

A40 decision welcomed

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A Government decision to deal with a notorious accident blackspot on the A40 at Wheatley has been met with delight.

In a surprise announcement, the Transport Minister Mrs Lynda Chalker MP has ordered the closure of the gap in the road which allowed westbound traffic to turn right towards Forest Hill and Islip on the B4027.

There have been numerous accidents at the busy junction which is used by many motorists taking

the B4027 as a short cut to the A43 and the north.

Mrs Chalker has also promised measures to deal with the equally dangerous Forest Hill turn-off near to Oxford, though plans have not been finalised.

It was at this junction in 1981 that the Rev Hubert Brasier, the Vicar of Wheatley, was killed on his way to an evening service in Forest Hill.

There have been nine accidents there in the past five years, and 14 crashes at the B4027 turning.

Mr Joe Weston, a veteran campaigner for the closure

of the B4023 gap, said he was surprised by the speed of Mrs Chalker's announcement.

Mr Weston, the chairman of Oxfordshire Friends of the Earth, has lobbied MPs but never expected such a swift response to the latest appeal.

He said: "I must admit I'm surprised. We were expecting to be fobbed off."

He added: "We have been campaigning for years to get something done. The gaps should never have been allowed in the first place."

Draft orders for the closure will be published soon. The favoured way of providing access to the B4027 will be for westbound vehicles to turn left at Wheatley, then cross the existing flyover which will be connected to the Forest Hill road.

News of the closure of the turning was welcomed by Wheatley county councillor, Mr Peter Audley-Miller who said everyone in the area would be pleased with the change.

He added that it was particularly important that the work was being done before building of the M40 extension was underway.

With the northern section of the motorway likely to be finished first, many more motorists would be likely to use the B4023 as a short cut avoiding the Oxford ring road.

Mr Weston explained that the particular danger of the current junction was that it confused drivers. Cars appeared to be overtaking when they were in fact slowing down to move into the central reservation gap. That was when accidents happened.