

CABINET– 21 JULY 2015

CONNECTING OXFORDSHIRE: LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN 4

Report by Director for Environment & Economy

Introduction

1. Connecting Oxfordshire, our new Local Transport Plan has been developed over the past 18 months, in response to the rapidly changing national and local growth, economic development, infrastructure planning and funding agendas. The aim has been to develop a comprehensive policy and strategy framework to maximise opportunities for Oxfordshire, building on the success over the past two years on City Deal and other initiatives, and complement the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) and supporting documents.
2. Development of the Plan has followed on from the Connecting Oxfordshire roadshows held across the County last summer and has been informed by the feedback received from those events. This included a specific consultation exercise covering Goals, Objectives and Policies. It has been further developed in close partnership with internal and external Stakeholders, including the LEP, District Councils and Members. A full public and Stakeholder consultation on the draft Plan was undertaken in spring 2015.
3. The Plan has been designed as a living document, to be regularly updated as significant changes take place, for example as the 'Economic Heartland of England' Alliance develops or District Council Local Plans come forward and our growth town/locality strategies are updated. It will also directly inform our Strategic Infrastructure Plan, being developed alongside the update of the SEP this autumn, as part of our commitment to planning Oxfordshire's growth.

Consultation Feedback

4. There were over 500 responses to the public consultation exercise, from a wide variety of consultees. Annex 1 summarises the main areas the consultation response covered and how we are proposing to respond in the final plan, including the main points raised by District Councils. Annex 2 contains more detailed consultation feedback by area of the Plan.
5. Overall, the Plan has been broadly endorsed as the right direction and approach for Oxfordshire, if it is to succeed in planning for and accommodating growth and economic development, and taking forward innovative approaches and new ways of working, for example the Science Transit Strategy and the projects and schemes it contains.
6. Whilst a wide range of issues and concerns were raised, the main ones were:
 - (i) **Absence of local area strategies.** A number of smaller settlements had their own transport strategies as part of LTP3. Their absence from LTP4 has been

raised by their Town/Parish and some District Councils. The reason is that limited resources are being focused on the main areas of strategic growth, so these smaller towns can no longer be directly supported in this way. However it is recognised that in many of these settlements there is further growth planned and this needs to be planned and mitigated in other ways: for example through proposed route strategies and Neighbourhood Plans.

- (ii) **A34 and connecting the 'Knowledge Spine'.** The A34 already struggles to meet demand and is increasingly vulnerable to incidents, with knock-on effects on the wider network. There is a widespread public and Stakeholder view that it will not be able to cope with the extra traffic from the houses and jobs. This underlines the importance of the work planned over the next two years by Highways England, to develop the Oxford-Cambridge expressway scheme, whose scope includes the A34, on which we are already engaged. It also reinforces the need for us to continue to provide strong leadership on East West Rail and other rail projects, for example four-tracking of Didcot-Oxford.
- (iii) **Proposals for more 'remote' Park & Ride sites.** Whilst recognised by many as a logical approach, to create a Park & Ride network which better serves future development and travel patterns, concerns have been raised about the potential suitability of proposed sites in the Green Belt and the relationship with the existing network of 'edge of City' sites. Our view remains that the strategy for an 'outer ring' of sites is the right one, and that more detailed work needs to be done to assess demand, site suitability and operation. This would include an assessment of existing sites and is planned for the next 12 months.
- (iv) **Importance of the A420 Corridor.** This has been a growing area of concern, particularly in relation to housing growth now coming forward through the planning process, especially in neighbouring Swindon. A cross-Authority A420 Working Group has been formed to address this, and develop infrastructure and services that can be funded principally from development. Medium term, we see the potential for a proposed rail station in the Grove area as part of the solution for a wider 'Western Vale' strategy which includes better rail access.
- (v) **Invest in cycling.** This came across strongly, reflecting the Council's success with recent funding bids. One proposed change is to remove the target to treble the number of cycling journeys to work, owing to concerns that it was not realistic and was inconsistent with the rest of the Plan. Instead, we are proposing an aspiration to achieve a level of cycling of 10% of all trips (the current Countywide figure is about 3%). Success in this area will be closely linked to funding opportunities, especially those which provide revenue support that would be otherwise harder to justify in the current funding climate.
- (vi) **Managing freight.** This was commented on in a number of areas, especially in responses covering smaller towns and Air Quality. Whilst we propose retaining our six-stage approach to managing freight, this has been modified to ensure we do not create significant revenue resource pressure or

expectations of lots of further physical, regulation or enforcement measures on the network.

7. Some areas of the Plan were less controversial than expected - for example the proposal to consider a Workplace Parking Levy as part of the Oxford Transport Strategy, albeit this was opposed by some individual businesses. We therefore propose to develop this approach further, alongside and complementing the other strategy measures.

Proposed Changes to the Plan

8. Little change is proposed to Plan goals, objectives or policies, other than the proposed deletion of one Policy [previous reference] (and change to our bus strategy text) on supported bus services, in line with the Council's proposed approach currently out to consultation.
9. A number of detailed changes have been made as a result of consultation feedback: for example the Plan has clarified how we would consider the issue of existing Oxford P&R car park sites as part of the longer term approach to Park & Ride, and our strategies and proposed schemes for the A40 and A420 corridors have been more fully developed.
10. Other changes reflect changing circumstances nationally and in Oxfordshire, including:
 - i. Reference to new strategic approaches, for example the emerging 'Economic Heartland of England' Alliance and Highways England proposals for the Oxford-Cambridge Expressway;
 - ii. Updates resulting from where we are now on District Local Plans - for example the recent publication of the Cherwell Local Plan Inspector's report, which has led to refreshed Banbury and Bicester area strategies;
 - iii. Updated text on the A40 scheme proposals, which are the subject of a separate report to this Cabinet meeting, and a specific consultation exercise planned for this autumn;
 - iv. Reference to the development of an Oxfordshire Strategic Infrastructure Plan, now being taken forward as part of the Oxfordshire Growth Board's "Post SHMA" work programme and related infrastructure planning work;
 - v. Updating the Oxfordshire Rail Strategy, which was originally consulted on and approved in 2012, to reflect changes in the industry and new or updated priorities. This has now been added to the LTP documents;
 - vi. Reflecting the Councils increasingly challenging financial position and the need to achieve significant further savings and efficiencies.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

11. A full SEA of the LTP has been completed, in line with statutory requirements, including consultation with statutory bodies. A copy of the final SEA report, undertaken by independent consultants, is part of the LTP suite of documents.
12. The response from one of the statutory consultees, Natural England, raised some specific concerns in relation to the Oxford Meadows Special Area of Conservation, and potential impacts on it from predicted traffic growth on the nearby A40 and A34. Our response - to reference the developing A40 strategy, including the bus priority scheme which would help reduce traffic and therefore environmental impact – has been accepted by Natural England. We will ensure this issue is taken into account as the A40 and A34 strategies and other schemes with a potential environmental impact are progressed.

Financial and Staff Implications

13. Capital scheme proposals in the Plan will create future capital commitments, albeit that these will be subject to funding being available from Government and other sources. Capital commitments would also lead to revenue budget pressures and when developing projects schemes for approval, their full costs including revenue funding required to support them will need to be made explicit as part of business case submissions. Some changes have been made to reduce the commitment of the Council to revenue funded interventions, to ensure that the Council does not overcommit resources and manages expectations on what it can afford in the increasingly challenging financial climate. Progress of proposals will be dependent on the availability of funding and form part of the annual service & resource planning process.

Equalities Implications

14. A separate Service & Community Impact Assessment has been undertaken and is appended as Annex 3. Whilst this does not raise any significant concerns, it refers to the need for more bespoke assessments of individual programmes and proposals.

Next Steps

15. Once the Plan has been through the formal approval and adoptions process this summer, it is next proposed to be updated in spring 2016. In the meantime, the LTP will continue to inform our strategic infrastructure planning work, bids for Growth Funding and other sources, and the updated Strategic Economic Plan.

RECOMMENDATION

16. **Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to approve Connecting Oxfordshire and to RECOMMEND it for adoption by Full Council at its meeting in September 2015.**

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Director for Environment & Economy

Background papers: None

Annexes:

Annex 1: consultation summary

Annex 2: detailed consultation feedback

Annex 3: Service & Community Impact Assessment

Contact Officer: John Disley, Policy & Strategy Manager. Tel.: 01865 810460

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