from Jon Howe to Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	<p>Can you please investigate what powers Andrew North and Jeremy Williamson had to make assurances to the developers of the brewery scheme phase 2 that Boots Corner would be closed so increasing their footfall, these can be seen from both the letters sent to the Local Transport sustainability fund (LTSF) to leverage the funding. Please supply the documentation outlining these conditions, if this is not produced why were the LTSF funding body mis-led in this way.</p>
	Response from Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	<p>No assurances were made, as neither individual had the ability to offer such an assurance. Gloucestershire County Council is the highways authority and the only body able to implement the proposals embodied in the Cheltenham Transport Plan. The owners of the Brewery scheme fully understood, that, whilst CBC was supportive of the ambition to re-connect the High Street, it was not in their powers to do so, which is why no such documentation of "conditions" exist.</p>
10.	Question from Helen Aubrey to Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	<p>Given that the CTP Phase 4 Boots Corner trial is not one that would be supported on Transport or air pollution grounds, could you please outline the specific parameters to be considered and the balances weighed in determining if this scheme is a success and what criteria need to be met for the scheme to go forward in this or a modified form, or reverted.</p>
	Response from Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	<p>Your question assumes that the traffic and pollution monitoring will not support the trial. As neither of these sets of data is currently available it would be presumptive for me to respond, although such data will inform any consideration by GCC as the highways authority.</p>
11.	Question from Helen Aubrey to Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	<p>The CTP Phase 4 Boots Corner Trial seems to be very heavily weighted in favour of the opinion of large chain, high street retailers and is undermining the investment, energy and aspiration of a great many independent businesses in the town. It is the independent businesses in Cheltenham which make our town centre unique, yet when we band together to make a substantive objection we are barely paid lip service and no action has been taken. The fundamental principles of this scheme which were supposed to be being trialled, the timed closure and the restriction to a single lane have now seem to have been taken off of the schedule too. Can you please outline how democracy can be re-introduced into this process.</p>

	Response from Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	<p>The funding secured from central government was primarily about encouraging modal shift away from private motor vehicles towards more sustainable modes of transport (walking, cycling and public transport) although in the case of Cheltenham had the added bonus of reducing the severance of the High Street and at the same time supporting the town centre. All in line with government policy.</p> <p>There is no differentiation between large and small businesses who all make decisions in their own rights eg Monty Smith moving to Bennington Street and now opposite Urban Outfitters. Equally the footfall data recently released by the Brewery Quarter and by CBC directly relating to Boots Corner would suggest that all businesses in the town centre should benefit in the long term. The number of new openings in the town since the phased implementation of the trial in 2016 would suggest that Cheltenham is attracting significant investment. If your reference is to the Clarence Street traders, it should be noted that they have not all opposed the scheme and those that have, have been met and options for mitigation of their concerns explored. That dialogue is continuing and I believe that there are actions instructed but awaiting delivery.</p>
12.	Question from Mary Nelson to Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	<p>How much extra monitoring is currently being undertaken to measure the air pollution in areas affected by the increased traffic which has been displaced by the inner ring road closure at Boots Corner, and can all the information relating to this monitoring, including maps showing the locations of the diffusion tubes and/or the real time monitors, and the results, be made easily available to the public via CBC's website with immediate effect?</p>
	Response from Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	<p>The current air pollution monitoring is clearly visible on the CBC website https://maps.glosdistricts.org/map/Aurora.svc/run?script=/Aurora/CBC+Air+Quality.AuroraScript%24&no%20cache=769124778&resize=always</p>
13.	Question from Mary Nelson to Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	<p>Some people have expressed a view that Boots Corner should be totally free of all traffic, with no buses or taxis. Can you please confirm and make it clear to the public that CBC and GCC are still intending to permit a new bus lane, bringing buses from Pittville Street across in front of Boots shop, thereby creating even more bus movements through Boots Corner, <u>but that this will never be trialled</u>, as the intention is to implement this new bus lane <u>only after the trial period is over</u>?</p>
	Response from Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	<p>The option to make Boots Corner entirely traffic free was modelled but rejected as it impeded the delivery of people from the bus network. Given that 70% of all people in the town centre use sustainable modes of travel – walking, cycling or public transport – it is imperative that those routes were kept open. The exemption for taxis was to ensure that access for all was maintained.</p> <p>Options for bus movements in the vicinity of Boots Corner were explored but no decision made. Following public consultation of the traffic regulation orders it was determined to retain the pelican crossing between Boots and Primark so the option for alternative bus movements closed off.</p>
14.	Question from Peter Sayers to Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	<p>The consultation on the Experimental TRO to close the South North route through Boots Corner has been running for four months. Please may I ask what are the total quantities of respondents so far and the percentages of those respondents who are in favour of the trial and those against?</p>

	Response from Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	As the consultation period is set for 6 months, no data will be available until after that date.
15.	Question from Peter Sayers to Cabinet Member
	Due to the failure to provide alternate signposted routes for the now prohibited vehicles through Boots Corner, traffic was asked to 'find its way'. This has resulted in a number of congested areas or hot spots in residential streets. What plans are there to monitor the increases in particulate pollution and noxious gas pollution in these areas?
	Response from Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
	The current air pollution monitoring is clearly visible on the CBC website https://maps.glosdistricts.org/map/Aurora.svc/run?script=/Aurora/CBC+Air+Quality.AuroraScript%24&no%20cache=769124778&resize=always