

TEXT OF SPEECH BY RICHARD DREW ON BEHALF OF THE BEECHWOOD ESTATES COMPANY LIMITED TO THE OXFORDSHIRE FULL CABINET MEETING 11.02.2025

I am speaking on behalf of The Beechwood Estates Company Limited who own Grade I & II Listed heritage assets of national and historic importance and land on either side of the B 4009 through the conservation village of Shirburn.

The Company are concerned at the proposed funding provision in the 2025/26 budget recommendation of £11.1m from the fund to encourage and facilitate active travel and improve market towns for the as yet unconsented and now further delayed Watlington Relief Road which if constructed will have a significantly detrimental effect on Shirburn.

The total proposed fund is £15.2m, the provision of £11.1m represents almost 75% of this on one small scheme. The budgeted cost is £19.3m and the ongoing delays of the application will now only increase this cost.

The new residential developments at Watlington amount to 313 dwellings which were consented without any requirement for the WRR and supported by the County Council. We understand that the infrastructure subsidy for the WRR will be £64,000 per dwelling against a national average of £14,000 which cannot be considered "value for money" as required by central Government.

Watlington is not a "Market Town" in the same way as Abingdon, Thame, Wallingford and other towns in the County are. The Leaders budget overview states that the funding for the WRR will "take heavy traffic, including school buses and lorries, out of the historic Watlington town centre freeing residents to walk and cycle safely and improving air quality." This ignores expert opinion that there will still be buses and heavy traffic in Watlington. The proposed WRR has no provision for bus stops/laybys, inadequate cycle provision and there is no air quality issue in Watlington with no exceedances being recorded since 2018. There is an alternative low-cost scheme to improve traffic flow in Watlington which together with improved policing of the 7.5t weight limit would see immediate benefits. This has been ignored by the County and its agents to date.

There is no proposal or realistic expectation that public transport serving Watlington will be improved or increased and no funding from the County.

This expenditure is objected to by the Environment Agency and the County as Lead Local Flood Authority due to its unacceptable risk to the environment. The scheme will make flooding worse.

Furthermore, the scheme is not supported by the County's own Lead Transport Development Management Officer, or the Senior Tree Officer (PES) both of whom state that they cannot support this scheme and request further information as do those external experts acting for the Company and where environmental and ecological surveys have yet to be fully complied with.

The proposed expenditure does not accord with the County's own corporate policies and if approved will result in the County being exposed to further unquantified capital expenditure

The Company request that the Full Council does not approve the proposed expenditure on the WRR and immediately reviews the alternative low cost alternatives.

Thank you for your time on this important matter.

