



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

**Response to Public Consultation on Proposed Banbury 20mph Speed Limit**

1. Background

- 1.1. In recent years, there has been an increased focus on 20mph speed limits locally. This is largely the result of the current campaign by Oxfordshire County Council to replace 30mph limits with 20mph, as well as a wider national discussion. Throughout, I have received correspondence from those constituents who have sought a 20mph limit for their communities, but also from those concerned by the county-wide approach.
- 1.2. Since the launch of this consultation, I have been contacted by a significant number of constituents who live in Banbury and the surrounding villages. Some residents wanted to express their support for these proposals in full. The majority of those who have contacted me – over three quarters – however, wished to raise concerns about the plans. Broadly speaking, my constituents' views can be grouped as follows.

2. Road Safety

- 2.1. Road safety must be the paramount consideration in any discussions about altering our existing highway network. It is clear that many see targeted 20mph zones as an important tool for improving local road safety. Those constituents who have contacted me to support the proposals for Banbury feel that lowering the speed limit in specific areas would give drivers more time to react to hazards and make pedestrians and cyclists feel safer.
- 2.2. Even those who have raised concerns with me about the overall plans for Banbury largely agree that 20mph zones are effective when they are targeted at specific locations. In particular, constituents feel that roads outside schools and health centres, or through quieter residential areas, may be suitable for a reduction to 20mph. This reflects the higher pedestrian footfall to be expected in these areas, especially with more vulnerable road users such as children, the disabled and elderly.
- 2.3. In Banbury, most of our primary and secondary schools are located within residential areas, set back from the town's main through routes. The same can be said for a number of our GP surgeries, health centres and community facilities. In these instances, I agree with my constituents that it is appropriate to introduce targeted 20mph limits on the roads outside these locations as a logical step to improve road safety.





### 3. Current Pressures

- 3.1. By contrast, the County Council's decision to propose a blanket 20mph zone – incorporating the majority of Banbury's roads – rather than taking a more targeted approach has caused significant local concern. Stretches of many key routes through the town will be reduced to 20mph, including the Southam Road, Warwick Road, Horse Fair, Broughton Road, West Bar, South Bar, Oxford Road, Hightown Road, Cherwell Street, Bridge Street and Middleton Road. These roads form the spine of the town's strategic road network and are heavily used.
- 3.2. The pressures on Banbury's existing road network are well-known. Suffering from a lack of a strategic ring road, the town is reliant on its north-south and east-west corridors. Anybody wishing to circumnavigate the town has no real option but to take a route through its centre. Residents are concerned that a blanket speed reduction on so many of Banbury's strategic roads would only exacerbate existing congestion. I share these concerns and cannot see how this approach will meet the County Council's stated ambition to facilitate the effective passage of traffic around the town.

### 4. Cost

- 4.1. The scale of the proposals has also prompted concerns about the costs they will incur. At a time when our roads in Oxfordshire are in the worst state they have been for many years, despite record funding allocated by the Government, my constituents fear that these plans will distract the County Council's Highways department further. Local experience in places like Bucknell – where existing signs were painted over without being replaced by new signs or even recycled – only raises more doubts about County Hall's ability to implement a scheme of this scale effectively.

### 5. Effectiveness

- 5.1. Possibly the most fundamental question asked of these plans by my constituents, however, is whether a blanket 20mph zone would actually deliver reductions in overall road speeds. The County Council's own guidance on 20mph is clear that areas should be considered only where there is explicit local support. It also states that new zones will not be accompanied by any other traffic calming measures. This approach relies on securing local consent in order for the reduction to achieve compliance.
- 5.2. The Government recently published The Plan for Drivers which outlined how, while 20mph zones are an important tool for improving road safety in residential areas, their over-use risks undermining public acceptance and compliance as a result. The Department for Transport has made clear that 20mph speed limits should be considered



on a road-by-road basis with local consultation, rather than as blanket measures. It strikes me that residents are right to be concerned that the proposals for Banbury have strayed in this direction.

## 6. Active Travel

6.1. I agree that measures to improve active travel routes should be encouraged within our town. However, we cannot ignore the fact that many residents will continue to rely on their car for a considerable time to come. It is exactly for this reason that the Government has made clear that the needs of motorists should not be ignored in future highway planning, nor should barriers be erected to prevent car use. This is particularly relevant in Banbury given the town's role as the primary service centre for the surrounding rural area.

6.2. Residents feel that Banbury continues to be overlooked for significant infrastructure upgrades while County Hall's focus is on other projects elsewhere. Despite continued discussions on possible improvements to Hennef Way or a new motorway junction for the town, these rarely feature highly on the County Council's agenda. The much-needed Tramway Road improvement scheme is scheduled to be delivered next year, yet this comes more than two years after the plans were consulted on.

## 7. Conclusion

7.1. Overall, my constituents are supportive of targeted, localised measures to improve road safety around Banbury's schools, health centres and quieter residential areas. However, the blanket approach of these proposals has generated considerable concern about the possible impact on existing pressures within Banbury's strategic road network. Ultimately, many of the roads proposed to be reduced to 20mph are not pedestrianised areas or quietways, but some of our town's most important arteries. This should be reflected in the County Council's plans.

7.2. I trust that my constituents' concerns will be at the forefront of considerations as these proposals are reviewed.

**Rt Hon Victoria Prentis KC MP**  
**8 December 2023**