

GREEN LANE, NORTHWOOD – PETITION ASKING FOR REMOVAL OF THE TRAFFIC SIGNALS AT THE JUNCTION WITH EASTBURY ROAD

Cabinet Member	Councillor Keith Burrows
Cabinet Portfolio	Planning, Transportation and Recycling
Officer Contact	David Knowles, Planning, Environment, Education and Community Services
Papers with report	Appendix A

HEADLINE INFORMATION

Purpose of report	To inform the Cabinet Member that a petition has been received asking for the removal of the traffic signals at the junction of Eastbury Road, Station Approach and Green Lane, Northwood.
Contribution to our plans and strategies	The proposals form part of the Council's strategy for road safety.
Financial Cost	There are none associated with the recommendations in this report.
Relevant Policy Overview Committee	Residents' and Environment Services
Ward(s) affected	Northwood

RECOMMENDATION

That the Cabinet Member:

- 1. Meets and discusses with the petitioners their concerns with regard to the traffic signal installation at the junction of Green Lane, Eastbury Road and Station Approach, Northwood;**
- 2. Subject to the outcome of 1 above, asks officers to consider the concerns raised by petitioners as part of a review with TfL of the effectiveness and efficiency of the present arrangements;**
- 3. Notes the proposals for an independent study of the arrangements at the junction as part of the Council's Local Implementation Plan (LIP) programme for 2011/2012 (funding for which has been agreed by the London Mayor);**
- 4. Notes the views of the Metropolitan Police Traffic Division, quoted in the report;**

5. **Instructs officers to seek the views of local residents, businesses, Police Safer Neighbourhood team, local schools, bus operators, passengers using Northwood Station and other relevant stakeholders, at the same time incorporating the views of the petitioners within this dialogue; and**
6. **Instructs officers to report back to him and Ward Members on the outcome of these further investigations with possible options, together with any relevant cost implications.**

INFORMATION

Reasons for recommendation

The Council wishes to consider the views of residents when designing or reviewing the status of traffic and road safety measures. The Petition Hearing will provide an extremely valuable opportunity to hear directly from the petitioners of their concerns and suggestions, and may influence the subsequent development of proposals for the site in question.

Alternative options considered / risk management

These may arise from the Cabinet Member's discussions with petitioners.

Supporting Information

1. A petition has been received from residents of Northwood asking for the removal of the traffic lights at the junction of Green Lane, Eastbury Road and Station Approach, Northwood.
2. The petition states '*we the undersigned petition the Cabinet Member ... requesting the removal of the traffic lights at the junction of Green Lane, Eastbury Road and Station Approach*'.
3. The petitioners furthermore highlight their view that '*these lights cause gridlock in the town centre for much of the day, reduced parking and access for the shops, causing financial hardship for the shopkeepers as many residents will no longer come to shop in the centre. They have also increased the problems of crossing the road to and from the station. We ask that these lights are removed and replaced with a Pelican crossing in the location of the old zebra crossing, to improve pedestrian access to the station with increased safety and allow traffic to flow once again.*'
4. Green Lane is a busy road through the local shopping area, not only serving local businesses (including a national chain supermarket), schools and the Metropolitan Line station, but also carrying significant volumes of commuter traffic with origins and destinations well beyond Northwood itself. Peak traffic levels have for a long time been high in this section of Green Lane, and traffic congestion issues have often been precipitated by other problems in the wider area. Eastbury Road brings in both local and commuter traffic, as well as quite high numbers of vehicles associated with the school run at the various local schools.
5. Station Approach is a private road, owned by Transport for London (TfL), and the Council has for several years been working with TfL to encourage them to undertake the substantial improvements that are clearly needed to the road layout, which suffers at present from parking abuse and obstructions to TfL's own bus network.

6. The Metropolitan line station is situated prominently on the south west corner of the Green Lane/ Eastbury Road/ Station Approach junction. As one of the better public transport nodes in the area, serving the outer suburbs (via the Amersham & Chesham branch) as well as good links to central London, the station is understandably well used both by commuters and children attending the local secondary schools.
7. To the west of the junction is a popular local supermarket which previous investigations had shown was a major reason why pedestrians wished to cross Green Lane. Prior to the present arrangements, the only places where pedestrians could safely cross using dedicated crossing facilities were at a zebra crossing to the east of the junction (near Rowland Place) or some way further west at the zebra crossing near Oaklands Gate. The attached location plan at Appendix A will help to illustrate the local context.
8. Not far from the junction, there are a number of premises which provide sheltered accommodation, and therefore there are many older and more vulnerable pedestrians who may wish to cross here. Traffic signal control on all four arms is clearly of some benefit to such pedestrians.
9. The Cabinet Member will recall that the proposals to improve traffic controls and pedestrian crossing safety stemmed in part from the development of the town centre improvement scheme for Green Lane. This culminated in the present arrangements including major streetscene improvements and a 20mph zone. The focus on making the Eastbury Road/Station Approach junction safer also developed as a consequence of a fatality which resulted from a driver striking a pedestrian who was trying to cross the road.
10. In the aftermath of this tragic accident, in which a local man died, the Metropolitan Police expressed the view that traffic signal controls at this junction could well have prevented the fatality (see also their recent feedback referred to below). Investigations showed that there were many deficiencies with the existing arrangements. For example, there were no pedestrian crossing facilities directly serving the rail station, there were problems with traffic movements in and out of Station Approach and, whilst there was a zebra crossing east of the junction adjacent to the junction of Green Lane and Rowland Place, there were safety issues associated with it.
11. Zebra crossings with a high level of use by pedestrians can also have an adverse effect on traffic flows at peak periods, as pedestrians at the crossing have priority and this can result in frequent but irregular delays for passing traffic.
12. The nature of the junction, including the tight physical constraints and visibility splays, restricted the options that the Council could consider in order to make the junction safer for the many pedestrians who wish to cross here.
13. The signals themselves are, as the Cabinet Member will be aware, designed, installed and maintained by Transport for London, who have overall responsibility for the entire network of traffic signals across the whole of Greater London.
14. Whilst the Council takes responsibility for agreeing the principles, seeks the necessary authorisations and undertakes the civil engineering work associated with any new scheme, the funding, the detailed traffic modelling and all the works associated with the signal equipment itself generally falls under TfL's remit.

15. Standalone signal crossings, of the kind suggested by the petitioners, must comply with certain basic design criteria laid down by the Department for Transport. There are, for example, different rules which apply to zebra crossings and signal-controlled crossings:

- a) A new zebra crossing (such as the one that formerly sat at the western end of Rowland Place, by its junction with Green Lane) must be located a minimum of five metres from the nearest junction;
- b) A new standalone signal controlled crossing (generally a Pelican, Puffin or Toucan crossing) which does not serve any other purpose beyond providing a crossing facility may not be located any less than 20 metres from the nearest junction; and
- c) Traffic signals incorporated into the junction and which include a pedestrian crossing phase are exempt from this latter rule.

16. The design rule under (b) above means that it would not be feasible to install a standalone signal crossing at the location of the former zebra crossing near the junction of Rowland Place and Green Lane. It also means that a standalone crossing to the west of the junction of Eastbury Road/Station Approach/Green Lane would have to sit on the bridge deck (i.e., where Green Lane passes over the rail line) and, in addition to the technical installation issues this would pose (i.e., the fact that there is a bridge deck immediately below the road and footways), there would be concerns about visibility and also the proximity of such a crossing to the Maxwell Road junction.

17. One benefit of the present arrangements for pedestrians is that they can, as a consequence of the signals, cross at all four sides of the junction. The former zebra crossing catered solely for pedestrians crossing Green Lane on the eastern side of the junction (although there were reports of drivers turning out of Eastbury Road and failing to stop at the crossing) but this unfortunately did not provide for the significant demand for pedestrians who wished to cross more directly to and from the rail station and the supermarket.

18. Detailed monitoring of the present arrangements confirm that there is a significant demand and consequent use of these arms of the junction (i.e., crossings nearest to the station) and any changes to the layout would need to address this demand.

19. The fatal accident referred to earlier took place on the entrance to Eastbury Road. The pedestrian who died as a consequence of the accident was attempting to cross the mouth of the junction but was struck by a vehicle emerging from Station Approach and crossing Green Lane. Whilst the driver undoubtedly checked for traffic in Green Lane (doubtless coping with the visibility difficulties posed by the façade of the rail station and the vertical curve of the road over the adjacent bridge over the railway), it appears that she failed at the same time to look forward and observe the pedestrian, and as consequence struck him and caused him to sustain his fatal injuries. Any changes to the controls at this junction would need to be mindful of the risk of reintroducing such a risk.

20. When the new signal installation was first introduced by TfL, there were indeed many initial problems with the phasing and indeed some aspects of the traffic control sequence appeared inadequate. There were at the same time problems with familiarity, of the kind that often take place whenever new traffic control arrangements are introduced. Officers worked closely with TfL to improve the situation, making changes which improved the logic of the signal phasing. These improvements reduced confusion for drivers emerging from Eastbury Road who were in some cases uncertain about whether or not they needed to stop again at a red light where the pedestrians crossed on the western arm of the junction.

21. At the same time, officers instigated reviews by TfL of the overall phasing and in particular the timings of the signals, in light of the concerns raised by residents about delays in peak periods. The 331 bus service comes in and out of Station Approach, and the traffic signals have given greater certainty for the buses when exiting or entering Green Lane. The 282 and H11 bus services also run along Green Lane.

22. Officers also undertook a series of CCTV video surveys of the junction throughout peak periods and in fact found that, in most cases, traffic appeared to flow efficiently. Officers reviewed the videos which had recorded live traffic through the junction throughout two typical morning and afternoon weekday peak periods covering the western, northern and eastern arms of the junction only (the video camera could not see the southern arm, across the mouth of Station Approach, at the same time).

23. The surveys showed that typically 1,029 people used the three visible crossings in an afternoon peak (7 June 2010: 15:30-17:30 recording period) and 639 in a morning peak (9 June 2010: 07:30-09:00 recording period). Close study of the live video showed that there were no instances of pedestrians holding up traffic, with junction 'locking' (i.e., problems for turning vehicles) or indeed queuing across the junction, all of which, had they been evident, may have supported an argument for poor layout or junction controls.

24. Clearly few drivers welcome the delays caused by a red light, but in practice as already mentioned, traffic flows along Green Lane in peak periods has often been heavy with much school related traffic part of this at peak times. So, without prejudicing the outcome of any more detailed investigations, it could be possible that to some extent the signals may have become a focus for traffic congestion concerns. However, it is acknowledged that the data above is only a snapshot – albeit one at the busier times of day – and that there may be a case for a more in-depth study.

25. The Cabinet Member may be aware that TfL has instigated a number of reviews of traffic signals throughout London, and so there is a willingness on TfL's part to work with boroughs to find better solutions. Examples of this include the 'countdown' traffic lights, which are presently being trialled in central London, which are based on a system already established overseas through which the lights provide an indication for pedestrians how long they have left to cross. In practice, this improves the efficiency of the crossing and can reduce the waiting time for through traffic. Studies are also under way outside London to investigate 'flashing amber' signals at off-peak or night-time, although it is considered unlikely that this practice will be adopted by London's traffic signal authority (TfL) in the short term.

26. It is recognised that legitimate concerns have been raised about traffic congestion in Green Lane where the signals are located. There have also been issues with traffic blocking the mini-roundabout at the junction of Green Lane and Maxwell Road, and it is likely that some of the latter problems are linked to heavy flows through the signal junction at Eastbury Road/ Station Approach. The petitioners have suggested there have been impacts on local businesses and increased difficulty in crossing the road, although no evidence has been seen for this by the Council to date.

27. Officers have discussed with TfL the possibility of commissioning a study by specialist consultants to investigate the layout, operation and effectiveness of the present arrangements and to establish if there are any beneficial changes that can be made. This study should be open minded in terms of solutions which could include options from signal refinement, major alterations or even complete removal, but mindful of the necessary commitments to road safety.

PART 1 – MEMBERS, PUBLIC AND PRESS

It is proposed that this study will, subject to the Cabinet Member's agreement, be commissioned early in the new financial year (2011/2012).

28. Officers have sought the views of the Metropolitan Police Traffic Division on the traffic signals, and their response is as follows:

'officers from our collision investigation unit [feel] that the installation of the traffic signals at this junction has improved road safety for vulnerable road users crossing the road. It is their opinion that if these traffic lights had been in operation before the fatal collision involving the elderly gentlemen, it may never have occurred, as vehicles are now managed in a better way. All traffic signals tend to add small delays in journey times, but this must be weighed against the safety of the junction which we feel has been improved by their installation.'

29. Feedback has also been received from the local Northwood Safer Neighbourhood Team, who state:

'[Yes], there is congestion at times and traffic in Green Lane may have to wait unlike previously, but this has to be balanced against the safety of the junction. [We] think it would be a retrograde step to now remove the traffic lights.'

30. It is therefore recommended in the meantime that the Cabinet Member invites the petitioners along to one of the petition evenings that he sets aside and listens to their concerns, after which he may wish to consider the recommendations set out at the beginning of this report. Officers recommend that the concerns of petitioners should be noted and included as part of the study brief.

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report. However, the Council has committed, through its TfL-funded Local Implementation Plan (LIP) funding for 2011/2012, to commission an independent investigation of the junction, and this will require funding from within the Council's LIP allocation for 2011/2012.

Should the recommendations and consequent decision be to make substantial changes to the junction, either in the form of significant modifications or removal of the signals, then the Council would need to explore potential funding to cover the cost of this work. No work on this investigation of suitable funds can realistically be undertaken until the present petition process and the subsequent investigations have been satisfactorily concluded.

EFFECT ON RESIDENTS, SERVICE USERS & COMMUNITIES

What will be the effect of the recommendation?

To allow the Cabinet Member to discuss in detail, residents' concerns and the potential solutions that could be considered.

Consultation Carried Out or Required

No consultation has been carried out prior to this petition. However, the Council has identified a sum of money within the 2011/2012 TfL LIP allocation to undertake a study which will involve

elements of consultation with affected stakeholders, including local residents and in particular those who use the crossing arrangements. The nature and form of any such consultation will be developed and agreed with the input of Members.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Legal

At this stage there are no special legal implications for the proposals set out above.

Should there be a decision that further measures are to be considered then the relevant statutory provisions will have to be identified and considered.

In considering any future informal consultation responses following officers seeking the views of local residents, businesses, Police Safer Neighbourhood team, local schools, bus operators, passengers using Northwood Station and other relevant stakeholders, decision makers must ensure there is a full consideration of all representations arising including those which do not accord with the officer recommendation. The decision maker must be satisfied that responses from the public are conscientiously taken into account.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Petition received September 2010.

Department for Transport 'Local Transport Notes' LTN 1/97 and LTN 2/97 (design standards for pedestrian crossings).