26. Wallingford

26.10 Wallingford is a market town in South Oxfordshire district with a population of around 8,000 if Winterbrook in the parish of Cholsey is included. It is located 13 miles south of Oxford, 6 miles west of Didcot and 14 miles northwest of Reading and boarded by both the Wessex Downs and Chiltern Hills Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

26.11 There is a concentration of shops and services within the town centre, and significant employment at the Hithercroft Industrial Estate in the south west of Wallingford and north of Crowmarsh Gifford where South Oxfordshire District Council have their offices, adjacent to the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology and Howbery Park. CABI is also a large organization located on the bypass.

26.12 Wallingford has three primary schools and Wallingford School a Secondary with 6th Form. Wallingford Community Hospital south of the town centre on Reading Road, also houses the town's health centre. Sports Facilities are located west of Hithercroft and Castle Leisure Centre within Wallingford School site, in the north of the town.

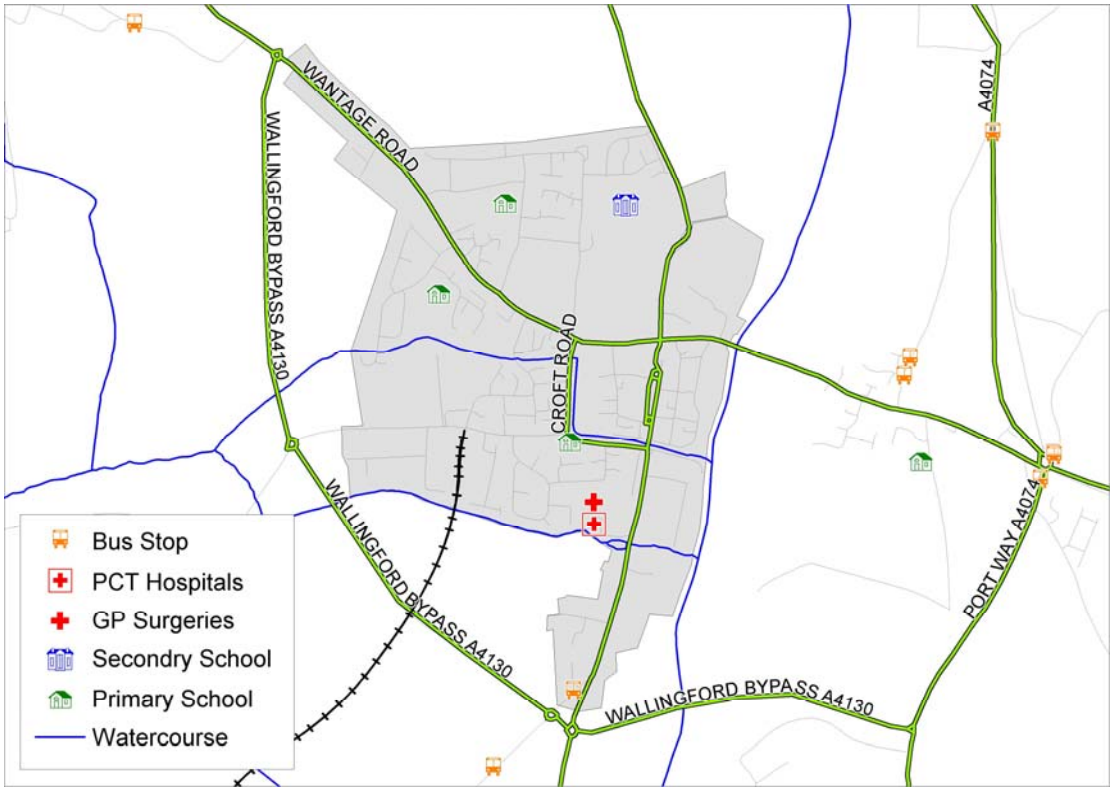

Figure 1 – Plan of Wallingford

26.13 The town is relatively flat, and is a compact and self contained town, although Crowmarsh Gifford is nearby, separated by the River Thames and riverside meadows.

Transport within Wallingford

26.14 Wallingford bypass to the south and west of the town was completed in 1993 and relieves Wallingford town centre of through-traffic by encouraging traffic to remain on the A4130 and A4074 rather than travel through the town.

26.15 In 2006 South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) declared an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) within Wallingford centred on the Lamb crossroads. Traffic has been identified as the main cause of the air pollution.

26.16 Although the traffic levels passing through the AQMA in Wallingford are not particularly high, when compared to other towns in the county with decalred AQMAs, the urban topography exacerbates the problem. The ‘street canyon’ effect of high-sided buildings with a narrow carriageway makes pollutant dispersal difficult. Also, due to a number of traffic pinch points such as Wallingford Bridge and the Lamb crossroads, queuing traffic occurs along sections of the High Street, Castle Street and St. Martins Street throughout the day.

26.17 Traffic queues at the Lamb crossroads at the traffic signals work on a 180 second cycle, this is the longest traffic signal cycle time in the county. The Lamb crossroads signals only allow one direction of traffic movement at any one time, including a separate phase for pedestrians to cross; this results in traffic queuing. Queuing traffic is the main cause of the air quality problems. Additionally, the length of wait at the Lambs crossroads, in conjunction with no direct west to north route other than via the town, has resulted in a considerable number of trips through north Wallingford from Wantage Road to Wallingford Road/Castle Street. These trips by pass the Lamb crossroads which reduces congestion here, but presents quality of life issues for people residing in north Wallingford, as there is considerable through-traffic.

26.18 Although the topography of Wallingford is not particularly adverse, narrow footways and a high quantity of on-street parking, inhibits walking and cycling.

26.19 Local groups such as ‘Sustainable Wallingford’ are committed to making Wallingford more environmentally sustainable and reducing its ecological impact. In transport terms the group seeks to improve walking and cycling routes, both within Wallingford, but also

improved facilities for cyclists to cycle further afield, to Didcot, Cholsey, Benson, Reading and Oxford, for both commuting and leisure trips.

26.20 Sustainable Wallingford promote the "Liftshare" website for Wallingford/ Crowmarsh Gifford Commuting Group Car Share Scheme, which seeks to link drivers and passengers together online as part of a UK wide car sharing scheme, aimed at reducing pollution and congestion on our roads.

26.21 Wallingford does not have a rail station; however Cholsey Station is around 3 miles from the centre of Wallingford. The rail station at Cholsey is accessible by bus and cycling as well as private car. Cholsey station has 61 car parking spaces. Cholsey Station is on the main Oxford to Reading line with trains in both directions every 30 minutes.

26.22 Currently the Market Place is home to the town centre bus stops. The X39/X40 Thames Travel Service provides half hourly service from Oxford to Reading via Wallingford, Monday to Saturday with a reduced service on Sundays. This service provide buses to Benson, Corwmarsh Gifford, and serves the Reading Road and Winterbrook Road, Wallingford, as well as serving many other villages.

26.23 There is an hourly service to Henley-on-Thames and Didcot. There is a Wallingford to Cholsey service which links Wallingford Market Place to Wallingford Community Hospital to Chosley rail station.

26.24 Wallingford has a very high proportion of parking spaces within the town with an excess of 980 spaces. This only acts as an attractor to residents and shoppers to travel into the town by private vehicle and does little to promote sustainable alternatives.

26.25 There is a good range of public rights of way that connect Wallingford to the surrounding countryside. However the network is disjointed in many places where paths meet the road network. Selected improved management, road crossings and traffic-free links could help enable more people to access the countryside on foot, cycle or horseback.

Problems and Challenges

Walking

26.26 The pedestrian environment within Wallingford town centre is considered poor compared to the attractive setting and architecture of the town. The medieval street pattern means that there is a

conflict for space from pedestrian footways and road space. The area around the Lamb crossroads is particularly poor, as the four-way junction is signal controlled, and in parts the footways are very narrow, and not particularly functional. The Market Place has some public space, which is often used for temporary parking.

26.27 St Leonard's Square, acts as a large roundabout, again with narrow footways and most of the space dedicated as road space. St Martin's Street is traffic calmed and one-way northbound while St Mary's Street is also traffic calmed and one-way southbound. Overall the current streetscape does not meet all pedestrians' needs.

26.28 There is no visual or attractive functional link, or adequate signs from the town centre to the River Thames or Thames path.

26.29 Maintaining and improving links where public rights of way meet urban footways and highways could help to enable more people to feel confident in using alternatives to the private car for local journeys and recreation.

Cycling

26.30 Across Wallingford there are limited dedicated cycle routes and cycle infrastructure, particularly within the town centre but also to access key local facilities and employment areas from residential areas. Cycle parking at key destinations within the town is also considered poor.

26.31 Publicity (signs & maps) of cycle routes from residential areas to local services, schools, employment areas and the town centre is limited.

26.32 The quantity of on-street parking also inhibits cycling, and is a perceived safety issue in some parts of the town.

26.33 There are a number of unclassified tracks and paths available for walking and cycling within the countryside around Wallingford. However, these are not publicised within the town. Although cyclists can use bridleways, restricted byways and byways (along with horse riders) these often do not connect safely with roads that are safe to use. The National Cycle Network route number 5 runs across Wallingford, through the town centre.

Public Transport

26.34 Wallingford is currently well served by bus services and the services operated by Thames Travel have been greatly improved in recent years.

26.35 The rail station at Cholsey is accessible by bus and many of the villages in the Wallingford area are served by a Friday bus service to coincide with the weekly market held in Wallingford Market Place.

26.36 Although there are regular bus services on Reading Road and Wantage Road and via Crowmarsh Gifford, there is limited public transport provision to the Hithercroft Industrial Estate to the south of the town.

26.37 Real Time Information is being rolled out across the county, and Wallingford is yet to receive this service at bus stops within the town.

26.38 We identify the Market Place as the most suitable location for bus service to stop within the town centre, although many people feel the square is dominated by bus movements. We aim to work with bus operators to minimise the environmental impact of buses in the Market Place whilst retaining this as an important and well located facility.

Behavioural Change

26.39 The majority of private vehicles in Wallingford are from the local area. Whilst we recognise there is a need to remove through-traffic from the town centre, there is also a need to change the behaviour of local residents to use more sustainable modes of travel, especially for trips within the town.

26.40 The high car parking spaces within the town also do little to encourage sustainable modes of travel into the town.

Roads and Traffic

26.41 Although Wallingford does not experience high volumes of traffic compared to other towns in the county, it does have congestion as certain locations due to the historical street pattern causing pinch points on the network.

26.42 A number of vehicles choose to avoid the Lamb crossroads in the centre of Wallingford by travelling through the residential area of northern Wallingford; although there is available capacity on these roads they are unsuitable to take a large number of vehicles due to housing the two of Wallingford schools, including the secondary school.

26.43 There is criticism that the bypass is not fully utilised, and signage is not clear enough, again not deterring motorised vehicle in the town centre.

A Transport Strategy for Wallingford

Walking & Pedestrian Environment

To improve facilities for all pedestrians in Wallingford through developing good, clear routes from residential areas to the town centre and other key services and facilities around the town.

To join, for both access and leisure, urban footways with public rights of way.

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

* Conducting a study into options to improve the pedestrian environment in Wallingford and in particular at Lamb crossroads, the Market Place, St Martins Street, St Mary's Street and St Leonard's Square. With specific aims to provide wider functional footways.
* Examine the options to provide a clear pedestrian link between the Thames Path and the town centre.
* Improve signage and links to rural rights of way footpaths and bridleways, to ensure that urban and rural footways are well linked.

Cycling

To develop new cycle routes and ensure that the best cycle links from residential areas to local services, schools, employment areas the town centre and access to National Cycle Route no 5 are publicised. To provide a suitable number of good quality cycle stands at the key destinations and appropriate infrastructure where required along the routes.

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

* Improving facilities for cyclists by conducting an audit of existing cycleways, well-used routes and locations of cycle parking across Wallingford and Crowmarsh Gifford. This data will be used to develop schemes which will provide a high quality cycle network. Measures will also involve the provision of additional cycle infrastructure such as cycle

lanes/cycle paths, advanced stops lines, signage and cycle parking where appropriate, with a particular focus to improve accessibility to key destinations.

* Conduct a feasibility study into options of providing cycle routes between Wallingford and the surrounding areas including Cholsey, Didcot, Benson, and Oxford.
* Joining up the cycling network across the wider area using public rights of way so that routes for commuting and recreation are improved.

Public Transport

Work with local bus companies, developers and other partners to improve and develop bus services on certain routes to increase the accessibility of Wallingford to/from other key locations particularly towards from the surrounding villages. Retainment of the existing local bus services in the area is also important.

Retain and improve the bus stops within Market Place at the heart of Wallingford to ensure good access to local amenities

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

* Continue to work with bus operators to upgrade the existing X39/40 bus services to 4 buses per hour, in line with the Premium Route Strategy.
* Work with bus operators to link Wallingford to Didcot with a ½ hourly service.
* Improve quality of bus stop infrastructure and information at the Market Place bus stops.
* Investigate what could be done in the Market Place to ensure good bus access at all times.

Behavioural Change

The strategy also aims to increase awareness and promote better infrastructure for walking, cycling and public transport in and around Wallingford and further afield.

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

* Continue to promote travel planning for both schools and businesses within the Wallingford area.
* Publicise and promote walking routes by producing information on walking maps, literature and route planners which can made available in print or electronically.
* Work in conjunction with SODC to review and implement a joined up car parking strategy for the nine pay & display car parks across Wallingford. Including reviewing long and short stay car parks, uniform and clear charging regime and opening times, attractive town centre employee car parking, as well as ensuring adequate supply of car parking for shoppers, visitors and tourists. As well as effective car parking signage from radial routes.
* Ensure that developers of sites within the Wallingford area produce a travel plan as part of their application.
* 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.
* To continue to support SODC with measures to improve Air Quality within the town, and the AQMA.
* Encourage the use of the bus by improving marketing and by providing passenger information through on street equipment, website and mobile phones.

Traffic Management

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

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

* Ensure through-traffic is directed on the A4130//A4074 bypass by reviewing signage.
* 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.
* Conduct a review of signage on the entrances to the town, to ensure key destinations (such as the Community Hospital, Hithercroft Industrial Estate and employment at Howbery park, as well as short and long stay car parks) are signed for traffic to take the most appropriate route. Within

the town ensure that car park signs are clear and direct to the most appropriate car park.

* Assess how improvements to balance pedestrians, cyclists and traffic in the town centre, particular in Market Place, St. Martin's and St. Mary's Streets and St. Leonard's Square can be made, to overall improve the environment of the town centre.
* Consider if traffic calming measures throughout north Wallingford would be beneficial to controlling the vehicle movements that use north Wallingford as a route to avoid the Lamb crossroads.