

WANTAGE, GROVE & DISTRICT DRAFT ACTION PLAN – JULY 2008

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

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| Findings: A report by consultants, to Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) highlighted many transport issues and made recommendations, but there is little confidence that these are being addressed. The County Council in association with others has produced the recently published South Central Oxfordshire Transport Strategy (SCOTS). |
| 1. Proposed Action: Thoroughly review the Southern Central Oxfordshire Transport Strategy and determine actions to be taken in response. Lobby OCC for implementation of recommendations. Work with Oxfordshire Rural Community Council (ORCC). |
| Findings: Disabled access on public transport is patchy and the Octabus Dial-a-Ride service is restricted and over subscribed. Additional seating at bus stops would be helpful. |
| 2. Proposed Action: Audit current use of services and if necessary seek to revise arrangements to optimise their use. Seek funding for more lighting, seating and shelters at bus stops. |
| Findings: Access to health care is affected by poor transport, with a lack of volunteer drivers and the withdrawal of travel tokens being contributory factors. The hospital transport service operated by the Independent Advice Centre is overloaded. |
| 3. Proposed Action: Co-ordinate a recruitment drive for volunteer drivers. Seek to support and increase the service provided by the Independent Advice Centre. |
| Findings: Bus services to the villages are not always convenient for people travelling to work and school, and the possibility of withdrawal of services is always a concern. Where travel by public transport is possible, its use can result in a very long working day. Bus services in general are sometimes unreliable. |
| 4. Proposed Action: Identify existing data (SCOTS) and/or commission new research into access to services for the hinterland of Wantage and Grove, working closely with Oxfordshire Rural Community Council. |
| Findings: The dissemination of up to date travel information could be improved, bearing in mind not everyone has internet access. |
| 5. Proposed Action: Publicise Travel line and consider local integrated travel information and Real Time Bus information |

CYCLEWAYS, FOOTPATHS AND WATERWAYS

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| Findings: Cyclists, motorists and pedestrians are often in conflict, especially around school routes. There is a need to improve existing cycle routes and an opportunity to develop a range of new ones. There is scope to improve natural links between the towns and countryside utilising footpaths, bridleways and waterways (including the Letcombe Brook). |
| 1. Proposed Action: Undertake a mapping exercise to record existing and planned routes and indicate additional routes which need to be developed. Review and develop if necessary plans to improve cycleway, footpaths and water routes, including seeking support of Sustrans, the UK's leading sustainable charity. |

WANTAGE TOWN CENTRE VITALITY

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| Findings: More needs to be done to improve the Market Place and encourage links to it from the new shopping area. The need to create strong links to Limborough Road is crucial. The refurbishment of the Market Place to support the retail sector is planned and is a key priority. |
| 1. Proposed Action: Develop a strategy to ensure there are services and facilities in the Market Place, so it continues to attract visitors, when some of the key retailers move to the Limborough Road site. This may be achieved by developing a masterplan for the area. Linked to these issues is the impact of heavy traffic accessing the Mill. Develop and implement a range of measures to encourage footfall in the Market Place. These could include vouchers for local shops, more specialist markets, improvement in the 2 x weekly market, more financial support for planting schemes and hanging baskets in Summer, improvements to the paved surface in and around the square, and performances by arts groups etc. Develop and promote a programme of events annually to bring visitors to the market square. Also develop a strategy, using incentives to encourage more restaurants of a good standard to come to the area. |
| Findings: Vacant properties especially in Mill Street are a problem. |
| 2. Proposed Action: The Market Place project to be widened to develop a strategy to link improvements in Mill Street, Grove St, Newbury St, and Wallingford St to the Market Place. |
| Findings: There is a need for additional coach and commercial vehicle parking in Wantage. |
| 3. Proposed Action: Investigate the feasibility of developing a coach/ lorry park at Grove Technology Park. |
| Findings: Congested access to public transport services in Market Place. |
| 4. Proposed Action: Commission a feasibility study into creating a public transport interchange away from the Market Place to reduce congestion and pollution. |

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GROVE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Findings: In spite of the excellent work at Mary Green, there is a lack of attractive public realm and two unconnected, unattractive shopping precincts, the results of poor planning policy in the past. With major new development planned (2050 new homes) there are opportunities to address this and maximise community gain from the situation. It is felt there is a lack of expert input at planning level.

1. Proposed Action: Ensure that plans for new facilities at Grove, and development of existing ones, meet the overall needs and aspirations of the community. Lobby the Planners to ensure integration of existing Grove to new development.

Findings: It is important to build on the complementary roles of Wantage and Grove, but also to respect the 'buffer zone' between them.

2. Proposed Action: Lobby to ensure that future development respects the different roles of the two communities and protects and complements their retail centres.

IMPROVE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Findings: Major development at Grove, a proposal for a large new reservoir, and an extensive brown field site in Letcombe Regis, are examples where change could have a significant impact on the environment – there has not been enough expert input.

1. Proposed Action: Take a proactive approach to environmental improvements which could accompany major new development.

Findings: Opportunities have been lost to capitalise on the rich environmental assets of the area and recent development has harmed fragile environments. We are among the very few councils without an in-house ecology expert. but more could still be done, particularly with a targeted approach.

2. Proposed Action: Fund an independent ecologist to undertake a co-ordinated over view of the impact of current and planned development in the area on key environmentally sensitive sites.

Findings: Although there are a number of conservation and restoration groups in the area, there is scope to develop a more co-ordinated approach and a need to involve a broader range of volunteers to sustain voluntary effort. Currently what is undertaken is patchy. Volunteer groups need to be connected.

3. Proposed Action: The Joint Environmental Trusts for Wantage and Grove to act as a focal point for co-ordination, including exchange of information between local conservation and restoration groups.

SUSTAINABILITY

Findings: There is an opportunity to develop and promote environmentally sustainable initiatives, especially with massive housing development planned for Grove.

1. Proposed Action: Encourage use of sustainable products and low energy buildings when the new development takes place.

Findings: There is strong local interest, especially within schools in eco issues.

2. Proposed Action: Encourage formation of a Community Action Group funded by OCC.

Findings: There is local demand for locally sourced products.

3. Proposed Action: Support initiatives such as the sale of locally sourced products and consider the revival of the Grove Summer Horticultural Show.

YOUTH AND LEISURE FACILITIES

Findings: Certain Leisure facilities are inadequate. The Leisure Centre in Wantage has the only swimming pool in the area and shares it's timetable with local schools leaving no spare capacity for the public and failing to meet the needs of a range of other groups, such as toddler swimming. There are other good leisure facilities without a pool. There is a lack of athletics facilities.

1. Proposed Action: Develop a joint approach between the Wantage and Grove Forums to ensure new facilities linked to the Grove development fill existing gaps such as the need for a toddler pool and athletic tracks. The new secondary school may be able to incorporate such facilities. Support to be given to the development of playing fields and facilities at Tugwell Field.

Findings: Youth clubs are limited in resources and facilities offered. The current facility in Wantage is on a school site in Springfield Road and will be lost when the school site is redeveloped.

2. Proposed Action: Identify a location between Wantage and Grove for a shared facility, possibly Mably Way. Lobby for, support and seek grant funding for developing a new youth facility.