

Agenda item 3

For information - Update on Frome Safer School Streets project

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Summary

This report provides an update on the Frome Safer School Streets project with a reminder of the aims of this trial scheme, how it is being funded, what highway improvements and vehicle access restrictions will be introduced and when, feedback from the community so far and what further contact with the community is planned.

1. Background

Over the past few years, FTC has been working with active travel charity Sustrans and Somerset Council as Highway Authority to implement Frome's first School Streets project in the Oakfield and Park Wards.

The Safer School Streets project will trial restrictions to vehicle access during drop-off and pick-up times making it safer for those walking and wheeling to and from school. It will also introduce highway improvements that are designed to make the streets more pedestrian and cycle friendly.

The purposes of the scheme are to:

- Create a safer and more pleasant environment for those travelling to and from school
- Reduce traffic and congestion, and improve road safety
- Encourage active travel for some, or all, of the journey to and from school
- Improve the overall health and wellbeing of young people and their families

The identified School Streets zone will serve 4 schools and a nursery, and over 1500 children – Oakfield Academy, Trinity First School, Critchill School, Avanti Park School and Bright Stars Nursery.

2. What approvals are in place?

Councillors agreed to take this project forward in December 2022 and work with Somerset Council and Sustrans to engage the community, implement the scheme and monitor its effectiveness. They noted that because the scheme was subject to technical approval and sign-off by Somerset Council that it may change at the margin.

Technical approval has now been secured with marginal changes made to keep the scheme within budget. A legal agreement with Somerset Council enabling works to commence on the highway has been completed and the necessary licences and traffic regulation orders will be

completed imminently. Following an earlier tendering exercise, a contractor, Northavon has now been commissioned.

3. What are the restrictions to be introduced and when?

Sections of Oakfield Road (outside Oakfield Academy) and Nunney Road (outside Trinity First School) will have limited vehicle access between 8.10 a.m. and 9.00 a.m. and 2.45 p.m. and 3.30 p.m., Monday – Friday during term time. The morning restrictions will be different in Park Road (up to Avanti Park School) namely 8.25 a.m. to 8.55 a.m. with afternoon restrictions in place between 3.00 p.m. and 3.30 p.m. A 20-mph limit will be introduced along all roads in the Safer School Streets area which includes the Critchill estate. Please follow this link to see the Safer School Streets zone and the roads where the 20-mph zone will be extended: <https://bit.ly/frome-school-streets>

All residents within the Safer School Streets zone will still be able to access their streets without restriction, along with buses, blue badge holders, emergency services and trades people.

These restrictions are expected to come into force in the Summer Term. They will run for a trial period of 18 months with the hope that they will become permanent if children, parents, schools and local residents are in support of the continuation of the scheme.

4. What are the planned highway improvements and when will the work start and finish?

The scheme will introduce new uncontrolled crossings, new dropped kerbs and tactile paving, footway build outs, updated white and yellow lining, surface patterns to the areas outside schools and the nursery to make it clear to drivers that they are entering a school zone, low maintenance planters, benches and cycle stands. The details have been agreed with Somerset Council following earlier engagement with FTC councillors and the community. Plans are available at <https://bit.ly/frome-school-streets>

The highway works started on 12 February with the installation of a raised table outside Oakfield Academy in Oakfield Road. Traffic management measures will be in place throughout the build programme. Sustrans will supervise the works.

5. What community engagement has been completed and what feedback was received?

Councillors will recall (and it was reported to Council in December 2022) that the scheme was produced using a co-design approach with the local community. In September-October 2021 seven public events were held in Victoria Park, at Critchill and Avanti schools, in the Town Centre, at Town Hall and online. We had hundreds of conversations across these events. The information gathered in the co-design sessions was used to create a concept design that was shared in April 2022. The designs were on display at Town Hall and online, and sessions were held outside the schools to allow people to view the designs and provide feedback.

Since then, there has been further engagement with schools and parents on a number of occasions with positive responses received. In October 2023, letters were delivered to 4000

households in Frome and Nunney, and to parents at all four schools. The letters included the opportunity to respond to a pre-trial survey with the majority of respondents so far supporting the scheme. Further details of responses to the survey will be presented at the meeting.

6. What engagement is planned next?

Full details of the highway works, and their timing are being communicated across all channels. Letter drops to residents, schools, businesses and other organisations in the area have already been completed.

We have been working closely with Oakfield, Avanti, Critchill and Trinity Schools to organise a calendar of fun, interactive events to engage students and their families in activities to promote active travel, and the direct benefits of the trial itself. We will work with students to create bespoke Walking Wheels to illustrate the walking and wheeling route options available to each school. These will include travel times to encourage habit change.

We have booked an extreme BMX stunt show for each school to create excitement about cycling, and Dr Bike will visit each school to perform bike safety checks, and gear and brake tune ups, for everyone who books in. We are inviting students from Avanti and Trinity to join Ginny from Mojo Moves for some invigorating morning exercise and a very fun walk to school with friends. We have also introduced schools to the 'Go Jauntly' free walking app and their fantastic Nature Connectiveness lesson plans, which have been very gratefully received, particularly by Critchill.

We are working with the Bee Friendly Trust who will build our 12 self-watering planters, and which will be installed along Oakfield and Nunney Roads. They will help us to run planting workshops with students of Critchill and Oakfield which we hope will engender a sense of ownership and care and teach the students of the importance of pollinators and pollinator-friendly plants.

We are also working with FromeTech/Clear Air Frome and the Oakfield STEM club to build new air quality sensors, install them around the School Streets area, and collate air quality data to share.

7. What are the funding arrangements

Funding has been drawn down from Somerset Council and has been sourced by Sustrans from the Department for Transport to cover design, construction and legal costs with a healthy contingency in place to allow for unforeseen costs when construction work starts. FTC's input is in terms of staff time and costs associated with ongoing community engagement, maintenance of new planters and evaluation. These costs were detailed in the 2024/25 budget report to the last Council meeting and were approved.