15. Banbury

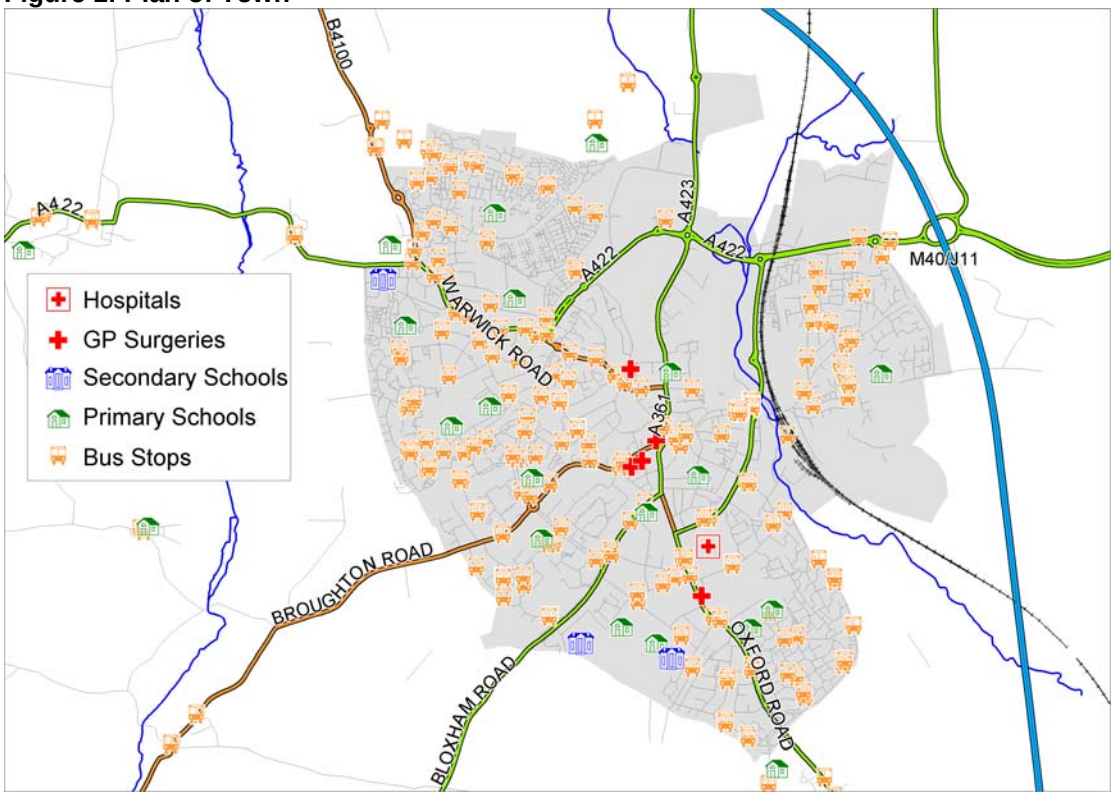
15.1 Banbury is located in the north of Oxfordshire and is the second largest settlement in Oxfordshire, 38 miles from Birmingham; 28 miles from Oxford; and 32 miles from Northampton. It has a population of nearly 43,000. The town has a strong retail offer along with a range of leisure and tourism facilities, such as the recently redeveloped Spiceball Leisure Centre.

15.2 There are 18 primary and 3 secondary schools in the town. Northern and eastern employment sites are not within close proximity to the majority of these.

15.3 Banbury serves a large rural hinterland that spans parts of Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire and Warwickshire. This area is bisected by the railway, the M40, the A4260, the River Cherwell and the Oxford Canal.

15.4 Banbury's rivers and canals regularly flood, which limit the development options and transport solutions for the town.

Figure 1: Plan of Town



Transport in Banbury

15.5 Banbury has excellent access to the strategic motorway network and is served by Junction 11 of the M40. There are good transport links to the major A roads, as well as having a mainline rail station with links to

Oxford, Reading and London, and to Leamington Spa, Birmingham and the North.

15.6 It also benefits from a good bus network serving the town centre and nearby settlements. However, some of the major employment sites are less well served by public transport connections.

15.7 In town there are congestion issues affecting key routes in the central area relating to north/south movements, in particular. The main employment sites, the town centre and hospital are all accessed along the north/south corridor.

15.8 The commuting to higher order cities such as Birmingham, London and Oxford for journey to work purposes does occur. Those people who travel to work in Oxford tend to travel by train. However, there are still large numbers who drive from within Banbury to the station or who drive all the way to Oxford.

15.9 Nearly two thirds of workers in Banbury travel less than 10km to work. This proportion is significantly higher than in the county as a whole. Accordingly, relatively fewer people commute by car; and almost 18% of workers walk to work compared with 10.2% in the county. At the same time, however, only 4% cycle to work *(Census 2001, Travel to Work)*.

15.10 Access to primary education is considered good as primary schools are evenly distributed across the town being within walking distance from residential areas. The three secondary schools are located on the southern and western outskirts of town thus restricting walking access to the majority of its students and those from East Banbury in particular. These schools are on or are close to bus routes, of which some services are supported financially. Although the majority of pupils under 16 walk to school, approximately one in four is driven.

15.11 The Horton General Hospital provides paid parking and is served by various bus routes. Reaching the site by foot or bike from most residential parts of the town is more difficult.

15.12 There is a good range of public rights of way that connect Banbury 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

15.13 There is limited publicity of pedestrian (and cycling) routes from

residential areas, to local services, schools, employment areas and the town centre. This means that the town can be difficult to navigate on foot, especially for visitors.

15.14 Within Banbury pedestrians and cyclists can be inhibited by high levels of traffic, on-street parking and a general lack of travel information. Therefore, improving existing walking and cycling facilities and signage is important, alongside promotion of existing and new routes.

15.15 Permeability is further constrained by the River Cherwell, Oxford Canal and the railway line bisecting the town. The topography of certain areas for example around Bretch Hill to the west of the town, also may mean that walking for certain types of journey is less attractive

15.16 With the exception of Banbury's thriving town centre and immediate areas, the width and surface of some footways doesn't make them particularly attractive for pedestrians to use. To the north of Banbury urban foot & cycle ways do not link particularly well with rights of way and rural footpaths. 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

15.17 There are number of factors constraining cycling in Banbury, be it the distance from some residential areas to the town centre, lack of infrastructure or the topography of the town. Western, northern and southern parts of the town are positioned on higher ground than the rest of town restricting cycling viability. Despite this cycling is not constrained in every part of the town, nor for every journey type.

15.18 Although cyclists can use bridleways, restricted byways and byways (along with horse riders) these often do no connect up safely with roads that are safe to use.

Buses

15.19 Banbury is a destination in its own right and therefore has to cater for a variety of buses starting and finishing as the centre expands to the south east.

15.20 The number of people who travel to work by bus in Banbury is very low. The industrial areas and employment areas are concentrated in the town centre and to the north east, which is not well served by a good local bus service. Bus services within the residential areas provide a good level of daytime service; however, evening and weekend services are considerably less frequent. Bus services from the rural areas are infrequent and in most cases do not provide a realistic alternative for journeys to work or for evening/weekend leisure purposes.

15.21 The services from Oxford (via Deddington), from Chipping Norton, Woodford Halse and from Brackley operate at hourly frequencies or better.

Rail

15.22 Banbury Railway Station is located in the town centre but main roads and narrow footpaths mean it is not very permeable and it does not have a very welcoming appearance. Visitors' first impression of the station is a view that is dominated by traffic and industry. There are no obvious pedestrian links to the town centre, the Canalside on the opposite side of the Oxford Canal or the employment and residential areas to the east of the railway. In addition, the main access to the station is from congested Bridge Street.

15.23 Local bus services do not link the railway station very well with the rest of town and the nearby Canalside, and have relatively short operating hours.

15.24 There is an abundance of car parking at the station and the lack of public transport at a time when it can be used by the majority of rail commuters and limited provision for cyclists mean that the private car is the dominant mode for accessing the station.

Highways and Traffic

15.25 The key routes in the central area suffer from heavy congestion. This arises from the north/south movements across the town. These routes enable access to the town centre and key employment areas in Banbury. Further development in Banbury is likely to worsen congestion in the town centre, especially because of the increased attractiveness and accessibility by car via Junction 11 of the M40.

15.26 Cherwell District Council are likely to announce Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) in 2010/11 in Banbury along Hennef Way, between Daventry Road and A4260 Cherwell Street roundabouts or along Oxford Road, South Bar, Horse Fair, Warkwick Road, Bloxham Road – further monitoring & modelling will help define a precise area.

Transport Strategy

15.27 The town strategy aims to deliver transport improvements to Banbury with a focus on walking, cycling bus service improvements and reducing congestion around the town and the use of low emission vehicles as they become available. This Strategy supersedes the Banbury Integrated Transport & Land Use Study (2000).

15.28 The strategy will look at highway and traffic management measures that can used to improve the road network; it will also look at how to

initiate and influence travel behaviour in particular by encouraging people to make fewer trips by car and replacing these with trips made by foot, bike or bus. Promotion of sustainable travel also brings about wider benefits, such as healthy lifestyles, improved quality of life and also can have both local economic and environmental benefits.

15.29 The strategy will look at how to reduce unnecessary road traffic and associated pollution through increases in the use of sustainable modes of travel. In principle however, in line with the level of housing and economic development that is planned for Banbury, improvements to cycling and walking networks, and better bus services will be examined. At the same time, requirements will also be looked at for specific highway improvements, where necessary.

15.30 Behaviour change seeks to promote travel by healthy and sustainable modes and reduce trips by car for journey to employment, health, shopping and education. Where trips are made by car, other behaviour change initiatives such as car sharing can be deployed. Because of the congestion problems in Banbury, and the scope for promoting a reduction in car use (predominantly for local trips), behavioural change has an integral role to play in achieving this.

15.31 Working with local major employers in Banbury will be key to delivering behavioural change. Much can be learnt and adapted from travel behaviour and travel planning initiatives already developed at Banbury schools, such as cycle training, promotion of walking from areas within 15 minutes from school and Walk 2 School Week. .

15.32 In terms of work already undertaken in Banbury, Oxfordshire County Council's Travel Behaviour Team is already engaged with schools in the town to promote walking and cycling. Since 2005, a number of pedestrian as well as cycle crossings, cycle lanes and cycle parking facilities have been delivered at, or around, schools in Banbury.

Walking and the Pedestrian Environment

Improve facilities for pedestrians, including disabled people, across Banbury. Schemes to improve links between employment and residential areas to key services and destinations such as the town centre, by foot, will be delivered.

Work with Cherwell District Council and developers to ensure new developments are designed to promote permeability on foot both within the site and to link with the existing settlement.

Ensure urban footways join up with rights of way and rural footpaths.

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

* Improving the pedestrian environment in Banbury, in the town centre and to/within residential and employment areas. An audit process will identify areas where footways can be improved through widening, providing dropped curbs, and new or improved crossing points, building up a work programme which will contribute to greater containment and thus support economic vitality.
* Improving, publicising and promoting walking routes such as College Fields Canal Bridge and improvements to the towpath linking to the town centre and by producing, in conjunction with information on cycling, maps, literature and route planners, both in written print and on the internet.
* Supporting ongoing redevelopment of the town centre – land at Bolton Road and proposals for a cultural quarter in particular, to provide excellent access to facilities for pedestrians, improved surfaces and pedestrian crossings.
* 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

Cycling

Improve facilities for cyclists and develop schemes which will provide a high quality cycle network. Measures will involve the provision of additional cycle infrastructure such as cycle lanes/cycle paths, advanced stops lines, and cycle parking where appropriate, with a particular focus to improve accessibility to key destinations.

Work with Cherwell District Council and developers to ensure new developments are designed to promote permeability by bike both within the site and to link with the existing settlement.

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

* Conducting an audit of existing cycleways, well-used routes and locations of cycle parking across Banbury to develop schemes to deliver a high quality cycle network, for example in Grimsbury. The audit will be the foundation for developing a series of joined up cycle paths to link residential areas with the town centre, key local facilities and employment sites along the M40 corridor.
* Working with Sustrans, Cherwell District Council and British Waterways to deliver the Connect 2 pedestrian and cycle scheme to link College Fields (Bankside) to the town centre. If development at land south of Bankside should go ahead,

investigate delivery of an extension to this route with access either through the Bankside development or via the rural land to the north of the development.

* Delivering the Hanwell Fields 4 cycle route along the Former Minerals Railway, providing improvements to the Mineral Railway route, between the existing Highlands-The Wisterias cycle track and the existing footpath east of The Magnolias.
* To improve connections to the rights of way network particularly within urban cycle ways and northern links extending to rural rights of way. New footpaths and signage to provide cycle ways throughout the town and into the countryside are to be encouraged and linking with the National Cycle Network.
* Publicise and promote cycling routes by producing, in conjunction with information on walking, maps, literature and route planners, both in written print and on the internet. This will include promotion of cycle routes, across the wider community, as well as continuing the work in schools

Public Transport

Ensure that new developments are located and designed to encourage the use of the bus, with particular attention to minimising walking distances to bus stops on the strategic routes. Seek contributions for new bus stops and associated development which are created to serve new development or developments which are an intensification of current use or change of use. Provide a frequent and comprehensive bus service from forthcoming Bankside developments.

Ensure the provision of good quality bus information at bus stops and local centres.

Improve the walking and cycling links from residential and employment areas to the bus stops.

Work with the bus companies to improve the Oxford to Banbury bus route with regard to frequency (especially on the Banbury to Deddington section) and quality of bus, along with equipping vehicles with real-time information equipment.

Work with local bus companies to improve and develop bus services on existing routes and new routes in order to increase accessibility to/from residential areas to key facilities and employment sites to the north, in particular.

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

* Providing better footways and pedestrian crossing facilities at

bus stops where appropriate.

* Providing cycle stands at bus stops where physically possible, at key locations.
* Encouraging the use of the bus by improving marketing and by providing passenger information through on street equipment, website and mobile phones.
* Delivering an information system and infrastructure improvements at Banbury bus station, in conjunction with public realm / environmental enhancements.
* Adopting Higham Way (Grundon's) to open up the bus route between Thorpe Way and Bridge Street. This will also rely on the installation of a developer funded bus gate on Thorpe Way.
* Implementing a bus link between Bridge Street and Tramway Road to better serve the railway station, Canalside redevelopment and College Fields(Bankside).
* Delivering bus stops that give improved walking links to the employment areas (for example, along Hennef Way, near Wildmere Road).
* Investigating if Bridge Street and Oxford Road junction could operate with bus priority or other changes to improve bus journey time through the junctions
* On selected routes, deliver bus stop improvements to a Premium Route standard.
* Improving bus services and facilities, between employment land North West of Junction 11 M40 (off Wildmere Road) to the Bodicote, Bankside, Easington and Hardwick areas.
* Promoting the existing PLUSBUS scheme which enables unlimited travel by local bus to be purchased at the same time as a train ticket to enable a seamless journey.

Rail

Improve station accessibility and appearance through enhanced transport facilities and improved public realm that provide for all modes of travel and link the station with the rest of town.

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

* Redesigning the station forecourt to create a Station Interchange that will provide for through bus services, a taxi rank, better cycle facilities and more pedestrian space with an improved public realm giving a sense of arrival. This may form part of the Canalside redevelopment and will help improve connectivity at the station from other areas of the town and the bus station.

* Creating a bus link to the station from College Fields (Bankside) development using a reopened bus-only link between Bridge Street and Tramway Road.
* Extending the operating hours of local buses so commuters heading to and from the railway station can use them.
* Improve walking routes between the railway station, bus station and town centre via Bridge Street and/or through Canalside redevelopment with wide footpaths, dropped kerbs and signage.
* Improving cycle parking and creating a cycle hub at the station with a secure cycle storage compound.
* Improving platform waiting environment so that rail passengers starting their journeys at the station, or interchanging there between services, have modern heated waiting areas on both platforms with an adequate provision of seating and train service information.
* Introducing a Station Travel Plan to bring together all stakeholders to develop common objectives for reducing the impact of traffic generation and agree a co-ordinated approach to delivering them

Behaviour Change

Increase the awareness of health benefits and quality of life by enhancing the natural and built environment of the town through reducing congestion and improving air quality.

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

* Identifying employers with high trip rates by car and contributing to traffic in the area and then work with those employers to produce and enforce a workplace travel plan. The plan should particularly focus on reducing car use by initiating and exploring car-share schemes, working at home policies and promoting walking and cycling by exploring the provision of facilities such as cycle parking or changing facilities.
* Continuing to work with Banbury schools, targeting and prioritising those which contribute the greatest traffic in the area. Update the existing School Travel Plans and work with the school to ensure it is carried through. Explore current transport and travel opportunities and concerns for students travelling to school with a focus on reducing car use, increasing road safety education, training and publicity including cycle training.
* Advising on the development of travel plans and travel behaviour initiatives for new development sites to promote sustainable travel habits from the outset for new residents
* Exploring the potential for car clubs in the Banbury area.

* Promoting car sharing in the Banbury area through oxfordshirecarshare.com.

Highway Infrastructure and Traffic Management

Promote travel behaviour change in particular to encourage people to make fewer trips by car, where possible and to use more efficient and lower emission vehicles as they become available.

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

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

* Examining the options available to greater encourage use of the strategic network (including routing via both A roads within Banbury and at Junction 11 on the M40) to discourage use of undesirable routing via town centre, residential and rural routes. This will include assessment, promotion and physical works along a north/south route through Banbury for access to the town centre and key employment areas.
* Investigating the need for new road links. This should be considered where the required capacity cannot be realised, due to physical or practical constraints and where other alternatives have been investigated as such schemes are very expensive and problematic to implement – the South East Relief Road falls into this category. This scheme could comprise:
* Banbury South East relief road (Bloxham Road to Hennef Way)
* Banbury South West relief road (Stratford Road to Bloxham Road)
* Delivery of the road must be linked to development of such scale that would be able to fund the road, estimated to cost at least £30 - £40million. This scheme is unlikely to attract Central Government funding; as such it could only be delivered through development.
* Supporting the principle to redevelop the town centre, including transport infrastructure and schemes which improve accessibility and promote travel on foot, by bike or by bus.
* Adopting Higham Way (Grundon's) to relieve the pressure on Merton Street as currently all the Cattle Market traffic has only one point of access and egress which is via Alma Road onto Merton Street.
* Investigating the potential for changes to junction design to mitigate the congestion on roads and through junctions along existing congested routes/junctions. In conjunction with this, opportunities for improving walking, cycling and public transport

should also be identified on these links. This will ensure that travel by sustainable modes is a viable alternative to car travel, particularly between existing and future residential/employment sites to the town centre, and other key destinations such as the train/bus stations.

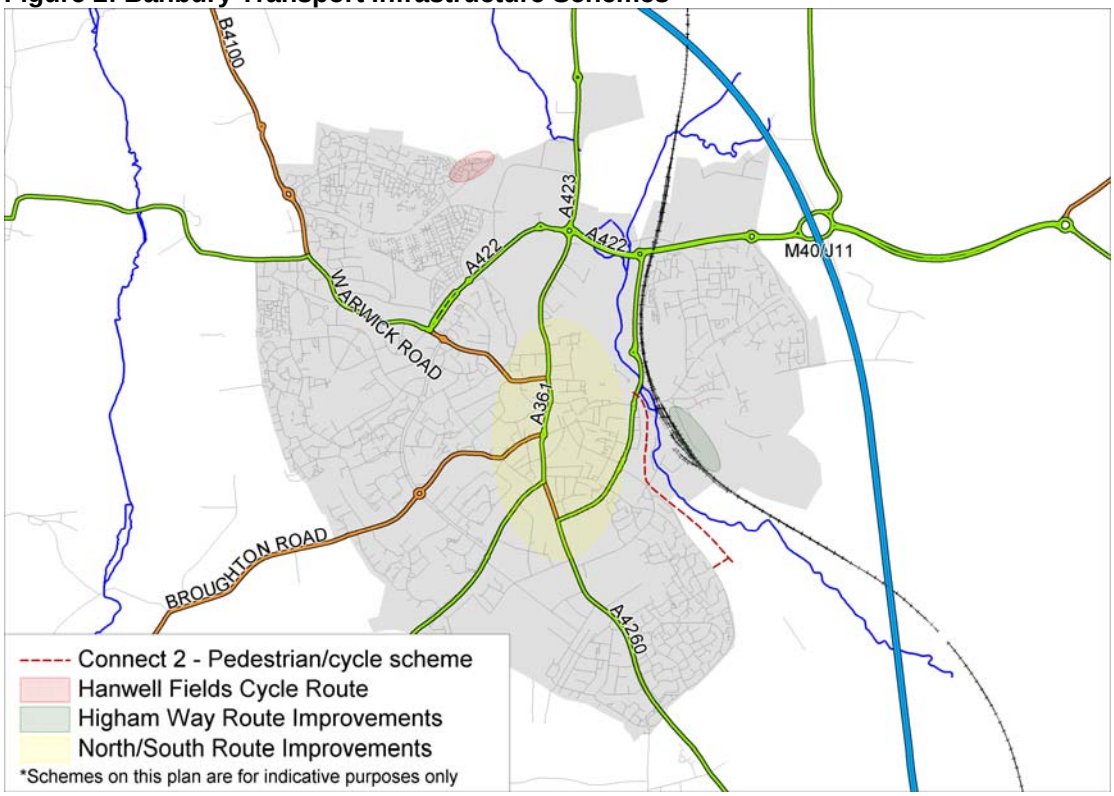



Figure 2: Banbury Transport Infrastructure Schemes