

HIGHWAYS AND TRAFFIC REPRESENTATION PANEL

TBC

SUBJECT:	LOWWOOD ROAD, BIRKENHEAD – PROPOSED ACCESSIBILITY IMPROVEMENTS
WARD/S AFFECTED:	BIRKENHEAD & TRANMERE WARD
REPORT OF:	MARK SMITH, INTERIM DIRECTOR OF HIGHWAYS AND STREETSCENE
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	COUNCILLOR JULIE McMANUS CABINET MEMBER COMMUNITY SERVICES
KEY DECISION?	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report considers objections received against a proposal to re-opening a previously closed road connecting Lowwood Road with Circular Road, within the Birkenhead & Tranmere Ward as shown on drawing no. DC/0334/100.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

2.1 On 15th April 2016, the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority awarded £1,375,000 of Integrated Transport Block funding to Wirral Council, to support the delivery of the Liverpool City Region Transport Plan for Growth.

2.2 The proposed scheme forms part of the 2016/17 Transport Plan for Growth Capital Programme of Works (Integrated Transport Block – ITB) subsequently agreed by Cabinet at its meeting on 18th July 2016 [Minute 34 refers]

2.3 The proposal was identified by a Birkenhead Constituency Committee Member following concerns raised by local residents regarding lack of access and egress to Lowwood Road and Circular Drive, Birkenhead.

3.0 OBJECTIONS

3.1 A public consultation exercise was undertaken between the 7th and 30th November 2018. During the consultation period the council received 18 objections, 3 expressions of support and a 22 signature petition supporting the project.

In addition significant levels of concern against the scheme proposals were raised by Merseyside Police.

3.2 Merseyside Police's comments are as follows:

There will be a potential conflict between road users and residents when accessing the private drive ways of The Moorings and No. 8 Lowwood Road. The narrow width of Lowwood Road and Circular Road will restrict the ability of vehicles travelling in opposite directions to pass each other safely. There will be a lack of visibility at the junction for road users. There is a limited benefit to road users compared to negative impact on residents.

In response; Due to the layout of the existing highway it is not possible to accommodate a new physical layout which meets the current standards for highway design and visibility. Wirral Council's Road Safety Manager supports the concerns raised by Merseyside Police.

Lowwood Road has no designated footpaths and has shared space for both pedestrians and vehicles. There is potential to increase the vehicular activity on said shared spaces.

In response; Whilst Lowwood Road does not currently have any segregated footways the existing arrangements with limited access for vehicular traffic minimise risk. Permitting access for additional traffic through the implementation of this scheme may increase this risk.

Vehicles are currently able to travel in either direction on Circular Road, due to narrow width and the proposal to open up the junction, if the scheme continues, a one way system would be recommended.

In response; Whilst understanding this point of view expressed by Merseyside Police, officers have concerns that a one-way system is likely to increase vehicular speeds and could increase risk to pedestrians especially as there is no footway.

3.3 The objections against the project from members of the public are summarised as follows, as multiple residents raised the same points;

There is a possibility of increased conflict between pedestrians and vehicles. Vehicle speeds will increase and the scheme may be used as a rat run.

In response; it is envisaged that traffic flows will increase through the section of public highway previously closed to vehicular traffic. However, it is not envisaged that this will create a rat run to anything other than local traffic.

Pollution will increase due to increase vehicular traffic.

In response; it is not envisaged that pollution will increase as a result of the proposals. It is not expected that the proposals will increase traffic levels in the area other than those already expected. In addition, with technological advances in the motor industry it is likely that there will be more hybrid and electric vehicles on the borough's roads in the future.

There may be an increase in criminal activity. Drug running already happens in the area, it will be made easier / car thefts break-ins and vandalism / joy riders (Police have previously halted joy riders at this position due to the existing road closure / bollards).

In response; the proposals have been shared with Merseyside Police and whilst they raised significant levels of concern regarding the proposals, they did not specify a potential rise in criminal activity as a reason against the scheme. The concerns from residents have been shared with Merseyside Police.

There may be an increase in conflict between pedestrians and drivers. Children play in the area where the road is closed

In response; from a road safety point of view it would be unsuitable for children to play on the public highway where there is potential risk of conflict with vehicular traffic.

This area is a Conservation Area – Why is this being allowed?

In response; Traffic calming features are already present in The Woodlands and Brookland Road within Clifton Park Conservation Area. This road was formally a through route and it was closed in the early 1990's as part of an overall area wide improvement scheme.

The scheme is likely to cause an inconvenience. There will be a loss of parking.

In response; there will be a loss of 4 on-street parking spaces as part of the proposals. A number of properties in the area have access to off-street parking. However, there is insufficient highway space to provide additional parking bays to mitigate the removal of the 4 bays.

There is a potential risk to health. There will be nowhere to park for those providing healthcare & emergency assistance and it will be further to walk for those who have health problems.

In response; as previously stated, there will be a loss of 4 on-street parking spaces. It is not proposed to create additional on-street parking spaces as part of the proposals. Vehicles on emergency calls or NHS service vehicles would be permitted to park within close proximity to any property affected by the proposals

There will be an impact on property prices due to reduction in parking.

In response; there is no evidence to suggest that the proposals will have a negative effect on property values. This section of highway was previously open to vehicular traffic up until the early 1990's.

There will be increased insurance premiums, due to parking away from house & increase in potential criminal activity.

In response: there is no evidence to suggest that the proposals would cause an increase in insurance premiums for the vehicles that usually park in the parking bays that would be removed as part of the proposals. In addition, any displaced parking would be from public highway to public highway.

4.0 RELEVANT RISKS

4.1 Failure to undertake the proposed scheme would result in a failure to support the priorities of the Liverpool City Region Transport Plan for Growth and the Council's existing Corporate Goals and Objectives.

5.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 The option to open up the previously closed section of public highway in Lowwood Road is unique in that it is the only option that can be considered to achieve the request made by the Local Ward Members and residents.

6.0 CONSULTATION

6.1 As part of the consultation exercise for this scheme, letters were delivered to local residents in the vicinity of the scheme, informing them of the proposals. Consultation was also undertaken with Party Spokespersons, Ward Members, Active Travel Forum, Emergency Services, Freight Transport Association, Road Haulage Association and Merseytravel.

7.0 OUTSTANDING PREVIOUSLY APPROVED ACTIONS

7.1 None.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

8.1 All groups will benefit from improved access to opportunity.

9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

9.1 The cost of implementing these works will be in the region of £26,000, which is funded from the Capital funding that originated from previous Constituency Committee Allocations for Birkenhead. Existing staff resources will be used to undertake the work.

10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The Council follows statutory processes to implement this type of proposal.

11.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The Equality Impact Assessment demonstrating a potential negative implication associated with the implementation of these proposals on the 'protected characteristics', may be accessed via the following link;

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversity-cohesion/equality-impact-assessments/eias-april-2014/eias-regeneration-envir>

12.0 CARBON REDUCTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

12.1 It is not envisaged that pollution will increase as a result of the proposals. It is not expected that the proposals will increase traffic levels in the area other than those already expected.

13.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

13.1 The implementation of this proposal will increase access ability for residents within the Clifton Park Conservation Area.

14.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

14.1 Panel is requested to:

a) Note the levels of objections/support received and the Officers' responses; and

b) Recommend to the Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee that the proposals as shown on attached drawing no. DC/0334/100 are withdrawn due to significant levels of concern raised by Merseyside Police and supported by Wirral Council's Road Safety Manager.

15.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

15.1 To support the priorities of the Liverpool City Region Transport Plan for Growth and the Council's existing Corporate Goals and Objectives.

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APPENDICES: DC/0334/100

BACKGROUND PAPERS/REFERENCE MATERIAL

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority - 'A Transport Plan for Growth'

<http://councillors.knowsley.gov.uk/documents/g6257/Public%20reports%20pack%2006th-Mar-2015%2011.30%20Liverpool%20City%20Region%20Combined%20Authority.pdf?T=10&StyleType=standard&StyleSize=none>

<http://www.merseytravel.gov.uk/about-us/local-transportdelivery/Documents/8375%20Plan%20for%20growth%20WEB%20FINAL.pdf>

BRIEFING NOTES HISTORY

Briefing Note	Date
None	

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Cabinet - TRANSPORT PLAN FOR GROWTH PROGRAMME 2016/17	18th July 2016