



COVID-19 Oxford City Council

Green Recovery

Oxford City Council's recovery revitalised the city centre to benefit communities, create liveable streets, start green recovery and improve air quality.

Context

As a result of Covid-19, Oxford City Council has implemented a wide range of measures to create liveable streets, start the green recovery and improve air quality. These include creating one-way pavements to free up pavement space; installing 130 bike parking spaces at Park and Rides; creating and running an inclusive transport and movement focus group; free parking at Park and Rides; and pedestrianising streets including St Michael's Street and George Street. In addition, the council has installed temporary bus gates and supported the pedestrianisation of North Parade. The Council made £100,000 of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) available for the Restart phase, in addition to the £134,000 which the Government allocated to Oxford as part of its Reopening High Streets Safely Fund.

Development

As the Government announced an easing of lockdown, the Council focused on supporting a successful restart for Oxford's retail and hospitality economy. The approach has been guided by the 10-point checklist developed by the national High Streets Task Force. Reasons underpinning work are:

- Economic recovery: measures to enable social distancing in the public realm were essential if people were to have the confidence to return to the city centre and district shopping areas
- Liveable streets: the creation and regular running of the inclusive transport and movement focus group means that Oxford remains an accessible city for residents, shoppers, visitors and workers
- Air quality: Oxford city centre saw a historic 59% drop in air pollution as a direct result of the coronavirus lockdown. It is hoped that a number of the changes might sustain the benefits of improved air quality while kick-starting economic recovery
- Supporting local businesses: the hospitality sector has been hit particularly hard by the pandemic and the narrow pavements and roads in Oxford make "pavement cafés" impossible in numerous locations. The Council's creation of safe "tables and chairs zones" on

the highway has been essential to the reopening of some hospitality-dominant areas of the city.

Implementation

The reaction from local businesses has on the whole been very favourable. There was strong support for the “tables and chairs” measures to support hospitality businesses in George Street and St Michael’s Street through pedestrianisation, and the extension of St Michael’s Street. There has also been good support from some of the major employers and businesses regarding the more strategic shift towards active travel and public transport and away from the private car. This was confirmed in a survey of Oxford businesses, conducted in May 2020, which showed strong support in principle for green recovery measures including:

- More secure cycle parking in key locations
- New segregated cycle ways on key routes by removing bus lanes or narrowing traffic lanes
- Extra space for outdoor tables and chairs for food and beverage businesses



Review

The urgent situation, the new funding coming available, and a strong spirit of collaboration within the Council and across all the major stakeholders in Oxford, combined so that things which might usually take months or years have been possible in days or weeks. At an officer and political level, the City and County Councils have been meeting regarding active travel and economic recovery with a frequency and positivity that is unheralded in recent years. Relations with businesses have understandably been more delicate. Businesses have been supportive partners of Council measures which have an obvious and immediate benefit to them, such as the pedestrianisation of streets with a high proportion of hospitality premises. But it has been much harder to win around city centre businesses to the concept of a green recovery where the proposed measure is linked to a more strategic objective which may not immediately benefit the businesses affected. This is most obvious in relation to the proposed city centre bus gates, where there has been very vocal dissent from prominent business owners and operators. There is a sense among some businesses in which a measure which is broadly “anti-car” must be “anti-business”, even though there is strong evidence in a city such as Oxford, with a high proportion of cyclists and bus users and a highly constrained road and car parking network, that the car cannot be key to the city’s recovery.

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