



A34 Wolvercote traffic chaos leads to artists losing funds

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Artists taking part in an Oxfordshire arts festival have blamed A34 closures for causing a “devastating economic impact” and thousands of pounds in lost income.

Oxfordshire Artweeks is the UK’s oldest and biggest artist open studios and pop-up exhibition event.

This year the three-week festival has been disrupted by A34 traffic chaos.

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The A34 southbound was closed for the last two weekends between the Peartree and Botley Interchanges due to National Highway’s essential repair works to the Wolvercote Viaduct.



A lorry blocks the road in Wolvercote last weekend (Image: Nick Malden)

Motorists travelling through Wolvercote and Wytham have reported “traffic mayhem” and villagers told the Oxford Mail they were stuck in their homes due to gridlock in the villages.

Oxfordshire Artweeks, which started on May 6, is organised by the festival director Esher Lafferty and she estimated A34 traffic queues had led to losses in the region of £250,000.

The total value of the artwork sold during this festival can come to as much as one million pounds, according to Ms Lafferty.

Ms Lafferty said: “The traffic has led to people turning around before reaching a venue.

“This has been the most dispiriting time for many Artweeks exhibitors since the festival first began 40 years ago.”



Oxford University kilns in Wytham (Image: Dr Robin Wilson)

The festival includes nearly 1,000 artists showcasing their work at 500 venues but this year artists across the county have reported a “seismic downturn in their annual Artweeks visitor numbers”.

Dr Robin Wilson, print maker and director of the Oxford University’s Kilns Project in Wytham, opened his printmaking studio but was disappointed by a scarcity of visitors during the first weekend of the Wolvercote closures.



Artist Dr Robin Wilson (Image: Dr Robin Wilson)

Dr Wilson said visitors who had to cancel due to the traffic disruption included the Japanese Minister of Culture from the embassy in London, a visit from state school pupils in the Midlands and a community pottery group which intended to travel across from Birmingham.

Dr Wilson said: "The whole situation has been a really very expensive disaster.

"Many people have wasted a good deal of time that could otherwise have been avoided with greater forewarning and better traffic management.

"To say I am angry is an understatement."

Dr Wilson was particularly annoyed the festival had coincided with **the Botley Road closure** and the closure for works in Wytham Village.



Artist Dr Robin Wilson (*Image: Dr Robin Wilson*)

Jackie Richards, an artist exhibiting in Wolvercote, said the traffic chaos near her village last weekend meant it took two hours for her to reach the site from Rose Hill on the opening day.

She said: "On the second day last weekend, May 21, I couldn't even get to my own exhibition.

"My brother told me not to bother trying to reach Wolvercote as an articulated lorry was stuck across the road and nothing could get in or out."



Artist works at the Oxford University kiln site in Wytham (Image: Dr Robin Wilson)

Ms Richards said most people who live close by in East Oxford decided not to venture out when they realised the extent of the traffic chaos in the area.

A glass artist based in Kidlington, Pam Fyvie, said visits to her home were very limited due to the "absolute carnage" on the roads surrounding Oxford.

She said: "I could not believe National Highways was allowed to close the A34 for two weekends running at the same time as the Botley Road closure.

"Do they not actually ever communicate with each other?"

A Network Rail spokesman said: "We are working to build a bigger and better Oxford station and expand the railway for the future - ensuring that passengers and the local community experience a service they truly deserve.

"Unfortunately, this means closing Botley Road at the rail bridge for six months while we carry out this work as quickly and as safely as possible.

"Despite road access being blocked under the rail bridge, Botley Road is still open for business as pedestrians and cyclists can still access local businesses and amenities and residents can still access their homes.

"However, we do realise that there's never a good time to block road access, and we'd like to thank the local community for their patience while we carry out this work."

Greg Stone, National Highways route manager, said:"There's never a good time to work on a major road like the A34 and we understand the impact these closures have on people.

"The work on the Wolvercote Viaduct was planned months in advance, is safety critical and also weather dependent so needs to take place as soon as possible during the warmer months.

"I thank people for bearing with us and advise anyone travelling in and around Oxford over the next few weeks to plan ahead, leave extra time for their journey or consider other modes of transport if possible."

A Southern Gas Network spokesman said: "Our recent work in the A34 was planned in co-ordination with the local authority, and all local stakeholders were notified in advance.

"This work was essential to maintain a safe and reliable gas supply for the local community, and to prevent further emergency repair work which leads to unplanned disruption for road users.

"The majority of our work was carried out under temporary traffic lights, but when a road closure was required we worked in collaboration with National Highways to ensure we were as efficient as possible."

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