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Bagpuize

CABINET 15 SEPTEMBER 2009

ACCESSING SCIENCE VALE UK - SOUTHERN CENTRAL OXFORDSHIRE TRANSPORT STUDY (SCOTS) – RECOMMENDED STRATEGIC TRANSPORT PACKAGE REPORT

Report by Head of Transport

Introduction

1. The purpose of this report is to inform members of the progress made in developing a strategy for accessing Science Vale UK which includes the Southern Central Oxfordshire Transport Study (SCOTS) and to seek approval in principle for the proposed strategic transport package being put forward. A copy of the study and its appendices has been placed on deposit in the Members' Resource Centre.
2. The in principle approval of the schemes package will form Oxfordshire County Council's strategic response to the Vale of White Horse (VoWHDC) and South Oxfordshire (SODC) District Councils' Local Development Framework (LDF) proposals for southern central Oxfordshire. As such it will become part of the evidence base for both SODC's and the VoWHDC's LDFs.
3. Although the SCOTS work cannot pre-empt the outcome of LTP3, it can inform it. Likewise, it can form the basis of applications for funding. The SCOTS work will continue to evolve with the imminent study of the Science Vale UK area under the Government's 'Delivering a Sustainable Transport System' (DaSTS) work programme via the South East Regional Partnership Board. The outcome of this work will help build a strong case for transport infrastructure investment in an environment of reduced mainstream funding. SCOTS has been subject to extensive technical and full consultation processes along side the district councils' LDFs.
4. Once the Accessing Science Vale UK strategy work is complete it will supersede the Wantage and Grove Area Strategic Transport Strategy produced in May 2005. The Didcot Area Integrated Transport Strategy (DidITS), produced in March 2004, will remain an approved strategy that will not be superseded by SCOTS. DidITS concentrates on schemes that improve links across Didcot which are beneficial locally.

5. The SCOTS over arching objectives are as follows:
 - To establish a transport network that supports economic investment and growth through Science Vale UK to position Oxfordshire as a world-class economy.
 - To set out the transport infrastructure necessary to deliver the proposals in the district councils' LDFs.
 - To provide a framework for securing funding for these infrastructure needs, both from developers and via national and regional processes (for example Regional Funding Allocation (RFA)).
 - To provide a context for transport improvements across the southern central Oxfordshire area to be included in the 3rd Local Transport Plan (LTP3) from 2011.

6. The main purpose of SCOTS is to facilitate sustainable economic and housing growth in the area through a combination of transport investment and demand management, particularly to achieve a higher degree of containment of trips within the area.

Background

7. In July 2007, Oxfordshire County Council commissioned Halcrow to provide the transport evidence base to support the proposals in the Wantage/Grove and Didcot area in the District Councils' Core Strategies, and subsequent plans and site allocation documents. The South East Plan requires 11,560 new homes to be built in the Vale and 10,940 new houses in South Oxfordshire by 2026. Didcot has been designated as a New Growth Point (NGP), with a total of 8,000 homes proposed for the town shared between the two districts. In addition sites have to be identified for employment, shopping and leisure facilities through the LDF process. The potential for the established research and business parks to expand further needs to be planned for, through Science Vale UK, principally at Harwell Science and Innovation Campus (SIC) and Milton Park. The aim of the emerging transport study was to promote stronger transport links between housing and employment locations to encourage higher levels of containment of trips. This was recognised from the start as vital if development in the area is to be accommodated sustainably. A plan of the SCOTS area can be seen in Annex A.

8. Halcrow concluded their study work in October 2008 providing technical evidence and recommending elements to be incorporated into a strategy for the area. Officers from the County Council consulted on the recommended schemes over the first four months of 2009 alongside the district's LDF consultations. Officers had gauged from attending the exhibitions and workshops where the main areas of concern would be and instructed Halcrow to carry out some further testing. This additional work has led to the production of the final recommended strategic transport package for the SCOTS area to 2026.

9. As the package of schemes will become part of the evidence base for both South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse District Councils' LDFs,

officers from the county council and the two district councils have discussed further modelling work to support this process. District officers' comments can be seen along with other key stakeholders and all responses in Appendix 1 of the Recommended Strategic Transport package report (copy in the Members' Resource Centre).

Recommended Strategic Transport Package required to mitigate impact of growth in the SCOTS area to 2026

10. The schemes put forward have been developed as a package of measures that will complement each other and are seen as strategically essential in order to mitigate the impact of the proposed development in the area to 2026. The schemes package consists of demand management, highway infrastructure, public transport, cycle network elements, as well as road safety principles. The routes and alignment of the schemes are indicative and further work is being undertaken to establish their precise alignment and deliverability.

Highway Infrastructure

11. The following schemes are recommended through the study work, these can be seen on a plan in Annex B.
- Harwell Strategic Link Road (from the A4130 east of Milton Interchange to the A417);
 - Relief to Rowstock junction (Harwell Field Package) to include:
 - A Harwell Field Link Road (from the A417 to the entrance to Harwell SIC on the A4185);
 - An increased capacity roundabout at the Harwell SIC entrance;
 - Rowstock Western Link Road (from the A417 Wantage Road to the A4185 Newbury Road, to the south west of Rowstock junction);
 - Improvements to Featherbed Lane junctions;
 - Wantage Eastern Link Road (WELR);
 - Traffic calming through East and West Hagbourne and Harwell villages.

Public Transport Elements

12. Public transport infrastructure schemes are recommended through the study as well as a number of improvements to bus services in the area, as follows and set out in Annex C.
- Provision of a route to enable buses to overcome congestion problems at Milton Interchange;

- Grove and Wantage Rail station;
- Service improvements include:
 - Grove to Harwell SIC peak period;
 - Wantage to Didcot enhanced route.

Cycle Elements

13. The following strategic cycle corridors are recommended through the study, these can be seen on a plan in **Annex D**.

- A strategic route between Wantage/Grove and Harwell SIC;
- Movements from central Didcot to Milton Park;
- Movements from central Didcot to Harwell SIC;
- Northern Links.

Schemes identified through the SCOTS work but not of strategic necessity

14. A number of schemes have been identified through the study work that will be required to mitigate local impacts. However they are not of sufficient strategic importance to be included in the recommended SCOTS schemes package. These schemes should be considered alongside the development of Area Action Plans produced by the district councils.

The schemes are:

- Grove northern link road;
- Didcot southern perimeter road;
- Access issues on the A417 between Wantage and Rowstock;
- Two-way road tunnel at Cow Lane, Didcot;
- Bus lane on the A4130 between Great Western Park and Didcot Parkway rail station.

There may also be other localised junctions and links that are affected by individual development sites that will require mitigation.

Consultation

15. Although extensive consultation has taken place with local people, to identify the recommended schemes, further consultation will need to take place at various stages as the proposals are developed. Those people directly affected by any of the proposed schemes will have many opportunities to comment later in the process.

Environmental Implications

16. The introduction of the proposed package of measures should bring significant benefit to Oxfordshire by containing trips in the SCOTS area; however highway construction will encroach into an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and will need to be fully evaluated to demonstrate the benefits in terms of relieving congestion. Whilst engineering work undertaken by Halcrow to date has had regard to impact on the AONB, impacts on this area will be an important issue through the detailed planning process.

SCOTS will form part of the evidence base for both South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse District Council's LDFs. It will be subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment by both district councils, as required by the LDF process.

Financial and Staff Implications

17. The Harwell Strategic Link Road is a key piece of infrastructure for the SCOTS area; the model would not run without this in place. All of the schemes recommended in the transport package are essential to sustain development in the area to 2026, and if funding is not secured for them then road network could not cope with the level of growth planned for this area. With this in mind an early bid was made for Regional Funding Allocation (RFA) towards the SCOTS package in April 2008. At the time, this highlighted a link from the A4130 to the A4185 and relief to Rowstock junction (this is the equivalent of the current Harwell Strategic Link Road and Harwell Field package).
18. Due to severe national funding constraints, a decision on whether this bid has been successful will not be made until 2011. The DaSTS work, mentioned earlier, will play a key part in securing regional support for RFA. Once the strategic transport package has been approved in principle, further work will be carried out to feed into the district councils' delivery and infrastructure documents to establish a delivery programme and how each scheme will be funded. The delivery report will need to consider the impact of whether or not RFA funding is received.
19. Funding for the whole SCOTS package of schemes and services will be through a combination of developer contributions negotiated through S106 agreements and the RFA funding. In addition, there may be elements that could possibly be funded through the LTP3 allocation. Assessment will be made through the LTP3 process as to which schemes are appropriate and of high enough priority to be funded. As highlighted in the next steps section (below) further work will take place to identify how these schemes will be funded. It will need to be made clear to Government that the recommended transport infrastructure required in the SCOTS area is essential to deliver the growth in the area and therefore it is vital that RFA funding is released to allow this growth to happen.
20. Existing staff resources from within Transport Policy and Strategy as well as resources from Halcrow will be allocated to complete the delivery and

infrastructure report. Considerable resources will be required to implement the schemes, including undertaking statutory requirements such as consultation and the district councils' Examinations in Public.

Next Steps

21. As identified above, once the principles of the infrastructure schemes package have been approved further work is required to:
 - Complete feasibility work for all recommended schemes, including estimated costs.
 - Produce a phasing and delivery report to assess when schemes need to be designed and implemented in relation to levels of development and how they will be funded, including key trigger points.
 - Assess the impacts of the proposed development and transport schemes to 2026 outside the SCOTS boundary.
22. This further work needs to be produced to complement the district councils' submitted Core Strategy documents and to be read alongside the SCOTS Recommended Schemes Package report. This further work is important to establish how the schemes will be funded and to form the basis of negotiations with developers.

Risks

23. There are a number of potential risks that are associated with the outcomes of this study. In terms of funding, costing of the recommended schemes and services needs to be completed to understand what the total funding requirement is likely to be. The risk is being managed by seeking funding through a variety of sources; developer funding, an RFA bid and, potentially LTP3 funding. At this stage it is unknown how much, if anything, will be available through these sources. The risk can be further mitigated by the ongoing work clearly identifying delivery timescales and phasing.
24. A rail infrastructure scheme has been recommended; whilst costing can be provided for the stations themselves, on-going negotiation will be required with Network Rail, service providers and land owners in order to implement schemes that will be financially viable for the rail industry.
25. There is a risk that planning permission will not be granted for the recommended infrastructure schemes within the AONB (this can be seen on Annex B). This risk should be carefully managed through further work to demonstrate that the infrastructure is essential and to minimise the environmental impact of the scheme.
26. There is a risk that further work required for submission with the district councils' core strategies may not be completed on time. Ongoing discussions between the districts and OCC are essential to ensure all parties are aware of the timescales, any change in them and the impacts of any changes.

RECOMMENDATION

27. The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to:

- (a) **Approve in principle the strategic transport package required to mitigate growth in the SCOTS area to 2026, subject to the further work being undertaken, including funding options; and**
- (b) **Delegate the decision to add to or amend the SCOTS to the Director for Environment and Economy, in consultation with the Cabinet Member of Growth and Infrastructure, should the further work reveal that changes are necessary.**

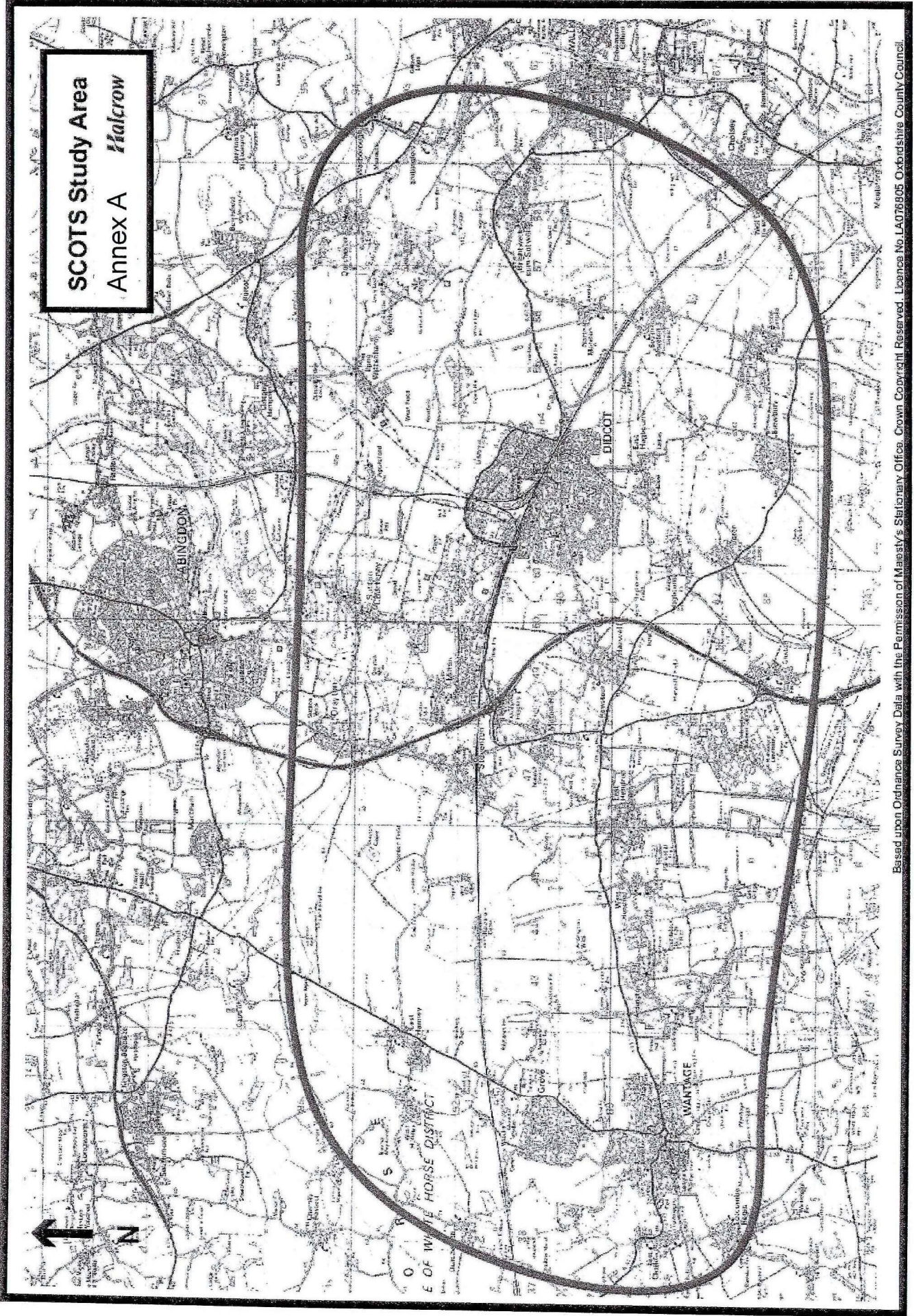
STEVE HOWELL
Head of Transport
Environment & Economy

Background papers: SCOTS report and appendices - In Members' resource centre

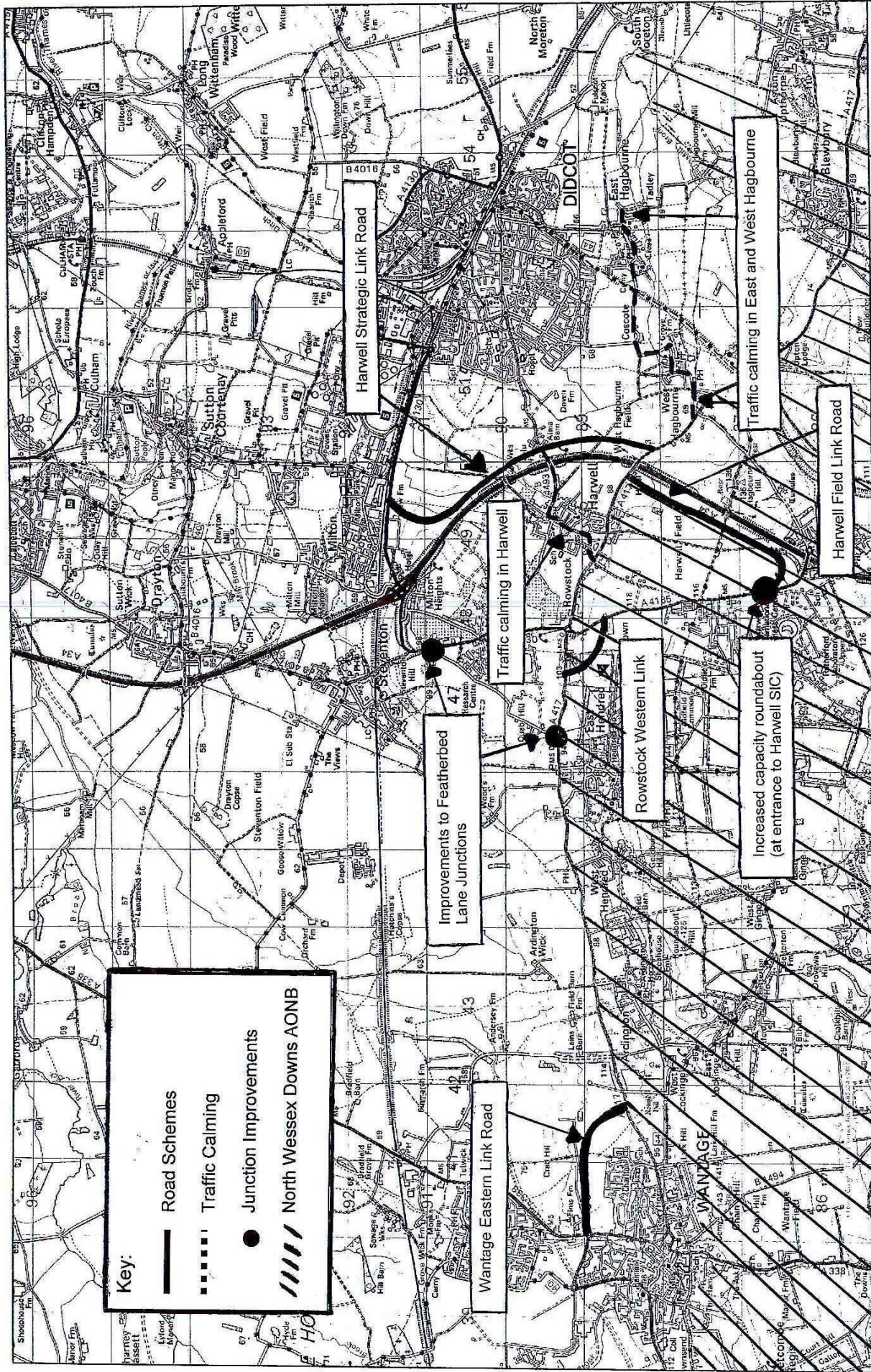
Contact Officer: Cathy Browning, Senior Transport Planner
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September 2009

SCOTS Study Area
Annex A *Halcrow*



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Key:

- Road Schemes
- ▬ Traffic Calming
- Junction Improvements
- //// North Wessex Downs AONB

Annex B

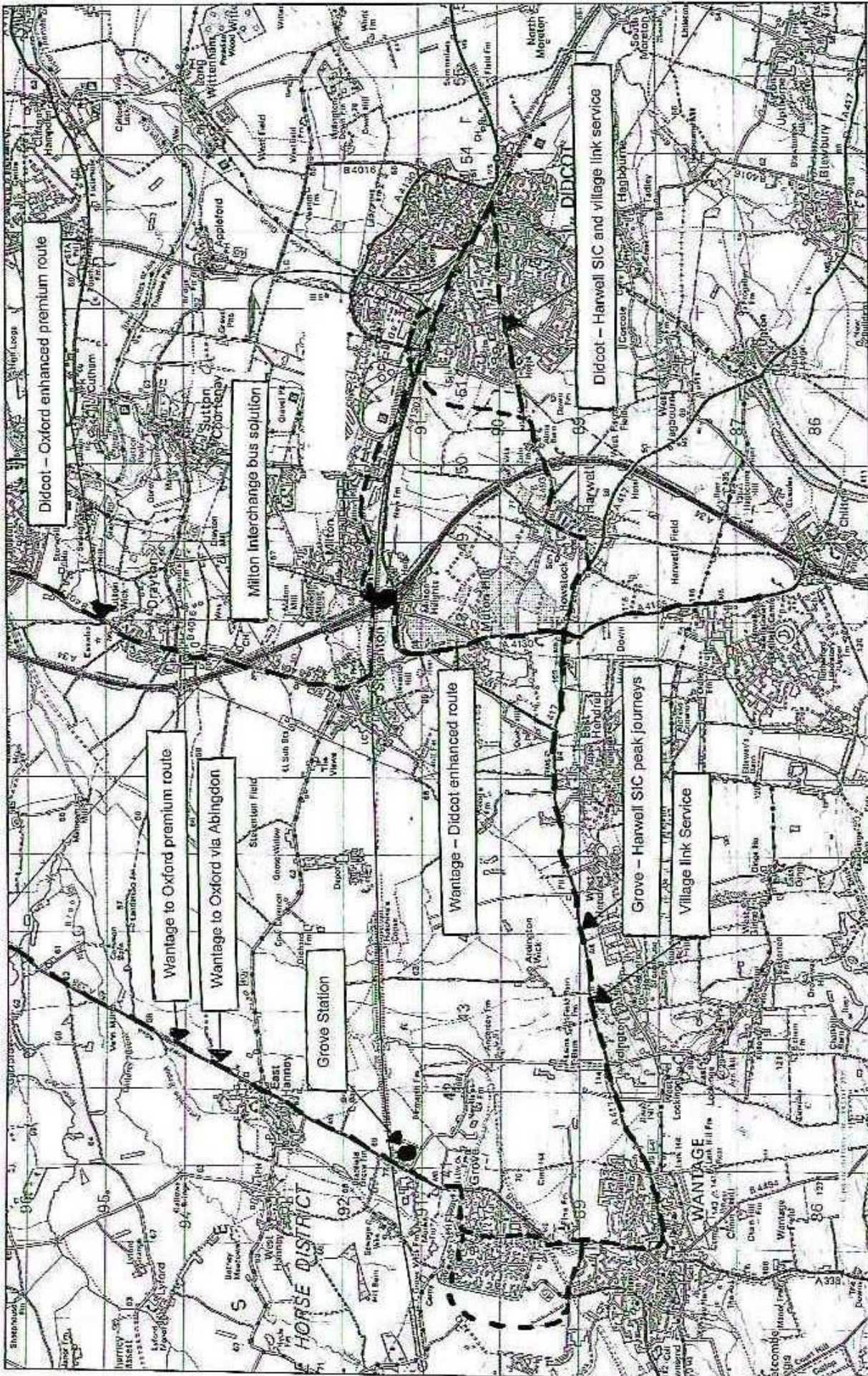
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Annex C

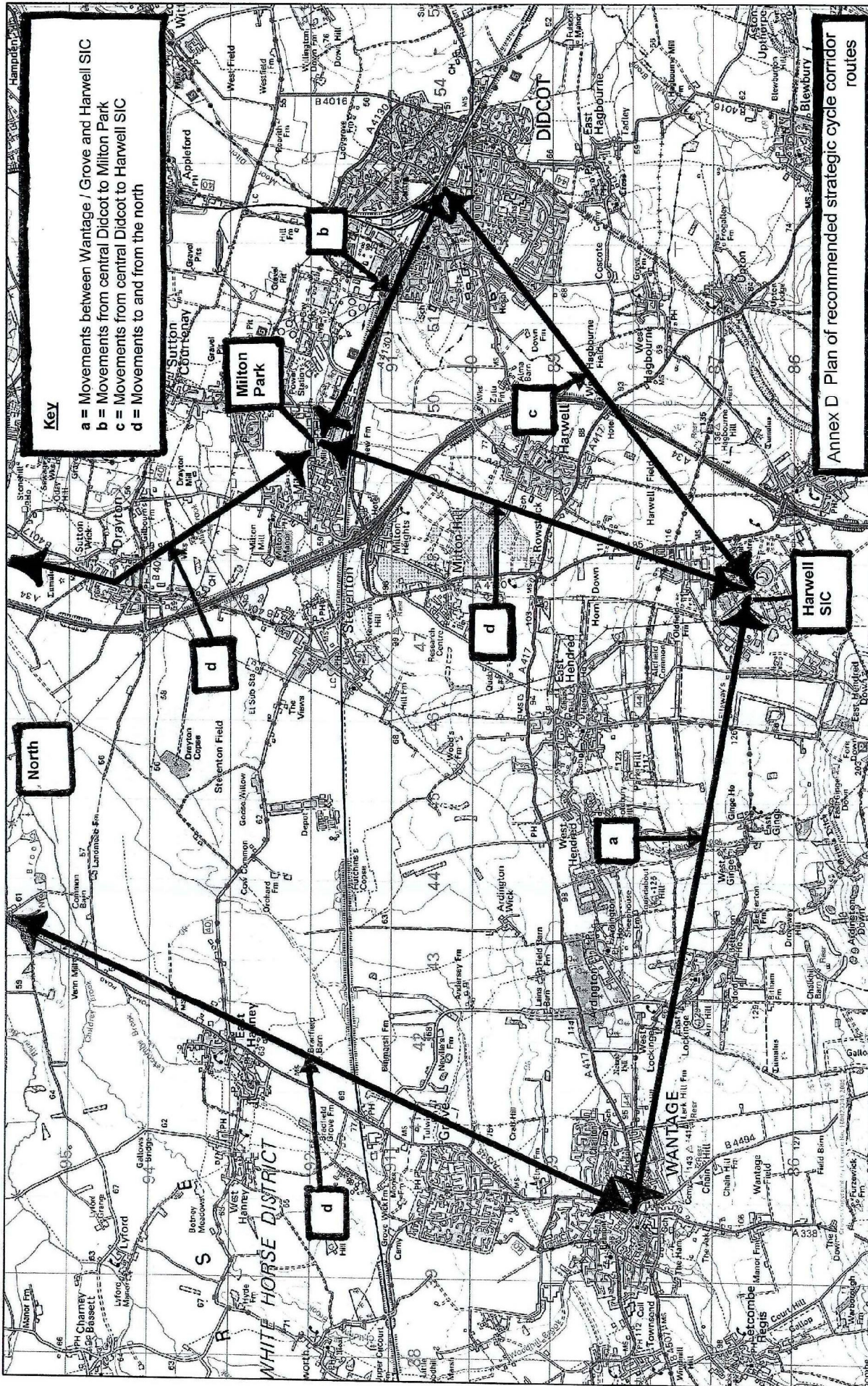
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Cycle corridor directions are indicative only
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Annex D Plan of recommended strategic cycle corridor routes