

# Friends of Mitcham's Corner

## **Public meeting, 24 February 2015: The Future of Mitcham's Corner**

Over 90 people attended, including City and County Councillors Damien Tunnicliffe, Jocelyne Scutt, Ysanne Austin, Richard Robertson and Noel Kavanagh (who is a member of the City Deal Joint Assembly), candidate Councillor Mike Sergeant, and Chesterton Coordinator Polly Plouviez.

FMC chairman Anne Cooper opened the meeting and introduced the two guest speakers: Glen Richardson (Urban Design and Conservation Manager at the City Council), and Brian Stinton (Highways and Infrastructure Officer at the County Council). They were followed by a presentation from FMC committee member Simon Baugh on the results of the recent survey. After a summing up by committee member Adrian Medd, the meeting concluded with a 30-minute session during which the guest speakers answered questions from the floor.

### **Glen Richardson: Planning for Mitcham's Corner**

Traffic in the Mitcham's Corner area has been challenging for decades. The gyratory was created in the early seventies, and from then on Mitcham's Corner began to become a non-place, dominated by traffic. The Council aims to strike a balance between two objectives: on the one hand we want to give the place back to the people living and working here, but at the same time we have to keep the traffic moving. Later I want to share some concepts of how to deal with this (please note these are only concepts or potential ideas of what could be done – this stage they are definitely not concrete plans).

The new Local Plan contains a section (Policy 21) which identifies the Mitcham's Corner area as an Opportunity Area. This declares the intention to make something of Mitcham's Corner, and recognises that this requires the development of a Master Plan, a vision of what could change. There are two large sites earmarked for development which are particularly significant: the sites of St Giles House and Staples. We can provide guidance for the development of the sites, e.g. recommending a maximum height for buildings.

The Local Plan is still awaiting government approval, but the signs are looking positive for Policy 21. In broad terms the objectives are:

- reduce the speed of traffic
- increase the width of the road
- remove the gyratory system
- re-establish historical routes
- create a public space
- improve the pavements.

There are interesting precedents for schemes that have tackled problems similar to Mitcham's Corner. An example is in Poynton in east Cheshire; this area was also heavily dominated by traffic (around 26,000 vehicles per day). The solution was to get rid of all the "stuff" in the space – lights, signage, street furniture, etc. – to create something much more friendly. A key feature of the new road system was to use "double roundels" (*not* roundabouts) and to do away with the standard defined traffic priorities. Even though the speed limit remained at 30 mph, the psychological effect of opening up the road space was to make people drive slower – the average speed dropped to 20 mph, there were less accidents, the local shops benefited, and generally people's lives improved. There are other examples of this approach in the UK and around the world. The concept is often referred to as "shared space" or "calmed traffic".

The City Council has been looking at several possible solutions for Mitcham's Corner, including some proposed by FMC and by young professionals attending the IDBE course in 2013. [Mr. Richardson showed three examples during the meeting, but prefers not to have them reproduced here as they are only possible concepts.]

It is necessary to test the impact of these possible schemes, not only on local traffic, but also on the wider road system. The Council wants to investigate these ideas with you through the Master Plan process. The City Deal is one way to pay for these improvements, but in order for any such scheme to be eligible for City Deal funding, it would need to have a demonstrable benefit for *buses*.

## **Brian Stinton: The City Deal and Mitcham's Corner**

The City Deal is a way to build on the success of Cambridge and to address the fact that Cambridge's further growth is threatened by increasing congestion. It is clear that we need to improve sustainable transport – we cannot keep feeding more and more traffic into the system. The focus of the City Deal is on getting sustainable improvements to the transport system which will result in connectivity and economic benefits to the areas targeted. It is vital that any schemes can be demonstrated to be *deliverable*.

Money will be given to the City Deal by the government in three tranches over a period of 15 years. The first tranche of £100 million will be invested over the period 2015–2020. It is planned that this sum will be supplemented with a further £30 million from local sources.

Governance of the City Deal is as follows (details can be found on the County Council website<sup>1</sup>).

- **City Deal Executive Board** – includes the leaders of the City Council, County Council, South Cambs District Council, and representatives from the University of Cambridge, and the Local Enterprise Partnership.

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See [http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/citydeal/info/6/home/4/about\\_the\\_greater\\_cambridge\\_city\\_deal/5](http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/citydeal/info/6/home/4/about_the_greater_cambridge_city_deal/5).  
The following document is also of interest:  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/321722/Greater\\_Cambridge\\_City\\_Deal\\_Document.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/321722/Greater_Cambridge_City_Deal_Document.pdf)

- **Joint Assembly** (supporting and advising the Executive Board) – representatives from the three Councils, and stakeholders from the business and education sectors.
- **Local Forum** – local stakeholders, who will provide inputs regularly.

In January the Executive Board prioritised the various schemes being put forward, based on their benefits and deliverability, and approved the Milton Road Bus Priority Scheme. £25 million will be allocated to this scheme, which will develop an improved bus system between the A14 and Mitcham's Corner. Histon Road is explicitly included as part of this.

The need for the Bus Priority Scheme is clear. During the evening peak period (4–6 pm) less than 40% of buses are on time, and an even greater problem than lateness is *unreliability*. However, it is also an objective of the scheme that it must be good for *everyone*, not just for traffic. And to ensure this, there must be significant involvement and consultation with local stakeholders.

The process for the Milton Road scheme will be as follows:

- baseline ('as-is') survey of traffic, data gathering and modelling
- development of options and initial design work
- development of preliminary business cases for promising options
- selection of the preferred option, involving a consultation process with local stakeholders
- detailed design and full business case for preferred option
- final decision whether to go ahead
- statutory processes, such as traffic orders and Council decisions.

The planned schedule is as follows:

- analysis and development of options (March–September 2015)
- consultation (January–March 2016)
- selection of preferred option (June 2016)
- detailed design and business case (February–July 2017)
- local consultation (February–July 2017)
- approval (September 2017)
- statutory processes (September–December 2017)
- commencement of construction (summer 2018).

An initial brief to guide the development of possible options has already been prepared. It includes, for example, provision for cyclists on Milton Road, Histon Road and Mitcham's Corner, as well as a number of public realm proposals – the aim is to do whatever we can for local people. It is expected that the scheme will result in traffic levels that are the same as at present, or even less.

## **Simon Baugh: Results of the survey on the future of Mitcham's Corner**

[Please refer to separate PDF of Simon's presentation on the results of the survey]

## Questions and discussion

[Q1] It is vital that bus stops at Mitcham's Corner should be in a convenient place for local people (rather than convenient for the bus operators). Cambridge needs a complete review of its bus system and routes. Bus services should not be run on a purely commercial basis.

[GR:] There's not much the Councils can do about this, but we do work closely with the operators. We have a dialogue with Stagecoach, which will be part of the discussions of the scheme. I agree that buses should serve the people of Mitcham's Corner.

[Q2] I note there were no bus operators at the City Deal meeting, which is surely an omission. My main question is that the cost of the approved City Deal schemes comes to £160 million, but the budget is only £100 million – where will the remaining money come from? In addition, won't the budget for the Milton Road scheme be used up quickly if any compulsory purchases are required?

[BS:] Government funding for the City Deal will be supplemented by money from Section 106 contributions by local developers and other funding. In addition, the figure of £160 million takes into account the fact that it's quite likely that some parts of schemes will in fact not be delivered. Regarding compulsory purchase, there are no explicit plans for this at the moment, but all options will be looked at.

[Q3] It would be very useful to have the figures and sources for other funding that is available.

[BS:] Agreed. I'll check.

[Q4] What about Victoria Road?

[GR:] Yes, this must also be considered in the Central Area analysis, and this will feed into the Mitcham's Corner Brief being developed.

[Q5] The increased charges for the Park and Ride have had a disastrous effect on the number of cars coming into central Cambridge.

[BS:] We do indeed know that this has affected the usage of the Park and Ride, but the figures for the impact on cars are not readily available. I'll check.

[Q6] The survey showed strong local resistance to the entry of flagship stores, so why was a large Sainsbury's approved as part of the 1 Milton Road development?

[GR:] In fact that Sainsbury's will be only a smaller outlet. But the wider issue is that the planning system does not legally *allow* Councils to block the entry of Sainsbury's, Tesco's, etc. Nevertheless, within this constraint, we will consider local views regarding future developments, especially for the two large sites in the area – St Giles House and Staples.

[Q7] It is absolutely vital to maintain the level of trees in the area. Can you give a categorical assurance that any trees removed as part of this scheme will be replaced elsewhere?

[GR:] I can't give such a categorical assurance, but mitigation measures *will* maximise compensatory trees, and in fact it is hoped that the scheme will improve tree planting.

[Q8] Just how radical are you willing to be about the road system?

[GR:] Radical options have indeed been discussed, for example severing the Victoria Avenue route for cars. How radical do you want to be? – we are open to any suggestions. As I mentioned, there will be consultation as part of the Master Plan process, and the format for this will be discussed with FMC and other stakeholders, for example what kind of meetings, etc. we want to have to discuss possibilities.

[Q9] I agree with the previous speaker [Q7] that green space and trees are needed. Large trees are going at the rail station and Alexandra Gardens, and there's no guarantee this won't happen with the present scheme. I also agree with the first speaker [Q1] that the public transport system cannot be commercially driven: it is vital to have public spending on it.

[Noted.]

[Q10] The problem is that there is no character to the Mitcham's Corner area. In order to draw cafes and retailers into the area, it needs some unity and to have features that will attract them. Mill Road has done this successfully.

[GR] Public spaces and trees are part of the options we are considering: removing the gyratory creates the opportunity for this. We don't want amorphous blocks of buildings without character. The Master Plan will articulate this desire within the Mitcham's Corner Brief, and there is lots of scope to develop this over the next 18 months.

[Q11] The recent replacement of street lighting has been a disaster.

[BS] I agree that lighting can influence the character of an area, and the County Council has had a lot of complaints about this project. A main objective was to save energy, and indeed the new system has resulted in a 25% saving. The lighting contract was given to Balfour Beatty to ensure certainty of lighting supply, and they have used a single standard lamp in all areas outside the city centre.

[Q12] The proposed timetable of three years for the Milton Road scheme looks slow – can't we streamline the consultation and make it more dynamic and modern, using up-to-date media?

[BS] I agree we need to make the process more slick. This will be discussed with FMC and other stakeholders.

[Q13] The major problem with public transport is that bus provision in Cambridge is a market monopoly. Stagecoach is the only provider, and this must be addressed before there can be significant improvement in services.

[Noted]