

Work expected to start in February

Cowley Rd changes welcomed

By Samantha McGregor

THE results of a public consultation over planned safety improvements to Cowley Road have been published.

More than 1,000 people went to see an exhibition organised by Oxfordshire County Council in April to show what changes would be made to the busy shopping street as part of a £1.3m project.

Almost 500 residents filled in questionnaires giving their views on the proposals. Three quarters welcomed the scheme, but there were concerns about cyclists' safety, an increased congestion and commercialisation of the area.

The Department for Transport identified Cowley Road as one of ten areas across the country in need of road safety measures to reduce accidents.

The road has been identified as having the highest accident rate per kilometre of all shopping streets across Oxfordshire — with 104 reported incidents between August 1998 and 2003. That is almost one every two weeks. About 40 per cent of the accidents happened after dark.

The consultation found:

- 42 per cent of people had reservations, but thought the scheme should go ahead

- Just four per cent felt the scheme should be stopped

- Lots of people called for more trees

- Many people thought the scheme would make the road safer for cyclists

- 58 out of 486 responses expressed concern about cycle safety — most thought cyclists would be squeezed at points where the road will be narrowed

- Almost all traders supported the plans

- 47 people thought the plans would increase congestion.

- 30 people feared the council would not get the scheme right or finish it on time and within budget.

- Many respondents were anxious the scheme might alter the special character of the area.

Oxfordshire County Council has addressed the key findings, promising as many trees as possible will be planted. It says the scheme will address concerns over cyclist safety and should reduce journey time. The design will be sensitive to the character of the area and the

authority has promised every effort will be made to ensure the scheme is finished on time and within budget.

Head of transport at the county council, David McKibbin, said: "The whole point of this project is finding innovative solutions for roads, which in the past were classed as too hard to treat, so we knew we were going to have some tough problems. And this was one of the toughest.

"The lessons learned in developing and implementing the schemes will be used to produce good practice guidance for authorities wishing to develop similar schemes."

Both the cycle campaign group CycloX and the English Regions Cycle Development Team took part in the consultation and community group East Oxford Action also supported the scheme.

Work is expected to start in February.

The other schemes being funded by the Government are in Lambeth, Norwich, Manchester, Leamington Spa, Crewe, Hull, Liverpool, St Albans and Southwark.

Proposals for the road

- 20mph zone between Stockmore and Divinity Roads, with flashing signs reminding people driving more than 20mph to slow down.

- Cycle lanes in the 30mph area at the beginning and end of Cowley road.

- Wider pavements and bollards to stop people parking on the corners

- Reorganisation of parking and loading areas.

- More benches, cycle racks and trees.

Key findings

- Most people were positive about the scheme

- Concerns that cyclists will feel "squeezed or tailgated"

- Concerns the scheme could increase congestion or force traffic to use side streets

- Fears Cowley Road will become too "slick and commercialised"

- Concerns the council cannot deliver the scheme on time or within budget

- Many people were keen that more trees were planted along Cowley Road