

CABINET

19 March 2013

Title: Merry Fiddlers Junction Improvements – Consultation Findings	
Report of the Cabinet Members for Regeneration and Environment	
Open Report	For Decision
Wards Affected: Heath, Valence and Whalebone	Key Decision: Yes
Report Author: Tim Martin – Transport Planning & Policy Manager	Contact Details: Tel: 0208 227 3939 E-mail: timothy.martin@lbbd.gov.uk
Accountable Divisional Director: Jeremy Grint, Divisional Director Regeneration	
Accountable Director: Graham Farrant, Chief Executive	
Summary: <p>Cabinet on 28 September 2010 approved the Local Implementation Plan Delivery Programme for 2011/12 – 2013/14, (Minute 38 refers). The single largest project within the programme is the Merry Fiddlers Junction Improvements which has an allocation of £1.1 million, spread over the three years, to be spent on a range of safety/accessibility improvements to the main junction, several adjacent turnings together with improvements to the local public realm (including the nearby shopping parades on Whalebone Lane and Becontree Avenue).</p> <p>This report presents the results of a public consultation exercise on a range of options for the improvement of the Merry Fiddlers Junction with a view to improving road safety, reducing congestion, improving the quality of the public realm and conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. The proposals form an integral part of a wider Masterplan proposed for the area, the development of which was approved by Cabinet on 24 April 2012 (Minute 144 refers).</p> <p>A total of 340 responses to the consultation were received. People were asked whether they support the eight separate proposals for improving the Merry Fiddlers junction. Apart from the proposal to ban the right hand turn from Whalebone Lane into Green Lane all the proposals were supported as set out in the recommendation. However it is not proposed to proceed with the option to open up the Broadway to allow traffic from Whalebone Lane to access the Broadway due to its impact on pedestrians and limited benefits to road users.</p> <p>If Cabinet agrees the recommendations detailed designs will be drawn up for these proposals. These will then be subject to further consultation with a range of statutory undertakers (e.g. utility companies, Transport for London, the Police, etc.) to address any outstanding issues. Once the detailed designs have been confirmed, it is anticipated that implementation works can begin in May 2013. Works will be carefully phased over the course of the 2013/14 financial year to ensure that disruption to residents, car users and businesses is kept to a minimum.</p>	

Recommendation(s)

The Cabinet is asked to agree:

- (i) To the implementation of the following improvements to the Merry Fiddlers Junction and surrounds, the detail of which is set out in Appendix 1 to the report:
 - Replace the paving around the junction.
 - Reduce the number of lanes on Wood Lane next to the leisure centre from 5 to 3
 - Make the dangerous Wood Lane/Homestead Road junction safer.
 - Link the Becontree Leisure Centre and Morrisons car parks together.
 - Ban the dangerous right hand turns into and out of Althorne Way and out of Morrisons onto Wood Lane. Open up Stour Road to allow access from Althorne Way to Rainham Road North.
- (ii) To undertake a consultation on the nature and extent of a localised parking plan for the area, including the Stour Road area and the area outside the Merry Fiddlers shopping parade on Becontree Avenue.
- (iii) To authorise the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Cabinet Members for Environment and Regeneration and the Valence and Heath Ward Members, to:
 - a) agree and implement specific measures for the Wood Lane / Homestead Road junction, following consideration of the options to improve safety in that area,
 - b) to undertake further investigative work to establish the feasibility of banning the right turn out of the Shell petrol station onto Wood Lane and changing the access into the Merry Fiddlers shopping parade from Wood Lane to Green Lane.

Reason(s)

To assist the Council in achieving all of its Community Priorities, in particular: 'Raising General Pride in the Borough', 'Making Barking and Dagenham cleaner, greener and safer', and 'Promoting equal opportunities and celebrating diversity'.

1. Introduction and Background

1.1 The area known as the Merry Fiddlers at Becontree Heath is a busy road junction, where the main roads from Barking to Romford and from the A12 to the A13 intersect. The 173, 175, 5, 150, 128, and 499 bus routes all run through the junction providing access to major centres including Romford, Barking, Dagenham Heathway and Ilford. It is also a junction which is heavily used by pedestrians and cyclists due to the variety of destinations in the area, these destinations include:

- Becontree Leisure Centre and forthcoming BMX (Bicycle Moto Cross) and Skateboard Park
- Robert Clack Secondary School – 1800 pupils
- All Saints Catholic School – 1100 pupils
- The shops and services provided at Merry Fiddlers and Whalebone Lane North Neighbourhood Parade

- Morrisons Supermarket
- Civic Centre

- 1.2 However, the junction suffers from significant congestion problems, which can be particularly acute at peak hours and poor accessibility – acting as a barrier to vulnerable road users wanting to access the destinations listed above. In addition, a recent Accident Investigation and Prevention study revealed that the junction has a higher collision rate than the borough average for signal controlled junctions. Finally, the local environment has deteriorated somewhat which has been thrown into sharp relief by the Becontree Leisure Centre.
- 1.3 A key priority for the Council is to secure improvements to the junction, and along the key corridors leading up to the junction, in order to reduce traffic bottlenecks and delays, improve accessibility for vulnerable road users and improve safety and security. Work is also required to enhance the quality of the local street scene. The improvements form an integral part of a wider Masterplan proposed for the area, the development of which was approved by Cabinet on 24 April 2012, (Minute 144 refers).

2. Proposal and Issues

- 2.1 The Council commissioned Parsons Brinkerhoff (PB) in July 2011 to undertake a feasibility options study for improvements to the junction. As part of the original brief PB were tasked with ascertaining the extent of the various congestion, accessibility, safety and security issues and to propose appropriate remedial measures. A key requirement of the project was also to give consideration to how the local public realm could be improved and to explore possible revisions to the entrance/exit to the nearby Morrison's car park, with the possibility of creating new access/egress arrangements at Althorne Way or Stour Road.
- 2.2 PB produced a report in February 2012 which identified a number of issues and outlined a range of potential options to address these. The key findings of the report were:
- A high number of accidents at the junction and the roads leading to it (42 accidents in the 3 years to 2011);
 - The layout of the junction causes delays to motorists, and pedestrians and cyclists find it difficult to use the crossings safely;
 - The general environment is tired in need of revitalisation;
 - There are long traffic queues heading up Wood Lane to Whalebone Lane in the mornings;
 - The crossings outside Morrisons and on Green Lane are very busy at school times;
 - Buses stop for a long time at the bus stop opposite Morrisons which delays other traffic;
 - Due to having to wait a long time at the junction for a green light, motorists rush to get through the lights and this has caused a number of rear end shunts;
 - The right hand turn out of Morrisons onto Wood Lane and the right hand turn out of Althorne Way onto Wood Lane are very dangerous;
 - Morrisons car park generally has a lot of empty spaces;
 - Pedestrians often get caught out by traffic on Wood Lane turning left past the leisure centre;

- The bus stops outside Morrisons and near Althorne Way are very busy with up to 31 buses per hour in the morning.

3. Options Appraisal

3.1 To address these issues, a number of proposals were developed for the Merry Fiddlers junction and its environs. These have varying degrees of benefits to traffic and the pedestrian environment, but also have implications for road safety. In addition to the main junction options, a number of complementary options were also developed. These principally focus on altering the access arrangements to Morrisons Car Park with the intention of limiting the impact on the operation of the Merry Fiddlers junction. Further details on the different proposals, the level of support for these, and the potential implications of the measures are set out in Appendix 1 to this report. Outline plans of the various options are also included in Appendix 2.

4. Consultation

4.1 An informal consultation event was held at the Dagenham Town show in July 2012, where members of the public were asked what improvements they thought would benefit the Merry Fiddlers area. The responses can be summarised into a desire for a general upgrade of the built environment, with improved facilities for pedestrians, cyclists and disabled access. There is a desire for better parking, more retail shops and cafes – attracting shoppers into the area, and the addition of markets and other weekend functions to extend the range of goods on offer. There also appears to be a strong desire for a better deterrent to anti-social behaviour.

4.2 A more comprehensive programme of community consultation and engagement with a range of local stakeholders including residents, schools, businesses, transport operators and emergency services was undertaken between October and November 2012. This involved the distribution of some 2,900 leaflets outlining the various proposals, publication of the plans on the Council's website, and a special public consultation event at Becontree Leisure Centre on 25 October 2012. The key findings of the consultation exercise are summarised below:

- A total of 340 responses to the consultation were received, a response rate of around 10%. Of these some 290 responses were received from borough residents, 16 were received from local businesses and the remainder were either from outside the borough or did not indicate where they were from. 18% of responses were provided on-line, the rest were provided via return of a questionnaire.
- In general, a greater number of people supported the various proposals (62%) than were opposed (24%). Around 9% of respondents had no definitive view one way or the other. Only the banning of the right hand turn from Whalebone Lane into Green Lane was not supported. In addition officers do not recommend that the option to re-open the Broadway is taken forward.
- Within the responses to the questionnaire were two suggestions which had not been considered originally but which officers consider are worthy of taking forward. These include banning the right hand turn out of the Shell petrol station onto Wood Lane South and linked to this is a suggestion to ban the right hand turn to the Merry Fiddlers parade from Wood Lane and replace this with a new left hand turn into the parade from Green Lane.

- There is a general consensus that on-street parking arrangements in the area need to be managed more effectively, particularly to improve conditions for residents/businesses, but also as a means of helping to ease local congestion and improving road safety. Consequently, it is proposed to undertake a consultation on the nature and extent of a localised parking plan for the area, to include Stour Road/Althorne Way and the area outside the Merry Fiddlers shops on Becontree Avenue.

Next Steps

- 4.3 If Cabinet agrees the recommendations detailed designs will be drawn up for these proposals. These will then be subject to further consultation with a range of statutory undertakers (e.g. utility companies, Transport for London, the Police, etc.) to address any outstanding issues. Once the detailed designs have been confirmed, it is anticipated that implementation works can begin in April 2013. Works will be carefully phased over the course of the 2013/14 financial year to ensure that disruption to residents and businesses is kept to a minimum.

5. Financial Implications

Implications completed by: Phil Horner, Principal Accountant

- 5.1 The total capital budget for the proposed scheme, including design, consultation, construction and administration is £460,000. This sum will be entirely funded by Transport for London as the junction improvement works have been included in the Borough's Local Implementation Plan (LIP) for 2012/13.
- 5.2 Once the works have been completed, no additional revenue costs are anticipated in respect of maintaining the junction's highway infrastructure.
- 5.3 One of the proposals discussed in the report is to link the Leisure Centre car park with Morrison's car park. The Leisure Centre car park is currently under the control of the Parking Services Section and is operated as a "pay and display" site. It is, however, currently free to park in Morrison's car park.
- 5.4 The Authority currently receives around £10,000 per year from the Leisure Centre car park although the levels of charge in place at this time are due to triple with effect from 1st April 2013. Any potential loss of parking income to be sustained by the Authority will be mitigated to a great extent by the proposal to link the two car parks on a "one way" only basis. This will prevent users of the Leisure Centre from driving from that car park into Morrison's car park in order to avoid paying parking fees.

6. Legal Implications

Implications completed by: Paul Feild Corporate Governance Solicitor

- 6.1 The Council is a Highway Authority under the Highways Act 1980. The Act places a statutory responsibility on the Council to maintain and repair all those roads which are not trunk roads or roads administered by the Greater London Authority. To reduce the risk of accidents and so as to be able to rely on a statutory defence against claims in the event of accidents, the Council is obliged to establish a programme of inspections and prioritisation of works
- 6.2 The proposals set out in this report are identified as a priority and if as appears to be the case a junction presents an increased risk of danger to road users and pedestrians then such works as are necessary to reduce the risk should be accorded a special priority.

7. Other Implications

- 7.1 **Risk Management** – A number of the proposals will require further investigation/detailed design work before they can be progressed. In particular, further work is necessary to establish any utility diversion costs.
- 7.2. **Contractual Issues** - Procurement relating to this project will be undertaken in accordance with the provisions of the Council's contract rules and procurement rules including European Union procurement rules where applicable. Legal procurement advice would be consulted in entering into terms and conditions with suppliers in relation to such procurement.
- 7.3 **Customer Impact** - The recommended improvements will benefit all those who use the Merry Fiddlers junction and who access the Morrison's supermarket and Becontree Heath Leisure Centre including motorists, pedestrians and cyclists.
- 7.4 **Safeguarding Children** – The current junction is a formidable barrier to children accessing Robert Clack and All Saints Secondary Schools. Therefore improvements to pedestrian and cyclist access have been one of the key motivations for securing improvements to the junction and local schools have been consulted on the proposals (of these only All Saints School responded – their main concern centred on the potential safety implications of re-opening the Broadway to traffic). It is also the objective of the improvements to reduce the rate of accidents in the locality and to create a safer environment for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists.
- 7.5 **Health Issues** – The proposals are expected to have beneficial impact on health of local residents of Becontree Heath by helping to reduce local traffic congestion and thereby improving air quality, whilst promoting healthy travel practices through the provision of improved pedestrian/cycle facilities. In addition, general well being will be improved as a result of the enhanced visual appearance of the junction and surrounding public realm. It is anticipated that the various proposals will result in a reduction in the incidences of collisions at the junction, thus helping the borough to meet its road safety targets. Finally it is hoped that the junction improvements will make it easier for people to access the leisure centre by all means of travel.

- 7.6 **Crime and Disorder Issues** - The proposals will provide a safer and more secure environment where opportunities for crime are reduced and a host of public realm improvements (e.g. new street lighting, removal of street clutter, etc.) make the area more user friendly and more legible.
- 7.7 **Property/Asset Issues** – The recommended proposals work within the existing footprint of the junction. Further work will be required to ascertain the extent/cost of work needed to divert/replace utilities. The proposal to connect together the Becontree Leisure Centre and Morrison’s Supermarket car parks to allow access for the latter from Althorne Way may require the charging regime and hours of operation of both car parks to be harmonised.

Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:

- Merry Fiddlers Junction Feasibility Study, February 2012; Parsons Brinkerhoff
- Becontree Heath Masterplanning Cabinet Report; 24 April 2012
- Merry Fiddlers Junction Improvements Consultation Leaflet, October 2012

List of appendices:

- Appendix 1: Details of Merry Fiddlers Junction Improvement Proposals and Implications
Appendix 2: Outline Plans of Merry Fiddlers Junction Improvement Proposals