

STEERING COMMITTEE REPORT TO Watlington Parish Council 14th February 2017

After months of detailed work by the Watlington Neighbourhood Plan Forum, the Steering Committee will be bringing to the March Parish Council Meeting the outlines for its Neighbourhood Plan proposals. These will include –

- Provision for an alternative route round the north and west of the town in the form of a re-aligned B4009
- A maximum of 400 new homes in the Watlington settlement area. SODC now seems to suggest that 400 are needed to fund the road, augmented by some public funding.
- Proposals for traffic management to reduce the impact of traffic through the centre of Watlington and to improve air quality.

Consultation exercises over the last three years indicated support for three housing development options: A) focus any new housing on a small number of sites; B) location of development sites to create and fund an alternative road route to reduce traffic in the town centre; and C) “pepper-pot” to avoid any large scale developments through using only small sites distributed throughout the town.

To many people the “pepper-pot” was an attractive option, which potentially gave the best protection to the character and appearance of Watlington while enabling easy and quick integration of new developments and new residents into the community. However as Watlington’s allocated housing target rose during 2016 from 79 dwellings to 200 and now 400, this Option became unfeasible. The smaller sites available distributed around the town could not, in total, meet this increased target. In addition, this Option would not match one of the key priorities emerging from ‘*Vision, Objectives and Options*’ – to provide an alternative road.

The feedback from this consultation paper, roadshows and surveys indicated that the most important priority (along with maintaining the scale and character of the town) for the Community in developing the Neighbourhood Plan was to tackle road traffic issues in and around the town. Our residents also perceived very clearly that decisions on the location of new developments – both in Watlington and in surrounding villages and towns - could have a direct impact on traffic flows and issues. Traffic surveys over the last few years indicate that 80% of vehicles passing through Watlington in peak hours is through traffic. Projections of traffic arising as a result of significant new housing developments planned in Chinnor, Benson and Wallingford show significant increases along the B480 and B4009 roads during the Neighbourhood Plan period to 2033. Then early discussions with the HCA about the possibility of major housing developments on the Chalgrove Airfield appear to demonstrate that an alternative road around Watlington would be an essential requirement.

In looking at the 3 options supported by the Community, the Watlington Neighbourhood Plan Forum concluded Option A was not a viable or coherent solution to current or future traffic issues and Option C “Pepper Pot” could not provide the numbers of houses required.

As a result Option B was the only remaining choice, as its strategic approach to development. The alternative road – following on from and reinforcing the essential additional traffic calming measures within the town which can be implemented in a much shorter time frame - is deemed to be the best approach to manage Watlington's traffic issues. Taking into account feedback from residents we propose the logical route for this alternative road is around Watlington to the north and west of the town. This road should not only meet Watlington's present needs but also 'future proofs' Watlington against developments likely to happen elsewhere in South Oxfordshire. The proposed site selection, which will be report to the Parish Council in March will aim to provide a well-integrated extension of the town westward, with a similar approach to design of the housing and the access points to the new developments. The possibility of a chain of mismatched developments along the route must be avoided through co-ordinated planning and approval of the road and housing by both County Council and SODC.

In setting out this preference we propose that no planning permission shall be granted on any of the allocated development sites included in the alternative route envelope until and unless an agreed strategy (including funding), detailed plans and timetable for the alternative route is in place as approved by County Council, SODC and Watlington Parish Council; and that no housing construction shall be started on any such site unless the construction of the alternative route has been commenced to the agreed timetable. Our aim will be to facilitate the co-operation and consultation necessitated between land owners, agents, developers and builders to ensure this happens.

We will require the alternative route to echo the character of the existing B4009 road, and be approximately 6.5m in width, with verges on either side. There should be substantial screening in all sections of the route where it traverses or is close to residential areas, with large native trees especially on the countryside-facing sectors of the road and mixed native hedges on either side of the road for the majority of its length.

Footpaths and cycle ways should not be located immediately adjacent to the road, but have protected crossing points at regular intervals to encourage and enable safe transit to the town's facilities and access to the wider countryside.

The alternative route will be situated within the 7.5 Ton weight limit area, and provision should be provided at junctions with the B4009 at Shirburn Road and Britwell Road for non-permitted traffic to reverse their direction. The priorities at each of the junctions should be set to encourage use of the alternative road and discourage all through traffic from entering the town centre or use the B480 through Cuxham. Traffic calming measures should be installed on the town-side carriageway of the B4009 at Britwell Road and Shirburn Road.