

Oxfordshire wins £2.98 million to transform active travel

Cyclists, pedestrians and residents in Oxford, Witney and Bicester are set to benefit from government money to implement active travel and support local economic recovery over the coming months.

Oxfordshire's winning bid of £2.98 million was announced on 13 November by the Department for Transport, the maximum possible.

Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet member for Environment Yvonne Constance said:

"The award of £2.98 million is great news for Oxfordshire. The scale of this award recognises the ambition of our active travel plans and enables us to build on our existing commitment to accelerate our existing bold plans for transforming how people travel and how communities are connected.

"Active travel and climate action are at the heart of our plans. We have put forward schemes which will have the greatest impact in terms of air quality, physical activity and environmental benefit. These are projects which go to the heart of supporting healthy and vibrant communities and help enable a sustainable and safe recovery."

Oxfordshire County Council submitted a series of bold proposals in an effort to win a greater allocation of funding than had been indicated initially. An indicative allocation of £2.3 million was made for the second stage of funding by the government for Oxfordshire.

The measures announced are either permanent or have the scope to become permanent. The schemes will involve full consultation to consider feedback from residents and stakeholders and will account for a spectrum of views.

The five schemes – three in Oxford, one in Bicester and one in Witney - are designed to reallocate road space to cyclists and pedestrians and create an environment that is safer for walking and cycling, while enabling residents to continue to benefit from reduced levels of air pollution.

How will Oxford benefit?

The three proposed schemes in Oxford are to be introduced to compliment other schemes already planned to reduce traffic and promote walking, bus use and cycling. This additional investment will help improve the quality of the cycling and walking infrastructure

A core focus of the active travel investment is to encourage an increase in walking and cycling in targeted areas. The benefit is that it will lead to improved health, cleaner air and make a lasting difference to peoples travel habits.

The goal will be partly achieved by the proposed introduction of seven Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) across Oxford, in addition to those which are at a more advanced stage of development in the Cowley area. LTNs will improve the liveability of these neighbourhoods by removing traffic, benefiting walking and cycling for all. All roads will remain accessible but by traffic calming measures which will prevent certain residential streets from being used as rat runs.

Whilst waiting for confirmation of the additional funding from the DfT, officers at the Council have continued to work on other active travel measures.

The good news is that the LTNs for Cowley are at an advanced stage and were funded outside of the DfT active travel scheme. The County Council is proposing three experimental LTNs within the Cowley area. This means the introduction of traffic filters at specific points across Church Cowley, Temple Cowley and Florence Park. A resident survey on these will be launched in late November.

Within the plans for Oxford are two new proposed traffic filters: one in the retail area of Cowley Road and another in the Warneford Lane area. These two traffic filters will aim to reduce traffic, increase bus use and to make roads and routes more accessible and safer to use for cyclists.

Bicester to benefit

Rapidly growing Bicester is also to benefit from active travel investment backed by funding from the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) – with a focus on increasing cycle journeys. The Bicester Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) sets out an ambitious target of doubling sustainable transport, at a minimum, from around 15,000 to 30,000 trips a day within the town.

This equates to a daily increase from around 3000 to 9000 bike trips a day and 18,000 to 24,000 walking trips a day. It is based on the development and delivery of a comprehensive network of cycle routes across the town by 2031, in tandem with development allocated within the local plan. A detailed household survey showed that in Bicester, 50% of local car trips were easily replaced by cycling and 25% of car trips by walking.

This proposed scheme incorporates the eastern end of Middleton Stoney Road. This corridor scheme will capture flows from the expanding south and west of Bicester and provide connectivity into the town centre via the central corridor (Oxford Road/Kings End) and Causeway. The scheme will be complimented by off-road pedestrian and cycle facilities and reduced traffic speeds, creating a safe and attractive environment for those who might have previously driven or taken the bus into town.

Good news for Witney

Sustainable travel by walking and cycling will also be the core focus for the proposed scheme in Witney, also funded by OxLEP.

An active travel corridor for the town will be implemented to follow the most commonly used cycle route through Witney and connect to the National Cycle Route 57 and the main Witney to Oxford cycle route via the A40. This corridor incorporates many aspects of the East Witney Cycle Strategy.

This scheme will improve sustainable connections across a central corridor in Witney and so allow safer pedestrian and cycle journeys, whilst encouraging a shift away from car journeys. This scheme will have far reaching benefits beyond the immediate corridor, by combining proposed improvements with secured walking and cycling measures in western Witney, to provide a continuous east-west route across the whole town.

This scheme will be a series of complementary measures to slow vehicle traffic and prioritise cyclists and pedestrians. This scheme will consist of several temporary measures, including traffic filters at the Fiveways roundabout.

One-ways streets and speed limit reductions are also planned such as in Corn Street, to create a safer environment to cycle and walk.