

Greening axes Oxon's £18m town road plan

ROADS

TRANSPORT SECRETARY Justine Greening has blocked an £18m road scheme being promoted by Oxfordshire County Council.

The 2km single carriageway Cogges Link Road was being promoted as a way of reducing traffic in Witney town centre and would have been funded with council and developer contributions. The project had attracted local opposition, particularly for its impact on the Windrush valley and country park.

Greening accepted the recommendations of the public inquiry inspector who said constructing west facing entry/exit slip roads on the A40 (a county council road) would reduce town centre traffic for less money and with less environmental impact. The slip road idea was suggested by link road opponents.

Inspector Stephen Roscoe said a "significant proportion" of the congestion in Witney town centre was caused by local traffic, and pointed out that national and local policy was to encourage modal shift from car to other modes for such trips.

"There is, however, little evidence of effective demand

management measures having been implemented [in Witney]," he said. "The current use of time-limited free parking does little to encourage modal shift for shopping and other short duration convenience trips."

Roscoe accepted a need to re-route traffic from the Bridge Street area of the town centre. He said the slip road investment would achieve this by re-routing cross-town through traffic onto the A40. "This would release town centre street space for alternative and more sustainable modes than the car," he said.

Roscoe adjusted the benefit:cost ratio of the link road down from 16:1 to 11:1, and said the slip road works had a BCR of 21:1.

In her decision letter, Greening agreed with Roscoe that the £4m slip road option was better in terms of "traffic, landscape, noise and vibration, biodiversity and flood risk".

Oxfordshire's leader Ian Hudspeth said the decision was "bitterly disappointing" but the council would now work with stakeholders to develop "new ways" to tackle traffic in the town centre. The county has not committed to implement the slip road idea.