

Kidlington Parish Council

Chair's report

September 2019

The saga of the High Street bollard goes back several years. The section between Barclays Bank and the Oxford Road had already been partly pedestrianized when the present Traffic Order took effect in April 2012. The Council's policy, then as now, was to make the High Street as pedestrian-friendly as possible, in the interests not just of shoppers but of businesses as well.

The 2012 District Council Order prohibited all traffic in this section during a Pedestrian Core Period from 10 am to 4.30 pm, with a strictly limited number of exceptions. These are: 1) fire, police, ambulance and postal vehicles; 2) cash deliveries and collections, essential services, building operations; 3) disabled mobility aids; 4) owners of private off-street parking in the section, who have to display a certificate of exemption. Outside the Core Period the section is still closed to traffic, but the list of exemptions is extended to include deliveries, cycling, and disabled badge-holders. It should also be remembered (but is too often forgotten) that this section of this High Street is one-way for all vehicles.

As the picture of the traffic sign shows, the list of exemptions is complicated. It's made particularly difficult to enforce by the exemption of owners of parking spaces who have a legal right of access to their property. A more controversial decision has been the prohibition of disabled badge holders and cyclists during the Core Period (but not outside it). Reasonable people may differ on this decision, but the Council has stood by it in order to minimize the risk to pedestrians (extra disabled bays were created nearby).

Because the previous traffic closure had been widely ignored, the Council before last decided that the only way to ensure that it was respected was to install the rising bollard opposite Barclays. The bollard is meant to be raised from 10 am to 4.30 pm, but readers may well have noticed that it has been down during this period more often than up; indeed it has never operated as it should since it was first installed. As a result the traffic exclusion has become widely ignored—though given the somewhat confusing nature of the sign, that is not wholly surprising.

The reason the bollard is down so much is to do partly with technical problems, but also with the way it is operated. It is controlled from the CCTV room at Banbury Police Station, whose staff have to respond whenever exempt vehicles require access. Understandably, given that CCTV is mainly about crime prevention and given current staff shortages, the staff are often unable to respond, and are therefore obliged to leave the bollard down. Under some pressure from the Parish Council, however, the District Council is currently exploring alternative technical solutions, which we hope will avoid or reduce this problem. We have also asked the local police to carry out more spot checks on offenders. In the meantime, we do appeal to drivers to respect the regulations.

DAVID ROBEY