



Watchfield Parish Council

Local Transport & Connectivity Plan
Oxfordshire County Council
County Hall
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15 February 2022

Dear LTCP

Please find below comments from Watchfield Parish Council on the consultation topics of the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan survey.

Vision

This plan can only go in tandem with nationalised or subsidised public transport at reasonable costs and increased local employment opportunities. There should be no new development without new local employment.

Key Themes

Productivity must include local employment. New opportunities for new developments, not continually recounting employment opportunities already occupied by the existing population.

Headline Targets

Again, the reduction in the need for journeys would be very much linked to realistic local employment opportunities

Walking and Cycling Policies

Please ensure very local organisations and activity groups are engaged. A brief ring round has indicated that local cycling groups were unaware of this consultation.

Active and Healthy Travel Strategy Targets

There seems no accountability built into the targets, just monitoring of whether they have been achieved. These targets cannot be taken in isolation as achieving them will be linked to many other factors inside and outside of the LTCP. All new major developments should have clauses or conditions within the permissions that contributes to the increase in cycling and walking. Not just financial contributions or the much maligned Travel Packs in new developments which dismisses the developers' responsibility with a map to the nearest bus stop.

Commitments to active travel and governance policies and actions

Within the SMART framework, can accountability also be included, alongside achievability? The extent to which AHTS is incorporated into Planning conditions must be transparent and not a closed-door discussion with developers, as with S106. Developers cannot be allowed to dismiss their responsibilities with financial contributions.

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk

Chairman

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Clerk

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Cycle network policies and actions

Please ensure local groups and organisations are involved at the very early stages of planning where local knowledge of less known routes is key. Do not make any route decisions as a 'map only' exercise. We have had many problems resulting from Highways' decisions and diversions based on maps only. Seasonal viability of greenways must also be considered with unmapped routes.

Managing car use policies and actions

Who is funding the implementation and enforcement of speeding and parking in rural settings? It appears that civil parking enforcement is concentrated around urban areas and Parish Councils are asked to pay for local enforcement as well as funding lower speed limits etc. It should be clear in the LTCP that these policies are dependent on Parishes increasing their precepts in order to fund the projects and therefore, implementation of the policies is not a County decision at all. Implementation without co-ordinated and sustained enforcement is meaningless.

Measures to restrict private car parking must be made in tandem with Planning to ensure adequate parking within property boundaries of new builds and cycle storage as standard. Again, tying development to increased local employment opportunities will increase cycle usage more than introducing long distance commuting routes.

Cycling culture policies and actions

How are you assessing the accident data not reported to the police (policy 42)? Will the current standard of pot-hole repair be addressed as sweep and fill degrades quickly to leave hazards, especially for cyclists? What are the strategies for ensuring standard and novice cyclists are not usurped by electric bike and scooters users?

Urban realm policies and actions

On-the-ground assessments of many rural villages is required as many pedestrian routes are unlit and have no pavements. There is also often not the option of an alternative route or the installation of pavements due to the narrow nature of the roads. All new developments of any size should have walkable, lit routes to local facilities, with adequate pavements. If this is not possible, permission should be refused. Parishes are being told that extra street lighting would need to be funded locally so how can policies be made that are not enforceable within the budget of the County or developers?

Design for walking policies and actions

Please ensure that walking standards take into account rural unlit roads and those with no pavements. A review of existing crossing points on major roads is needed, especially those crossing points on extremely busy roads that divide communities and services. Some crossings are unused or mis-used due to poor design and re-thinks are required. Will pavement parking enforcement be funded by the County Council? Parish Councils are being asked to fund civil parking enforcement. Policies without adequate enforcement are meaningless.

Please ensure Planning Policy is fully in line with AHT policies. Development should only be permitted where there are safe and practicable alternatives to the car.

Healthy space shaping policies

Please ensure that the 20-minute neighbourhood strategy is practical on the ground and not a map-based exercise. Ensure all proposed 20-minute routes are accessible year-round in rural areas and not dependent on routes across private land.

Please thoroughly investigate the implications of the School Streets policy before implementation. Although the benefit for the immediate school vicinity would be obvious, are the problems just going to be pushed to the wider vicinity?

Have the effects of electric scooter and bike use been factored into the Low Traffic Neighbourhoods?

Road safety policies

The local road safety measures to protect vulnerable road users are laudable but there should also be strategies to minimise collisions on major routes. Traffic will undoubtedly increase on major routes when minor routes become less viable and care should be taken that these corridors are made safer. The accident record for the A420 is appalling for users and the road geographically divides some local communities. Greater use will lead to greater separation for some communities and services.

Public transport policies

As long as public transport modes are commercial ventures there cannot be a model for the future that is dependable. Economics will always win and 'non-viable' commercial routes will be withdrawn. This will mean that all developments and existing housing stock on those routes immediately becomes non-sustainable in terms of transport. Not for profit transport systems can reduce the fare costs to increase the uptake and become viable in the long term. If public transport is made cheap enough and frequent enough it will become the favoured transport rather than the car.

As well as encouraging sustainable transport to county airports, policies should only encourage airport use if aircraft are made more sustainable.

Digital connectivity policies

Why is the requirement for enhanced digital connectivity for all new builds not already a standard? Infrastructure should also be ducted in pavements to all properties to prevent roads being constantly excavated. No new overhead cables should be permitted. Local consultations on phone masts should continue to allow some say over the least contentious positions.

Environment, carbon and air quality policies

Commercial planning policies should also reflect the necessity for zero-carbon fleets if applicable. Air quality monitoring stations are few and far between. No sustained impact of being located adjacent to a major road like the A420 has been monitored. Better monitoring of air quality in more locations is required before life-affecting decisions are made.

Protection of the Green Infrastructure is also aligned with Planning and parking enforcement. Verge parking is an increasing problem leading to the destruction of the wide verges that make our villages distinct. Policies are meaningless without enforcement. Will Parishes be expected to fund enforcement of policies?

Network, parking and congestion management policies

Although the use of ANPR and cameras are proven technology, the use of Smart technologies such as those used on Smart motorways have not yet been demonstrated to be safe in all circumstances. Therefore, reliance on technology to alter road layouts at different times should be treated with extreme caution.

Will the reliance and funding for parking enforcement fall on Parish Councils?

Innovation policies

The use of CAVs and UAVs should be carefully considered in the light of security, not only physical safety but cyber-security. It is impossible to future-proof technology against hackers so planning for the worst-case scenario is prudent.

Micromobility in terms of shared bicycles is to be encouraged but the sharing of the 'safe' routes with e-scooters/bikes is more contentious. More thought is required on the impact of these motorised vehicles on vulnerable route users because, as you encourage more people to travel longer distances by non-car means, more will be encouraged to use the e-scooter/cycle easy option. This may lead to a detrimental decrease in pedestrians and cyclists.

Freight and logistics policies

The idea of freight consolidation will hopefully result in fewer onward carbon-producing journeys for freight. However, careful consideration needs to be made for where those consolidation hubs are located as they will result in an increase of traffic to those areas, not less.

The A420 is still considered by your HGV strategy documentation to be a primary route between towns with no upgrading projected. It must be stressed that some existing communities along the route are divided by the A420 and increased volumes of HGV traffic will make them yet more unsustainable. The A420 is classified as able to deal with high volumes of traffic. There is no reference that previous surveys have recorded it to be 'at or above capacity' as it is. The Hindhaugh report of nearly a decade ago classified the route as 'at capacity' when investigating the impact on the western villages. Any future reclassification of routes and their capacity must be 'honest' and reflect actual use at peak times. It must not rely on previously calculated data from developers.

Regional connectivity and cross-boundary working policy

OCC does not have a great record for working with SBC on A420 issues. It is not only a matter of highways policies but also Planning. On both sides of the border there is little reference to the impact of neighbouring development and issues of highway capacity etc are considered in isolation. Those living on the edges of the county are acutely aware that capacity issues are counted twice, once on either side of the border, and therefore there is not a true reflection of the traffic generation and implications for communities along the route.

Sustainability appraisal

There is no indication for how or when the baseline figures are derived for the Watchfield population. There are enormous changes in the make up of the population throughout the year as just under half the housing in Watchfield is military and associated with the Defence Academy. Therefore, much of the housing is occupied only for 9 months of the year with a relatively fit, young, healthy and largely international population. The figures derived will depend on whether the quarters were occupied at the time. Similarly figures for schools, education, income, deprivation etc will be similarly skewed.

The baseline data for conservation areas rightly does not show Watchfield. However, when consulted several years ago, the District Council stated that the old Watchfield village probably deserved conservation status but there were no funds available to instate it.

The baseline water quality data is horrendous, showing 498 water courses out of 498 failed the chemical water quality tests. It would seem that a greater emphasis should be placed on improving infrastructure, reducing run-off etc, to improve water quality.

Thank you for inviting comments on this draft plan. We look forward to hearing the results.

Kind regards

Claire Arnold
Clerk to Watchfield Parish Council