



## **Watlington Neighbourhood Development Plan**

### **Statement for the Examination Hearing - 5<sup>th</sup> March 2018**

#### **The proposed bypass of Watlington:**

1. In view of the number of different terms used to describe the proposed new route, we intend to use the term 'new edge road' in order to clarify its intended character and purpose. The objectives<sup>1</sup> for the route are to reflect the rural character of the B4009 and to fit well with the existing character of Watlington as it expands to the north and west. The road will provide a new edge to the settlement and will serve new development in addition to providing an alternative through route for traffic using the B4009. Traffic speed will be limited to 30mph. Good connectivity will be provided by associated new footpaths, bridleways and cycleways alongside the route ensuring that new development is integrated well into the existing town and provides good access routes into the surrounding countryside.
2. The new edge road will, inevitably, have an impact on the existing environment and on views from the Chilterns AONB. It is essential to reduce that impact as far as possible through sensitive landscaping and design but it has to be acknowledged that change is inevitable as a result of current and planned growth in Watlington, along the B4009 corridor and in the wider area.
3. The environmental impact of the new edge road has not been assessed on its own because it is integrated into the proposed sites for development. Watlington has made a carefully considered selection of sites for development. The process is detailed in the Sustainability Appraisal (W NDP 4) and Development Strategy Topic Paper (W NDP 12). The proposed allocated sites have been identified to have the least adverse impact on the landscape and the setting of the town and other designated heritage assets. The sites are also able to accommodate the increased number of new homes required by SODC (260)<sup>2</sup> and to contribute positively to the social and economic sustainability of the whole W NDP area.
4. A technical justification for the new edge road was not included in the W NDP. The Plan makes provision for land to be safeguarded within the proposed development sites in line with the emerging Local Plan (policy Trans 3). Analysis of current traffic volume and predicted trends over the Plan period (without the proposed development at Chalgrove airfield) demonstrate that traffic in the town centre is likely to increase by 39% in the

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<sup>1</sup> W NDP Criteria for the Edge Road

<sup>2</sup> SODC Emerging Local Plan

morning and 43% in the evening peak periods to 2031 (Chalgrove Airfield Briefing Pack)<sup>3</sup>. This level of growth would increase congestion and air pollution in the town which is not sustainable. Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) acknowledges that the Oxfordshire Strategic Model (OSM) is an Oxfordshire wide traffic model which is unable to exactly represent conditions at a micro scale<sup>4</sup>. This flaw has influenced the County's position regarding the assessment of need for the edge road. However, OCC has been working alongside Watlington, SODC, Homes England and potential developers of sites along the route to advance the coordination of all the stakeholders involved. Design parameters were agreed at a joint meeting at County Hall on 19.01.18<sup>5</sup> and discussions for delivery are ongoing.

5. All the relevant stakeholders in the edge road support its delivery. The land required for the road is offered at no public cost by all the potential developers along the route. Discussion is ongoing between the developers regarding possible equalisation payments between them. Homes England is assisting the planning and delivery of the route and is committed to make a significant contribution<sup>6</sup> towards its cost if development at Chalgrove Airfield goes ahead. The additional traffic generated on the B4009 as a result of the planned development at Chalgrove strengthens the evidence in support of a new edge road around Watlington. The available evidence indicates that the edge road is needed (even without the airfield development) to meet the expected growth in traffic using the B4009 and that it can be delivered.
6. The need to improve air quality in the town centre also requires the delivery of the edge road. Air quality has been above EU and UK standards from 2003. An Air Quality Management Area was designated in the town centre by SODC in 2009 and annual monitoring reported in the Air Quality Status Reports<sup>7</sup> show that air pollution remains an issue for Watlington. The main cause of air pollution is traffic emissions and it is exacerbated in Watlington because of the 'street canyon' effect in the town centre and congestion caused by local pinch points. The effects on human health are very well documented. Air quality in the town must not be allowed to deteriorate as a result of the traffic generated by the development proposed in the WNDP and in the wider area.
7. It is unlikely that damaging air pollution will result from the delivery of the edge road. New homes will be at least 10m from the carriageway and the provision for footpaths and cycleways along the route together with verges and tree planting will enable emissions to disperse quickly.
8. The Watlington Traffic Management Plan (WNDP 13) contains strategies to improve the flow of traffic through the town. These are options to consider before and after the edge road is delivered but they do not offer an alternative to the road. The calculation by Mode

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<sup>3</sup> Chalgrove Airfield Briefing Pack

<sup>4</sup> OCC Response 63 to WNDP Consultation

<sup>5</sup> Agreed Design Parameters for the Edge Road

<sup>6</sup> Homes England letters to SODC

<sup>7</sup> SODC Air Quality Status Report 2017

Transport Planning is that traffic through the town will reduce by over 60% in the morning peak when the edge road is in full use.

9. Concerns have been raised about the impact of traffic on Pyrton Lane and the increase in the number and type of vehicles which is expected in the short to medium term. The WNDP proposes the closure of the Lane to through traffic once the new edge road is in full use. Discussions are ongoing with the Parish Council and OCC to reduce damage to the Lane and make it safer for local residents.
10. In view of all the evidence, the Parish Council concludes that the edge road is needed, is deliverable and contributes to sustainable development. It considers that the benefits for Watlington, the WNDP area and South Oxfordshire outweigh the adverse impact on the environment.

## **The proposed housing allocations:**

1. The process used to select sites for allocation in the WNDP was thorough and reasonable. Details of the process are contained in the Sustainability Appraisal (WNDP 4) and Development Strategy Topic Paper (WNDP 12). All sites available for development were assessed against 16 site selection criteria and 22 sustainability objectives which were consulted on at the Summer Roadshows in June 2016<sup>8</sup>. The responses showed that, of the 250 feedback forms returned, 83% rated the site selection process good or excellent and 88 % rated the sustainability objectives good or excellent. The event also provided evidence of public support for development of the sites which were subsequently allocated in the Plan.
2. The sites were selected to deliver the required number of new homes allocated to Watlington in the emerging SODC Local Plan. This number had risen from 79 in 2014 to 260 in 2017. The location of the larger sites to the north and west of the town were able to meet the higher number of homes required and created an opportunity to include provision for a new edge road which would serve the developments as well as provide a new through route for traffic. The reduction of traffic in the town centre would be a very significant improvement for residents and local businesses. It would reduce air pollution as well as providing an opportunity to improve public spaces at the centre of the town.
3. The site selection process included assessment of the impact of development on the landscape setting of the town and views of and from the AONB. The sites selected were the least likely to have an adverse impact. Site A can be partially seen in distance views from Watlington Hill but it is not an 'open' view. The Landscape Capacity Assessment for Sites on the Edge of the Larger Villages in South Oxfordshire (additional villages)<sup>9</sup> included Watlington in an Addendum and was published in 2015. It assessed the Watlington sites

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<sup>8</sup> Summer Roadshows Summary

<sup>9</sup> Landscape Capacity Assessment for Sites on the Edge of Larger Villages in South Oxfordshire Appendix 15

identified in the SHLAA. Site A (a combination of WAT 11 and 12) is recorded as medium visual and landscape sensitivity and medium landscape value. The assessment concluded that 65 dwellings could be accommodated on the combined site. The site is just under 10ha including land within flood zones 2 and 3. The developable area is approximately 5.1 ha and has an indicative figure of 140 dwellings in the WNDP. This figure was calculated on the basis of between 25 and 30 dwellings per hectare. The current planning application is for 183 dwellings.

4. The recent review of landscape and visual aspects of the proposed development of Site A (February 2018, Peter Radnall Associates)<sup>10</sup> states: ‘Whilst any further urbanisation of views from the AONB could be regarded as harmful, it seems reasonable to conclude that the effect of the current proposals would not be significant’.
5. Site B is not visible from the escarpment but would affect views of the town coming from Cuxham. The impact is likely to be mitigated by sympathetic design and landscaping. Site C is more visible in views from Watlington Hill but the impact will also be mitigated by design and landscaping in accordance with policies in the WNDP, the SODC Design Guide<sup>11</sup> and the Watlington Design Guide (WNDP 11) which provides a local context for development proposals. The Chilterns Society <sup>12</sup>(response 32 to the submission consultation) welcomes the location of the sites away from the boundary with the AONB and considers that the sites will minimise the impact of development on the landscape.
6. Objections have been made to WNDP Policy 5(b)<sup>13</sup>. This policy is important for Watlington because it provides for small sites to come forward during the period of the Plan both in Watlington and the surrounding settlements. Development of these sites would be required to meet the other, relevant, policies in the WNDP including policies to protect the landscape and the AONB. There are very few small sites which are likely to come forward within the built form of Watlington but the Plan seeks to ensure that suitable sites within the smaller settlements can be considered. These settlements contain 15% of the population and contribute significantly to the social and economic vitality of the town and the WNDP area. They should be allowed to grow if suitable sites are available rather than stagnate with no renewal of the housing stock. The forthcoming revision of the NPPF could require local authorities to ensure that 20% of their housing supply involves small sites of under half a hectare. This emphasises the capacity that small sites have, in combination, to make a significant contribution to housing supply. In addition, they can be delivered quickly and their construction contributes to the local economy.
7. In compliance with NPPF 55, the policy avoids development of new isolated homes in the countryside. The judgement of Mrs Justice Lang on 15.11.17 at the High Court (Braintree v the SoS for Communities and Local Government)<sup>14</sup> clarifies the meaning of NPPF 55.

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<sup>10</sup> Peter Radnall Associates Review

<sup>11</sup> SODC Design Guide

<sup>12</sup> Consultation responses - Chiltern Society (32)

<sup>13</sup> Consultation responses – Chilterns Conservation Board (33) and SODC (37)

<sup>14</sup> High Court Judgement

Paragraph 28 of the judgement says: 'NPPF 55 cannot be read as a policy against development in settlements without facilities and services since it expressly recognises that development in a small village may enhance and maintain services in a neighbouring village , as people travel to use them. The PPG advises that 'all settlements can play a role in delivering sustainable development in rural areas', cross referencing NPPF 55, 'and so blanket policies restricting housing development in some settlements and preventing other settlements from expanding should be avoided....'. This judgement is crucial for the continuing sustainability of rural areas.

8. The local community supports the WNDP. The pre-submission consultation<sup>15</sup> resulted in the return of 527 questionnaires with 86% approval. The purpose of neighbourhood planning is that local communities can make decision for themselves about how best to shape their surroundings. The WNDP has been genuinely community led and is intended to guide sustainable development to 2033.

**Reference documents are on the WNDP website [www.watlingtonnp.org.uk](http://www.watlingtonnp.org.uk) under 'Examination Documents'**

**Watlington Parish Council**

**26<sup>th</sup> February 2018**

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<sup>15</sup> WNDP Pre-Submission Consultation Report