23. Henley-on-Thames

23.1 Henley-on-Thames is an historic town which lies at the far south east corner of South Oxfordshire on the bank of the River Thames. It is just within the Oxfordshire boundary; it is 24 miles southeast of Oxford, 9 miles northeast of Reading and 12 miles southwest of High Wycombe.

23.2 Most of the area is within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, with the Ridgeway nearby. The town is bordered to the east by the River Thames which means some areas of Henley-on-Thames are prone to flooding.

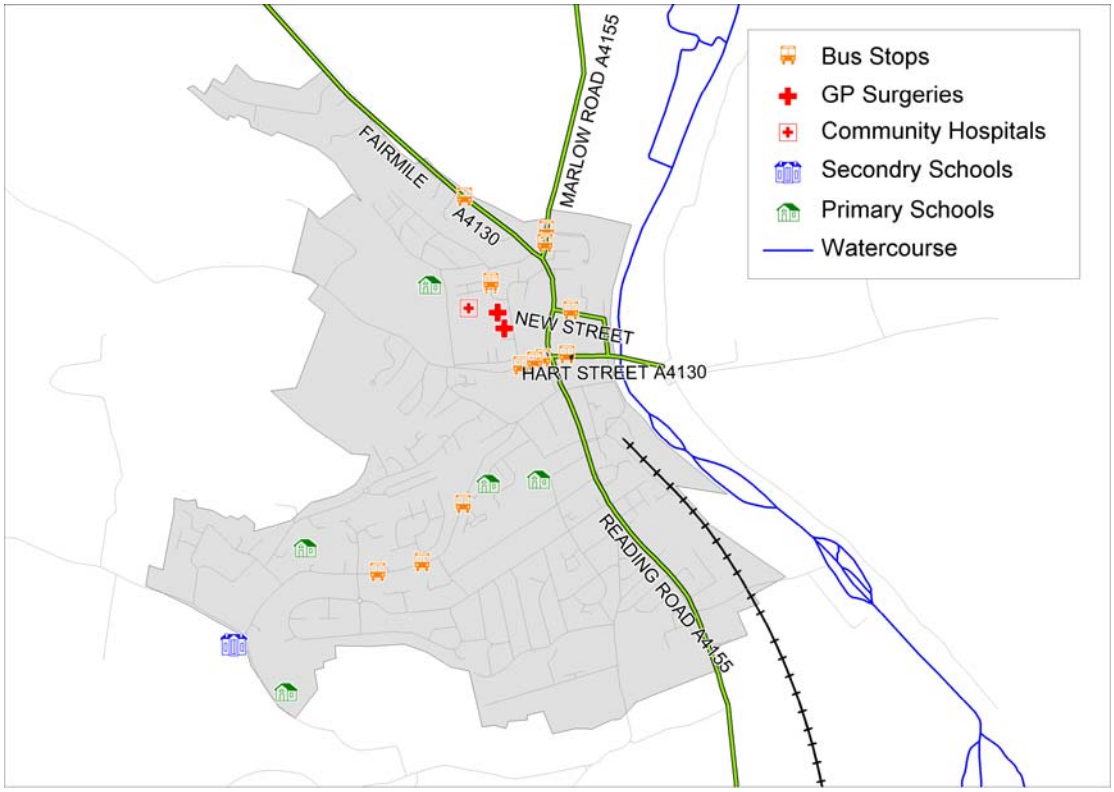

Figure 1 - Plan of Henley-on-Thames

23.3 The town centre has a concentration of shops and services, with a Tesco Superstore located on the southern edge of town; these reduce but don't remove the need to travel out for services. Reading, Maidenhead and High Wycombe are the nearest large centres to Henley-on-Thames if additional facilities or services are needed.

23.4 The town is served by the Townlands Hospital to the north; it is located within close proximity from the town centre which means it is accessible on foot from the nearby bus stops. There are six primary and one secondary school. Henley-on-Thames also has Henley College for post 16 education, which has a wide catchment area.

Primary schools are well distributed across the town. There are also two health centres and a leisure centre.

23.5 As well as serving the immediate population, Henley-on-Thames is also an attractor itself and experiences commuting from surrounding villages to access the facilities and services the town offers. It is also a tourist destination which experiences high visitor numbers for organised events such as the Regatta and festivals.

Transport in Henley-on-Thames

23.6 The road network is known to suffer from high levels of traffic which has to pass through the town centre as there is no ring road or bypass. The main routes into and through Henley-on-Thames are the A4155 or A4130. The road network from Henley-on-Thames has good connections to London via the M4 at Maidenhead and the M40 at High Wycombe.

23.7 The town has a rail station (branch line) with some direct trains to London and regular services to Oxford, Reading and London via the main line at Twyford.

23.8 Henley-on-Thames is linked with Reading and High Wycombe by bus services no. 800 and 850. These services run approximately every 30 minutes during the week and hourly at weekends. Bus no.139 from Henley-on-Thames to Wallingford operates on an hourly basis with additional evening buses provided on Fridays and Saturdays.

23.9 From 2006 – 2009 the town centre had improvements made, including signalisation of the Reading Rd/Station Rd junction; linking the town centre signals to hold traffic on the edges of town; making Duke Street one-way northbound and footway widening on Duke Street and Bell Street to allow greater ease of movement for pedestrians. High quality materials were used to help enhance the pedestrian environment and to be in keeping with Henley-on-Thames historic environment. Outside of the centre there are limited good quality walking and cycling routes.

23.10 There is high car use with nearly two thirds of population in Henley-on-Thames driving to work, however, it does have a high proportion of pupils who walk and cycle to school.

23.11 Access to employment opportunities located to the south of the town (outside the town centre) by walking, cycling and public transport is challenging. The area is served by only one subsidised bus service running on an hourly basis, and it has limited cycling infrastructure. Due to the distance, from the town centre, walking is not an attractive option.

23.12 Henley-on-Thames has an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA), which was declared in 2002; it covers the area including Duke Street, Bell Street, Hart Street and the northern section of Reading Road. The town centre schemes implemented to date have helped reduced the levels of pollution in the town centre, however they still exceed the national air quality objective level.

Problems and Challenges

Walking

23.13 The residential area around Henley-on-Thames has built up mainly south and west of the town centre; this means that some parts of the residential areas are a reasonable distance from the centre, which can discourage residents from walking and cycling to their local facilities.

23.14 The town's layout proves to be difficult to 'read'. The layout of urban form in residential areas does not enable people or vehicles to move freely in different directions, therefore, shifting traffic onto already congested network.

23.15 There is limited publicity of pedestrian (and cycling) routes from residential areas, to local services, schools, employment areas and the town centre. This makes comprehensive use of these facilities challenging.

23.16 The town centre is thriving with the market place and a variety of shops. Nonetheless, there are poor quality surfaces immediately outside the town centre with tarmac dominating the streetscape in residential areas.

Cycling

23.17 Overall cycling is significantly less popular in Henley-on-Thames, when compared to national, county and district levels.

23.18 Despite relatively wide streets in Henley-on-Thames outside the town centre, there is rather limited cycling infrastructure and in the northwest residential and employment areas in particular.

23.19 The undulating topography in Henley-on-Thames may deter walking & cycling in parts of the town except for the town centre itself. Nonetheless, more could be done to promote these for local trips.

Buses

23.20 The existing services including subsidised buses are satisfactory linking together all residential areas with places of general public interest; however the services are currently underused as more people travel by car. Also the one-way system within the town centre is onerous for buses, particularly from High Wycombe.

23.21 Henley-on-Thames is well served by rail, however greater promotion of the station and services is required to increase modal split.

23.22 Main links are with reading, improvements here are dependant on new bridge and P&R site.

Roads and Traffic

23.23 Henley-on-Thames does not have a by-pass and through-traffic, which is estimated to account for about a half of the overall traffic levels during peak hours, is required to go through the town centre. Henley-on-Thames is served by the A4130 and A4155 which meet in the town centre and traffic is taken through a gyratory/one-way system. The town centre regularly suffers from delays during peak times. Journey times during morning peak hours are relatively long on Northfield End, Bell Street and Reading Road (the main through roads) as well as residential streets adjoining the main roads.

23.24 Delay and congestion is regularly experienced to the east of the town centre. There is only one River Thames crossing in the vicinity of Henley-on-Thames which causes further delays. For that reason, there is some local support for a second river crossing (tunnel or bridge). We are not convinced this would provide best solution as it would be likely to encourage further traffic into the area along unsuitable local routes. Given that there is not a substantial amount of growth planned in Henley-on-Thames to 2026 it would be hard to gain central government funding for major infrastructure schemes; however its proximity to Reading could have impacts on infrastructure depending on their transport plans.

Transport Strategy

23.25 This Strategy replaces the Henley Integrated Transport Strategy (HenITS) (2004/2005). Contributions collected towards HenITS will be transferred to the LTP3 Henley-on-Thames Transport Strategy.

Walking and the Pedestrian Environment

To improve facilities for all pedestrians (including disabled people) across Henley-on-Thames through developing good clear routes from residential areas to the town centre and other services and facilities around the town. Along with making sure urban links join up with rights of way.

23.26 When resources or opportunities allow this is to be achieved by:

* Conducting an audit of current footways. The audit will identify measures to improve way finding by creating formal walking routes to key facilities from residential areas and between certain key facilities by providing new and improved signage, widening, dropped kerbs, and improved crossing points especially along routes leading to the main employment sites in Henley-on-Thames as well as to the schools.
* Improving connections to the rights of way network particularly where urban footways meet rural rights of way though new footpaths and signage to provide footpaths throughout the town and into the countryside.
* Publicise and promote walking routes by producing information on walking maps, literature and route planners which can made available in print or electronically.

Cycling and Behavioural Change

To ensure that the best cycle routes from residential areas to local services, schools, employment areas and the town centre are publicised. To provide a suitable number of good quality cycle stands at the key destinations and appropriate infrastructure where required along the key routes from the town centre to employment and education.

23.27 When resources or opportunities allow this is to be achieved by:

* Improving facilities for cyclists by conducting an audit of existing cycle ways, well used routes and locations of cycle parking across Henely-on-Thames in order to develop a high quality cycle network. Provision of additional cycle infrastructure such as cycle lanes/paths, advance stops lines and cycle parking where appropriate, improved signage and crossing points with a particular focus to

improve accessibility to key destinations.

* Publicise and promote cycling routes by producing, in conjunction with local cycle groups and cycle organisations, information on cycling, maps, literature and route planners which can made available in print or electronically.

Public Transport

To work with local bus companies to improve and develop bus services on existing routes and new routes in order to increase accessibility to/from Henley-on-Thames to key facilities, further afield and to secure increased accessibility to education and employment.

23.28 When resources or opportunities allow this is to be achieved by:

* Work towards 4 buses per hour on the 800 service and change the route so that it is a more direct service.
* Work with the Town Council to provide five or six shelters within the town.
* Investigate provision of a northbound bus stop/lay-by close to Tesco
* Upgraded bus stop poles at the principal stops in the town centre
* Investigate a coach waiting bay on Deanfield Avenue
* Work with partners to improve promotion of the 'Regatta Line'
* Encourage Henley-on-Thames rail station to produce a travel plan
* Work with Henley-on-Thames rail station to promote the extension of ticket office opening hours (especially weekends).
* Support establishment of Community Rail Partnership.

Traffic Management (including Lower Emission Vehicles)

To make best use of existing road space through careful planning, working with partners and utilisation of technology.

23.29 When resources or opportunities allow this is to be achieved by:

* Encouraging the use of lower emissions vehicles as

technology advances and comes forward with the aim to reduce average CO_2 emissions in passenger vehicles across Oxfordshire to 130 g/km by 2030.

* Improved signage within the town to aid vehicle movement through the town
* Loading restrictions to be investigated (defined times for loading/deliveries to shops) within the town centre
* Investigate traffic management measures such as parking restrictions, and increase of on-street pay & display parking and junction improvements across the town.