

Policy & Programmes

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Dear Oxfordshire County Council,

Thank you for inviting responses on the Watlington Relief Road scheme. South Oxfordshire District Council supports the provision of a relief road for Watlington and welcomes this progress towards delivery of the scheme.

Our adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 includes plans for a relief road for Watlington. The proposed scheme reflects the “bypass for Watlington” safeguarding in Policy TRANS3: Safeguarding of Land for Strategic Transport Schemes. Collectively the twelve safeguarded schemes across the district seek to “*support the demand for travel arising from proposed new development*” allocated within South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035.

The relief road will help address poor air quality in Watlington. Watlington has a designated Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) because in 2010 the nitrogen dioxide levels exceeded standards by 28% (reaching 51µg/m³ against the standard of 40µg/m³). The AQMA extends along Brock Street, Couching Street, Shirburn Street and partly onto Ingham Lane. The proposed relief road provides a route north-east of Watlington town centre avoiding the need for some journeys to enter the AQMA.

There are three conservation areas within and in the vicinity of Watlington with: Watlington Conservation Area, Pyrton Conservation Area and Shirburn Conservation Area. The proposed relief road seeks to reduce congestion and road traffic within the Watlington Conservation Area.

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The scheme being brought forward for this consultation provides an amended route from the current route safeguarded in the Local Plan, seeking to address consultation responses undertaken during stakeholder engagement.

Also referred to as the B4009 re-alignment, the new road will help to redistribute traffic away from Watlington town centre. The alternative road will allow traffic calming measures to be installed on part of the existing road network to support the redistribution of traffic onto the new road and improve active travel (walking and cycling) journeys within the town centre. The redistributed traffic will help improve the traffic flows in the area and air quality issues within the town centre.

Watlington has a Neighbourhood Plan (adopted in 2018) which is a statutory document developed by communities to help plan and guide the future of the places they live and work. During the development of the Neighbourhood Plan project consultation responses from residents and business indicated strong and consistent support for new housing to support the delivery of the relief road.

Delivery of the relief road will contribute to a number of objectives in the South Oxfordshire Corporate Plan. For example, by reducing congestion and promoting modal shift in how people travel (through better walking and cycling provision), gives clear benefits in terms of reducing carbon emissions, promoting 'zero carbon travel' and improving air quality in the area, in accordance with the Corporate Plan policy, **Action on the Climate Emergency**. The scheme also supports the **Improved economic and community well-being** policy as the scheme will improve congestion, which has an economic impact on business, and will improve the quality of life for residents in Watlington, through improved air quality, better active travel infrastructure and better journey times. Lastly, the scheme supports the Corporate Plan Policy for **Homes and Infrastructure that meet local needs** as the transport infrastructure scheme has been directly associated with housing delivery in Watlington and there is local support for its implementation as demonstrated by the Neighbourhood Plan.

In summary, the scheme seeks to reduce traffic through Watlington, which contains a Conservation Area and an Air Quality Management Area. It delivers a safeguarded transport infrastructure scheme that will improve provision for walking and cycling both alongside the relief road, and also help walking and cycling within the town centre due to reduced traffic volume and speeds. It is supported by residents and business as demonstrated by the Neighbourhood Plan and helps to deliver housing requirements as set out in the adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan. South Oxfordshire District Council therefore supports the provision of the relief road.

Please note: a new Conservation Target Area is being developed for the River Thames and its tributaries. Its geographical extent overlaps the land intended for this relief road and should be considered in future planning, detailed design, and build out of the Watlington Relief Road scheme.

Yours sincerely

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